

**FRAGMENTATION AND EROS IN DEBUSSY'S *CHANSONS DE BILITIS*
AND *SIX ÉPIGRAPHES ANTIQUES***

by

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ABSTRACT

Debussy based one of his last piano works, the *Six Épigraphes antiques* of 1914, on some unpublished incidental music he had composed in 1901 for Pierre Louÿs's *Chansons de Bilitis*. The original *Bilitis* music has typically been disparaged as a rough draft, left in fragments because Debussy didn't have enough time to finish it. The longer, more unified piano pieces are conventionally regarded as the polished, completed form of the earlier material.

This dissertation argues that fragmentation is a central symbol in Louÿs's *Chansons de Bilitis*, and that rough edges, broken forms and extreme brevity of Debussy's *musique de scène* constitute a sensitive response to the poetic text. The two works are related to historical fragmentary procedures in both literature and music. The loss of the celesta part for the incidental music is proposed as an aesthetically significant, and perhaps intentional, reflection of the poetry's themes of historical loss and decay. It is suggested that the work should therefore be performed without reconstructing the missing celesta part, and to this end, a new transcription of the work for flute and piano is included as an appendix, compiled from the surviving manuscript sources.

In this light, the treatment of musical themes and poetic references in the *Six Épigraphes antiques* is analyzed as a later repudiation of Louÿs's aesthetic and moral philosophies. The friendship between these two artists and their rupture in 1904 are examined, with particular emphasis on their other attempts at collaboration.

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1892 Claude Debussy and Pierre Louÿs meet at Mallarmé's salon.
- 1893 Debussy and Louÿs travel together to Gand, Brussels, to ask Maeterlinck's permission to set *Pelléas et Mélisande*.
- 1894 Louÿs publishes first edition of *Chansons de Bilitis*.
- 1897 Louÿs publishes second, expanded edition of *Chansons de Bilitis*.
- 1897-1898 Debussy composes *Trois chansons de Bilitis*.
- 1900 Premiere of *Trois chansons de Bilitis*.
Debussy composes incidental music to *Chansons de Bilitis*.
- 1901 Premiere of incidental music to *Chansons de Bilitis*.
- 1904 Rupture of friendship between Debussy and Louÿs.
- 1914 Debussy publishes the *Six Épigraphes antiques*.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have always had a passion for music and language, and as a performer, I am especially drawn to pieces that join the spoken word and playing the piano. So I was immediately intrigued when I learned that Debussy had based one of his last piano works, the *Six Épigraphes antiques*, on some unpublished incidental music he had composed for Pierre Louÿs's *Chansons de Bilitis*. The three *mélodies* Debussy composed from the same collection of poetry are perhaps my favorite songs of all time – I had listened to them so many times I had them virtually memorized before I played them for the first time. The prospect of more Debussy pieces with the same poet seemed almost too good to be true.

My plan when I started this project was to reunite the poetry with the *Six Épigraphes* and to perform them together. I thought this would be a fairly simple matter of finding the incidental music, comparing it to the piano pieces, and working out the best way to map the words onto the notes.¹ However, the more I read, the more complications I discovered, until I finally became convinced that my original goal was inappropriate – that despite their origins, the piano pieces seemed to do everything possible to distance themselves from the poetry. I next considered playing the original incidental music, scored for narrator, two flutes, two harps and celesta, but somehow I could not get as excited about this option. As a pianist, the more limited expressive scope of the celesta is uninviting, then there is the difficulty of obtaining the instrument, let alone two harpists. Moreover, Debussy's celesta part has been lost, so I would not even have been playing his music. And yet, the music and

¹ I later discovered that had already been attempted in Linda Lee Watson, "Debussy: A Programmatic Approach to Form" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1978).

poetry together are so heartbreakingly beautiful, I felt compelled to find a way to play the incidental music myself, at the piano. This is the story of that journey.

From the *Chansons de Bilitis* to the *Six Épigraphes antiques*

I can't tell from your letter if you are able to work or not. But I have a proposition for you. . . . I'm disposed to let M. Samuel repeat at the Variétés the performances of *Bilitis* to be attempted at *Le Journal* (the songs will be recited and mimed). . . . Are you free enough to write eight pages of violins, silences and resonant chords that will give an "artistic impression" to the Variétés?²

– Letter from Louÿs to Debussy, 25 October 1900

Debussy composed the *musique de scène* for the *Chansons de Bilitis* at the request of his close friend Pierre Louÿs. The texts were taken from a book of poetry Louÿs had published in 1894 under the title *Les Chansons de Bilitis, traduites du grec pour la première fois par P.L.*³ In one of the most celebrated, though short-lived, hoaxes of the nineteenth century, Louÿs initially claimed that he was merely translating newly discovered poems by a pupil of Sappho. Prefaced by a prose biography of the fictional Bilitis, the poems were divided in three sections representing three stages of her life: her childhood in Pamphylia (in what is now Turkey), her studies with Sappho on Lesbos and marriage to Mnasidika (a girl mentioned in two of Sappho's fragments), and her last years in Cyprus serving Aphrodite as a courtesan. The book closed with four epigraphs on her death, followed by a section of

² "Je devine mal, d'après ta lettre, si tu peux ou non travailler. C'est que j'ai quelque chose à te proposer. . . . je suis . . . disposé à permettre M. Samuel de reprendre aux Variétés les représentations de *Bilitis* qui vont être tentées au *Journal* (il s'agit de chansons récitées et mimées). . . . As tu l'esprit assez libre pour écrire huit pages de violons, de silences et d'accords cuivrés qui donnent ce qu'on peut appeler «une impression d'art» aux Variétés?" Claude Debussy and Pierre Louÿs, *Correspondance de Claude Debussy et Pierre Louÿs, 1893-1904*, ed. Henri Borgeaud (Paris: J. Corti, 1945), 150-151.

³ The publication date reads 1895 though the book actually appeared in December 1894.

scholarly notes.⁴ Debussy had already set three of these poems as the well-known *Trois chansons de Bilitis* in 1897-8. The incidental music would accompany twelve other poems from the book with very brief pieces scored for two flutes, two harps and celesta. The proposed performance at the Variétés never took place; the only performance during Debussy's lifetime was the premiere at *Le Journal* on 7 February 1901, performed with nude *tableaux vivants* for a select private audience.⁵ Debussy did not publish the incidental music, and only the flute and harp parts survive. In 1914, the composer reworked much of the musical material in a set of new pieces scored both for piano solo and piano duet, the *Six Épigrapbes antiques*. The incidental music only resurfaced in 1954, when Léon Vallas, to whom Lilly Debussy had entrusted the remaining parts, revived the work and commissioned Pierre Boulez to reconstruct the celesta part.

Prevailing scholarly opinion treats the earlier incidental music merely as source material for the later piano pieces.⁶ The original *Bilitis* music has received some scholarly attention, but the work has typically been disparaged as flawed, if not incomplete.⁷ Léon

⁴ Louÿs issued a second edition in December 1897, dated 1898, adding many new poems and replacing the notes with a bibliography combining fictional and real texts. The 1898 edition shortened the title to *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, and gave Louÿs's full name rather than just his initials, since his original authorship of the volume had long been accredited by that time.

⁵ The *tableau vivant* was a popular drawing room pass-time in which costumed performers stood mute and motionless, amid props and sets, forming a "living picture," often of Classical subjects. For more on the *tableau vivant*, see Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho History* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 28-34, and Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants. Studies on some Trends of Theatrical Fashion 1770-1815* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967).

⁶ Theo Hirsbrunner, "Claude Debussy und Pierre Louÿs. Zu den *Six Épigrapbes antiques* von Debussy," *Die Musikforschung*, 31, no. 4 (1978), 432-433; Rudolf Escher, "Debussy and the Musical Epigram," *Key Notes* 10 (1979): 59-63.

⁷ Four scholarly articles are dedicated to the incidental music. David A. Grayson, "Bilitis and Tanagra: Afternoons with Nude Women," in *Debussy and His World*, ed. Jane F. Fulcher (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford, UK.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 117-139 outlines the circumstances under which the work was composed and premiered. D. J. Hamoen, "The *Chansons de Bilitis*: Fiction, Facts and a New Face," *Key Notes* 21 (June 1985), 18-24 examines the manuscript sources. Escher, "Debussy and the Musical Epigram," and Hirsbrunner, "Claude Debussy und Pierre Louÿs. Zu den *Six Épigrapbes antiques* von Debussy," also deal with the pieces at some length, though the *Six Épigrapbes antiques* are the main subject of their articles. Two doctoral dissertations are dedicated to the work, Susan J. Kerbs, "Les *Chansons de Bilitis* by Claude Debussy: A Discussion of the Original Stage Music and its Resulting Transcriptions" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 2000);

Vallas, who revived the work, characterized it as "some hundred and fifty hastily written bars. . . a mere improvisation (sic.), pleasant and elegant, but of no great importance."⁸ Frank Dawes, in his book on Debussy's piano music, dismisses the twelve short movements as "sketches."⁹ Rudolf Escher states the case most strongly, saying that Debussy "wrote these fragments in great haste and would never have had them published in this form."¹⁰ The pieces are indeed fragmentary: all are extremely brief and undeveloped, many seem to break off abruptly, and the spoken poetry interrupts the musical flow. The *Six Épigraphes antiques*, on the other hand, are longer, self-contained and use more conventional forms, characteristics which several writers cite as proof that the later work is more mature and refined.¹¹

Juan Allende-Blin dissents, comparing the earlier stage music favourably with the later piano pieces:

The original shape of the music is bolder in its concentration and in its manner of treating the musical ideas. The instrumental movements for the melodramas avoided – in their brevity – conventional organization of form. Conversely, in the "*Six Épigraphes antiques*," a three-part division generally predominates . . . a comparison of both works shows the stage music has a more consistent syntax, which leads to a new rhetoric . . . "with the nothing of mystery, indispensable, which itself remains, expressed, somewhat." (Stéphane Mallarmé)¹²

and Pamela Jackson Youngblood, "'Musique de scène pour les Chansons de Bilitis' by Claude Debussy on Poems by Pierre Louÿs, a Lecture Recital" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 1980). However, these focus on substantially different aspects of the work than I do.

⁸ Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, trans. Maire O'Brien and Grace O'Brien (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1933), 110.

⁹ Francis Edward Dawes, *Debussy Piano Music* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), 52.

¹⁰ Rudolf Escher, unpublished draft of essay, quoted in Hamoen, 23.

¹¹ Hirsbrunner, 433; Hamoen, 23.

¹² "Die ursprüngliche Gestalt der Musik kühner in ihrer Konzentriertheit und in der Art der Behandlung der musikalischen Ideen ist. Die Instrumentalsätze für die Melodramen vermieden – in ihrer Kürze – die konventionelle Organisation der Form. Hingegen herrscht in den '*Six épigraphes antiques*' im allgemeinen deren dreiteiligen Artikulation vor . . . der Vergleich der beiden Werke erweist für die Bühnenmusik ein konsequenteres Syntax, die zu einer neuen Rhetorik führt. 'Avec le rien du mystère, indispensable, qui demeure, exprimé quelque peu.' (Stéphane Mallarmé)" Juan Allende-Blin, "Claude Debussy: Scharnier zweier Jahrhunderte," in *Claude Debussy* (Munich: Musik-Konzepte, 1977), 62-63.

Allende-Blin does not elaborate upon his claims, and they are worth examining in greater detail. Are there any indications in the incidental music that the brief, fragmentary structures might have been intentional rather than merely expedient? Why might Debussy have chosen such structures? Is this a "new rhetoric," and what is its effect? What were the consequences when Debussy knitted these fragments together into a more cohesive form? These are the questions this document seeks to answer.

Today, the fragment enjoys a perhaps unprecedented prestige, as Margaret Reynolds points out:

now, in the early years of the twenty-first century, we are familiar with the broken structures of Modernism and the post-Modern, and the fragment has become almost more than the whole. Less, we are told, is more. Today – possibly in opposition to a set of past ideals which we wish to construe as monolithic, imperialist, absolute and intolerant – we applaud multiplicity, variety, difference.¹³

Debussy scholarship is certainly not exempt from this trend. Linda Cummins notes that fragmentation has long been associated with Debussy's music, with increasingly favorable evaluations: "critics and scholars often seek to describe his music by stressing ruin and remnant; however where some earlier critics saw the ruin of a tradition, without potential, later analysts focus on Debussy's originality, viewing the fragment as a pointer toward modernism."¹⁴ She cites a number of "neutral to positive" examples from the literature, including Stefan Jarocinski ("Debussy's music neither begins nor ends. Its form is not closed. . . . It forms itself, it renews itself without ceasing"), William Austin ("fragments of counterpoint"), Paul Roberts ("fragments of melody"), Glenn Watkins ("collage citations") and Michael L Friedmann ("mosaic techniques").¹⁵ Marie Beltrando-Patier sees

¹³ Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 17.

¹⁴ Linda Page Cummins, "Debussy and the Fragment" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 2001), 4.

¹⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 3-4.

fragmentation in Debussy's *Trois chansons de Bilitis* as a sensitive reaction to features in Louÿs's text, praising

the response of the composer to the poetic provocation: revolutionary narrative style, absence of shame, aesthetic of the fragment, of the unfinished, in which the parts constitute a whole without ever affirming any visible links between them. Subversion and game at the same time, the musical choices induced by the poetic material show that Debussy had a particularly astonishing intuition of the poem down to its most secret depths.¹⁶

The minuscule movements of the *musique de scène* embody a far more radically discontinuous approach than the *Bilitis* songs, or indeed anything else in Debussy's oeuvre. Given the context, it is surprising that this feature of the incidental music should have attracted mostly negative attention.¹⁷

Clearly, it is time to reevaluate the fleeting and open-ended forms that characterize the *Chansons de Bilitis* incidental music. Louÿs's book foregrounds fragmentation in an astonishingly varied number of ways. It builds upon a rich tradition of literary works that employ structural irregularities, ruptures and apertures as symbolic devices. I contend that the rough edges, broken forms and extreme brevity of Debussy's *musique de scène* simply constitute the most appropriate and effective means to set the *Bilitis* poems, more so even than the songs. In this light, I will argue that the shift toward closure and integration in the *Six Épigraphes antiques* does not represent a completion, but rather a retreat from the incidental music and the poetry on which it is based.

¹⁶ "La réponse du compositeur à la provocation poétique: mode de récit révolutionnaire, absence de pudeur, esthétique du fragment, de l'inachevé, dont les parties constituent un tout sans jamais affirmer de lien visible entre elles. A la fois subversion et jeu, les choix musicaux induits par le matériau poétique montrent, chez Debussy en particulier, une intuition étonnante du poème jusque dans ses profondeurs les plus secrètes," Marie-Claire Beltrando-Patier, "Quelques mises en musique des *Chansons de Bilitis* de Pierre Louÿs: Une Esthétique 'fin de siècle'," *Revue Internationale de Musique Française*, no. 32 (1995): 112-113.

¹⁷ Especially curious is that Cummins's dissertation, "Debussy and the Fragment," mentions the incidental music only in passing in the sixteen pages devoted to the *Chansons de Bilitis*, 83-99.

A Brief History of Fragments

The twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of a potent – and I think, possibly even new – literary form, which we might dub, informally, the unwritten novel. The unwritten novel is a book, however polished, that seems a compilation of fragments. A typical example looks like a salad of autobiography, notebook ecstasies, diaristic confessions, prose poems, epigrams, meditations, shafts of critical discourse. Yet these scattered works are not mere pastiches. They *do* have a unity; but theirs is the coherence of a unifying refusal, an energizing denial. . .¹⁸

– Stephen Koch in the *New York Times Book Review*, 4 October 1981

With its ostensibly autobiographic prose poems, obituary epigraphs, faux-scholarly preface, notes and bibliography, Louÿs's book easily fits Koch's description of the "unwritten novel." It might be tempting to characterize a fin-de-siècle work like the *Chansons de Bilitis* as a foreshadowing of Modernism and its "heap of broken images," in the well-known words of T.S. Eliot. However, the preoccupation with the discontinuous, the open-ended and the non-linear that are so often cited as revolutionary innovations of Modernism and Postmodernism have in fact a long and venerable heritage. In musicology, John Daverio, Richard Kramer, and Charles Rosen have drawn attention to Romantic composers' use of the fragment, particularly in association with the aesthetic writings of Friedrich Schlegel.¹⁹ Scholars in other fields have examined the deployment of the fragmentary aesthetic from the Renaissance on, in artistic genres as diverse as *tableaux vivants*, sketches, epistolary novels, collections of maxims and aphorisms, the "unfinished" poems of the Romantics, the imitation ruins built in eighteenth century gardens, and sculptural torsos from Da Vinci to Rodin,²⁰

¹⁸ Quoted in Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 176.

¹⁹ See John Daverio, *Nineteenth-Century Music and the German Romantic Ideology* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993), 3-88; Richard A. Kramer, "The Hedgehog: Of Fragments Finished and Unfinished," *19th-Century Music* 21, no. 2 Fall (1997): 134-148; Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 41-115.

²⁰ See Harries, *The Form of the Unfinished*; Reynolds, *The Sappho History*; Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

The inspiration for discontinuous forms goes back further still, to Greek and Roman Antiquity. This ancestry runs contrary to conventional wisdom, since Classical (and neo-Classical) aesthetics are typically associated with unity and symmetry. However, there is evidence that even then, artistic fragments exercised a powerful fascination. Pliny the Elder wrote in the first century C.E.

Another most curious fact and worthy of record is that the latest works of artists and the pictures left unfinished at their death are valued more than any of their finished paintings. . . . The reason is that in these we see traces of the design and the original conception of the artists, while sorrow for the hand that perished at its work beguiles us into the bestowal of praise.²¹

Our exposure to Classical civilisations has been anything but symmetrical and unified, coming to us almost exclusively through shattered ruins, broken artifacts, and torn, crumbled manuscripts. As Harries points out:

The notion of the fragment is for us inextricably bound up with our notions about the ancients . . . Relatively few ancient texts have come down to us whole; we know many of them only as fragments or in fragments: isolated lines or episodes, sometimes too discrete to be brought together into any form that looks complete.²²

It was during the Renaissance that Europeans first began to unearth and venerate this Classical heritage. Simultaneous to the revival of idealist Classical aesthetics was a seemingly contradictory tendency to create fragmentary works in imitation of its remains. Margaret Reynolds asserts, "there is no doubt that the Renaissance fashion for the fragment . . . coincided and indeed probably grew out of the concurrent rise in Classical

University Press, 1981); Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Balachandra Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); and the collections of essays edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Fragments – Incompletion & Discontinuity* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1981).

²¹ *Nat. Hist.* 35.145, quoted in David Rosand, "Composition/Decomposition/Recomposition: Notes on the Fragmentary and the Artistic Process," in *Fragments: Incompletion & Discontinuity*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman and Jeanine Parisier Plottel (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1981), 22.

²² Harries, 12.

scholarship."²³ David Rosand likewise attributes the explosion of interest in torsos and sketches during the Renaissance to the concurrent rise of archeology:

In those fragments of the past, *objets trouvés de l'antiquité* . . . they discovered new aesthetic possibilities. More than a memento of lost greatness, but never entirely without that significance, the torso acquired an integral poetic function of its own, as the positive assertion of the legitimacy of the *non finito*, the unfinished in art. The experience of the fragment, valued initially for its referential worth, led to a larger appreciation of the fragmentary, to a broadening of the very concept of art.²⁴

The premiere Romantic theorist of the fragment, Friedrich Schlegel, also explicitly linked its use to Antiquity in one of his most frequently quoted aphorisms: "Many works of the ancients have become fragments. Many works of the moderns are already fragments at the time of their origin."²⁵ It should therefore not be surprising that Louÿs and Debussy should choose fragmentary structures for works depicting a poetess from the 6th century B.C.E.

Archaeology inspired artists to create fragments not only because of the tantalizing ruins it unearthed but also because it revealed a richly associative way of thinking. Honoré de Balzac described the process whereby the tiniest scraps of evidence could be used to evoke an entire culture:

Archaeology . . . is to the body social somewhat as comparative anatomy is to animal organizations. A complete social system is made clear to us by a bit of mosaic, just as a whole past order of things is implied by the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus. Beholding the cause, one deduction following another until a chain of evidence is complete, until the man of science raises up a whole bygone world from the dead, and discovers for us not only the features of the past, but even the warts upon those features.²⁶

Of course, archaeology didn't invent the synecdoche, but it did reveal just how powerfully suggestive a fragment can be. It showed that the part can suggest the whole even when that

²³ Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 18.

²⁴ Rosand, 18.

²⁵ Quoted in Harries, 2.

²⁶ Honoré de Balzac, *The Quest for the Absolute*, trans. Ellen Marriage (New York: A.L. Burt, 1899), 2; quoted in Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 134.

whole remains an enigma. Faced with a history riddled with gaps, archaeologists deduced, inferred, conjectured, that is, invented the rest. Each time unearthed artifacts forced a reinterpretation of the previous finds, it pointed out the motility of the past, and the contingency of what we know. The fact that the Classical civilizations had fallen to pieces, that so much was lost, only made the remains more intriguing, more potently multivalent. Although manifestly imperfect, in fact ruined, the shattered remains had an inherent generative power to fire the imagination because, as Balachandra Rajan points out, "It is the nature of creativity to populate empty spaces."²⁷

Artists were quick to grasp the possibilities. Not only the vestiges of ancient and revered cultures, but *any* fragment, however created, could engage the viewer in a way that a unified, organic whole simply could not. In the lacunae, interruptions or truncations of the fragmentary we sense that something is missing – which also speaks of latent potential. The fragment thus posits simultaneously a lack and an excess. The awareness of absence draws us in, fascinates us like a riddle, and inevitably provokes speculation. This process is often described as a projection of the whole from the part:

the fragment – whether planned or unplanned, the result of something being unfinished, or interrupted, or broken off – always forces on the reader, the viewer, that necessity of double vision, of actively participating in constructing an imagined entity from the extant ruins or remains.²⁸

Rosand speaks of this impulse as “the ‘beholder’s share’ . . . an indigenous will to completion that affords both poet and painter a fertile field for exploitation. Information withheld simultaneously frustrates and implicates; it forces active engagement.”²⁹

²⁷ Rajan, 309.

²⁸ Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 18.

²⁹ Rosand, 27.

Despite all the scholarly interest in the fragment, a common vocabulary has yet to develop. There are nearly as many ways of categorizing fragments as there are authors who write about them. Harries sees the primary distinction in terms of original authorial intention, and differentiates between "planned" fragments, "works of art that are conceived of and constructed as fragmentary from the very beginning," and "unplanned" fragments, "the result of their inability to finish, of a failure to complete . . . cut short by death or simply abandoned."³⁰ Marjorie Levinson, in *The Romantic Fragment Poem*, argues that the crucial difference lies instead in "authorial affirmation," and classifies fragment poems as "authorized," published with permission of the poet in an unfinished form regardless of how the work was initially conceived, or "accidental," that is "poems left unfinished, apparently not intended for publication in that condition, and printed posthumously through the intervention of an editor whose motivations may have been bibliographical, biographical, hagiographic, or commercial."³¹ Balachandra Rajan is not particularly concerned with the creator's intent, but rather with the work's tendency toward closure. He draws the line between "incomplete" and "unfinished" poems: "Incomplete poems are poems which ought to be completed. Unfinished poems are poems which ask not to be finished, which carry within themselves the reasons for arresting or effacing themselves as they do."³²

My examination of *Chansons de Bilitis* and the *Six Épigraphes antiques* draws upon all of these classifications to some degree, but, at the same time, it also problematizes them. The *Bilitis* incidental music shows how difficult it can be to know what exactly an artist had in mind. Most scholars assert that its fragments were unplanned, in Harries's terminology. I will present evidence that they were more likely planned, at least in part. Pending the

³⁰ Harries, 1-2.

³¹ Levinson, 18.

³² Rajan, 14.

discovery of new primary sources, however, we can only guess at Debussy's intentions.

Levinson's classification seeks to avoid this puzzle by using an artist's publication histories as evidence of his or her intent. Her categories of "authorized" and "accidental" fragments function reasonably well for works that may have been initially conceived as organic wholes but were ultimately left fragmentary. But what of works that were first presented as fragments, but later completed by the same artist, like the *Chansons de Bilitis* and the *Six Épigrapbes antiques*? Does this mean that the earlier conception is necessarily invalid simply because the composer later changed his mind?

Rajan's "incomplete" and "unfinished" fragments are an attempt to sidestep this pitfall by basing the classification on structural qualities immanent in the work. They however raise the question of what it means to complete a fragment, and whether this is ultimately possible. The *Six Épigrapbes antiques* are only one of many works in which the artist, starting from a pre-existing fragment, invents a conclusion, a reconstruction, or even simply a complement to it. These works may not exhibit any surface irregularities; they may appear to be finished and self-contained. Yet they remain fragmentary in some sense – their completions can only be provisional – because the original fragment stubbornly persists, pregnant with other possibilities. In a sense, the completion is simply part of the same phenomenon as the fragment itself, the "beholder's share," as Rosand calls it. Both activate the creative principle that defines the fragmentary, and that I will argue plays such a crucial role in both the *Chansons de Bilitis* and the *Six Épigrapbes antiques*.

CHAPTER 2

LOUÿS'S *CHANSONS DE BILITIS*

If I am to argue that the fragmentation evident in Debussy's *Bilitis* incidental music was inspired by Louÿs's text, I must demonstrate that fragmentation in the *Chansons de Bilitis* is not only present but also aesthetically significant. This is particularly crucial because Louÿs is never mentioned by any of the scholars who focus on fragmentation, nor is fragmentation a notable feature of any of Louÿs's other output. This chapter will examine the literary precursors that allow us to read the *Chansons de Bilitis* as fragmentary, and the symbolic functions that fragmentation serves in this work. I do not mean to imply that Louÿs would have read every one of the sources that I will discuss below. However, it should be recalled that Louÿs was a serious amateur scholar described by noted contemporary academic Frédéric Lachèvre as "the most erudite and spiritual bibliophile of our era."³³ A voracious reader fluent in five languages – English, German, Latin and Greek as well as his native French – Louÿs collected books compulsively, accumulating a library estimated at 3000 volumes occupying 140 metres of shelf space in 1902, which grew to 20,000 volumes by 1914.³⁴ He professed to having produced 2000 pages of draft for the 93 poems in the first edition of *Bilitis*,³⁵ and we know that a great deal of research went into the book's composition.³⁶ Since most of the books I will present were widely known in Louÿs's time, it is likely he would have been aware of them.

³³ "Le bibliophile le plus savant et le plus spirituel de notre époque," quoted in H. P. Clive, *Pierre Louÿs (1870-1925): A Biography* (Oxford Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1978), 195.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

³⁵ Letter to Georges Louis, 12 December 1894, Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis; Pervigilium Mortis: avec divers textes inédits*, ed. Jean-Paul Goujon (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 312.

³⁶ David J. Niederauer, *Pierre Louÿs, His Life and Art* (Ottawa: Canadian Federation for the Humanities, 1981), 134.

Fragments as Homage: Sappho I

... tongue is broken ...

– Sappho, Fragment 31

Louÿs dubbed the *Chansons de Bilitis* a lyric novel (*roman lyrique*) because it is a book that tells a story in poems. The narrative is orderly and chronological, as Bilitis relates her autobiography from early childhood until death. Her story however is full of holes. Each poem captures in four stanzas a single, fleeting moment – a snatch of conversation, a brief encounter, a passing mood. We follow her life through vivid tableaux, without ever seeing how she gets from one to the next. Characters appear without being introduced and disappear without notice, events occur without preamble and often apparently without consequence. Between the poems lie only blank, empty chasms, undermining any sense of connection or continuity. Bilitis's poetic reflection is shattered, offered up in shards and splinters.

Louÿs's immediate inspiration for this fractured portrait was Sappho, the earliest and most celebrated female poet in the Western tradition. He incorporated her into the *Chansons* as Bilitis's teacher:

At this time, Sappho was still beautiful. Bilitis knew her and speaks about her as Psappha, the name she used on Lesbos. Without a doubt it was this admirable woman who taught the little Pamphylienne the art of singing in rhythmic phrases and to preserve for future generations the existence of those dearest to her. Unfortunately, Bilitis gives us few details about Sappho, who today is not well known, and it is a cause for regret, for the slightest word about such an inspiring figure would have been precious.³⁷

When Louÿs declared that Sappho "today is not well known," he was not referring to Sappho's reputation. References and stories about Sappho so thoroughly permeate French literature from the time of Louis XIV on that Joan DeJean can plausibly claim that "her

³⁷ Pierre Louÿs, *Two Erotic Tales: Aphrodite and Songs of Bilitis*, ed. Dorothy Kavka, trans. Mary Hanson Harrison (Evanston, Ill.: Evanston Pub, 1995), 234-235.

poetry and her person are, as it were, indissolubly bound up with the articulation of [the French] literary tradition."³⁸ Louÿs was instead referring to the fractional knowledge of Sappho's poetry.

While virtually all ancient texts are fragmented due to age, Sappho's work offers perhaps the most paradigmatic example. Venerated as "the tenth Muse" or "*the* Poetess" from antiquity onward, Sappho's prodigious reputation is matched only by the scarcity of her words. From the nine books of her lyrics said to have been collected in the library at Alexandria, only one poem has survived intact, the ode to Aphrodite. Her other remaining writings, preserved on scraps of papyrus, broken potshards or in quotations by other writers, contain significant gaps, and the vast majority subsist only in short phrases or even isolated words. So closely is Sappho identified with the fragment that the two hundred or so remaining scraps of her words have come to be catalogued under that name. Even the ode to Aphrodite, though complete, is conventionally referred to as "Fragment 1."

The piecemeal condition of Sappho's works had been brought to the forefront in Louÿs's time. As Yopie Prins comments in *Victorian Sappho*,

While Greek fragments attributed to Sappho were collected and translated from the Renaissance on, the recovery of 'new fragments' of Sappho in the course of the nineteenth century coincided with a Romantic aesthetic of fragmentation and the rise of Classical philology, culminating in the idealization of Sappho herself as the perfect fragment.³⁹

Earlier editions had reconstructed Sappho's fragments to give an illusion of wholeness and coherence. By contrast, the most up-to-date Sappho editions with which Louÿs would have been familiar not only acknowledged but emphasized the piecemeal state of Sappho's

³⁸ Joan E. DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4.

³⁹ Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3.

remaining works, using devices such as parentheses, ellipses, or blank poetic feet to illustrate the places where her words broke off in the sources.⁴⁰

Even with regards to the handful of longer Sappho fragments, there are many gaps in our knowledge. Sappho's poems are lyrics, almost certainly intended to be sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, but nowhere is there any evidence of musical notation. There are claims that Sappho invented the mixolydian mode, the *Suda* (a plectrum), and the *Pektis* (a type of lyre), but nothing specific is known of her music.⁴¹ Furthermore, none of the manuscripts of her poems that have survived are originals, and in fact there likely were none. Sappho lived at the dawn of the literate era, and it is believed that her songs were orally transmitted for many years before they were ever written down. Although there is evidence of widespread manuscript production by the late fifth century B.C.E., the earliest Sappho texts we have date from the second or third century B.C.E, several hundred years after her lifetime.⁴² As to be expected, there are many problems of textual transmission. For example, some fragments exist in contradictory variants: Fragment 1 has three significantly different versions. Moreover, the early writing tradition itself created many more ambiguities because letters were recorded in an unbroken line, without spaces between words, let alone punctuation or line breaks.⁴³

If we have little information about Sappho's poems, we have even less about her life. Perhaps the most accurate biography to date is in Monique Wittig's and Sande Zveig's *Lesbian Peoples: Materials for a Dictionary* (1980). Their entry for Sappho is a blank page.

⁴⁰ Particularly notable are the 1885 collection of English translations by Henry Wharton and the 1895 French translation by Louÿs's close friend André Lebey, both based on German scholar Theodore Bergk's authoritative 1854 *Anthologia lyrica* in Greek, which Louÿs references in his prefatory "Vie de Bilitis."

⁴¹ Anne Carson, preface to Sappho and Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, Vintage Canada ed. (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2003), ix.

⁴² Margaret Williamson, *Sappho's Immortal Daughters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 39.

Almost nothing about her is known definitively except that highly regarded lyric poems are attributed to a female poet known as Sappho from the island of Lesbos in the late seventh century B.C.E. The secondary texts that are generally taken as sources for her history date from centuries after her death, and they prove frequently contradictory.⁴⁴ So sketchy are the details about the poet's life that Prins even goes so far as to suggest that Sappho may not have existed:

Just as "Homer" names an epic tradition composed by many voices over time and recomposed in the long history of being written and read, "Sappho" is associated with a lyric tradition originating in oral performance and increasingly mediated by writing. What we call Sappho was, perhaps, never a woman at all; not the poet we imagine on the island of Lesbos in the seventh century B.C., singing songs to her Sapphic circle, but a fictional persona circulating in archaic Greek lyric and reinvoked throughout antiquity as "the tenth muse."⁴⁵

Prins's suggestion is a radical one, however, and Sappho is generally assumed to have lived. Her poems are almost always taken as autobiographical, despite the critical consensus in other contexts that the point of view expressed in a poem does not necessarily represent the opinion of the author. Since antiquity the biography of Sappho the poet has been pieced together from a fabric of legend and rumors, and from the ragged scraps of her verse.

While Louÿs made Bilitis's poems more intact than Sappho's (for reasons I will discuss later), he mimicked the method of drawing a life story out of discrete, disconnected poems. For obvious reasons there were no historical references to Bilitis that Louÿs could weave into his story. So instead he cited a second century C.E. text by Philostratus regarding

⁴⁴ The chief earliest sources are plays from Old Comedy (dating from approximately two centuries after Sappho). Some plays treat her as a joke, for example giving her a husband with a name that means Prick, from the Isle of Man. Other treat her like legend, providing as love interests mythological figures, or poets who lived generations earlier or later. See Glenn W. Most, "Reflecting Sappho," in *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, ed. Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 14. For examples of modern texts that uncritically accept some of these stories as fact, see Holt N. Parker, "Sappho Schoolmistress," in *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, 146-147.

⁴⁵ Prins, 8.

"that woman from Pamphylia who was an intimate of Sappho and composed in the Aeolian and Pamphylian mode love songs and hymns. . . The name of that learned woman is Damophyla, and they say that like Sappho she surrounded herself with young virgins."⁴⁶ Louÿs turned the quote to his own means, suggesting that "Damophyla" was a simply nickname for Bilitis: "This passage evidently designates Bilitis, daughter of Damophylos. Undoubtedly the name Damophyla was given to her on Lesbos."⁴⁷ Also in imitation of Sappho, Louÿs called Bilitis's poems "*chansons*" and made references to them being sung, but he provided only the words. He says nothing about what the music might have been outside of the mention of a few instruments – lyres, flutes, and crotales. Moreover, just as new Sapphic fragments have periodically been unearthed that sketch in a little more of her picture, Louÿs continued to compose new Bilitis poems to put into the gaps that he had created. The tissue of holes and blanks in the *Chansons de Bilitis* is an integral part of Louÿs's reference and homage to Sappho.

Fragments as Authentication: Hoaxes and Manuscript Fictions

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the

⁴⁶ "Une femme de Pamphylie qui fut l'amie de Sapphô et composa selon le mode Éolien et le mode Pamphylien des chansons amoureuses et des hymnes.... Le nom de cette femme savante est Damophylé, et l'on dit que comme Sapphô elle s'entourait de jeunes vierges." Philostratus *Life of Appolonius*, I. 30, quoted in Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 294-295.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 295. The two preceding quotes were published in the Notes to the first edition, which were suppressed in all later editions.

future to which his back is turned while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.⁴⁸

– Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

The destruction of Sappho's work may be extreme, but it is not entirely unique. History always comes to us in rubble and shards, as Benjamin so eloquently reminds us. Loss and wreckage are inevitable results of age: human existence is brief, memory is fleeting, documents and artifacts record only so much and are vulnerable to the ravages of time. We are left to piece together what we can from the remains.

Given the decayed and ruined state of genuine historical writings, fragmentation has become one of the structural devices typically employed by literary hoaxes as a gesture of authentication. The most famous literary hoaxes circulating in Louÿs's time, James McPherson's Ossianic poems and Thomas Chatterton's Rowley poems, prominently featured manufactured gaps and holes in their texts. Both authors apparently assumed that if they claimed they had discovered undamaged manuscripts, it would arouse too much suspicion.⁴⁹ The *Chansons de Bilitis* were initially published as a hoax, so their narrative interruptions are to be expected as a convention of that genre.

A similar symbolic use of disjunctive structures is employed in what Elizabeth Wanning Harries terms "manuscript fictions," narratives which incorporate the discovery of imaginary source texts as part of their story:

These fictions always posit the existence of an older manuscript from which the writer, or "editor," or "translator" is transcribing his material. Sometimes, these fictions mark the text as belonging to what Susan Stewart calls "distressed genres," genres like fairy tales and ballads that are deliberately

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, with a foreword by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London England: Fontana, 1992), 249.

⁴⁹ On the influence of the hoax poems on the Romantic fragment, see Levinson, 34-50.

given all the signs of age, akin to the kits you can buy to give your unfinished pine an antique patina and uneven texture.⁵⁰

Some of the most celebrated works of the European canon are manuscript fictions, for example Rabelais's *Gargantua*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and Goethe's *Sufferings of Young Werther*. Their fictional primary sources are incomplete for a variety of reasons – *Gargantua*'s are eaten by rats, *Don Quixote*'s have been lost and are contradicted by competing accounts, *Werther*'s are interrupted by the hero's suicide.⁵¹ But all feature interruption or discontinuity as a narrative device to mimic "the malice of time, the devourer and consumer of all things," as Cervantes put it.⁵² These texts use their very form to symbolize our inability to retain or reconstitute the past.

Literary hoaxes and manuscript fictions are often structurally identical; frequently the only distinction between them is whether the fictional status of the found text is openly acknowledged. Surprisingly little distinction was made between the two genres in the nineteenth century. Though McPherson's and Chatterton's eighteenth century hoaxes were initially despised after they were exposed, they went on to become both popular and respected, not only by those who still maintained their authenticity, but also by those who accepted their status as fakes. The fin-de-siècle attitude toward them is summed up by Oscar Wilde, a vocal proponent of the parallels between fiction and lies:

we had a long discussion about Macpherson, Ireland, and Chatterton, and that with regard to the last I insisted that his so-called forgeries were merely the result of an artistic desire for perfect representation; that we had no right to quarrel with an artist for the conditions under which he chooses to present his

⁵⁰ Harries, 21.

⁵¹ For more detail on fragmentation in *Gargantua*, *Don Quixote* and *Werther*, see Ibid., 12-33.

⁵² Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1:9, 75) quoted in Ibid., 24.

work; and that all Art being to a certain degree a mode of acting . . . to censure an artist for a forgery was to confuse an ethical with an aesthetical problem.⁵³

An early preface to *Bilitis* shows that Louÿs for a time considered publishing the book as a manuscript fiction instead of a hoax, writing "We are no longer in the time of Ossian nor of la Guzla."⁵⁴ Once readers figured out that Louÿs was not the translator but the author of *Bilitis*, the book slid effortlessly into the category of manuscript fiction.

Many of the best-known books featuring tales about Sappho were framed as either hoaxes or manuscript fictions. Vincenzo Imperiale claimed that his *La faonide: inii et odi de Saffo* (1784) translated a work by Sappho, newly discovered by "the famous Russian scholar Ossur." Imperiale's fraud was reenacted on the French public by J.B. Grainville in his 1796 translation of the book, published as *Hymnes de Sapho, nouvellement découvertes et traduites pour la première fois en français* – a title which bears a clear resemblance to Louÿs's.⁵⁵ Etienne Lantier's 1797 novel *Voyages d'Antenor en Grèce et en Asie* is a manuscript fiction twice removed: it is premised on the discovery of papyri written by a traveler who in turn based his story on a manuscript entrusted to him by Sappho herself. The most influential of these Sapphic manuscript fictions was Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's 1788 *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce*. Like Lantier's book, it was presented as the writings of an ancient traveler, and featured a lengthy historical introduction, copious scholarly notes and many references to genuine classic texts. Many academics well into the twentieth century cited the book's account of Sappho as fact,⁵⁶ obscuring the line between literature and scholarship, a blur that was of particularly interest to Louÿs, as we shall see.

⁵³ Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* (London: Hesperus, 2003), 2. William Henry Ireland (1777-1835) forged numerous documents in Shakespeare's hand, including an "undiscovered" play, *Vortigern and Rowena*.

⁵⁴ "Nous ne sommes plus au temps d'Ossian ni de la Guzla." Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 207.

⁵⁵ Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 21.

⁵⁶ DeJean, 160.

In the "Vie de Bilitis," Louÿs wrote about the discovery of the *Chansons* in terms that emphasized the isolation of the burial site and the many obstacles to its access:

Her tomb was discovered by M. G. Heim at Paleo-Limasso by the side of an ancient roadway, not far from the ruins of Amathus. . . . the Phoenician custom of building tombs underground had saved it from the plundering of treasure hunters.

M. Heim penetrated the depths of the tomb by way of a narrow shaft that had been filled with dirt. Near the end of the shaft, he encountered a door that had been walled-up, which he dismantled. The spacious low burial chamber, paved with slabs of limestone, had four walls covered by slates of a dazzling black granite on which, engraved in primitive capitals, were all of her songs we are about to read, apart from the three epitaphs that decorated the sarcophagus.⁵⁷

Such a preface places the *Chansons de Bilitis* squarely within the parameters of what Harries describes as

the usual features of a manuscript fiction: the unearthing of the manuscript in a remote and unlikely spot; the decrepit, almost illegible state of the manuscript itself; the difficulties it presents to the decipherer. The manuscript is so old and faint that it's not clear whether the narrator has read or invented it – part of the point of course.⁵⁸

Unlike his precursors in frauds and manuscript fictions, Louÿs avoids the more obvious signs of textual ruin in *Bilitis*. Each poem is complete in itself, having survived miraculously unharmed on the stone tablets in Bilitis's tomb. This is perhaps one of the reasons the hoax was so quickly detected, for as Margaret Williamson comments: "It is not so much the loss of a classical author's work that requires explanation as its survival."⁵⁹ Themes of perishability and decay figure in the text in other ways. The last poem set by Debussy, "Morning Rain," refers directly to the perforation of Bilitis's words by the elements in a striking meditation on memory and loss:

⁵⁷ Louÿs, *Two Erotic Tales*, 236-237.

⁵⁸ Harries, 22.

⁵⁹ Williamson, 41.

The traces of night are fading. The stars are moving away. Here the last courtesans have returned with their lovers. And I, in the morning rain, I write this verse upon the sand.

The leaves are laden with sparkling water. The rivulets, crossing over the footpaths, drag along the earth and the dead leaves. The rain, drop by drop, makes holes in my song.

Oh! How sad and alone I am here! The younger ones do not look at me; the older ones have forgotten me. That is all right. They will learn my verses, and the children of their children.

This is what neither Myrtale nor Thais nor Glykera will say to themselves the day when their plump cheeks become hollow. Those who will love after me will sing my stanzas together.

Bilitis's invocation of future generations of readers, a common gesture in ancient Greek poetry,⁶⁰ ironically highlights the fragility of historical memory, since by the book's account, her works had been utterly forgotten for over two millennia and were recovered only by chance. Having left her corpus intact, Louÿs shifts the disintegration to her corpse. In the "Life of Bilitis" preface, he describes the discovery of her remains in a passage that foregrounds perishability and loss:

When the coffin was opened, she appeared just as she must have twenty-four centuries earlier, when some pious hand had placed her there. Vials of perfume hung from the clay pegs and one of them after so long a time, was still fragrant. . . . A small nude statue of Astarte, a relic forever precious, forever watching over the skeleton decorated with all its gold jewelry – white like a now covered branch, but so soft and fragile that, at the first touch, it mingled with the dust.⁶¹

Another technique deployed by hoaxes as a marker of age is parataxis: the abrupt juxtaposition of ideas without transitions. It was believed to be a stylistic feature of orally transmitted poetry, supposedly indicating a more primitive, archaic way of thinking.⁶² It is

⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁶¹ Louÿs, 237.

⁶² Julia Luisa Abramson, *Learning from Lying: Paradoxes of the Literary Mystification* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 106.

evident in the most celebrated French literary hoax before *Bilitis*, *La Guzla*, published anonymously in 1827 by Prosper Mérimée, the author of *Carmen*.⁶³

1. Adieu, adieu, bon voyage! Tonight the moon is full, we can see clear to the road. Bon voyage!
2. Better a bullet than a fever: free you have lived, free you have died. Your son Jean avenged you; he killed five of them.⁶⁴

Compare this to a similar passage in the first *Bilitis* poem in Debussy's setting:

Selenis lies on the meadow. She gets up and runs, or searches for cicadas, or gathers flowers and herbs, or splashes her face with the cool waters of the brook.

And I - I draw up the wool from the pale gold backs of the sheep to fill my distaff and I spin. The hours pass slowly. An eagle fades into the sky.

The shadow shifts away; let us move the basket of flowers and the jar of milk. We must sing a pastoral song calling on Pan, god of the summer wind.

So although *Bilitis*'s poems present themselves as structurally balanced wholes, elements of discontinuity are present within the syntax.

One more fragmentary element in both hoaxes and manuscript fictions is the use of paratexts that mimic scholarly writing – prefaces, notes, or commentary outside the main body of the text. They bracket the "discovered" text with stories about its retrieval and interpretations or explanations by the narrating editor or scholar. By interposing an editorial voice between the central text and the reader, these paratexts create what Harries terms a

⁶³ The *Chansons de Bilitis* have much in common with *La Guzla, or A Selection of Illyrian Poems Collected in Dalmatia, Bosnia, Croatia and Herzegovina*, as described by Abramson (102):

Guzla is a collection of songs in prose, purporting to be the original compositions and traditional repertoire of the guzla player Hyacinthe Maglanovich. The "gusle" is the "one-stringed bowed instrument" . . . which is used to accompany the singing of Yugoslavian ballads and oral epic. . . . The translator explains that the French versions are in prose because he felt unable to do justice to the original verse. . . . Scholarly notations accompany the texts, and a preface as well as a "Notice" describing the translator's encounter with Maglanovich introduce the volume as a whole.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

"double, oscillating" perspective that splits the point of view between past and present, writer and editor:

Because we're constantly reminded of the elaborate framing devices . . . we cannot remain within the moment. The ragged boundaries of the scene claim our attention as much as the scenes themselves. We oscillate from one to the other, from absorption to detachment, from immersion in the pathetic, sometimes tear-filled moments, to a critical awareness of its status as fiction and of ourselves as readers or observers. The fragmented form of these novels prevents us from submitting entirely to the dramatic power of individual scenes and from becoming committed to the perspective of the sentimental hero or heroine.⁶⁵

While the paratextual glosses in *Bilitis* function as authenticating gestures, they also keep us at a distance from the central text. Rather than allowing us to be absorbed by the story and identify with the narrative voice, the framing devices remind us that we have no unmediated experience of the central text. The reader of *Bilitis* is faced with the voice of not one, but three writers: the poet herself, the German scholar who copied the poems from her tomb, as well as Louÿs the translator. The bibliography introduced in the second edition added even more voices to this polyphony, placing alongside the fake G. Heim monograph a host of genuine texts derived from *Bilitis*. These include translations into other languages (even a "new" French translation that one Mme. Bertheroy claimed to have translated from the Greek), Debussy's musical setting *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*, and a review by the highly respected Hellenist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. Wilamowitz's review was a deeply offended, highly defensive debunking of the Bilitis hoax, but by giving only the title of the review (*Les Chansons de Bilitis*) Louÿs made it look as though the German scholar lent his authority to the book.

Both manuscript fictions and frauds challenge our methods of determining fact or authenticity. Most readers of ancient literature are dependent on secondary sources. We rely

⁶⁵ Harries, 113.

on the skill, learning and integrity of others for access. Markers of erudition – footnotes, bibliographies, academic language – are often our only basis on which to decide whether a text is credible or not. The *Chansons de Bilitis* contained all those features, seamlessly intermixing real and fabricated references. Yet it slyly offered several clues of its mendacity for the alert reader. It employed some rather obvious anachronisms in the text, for example epigrams by the much later writers Theocritus (c. 250 B.C.E.) and Philodemus (c. 110-35 B.C.E.). Louÿs's name for his fictional archaeologist, "G. Heim," is a German pun: "G/Heim = Geheim = Le mystérieux,"⁶⁶ (the mysterious) as Louÿs later wrote in a letter. This play on words seems to reference earlier texts, such as the hoaxes of Paul Masson published under the pseudonym "Lemice-Terrieux" (*le mystérieux*),⁶⁷ or Mérimée's precursor to *La Guzla*, a manuscript fiction titled *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazul* in which the "translator" is called "Joseph L'Estrange" ("the strange").⁶⁸ By closely mimicking a scholarly edition, while ensuring that the astute reader would inevitably uncover its spuriousness, *Bilitis* makes us question how we know what we know. As Lawrence Venuti points out:

Louÿs thus suggested that, like his counterfeit translation, scholarship is engaged in historical invention, which, however, can pass for truth because it shares the cultural authority enjoyed by academic institutions.⁶⁹

Through parody, *Bilitis* critiques the trustworthiness of scholarly discourse.

Louÿs had good reason to be skeptical toward Classical scholars. He was himself a talented amateur Classicist, and had already published two genuine translations: the *Poésies de Méléagre* in 1893, and Lucian's *Dialogues des courtisanes* in 1894.⁷⁰ His Meleager

⁶⁶ Clive, 110.

⁶⁷ Jean-Paul Goujon, *Pierre Louÿs: Une Vie Secrète, 1870-1925* (Paris: Seghers/J.-J. Pauvert, 1988), 141.

⁶⁸ Abramson, 82.

⁶⁹ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 40.

⁷⁰ Meleager of Gadara compiled in the first century B.C.E. the earliest collection of epigrams (including many of his own) that later became known as the *Greek Anthology*. Lucian of Samosata lived in the second century of

translation received a scathing and very public rebuttal by prominent Hellenist Théodore Reinach, printed in *Le Temps*. In the attack, Reinach cited a "well-known erotic poet" named Mélêtos, whom Reinach had in fact fabricated to support his claims.⁷¹ The name is so similar to that of Louÿs's heroine, one cannot help but wonder if Reinach's imaginary poet sparked the idea of the *Bilitis* hoax. It is clear that Louÿs specifically targeted Classical scholars as potential dupes. He mailed several of them copies of *Bilitis* together with his genuine Meleager translation, which bears close structural similarities to *Bilitis*: poetic fragments collected from the Greek Anthology preceded by a prose "Vie de Méléagre." Louÿs gleefully reported that one professor of Greek at a major French university, warmly thanked him for the books and proposed several alternate translations for *Bilitis*, while yet another claimed "Bilitis and Meleager are not strangers to me, but from now on they will be my personal friends."⁷² It is impossible to determine how many were actually fooled – some Louÿs scholars credit the hoax with great success,⁷³ while others claim that it fooled only a few hapless readers.⁷⁴ However, by forcing readers to question the book's authenticity, Louÿs insinuated that *Bilitis* might not be the only spurious antiquity in circulation.

Extrapolative Fragments: Sappho II

The romance of Sappho's fragments has been a part of her attraction from the earliest times. One is almost tempted to speculate that it may be the chief reason for her fame. Sappho, as a result, is not a person, not an oeuvre, barely

our era, and is probably best known for writing the original version of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." Both writers were Syrian born, but wrote in Greek.

⁷¹ Goujon, 91.

⁷² "Bilitis et Méléagre ne sont pas pour moi des inconnus, mais ce seront désormais des amis personnels," quoted in Goujon, 144.

⁷³ See Goujon, 144; Paul-Ursin Dumont, *Pierre Louÿs, l'Hermite Du Hameau* (Vendôme: Librairie de la Renaissance, 1985), 143-144; Arthur Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 175.

⁷⁴ See Clive, 110; Escher, 62; Venuti, 34.

a name. Instead S----o is a space. For joining up the dots. Filling in the blanks. Making something out of nothing.⁷⁵

– Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho History*

Les Chansons de Bilitis relate to the Sapphic fragments not only by imitation, but also by extrapolation. The book "is situated . . . in the interstices of Sappho scholarship. Louÿs weaves Bilitis into Psappha's life,"⁷⁶ as DeJean has explained. Louÿs not only made Sappho into Bilitis's teacher, but also incorporated into his narrative two women mentioned in Sappho's own fragments: Mnasiidika, as Bilitis's wife and the primary focus of more than thirty of her poems, and Gyrinno, the lover to whom Bilitis turns when abandoned by Mnasiidika. To ensure that no reader would miss the reference, Louÿs placed the Sappho fragment "Mnasiidika is lovelier than the gentle Gyrinno" as an epigram for the second grouping of poems. Furthermore, in the "Life of Bilitis," he claimed to definitively resolve a scholarly controversy regarding Mnasiidika:

We already know the name of this young woman from Sappho's verse extolling her beauty, but the name itself was questionable and Bergk was almost convinced that she was simply called Mnais. The songs that we will read further on proves, however, that this hypothesis must be discarded.⁷⁷

By creating a testimony of the period that, although intermittent, was still far more complete than the one left by Sappho, Louÿs gave the appearance of settling many of the ambiguities in the historical record.

The *Chansons* have been criticized for having little relation to genuine Sappho fragments.⁷⁸ However, I believe that they were intended to respond not so much to Sappho's works, but rather to works about Sappho. Such a wide variety of fictions and fabrications

⁷⁵ Reynolds, 15.

⁷⁶ DeJean, 277.

⁷⁷ Louÿs, *Two Erotic Tales: Aphrodite and Songs of Bilitis*, 235.

⁷⁸ Escher, 62.

have arisen around Sappho over the millennia that an entire discipline has now formed around Sappho reception.⁷⁹ Ellen Greene's introduction to a collection of essays on this subject describes

a more recent fascination with Sappho's "afterlife" – the seemingly endless permutations wrought upon her life and work through centuries of literary and scholarly readings and rewritings. The history of Sappho imitations, translations, and scholarship is a history of images and perceptions, fictions and fantasies. . . each age, each generation invents its own Sappho. . . . scholars and writers have read the fragmentary remains of Sappho's poetry and have, to a large extent, created the Sappho they wanted.⁸⁰

This fictionalization of Sappho has been both enabled and provoked by her fragmentary remains. So much is missing from her poetry that even the most basic edition must rely on conjecture to some degree, as Williamson reminds us:

Greek texts are habitually printed with an array of footnotes about disputed details, including the names of editors who have proposed particular variants, and for Sappho's fragments the notes often include the brief but telling statement that a particular editor "recreated" (*refinxit*) this version.⁸¹

Tales about Sappho's life are even more dubious. From some two hundred years after her death, writers began to spin stories about her. As time passed, facts about her grew ever scarcer, and the speculations eventually took on a life of their own.

The various extrapolations from Sappho's fragments resulted not only from a desire to replace what was lost, but also from a confusion, and to some degree a discomfort, with what had survived. Sapphic suppositions mostly revolve around three aspects of her legacy as handed down from antiquity. First, Sappho's remaining poems mostly seem to express or describe love or passion for various female companions, though a few feature men, and still

⁷⁹ Joan DeJean fired the opening salvo with her book on Sappho in the French tradition, *Fictions of Sappho 1546-1937*. Other notable works in this tradition include Margaret Reynolds *The Sappho Companion and The Sappho History*; Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho*; Margaret Williamson, *Sappho's Immortal Daughters*; and the collection of essays *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, ed. Ellen Greene.

⁸⁰ Ellen Greene, ed. "Introduction" to *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 3.

⁸¹ Williamson, 59.

others obscure the gender of the beloved in ambiguous terms.⁸² Second, depictions of Sappho in Ancient Greek comedies link her sexually to a large number of men, mostly poets. Third, another widespread legend about Sappho tells how she jumped to her death from a cliff on the island of Leucadia because of her unrequited love for the ferryman Phaon.⁸³ Hellenists concocted convoluted hypotheses to explain what they considered to be the contradictions in this record. It is worth reviewing a number of theories circulating during Louÿs's time because of the ways they are reflected in the *Chansons de Bilitis*.⁸⁴

Writers and academics had particularly great difficulty reconciling Sappho's literary eminence with her reputations for heterosexual promiscuity on the one hand and passion for women on the other. A typical view was stated by Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker, one of the founders of philology: "no educated Greek would have thought these were beautiful poems if something monstrous and disgusting had been going on in them."⁸⁵ The dominant nineteenth-century scholarly position portrayed Sappho as a chaste paragon of familial virtue. The mention in one fragment of a daughter, Cleis, was taken as proof that Sappho must have had a husband, and therefore could not have taken women as lovers. The husband was also assumed dead, to rationalize Sappho's fatal infatuation for Phaon. Some scholars discounted the stories of multiple liaisons with men as mere comic license. Others created a second Sappho of Lesbos, a courtesan, to whom the heterosexual indiscretions (and sometimes the love for Phaon) were attributed – for it was assumed no woman could have been with so many men unless she were a prostitute. With the second Sappho sometimes credited as a minor poet or a lyre player, the two-Sappho theory preserved the purity of the great poetess,

⁸² See Most, 26-33; Page DuBois, *Sappho is Burning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9-11.

⁸³ The Phaon story, now assumed to be fictional, was popularized especially by Ovid's poem about Sappho in his *Heroides*.

⁸⁴ For a detailed account of nineteenth and early twentieth century French Sappho portrayals, see DeJean.

⁸⁵ Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker, *Sappho von einem herrschenden Vorurtheil befreit*, 1816, quoted in *Ibid.*, 208.

Sappho, by attributing the stains on her reputation to a case of mistaken identity.⁸⁶ Sappho's passionate addresses to women were variously justified as expressions of friendship rather than eroticism. In some of the most widespread and enduring fictions, Sappho was transformed into a kind of boarding-school governess preparing young girls for marriage, and her poems were equated with the intense but purportedly non-sexual attachments formed between nineteenth century schoolmistresses and their charges.⁸⁷ The chaste Sappho theory prevailed from the early nineteenth well into the twentieth century. Its assumptions and reasoning are exemplified in a 1925 passage by David M. Robinson:

The moral purity of Sappho shines in its own light . . . [she] is never erotic. There is no language to be found in her songs which a pure woman might not use, and it would be practically impossible for a bad woman to subject her expressions to the marvelous niceties of rhythm, accent and meaning which Sappho everywhere exhibits. Immorality and loss of self-control never subject themselves to perfect literary and artistic taste . . . Sappho's love for flowers, moreover, affords another luminous testimony. A bad woman as well as a pure woman might love roses, but a bad woman does not love the small and hidden wild flowers of the field, the dainty anthrisc and the clover, as Sappho did.⁸⁸

By constructing a Sappho as wife and mother, a Sappho as schoolteacher, and two Sapphos as the virgin/whore duality, academics attempted to salvage her reputation by bringing her into conformity with their own contemporary morality.

Outside academic circles, the nineteenth-century image of Sappho was very different. In the literature and the popular imagination of the time, Sappho's poetry was downplayed while her name became almost synonymous with vice and excess. As author Guy de Maupassant wryly noted, "They claim Sappho wrote admirable verses. In any case, I hardly

⁸⁶ For a detailed account of the two Sappho theory, see Most, 11-35.

⁸⁷ See Parker, 150-154.

⁸⁸ Robinson *Sappho and Her Influence* (1925), quoted in Margaret Reynolds and Sappho, *The Sappho Companion*, 1st Palgrave ed. (New York: Palgrave for St. Martin's Press, 2001), 296-297.

believe that that is her main title to immortality."⁸⁹ When Alphonse Daudet wrote about unmasking a prostitute with a heart of gold, he described her as "Sappho toute la lyre" because she had practiced "the full sexual gamut," and showed her "completely revealed as a skillful courtesan, in all the horrible glory of Sappho."⁹⁰ In a culture extremely hostile to same-sex love of any kind, "sapphisme" and "lesbienne" entered French dictionaries in 1838 and 1867 respectively as terms denoting female homosexuality.⁹¹ In *Les fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire placed the poem *Lesbos* before the two poems dealing explicitly with female same-sex love, putting Sappho darkly in the lead of those he called *Femmes damnées*.⁹² In Verlaine's series of poems *Scènes d'amour sapphique* (*Scenes of Sapphic Love*) Sappho is depicted as "an outright madwoman, whose crazed final love for Phaon is her ironic punishment for indulging in stigmatized lesbian passions."⁹³ Meanwhile in England, Charles Algernon Swinburne, a writer Louÿs once called "the greatest living poet,"⁹⁴ portrayed Sappho as a cruelly compelling sadist in his "Anactoria," echoing the schoolmistress theory in a way that would have scandalized those who first conceived of it.⁹⁵

DeJean comments that "*Les Chansons de Bilitis* is steeped in nineteenth-century lore and scholarship."⁹⁶ This is not surprising, as Louÿs wrote the first edition of *Bilitis* at the same time as his very close friend André Lebey was preparing his 1895 translation of Sappho. Described by DeJean as "easily the best French edition of the century," the Lebey

⁸⁹ "On prétend que Sappho fit d'admirables vers. Dans tous les cas, je ne crois point que ce soit là son vrai titre à l'immortalité." Guy de Maupassant, "La Lysistrata moderne," quoted in DeJean, 231.

⁹⁰ Alphonse Daudet, *Sappho* (1884), quoted in Ibid., 260.

⁹¹ Ibid., 245. For nineteenth century French attitudes toward homosexuality, see Christopher Robinson, *Scandal in the Ink: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century French Literature* (London ; New York, NY: Cassell, 1995), 2-18.

⁹² See DeJean, 271-275; Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 140-168.

⁹³ Terry Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 478.

⁹⁴ Clive, 57.

⁹⁵ Prins, 152-154; Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 183-187.

⁹⁶ DeJean, 278.

volume was dedicated to "my friend Pierre Louÿs." In *Bilitis*, Louÿs consolidated the competing conceptions of Sappho, subverting them all in the process. Although Sappho herself appeared in only one of the *Chansons*, Louÿs used Bilitis as her counterpart, a pseudo-Sappho whose words and actions would answer most of the questions and controversies propagated by the disintegration of Sappho's own verse. He made Bilitis both student and lover to Sappho; both a highly respected poet and a courtesan; passionate for both men and women. For Bilitis there would be no Phaon, no expiatory suicidal leap; instead she ends her days as a courtesan, happily freed of any exclusive attachments, writing poetry until she dies of old age.

To respond to the charge that a "bad woman" could not write good poetry, Louÿs redefined virtue and piety to include prostitution as a pagan spiritual practice:

Bilitis began her life for the third time, and in a manner that it will be more difficult for me to make acceptable without recalling to what degree love was held sacred among the people of antiquity. The courtesans of Amathonte were not considered, like ours, as decadent creatures, exiled from all of mundane society. They were women from the best families of the city. Aphrodite had given them beauty and, in gratitude, they thanked the goddess by consecrating this beauty to the service of her cult. Every city that had a temple rich in courtesans like those of Cyprus gave these women the same respectful attention. . . . That she was a courtesan was undeniable: even her last Songs bear witness to that . . . She was pious and devoted. She lived a life true to the temple, so long as Aphrodite consented to prolong the youthfulness of her purest adorer.⁹⁷

Similarly, he recontextualized Sappho's love poems to women by depicting ancient Lesbos as a society in which female partnerships were an accepted norm, complete with officially sanctioned same-sex marriages. Louÿs's correspondence shows that he was aiming for a depiction of love between women that would avoid the negative, sensationalist terms of his contemporaries:

⁹⁷ Louÿs, *Two Erotic Tales: Aphrodite and Songs of Bilitis*, 235-236.

I believe that the originality of the book derives precisely from the fact that the modesty question is never posed. In particular, I believe that the *second* part will appear very new. Until now, lesbians have always been represented as femmes fatales (Balzac, Musset, Baudelaire, Rops) or vicious (Zola, Mendès, and a host of other lesser writers). Even Mlle. de Maupin, who is not at all satanic, is nonetheless not an ordinary woman. This is the first time . . . that an idyll has been written on this topic.⁹⁸

Dedicated in the second edition to "the young girls of future society," the *Chansons de Bilitis* had a significant impact on lesbian history. It was openly embraced by the contemporary lesbian writers of the "Sappho 1900" group.⁹⁹ Natalie Clifford Barney dedicated the first book of that movement, *Cinq petits dialogues grecs*, "To Monsieur Pierre Louÿs, from a young girl of future society." She wrote Louÿs personally to thank him for *Bilitis*, saying

If I have wanted to write books, it was to answer her. I would like to be one of the voices that her words have awakened, and to tell a world that is old and deaf due to lies, blind due to ugliness, that there are already young girls of future society who appreciate what you have done for them and who would like to express, as incoherent and awkward as they may be, their gratitude.¹⁰⁰

Barney's colleague and lover Renée Vivienne also wrote Louÿs to express her "profound enthusiasm," for *Bilitis*, which "has long possessed the passionate tenderness that I reserve for the few books that are inseparable from my thinking and my existence."¹⁰¹ Similarly, the women of the first American lesbian rights group paid tribute to the book by naming themselves the "Daughters of Bilitis."¹⁰² Ironically, though Louÿs created a character

⁹⁸ Letter to brother Georges Louis, quoted in Venuti, 43-44. Mlle. de Maupin is the cross-dressing protagonist of the eponymous 1835 novel by Théophile Gautier.

⁹⁹ DeJean, 279-281; Venuti, 44-46; Gretchen Schultz, "Daughters of Bilitis: Literary Genealogy and Lesbian Authenticity," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7, no. 3 (2001): 384, 386.

¹⁰⁰ "Si j'avais voulu faire des livres c'était pour lui répondre et je voudrais être une des voix que ses paroles ont éveillées et dire au monde vieux et sourd à force des mensonges, aveugle à force de laideur, que déjà il y a des jeunes filles de la société future que apprécient ce que vous avez fait pour elles et qui veulent vous exprimer, toutes incohérents et maladroites qu'elles puissent être, leurs remerciements." Quoted in Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 333.

¹⁰¹ "Aphrodite et les Chansons de Bilitis possèdent depuis longtemps la tendresse passionnée que je réserve à quelques livres inséparables de ma pensée, et de mon existence." Quoted in *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁰² Conversely, more recent writers have dismissed the lesbian eroticism in *Les Chansons de Bilitis* as voyeuristic masculine appropriation because it was written by a man. See Schultz, 378-380; Venuti, 35-37.

counterpart that challenged the one-sided views of Sappho, Bilitis, like her real-life model, is now almost universally thought of as exclusively lesbian.

Louÿs's Sapphic extrapolations may have had only a dubious basis in historical fact – but so did the speculative completions of Sappho's legend by many of his scholarly contemporaries. There is, for example, no evidence whatsoever that Sappho headed a girls' school nor that any such institutions even existed on Lesbos at that time.¹⁰³ Phaon and the second Sappho can be equally consigned to legend. And the contention that lesbianism and literary greatness are necessarily incompatible is now generally recognized as a minority personal opinion rather than a scholarly fact. Reynolds suggests that where Sappho is concerned, falsity is unavoidable:

We can know so little about Sappho – and even that little is an invention, a reconstruction. I have quoted Balmer's English translations of her poems. Insofar as that assumes the intervention of a voice other than Sappho's, those translations are just that – a 'carrying across,' a make believe, a forgery. Even if I were to quote the Greek I would choose to use a scholarly edition, which also can only ever be an intelligent fake. Even if I were to quote exactly from the papyrus remains, or the works of the ancient commentators who cited her, I would still be presenting you with a shadow, or a reflection.¹⁰⁴

Bilitis prods us to question the conventional distinctions between forgery and scholarly deduction. After all, MacPherson's Ossian poems incorporate a substantial proportion of genuine fragments from Gaelic ballads he collected in the Highlands.¹⁰⁵ Where exactly is the line that defines these as frauds but the recreations of Sappho as scholarship? Louÿs's challenge hit close enough to the mark that Wilamowitz felt the need to defend his discipline with a minutely detailed review of the *Chansons*, written in the "chaste Sappho" tradition:

¹⁰³ See Parker, 150-178.

¹⁰⁴ Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ K. K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7-13.

A volume of French poems with sickeningly obscene contents in parts might seem unsuitable for a discussion here: only I think it deserves notice, and use this opportunity to speak to things that have long weighed on my heart. For me, it has to do with the purity of a great woman: then I won't shrink from heartily biting into the excrement.¹⁰⁶

First of all, let it be stated that it is psychologically unthinkable that a woman like this Bilitis, who leads only an animalistic life (is only *le sexe*) could write poetry, could say what she feels. She could not if she wanted to, but she would not want to in the first place. . . . If the Hellenes had led the life of which he thinks them capable, that is, if they had exerted their reason only to be more bestial than any beast, then their lyrics would have emerged as little as their prophets and sages.¹⁰⁷

Wilamowitz found *Bilitis* so threatening that he even republished the review thirty years later as part of his 1926 monograph *Sappho und Simonides*.

Fragments as Censorship

". . ." or "___," the universal Morse code used in literature to represent the language of love.¹⁰⁸

— Walter Benjamin, "A State Monopoly on Pornography"

Since Louÿs made no attempt to continue the ruse after his authorship was discovered, his fraudulent presentation of the *Chansons de Bilitis* is usually dismissed as a schoolboy prank, designed to dupe a few unsuspecting scholars, but fundamentally insignificant.¹⁰⁹ I will argue that for Louÿs the hoax element of the *Chansons de Bilitis* was

¹⁰⁶ "Ein Band französischer Gedichte mit teilweise widerlich unzünftigem Inhalte mag für eine Besprechung an diesem Orte ungeeignet erscheinen: allein ich finde, daß er Beachtung verdient und ergreife diese Gelegenheit, Dinge anzusprechen, die mir lange am Herzen liegen. Mir ist es um die Reinheit einer großen Frau zu tun: da scheue ich mich nicht, herzlich in den Kot zu fassen." Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Sappho Und Simonides: Untersuchungen Über Griechische Lyriker*, 2d ed. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1966), 63.

¹⁰⁷ "Da sei zunächst constatirt, daß es psychologisch undenkbar ist, ein Weib wie diese Bilitis, die nur ein animalisches Leben führt, nur le sexe ist, könne dichten, könne sagen, was sie fühlt. Sie könnte nicht, aber sie würde gar nicht erst wollen. . . . Hätten die Hellenen ein Leben geführt, wie er ihnen zutraut, d.h. ihre Vernunft nur gebraucht um tierischer als jedes Tier zu sein, so wären ihre Lyriker so wenig aufgetreten wie ihre Propheten und Weisen." Ibid., 69.

¹⁰⁸ Walter Benjamin, "A State Monopoly on Pornography," in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996), 2:72.

¹⁰⁹ See Niederauer, 133.

in fact a serious enterprise. Not merely a poke at Classical scholarship, it was a targeted critique of specific practices and perspectives in society at large that Louÿs hoped to replace with his own ethical theories.

Louÿs would not be the first to use trickery to educate. Julia Abramson argues in her book *Learning from Lying* that the French had an established tradition of didactic deceptions, which she terms "mystifications." Mystifications differ from frauds and forgeries in that they are intended to be unmasked in order provoke dialogue:

A complete mystification necessarily ends with demystification. The mystifier creates a text designed to ensnare readers, but not permanently, as with forgery. The deception is short-lived, and it ceases upon the audience's discovery of the falsification. Having progressed through these stages, the literary mystification is essentially complete, but has only just begun to achieve its real purpose: to provoke reflection on the part of the reader roused out of intellectual slumber. The author of a mystifying text shapes a work to imitate a recognized form, with the aim of commenting critically on that form or on its current mode of production or reception. By involving the reader in the experiences of deception and discovery, the author seeks to guide the reading of the text. For the reader, disillusionment necessitates a new appraisal of the text, of its possible interpretations, and of his own prior assumptions.¹¹⁰

Abramson traces mystifications in France back to the eighteenth century *philosophes*, with particular emphasis on the works of Diderot and Mérimée.

An example contemporary to *Bilitis* was Oscar Wilde's novelette, "A Portrait of Mr. W.H.," published in *Blackwood's* magazine in 1889, and expanded into a book-length text in 1891, the year he met Louÿs.¹¹¹ Wilde asks, "What would you say about a young man who had a strange theory about a certain work of art, believed in his theory, and committed a

¹¹⁰ Abramson, 14.

¹¹¹ On Wilde's short-lived but highly influential friendship with Louÿs, see Niederauer, 43-46; Gordon Millan, *Pierre Louÿs: Ou, Le Culte De l'Amitié* (Aix-en-Provence: Pandora, 1979), 173-187.; Goujon, 100-102, 113-115.

forgery in order to prove it?"¹¹² Writing a story about a man who lies about a forgery to substantiate a theory, Wilde explored the various shades of invention like a hall of mirrors, all designed to demonstrate that Shakespeare's greatest works were inspired by his passion for the boy actor who played his female lead roles *en travesti*.¹¹³ Wilde devoted three of the novelette's five chapters to a close reading of Shakespeare's sonnets in support of this premise, thereby employing a fabrication – that is, a fiction – to prove a theory.

We know Louÿs was familiar with the story because he referred to Wilde's theory in the preface to his translation of Meleager, written one year before he began the *Chansons*.¹¹⁴ I believe Louÿs resolved to become the "young man who had a strange theory . . . and committed a forgery in order to prove it." An 1894 letter to his brother shows that he expected to be exposed as author rather than translator, and that the hoax was not in fact an end in itself:

. . . I'm very rapidly writing the alleged songs of a certain Bilitis, aka Damophyla, who was a poetess around the sixth century B.C. by whom we possess nothing. – It's a big secret! The tarot that I consulted alone told me, with its usual wisdom: 1st That the mystification will not hold. 2nd That these songs will be the best thing I've done. 3rd That despite the transparence of the strategy, the superchery, even unveiled, was completely necessary and to good effect.¹¹⁵

David Niederauer has convincingly argued that "Louÿs had decided that the role he was best fitted for was that of a reformer, a moralist in revolt against the harsh bourgeois

¹¹² Wilde, 3.

¹¹³ "Mr. W.H." refers to the unknown dedicatee of Shakespeare's sonnets (To the onlie begetter of/These insuing sonnets/Mr. W.H. all happinesse/And that eternitie/Promised).

¹¹⁴ Pierre Louÿs, *Œuvres complètes* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1973), I. 6.

¹¹⁵ "J'écris très rapidement les prétendues chansons d'une certaine Bilitis, dite Damophyla, qui était poëtesse vers le VI^e siècle avant J.-C. et dont nous ne possédons rien. – C'est un grand secret! Le tarot que j'ai consulté tout seul m'a dit, avec sa sagesse ordinaire: 1^e Que la mystification ne prendrait pas. 2^e Que ces chansons seraient ce que j'aurais fait de mieux. 3^e Que malgré la transparence du stratagème, la supercherie même dévoilée était tout à fait nécessaire et de bon effet." Letter to his brother Georges in April 1894. Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 310-311.

standards of the day."¹¹⁶ All of Louÿs's major works, beginning with the *Chansons de Bilitis* of 1894 and ending with *Le Roi Pausole* in 1901, champion a free, unfettered expression of sexuality. He also wrote a number of polemical essays in this vein for periodicals, including "*Plaidoyer pour la liberté Morale*" (Plea for Moral Liberty) published in 1897, and the three-part "*Liberté pour l'amour et le mariage*" (Freedom for Love and Marriage) published in 1900. Louÿs summed up his vision of himself as an activist author in an 1896 letter to an unnamed admirer:

... I am annoyed and somewhat scandalized to see that all European writers, without exception for a thousand years, close the bed curtains at the same time as their chapters, while Oriental literatures have left us such solemn and admirably beautiful pages on this point. For me, that is where the novel begins, and the jokes must cease. If I have not yet said all that I would like to say, it is because current laws do not yet permit it, but I do not despair to see someday in France a "moral freedom" equal to the religious freedom we are now granted . . . I have one goal, which is to deliver to modern art and literature the most essential subject, the most sacred of all, and until now, the most closed: a China of four hundred million images. I am certain that one day this prodigious mine will open for all, and I would like to be the one who turns the key.¹¹⁷

Niederauer has suggested that spreading this doctrine was in fact Louÿs's primary motive for seeking publication. Once Louÿs realized that his campaign had proven ineffective, he almost completely ceased to publish, although he continued to write.¹¹⁸

The most concise exposition of Louÿs's moral code can be found in his 1896 novel *Aphrodite*, which although published after *Bilitis*, was begun several years before it.

¹¹⁶ Niederauer, 145.

¹¹⁷ "Je suis agacé et un peu scandalisé en voyant que tous les écrivains européens, sans en excepter un seul depuis mille ans, ferment les rideaux du lit en même temps que leur chapitre, alors que les littératures orientales nous ont laissé sur ce point des pages si graves et admirablement belles. Pour moi, c'est là que la roman commence, et que les plaisanteries doivent cesser. Se je n'ai pas dit encore tout ce que je voudrais dire, c'est que les lois actuelles ne le permettent pas jusqu'ici, mais je ne désespère pas de voir un jour en France une 'liberté morale' égale à la liberté religieuse qu'on nous accorde . . . J'ai un but qui est de livrer à l'art et à la littérature modernes le sujet le plus essentiel, le plus sacré de tous, et jusqu'ici le plus fermé: un Chine de quatre cent millions d'images. J'ai la certitude qu'un jour cette prodigieuse mine s'ouvrira pour tous, et je voudrais être celui qui tournera la clef." Quoted in Niederauer, 157.

¹¹⁸ Niederauer, 143.

Aphrodite opens with an introduction that reads like a manifesto to the principle that "there is nothing under the sun more sacred than physical love, nothing more beautiful than the human body."¹¹⁹ For Louÿs, liberalizing attitudes towards sex was not an end in itself but rather a means to elevate the mind:

sensuality is a condition, mysterious but necessary and creative of the intellectual process. Those who have not felt the demands of the flesh to their fullest, either in loving or hating them, are incapable of comprehending the demands of the mind. Just as the beauty of the soul brightens the face, so too only the virility of the body nourishes the brain.¹²⁰

Louÿs claimed this philosophy was grounded in Hellenism and that its legacy could be clearly traced through the ages:

Such was the morality of the people who built the Acropolis; and if I add that it has remained that of every great mind, I have only verified common knowledge, so often has it been proven that the superior intellects of artists, writers, warriors or statesmen have never held its noble tolerance to be illicit. Aristotle made his debut by squandering his inheritance on courtesans; Sappho gave her name to a special vice; Caesar was the *moechus calvus*; - but we do not imagine Racine abstaining from the women of the theater, or Napoleon practicing celibacy. Mirabeau's fictions, Chenier's Greek verses, and Montesquieu's pamphlets even equaled Catullus in their daring.¹²¹

Here again we see the influence of Wilde, who similarly invoked the prestige of ancient Greece to legitimate a transgressive sexuality. Louÿs's line of reasoning closely mirrors Wilde's argument in *Mr. W.H.*, and again in his most famous speech from the prisoner's dock, that a sexuality criminalized by society was in fact a path to intellectual betterment following in the footsteps of the Ancients:

"The love that dare not speak its name" in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. . . It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great

¹¹⁹ Louÿs, *Two Erotic Tales: Aphrodite and Songs of Bilitis*, 26.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo. . . It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection.¹²²

This speech, which Wilde is said to have given almost verbatim four years earlier at the Crabtree Club, is echoed in the seventh poem of Debussy's incidental music, "Le Tombeau sans nom," as the epitaph of Bilitis's lesbian mother-in-law that reads "Je ne dis pas mon nom."¹²³ But whereas Wilde limited his theory to pederasty, Louÿs extended the principle to include a much wider range of transgressive sexual practices, with particular emphasis on nudity, lesbianism, prostitution, and juvenile sexuality – all prominently featured in *Bilitis*.¹²⁴

Ironically, Louÿs's and Wilde's association between sexuality and creativity can be traced back to the same scholars who propagated the "chaste Sappho" stories. Linda C. Dowling has traced the roots of the English homophile movement, of whom Wilde, John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater are the best-known proponents, back to their study of Classics at Oxford. Under the influence of Benjamin Jowett, Oxford Classics at that time was strongly influenced by German philology, the school of thought founded by Welcker:

the reformed *Literae humaniores* course at Oxford meant to move the university into the mainstream of progressive nineteenth-century thought, was dominated by a German-inspired revolution in historiography which in the fearlessness of its "scientific" objectivity had made the crucial discovery that *paiderastia* or Greek love was itself martial in origin. . . . As Pater and Symonds read a work such as K.O. Müller's *Dorians*, with its unembarrassed account of the pedagogical, military, and social centrality of Greek *paiderastia*, or Plato's *Symposium*, with its ideal of "spiritual procreancy"

¹²² Quoted in Michael S. Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 117. For a more extended version of Wilde's theory of "the soul of neo-platonism," see Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr W.H.*, 42-47.

¹²³ Linda C. Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 2; Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 98.

¹²⁴ *Bilitis* is frequently referred to as a lesbian text, but in fact lesbianism features prominently only in the second section of poems. Louÿs seems to have advocated an almost encyclopedic scope of practices, with the exception of male homosexuality. Despite the obvious influence of Wilde on his thinking, and his friendship and admiration for many of the most prominent homosexual artists of his time, including Gide, Flaubert, Proust and Loti, Louÿs appears to have had an extremely negative attitude toward same-sex male love. Reportedly, his final break with Wilde was specifically over Wilde's openness about his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas.

(209a) – that pure intellectual commerce between male lovers which brings forth the arts, philosophy, and wisdom itself – they saw that the whole idiom of "effeminacy" which had generated such fear and loathing of male love could now be suddenly reversed in its moral implications.¹²⁵

Wilde went further than many of his colleagues by asserting that the "spiritual procreancy" claimed for pederasty was in fact embodied in its sexual expression – a sexuality that procreated ideas instead of children. The German philologists, on the other hand, grimly maintained that the *paiderastia*'s lofty intellectual achievements demanded the strict sublimation of that sexuality. Moreover, as DeJean argues at length, the philologists directly grounded their claims about an idealized, non-sexual pederasty on Sappho's chastity.¹²⁶ Welcker, Müller and many others incorporated extended discussions of Sappho in their books defending pederasty, linked by a somewhat vague line of reasoning: (1) the way to greatness is to imitate the Greeks (2) the Greeks were great because of the pedagogical institution of pederasty (3) Greek pederasty transcended contemporary nineteenth-century homosexuality because it was purely non-sexual (4) we know pederasty was non-sexual because Sappho, whose poetry also expresses same-sex love, was chaste (5) we know Sappho was chaste because the alternative is unthinkable. For Louÿs to make a convincing case for his moral theories, he had to change the way people thought about the Classics in general, and Sappho in particular. The broken remains of Greek civilization left plenty of spaces in which competing theories could flourish.

Les Chansons de Bilitis was only one of many texts in which Louÿs attempted to debunk the notion that ancient Greek society was a model of ascetic restraint that

¹²⁵ Ibid., xv.

¹²⁶ DeJean, 202-234; see also Joan DeJean, "Sex and Philology: Sappho and the Rise of German Nationalism," in *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, 122-145.

corresponded to contemporary Judeo-Christian morality. For example, he wrote in

Aphrodite:

For the Greeks, love was, with all its consequences, the most virtuous and the most fertile in grandeur. They never attached the concept of shameful and immodesty to it that the Israelite tradition, along with the Christian doctrine, have introduced among us. Herodotus (*I.x.*) tells us very simply: "Among some barbaric people, it is a disgrace to appear naked."¹²⁷

Louÿs based this claim on a host of lesser-known Greek erotic texts, in particular the *Greek Anthology*, a compilation of fragments started by Meleager. That collection became for him so synonymous with sexual license, that he described his experiences with the prostitute who inspired many of the *Bilitis* poems by saying he "was able live out the entire *Greek Anthology* in a month."¹²⁸ Louÿs was particularly outraged by what he perceived to be the widespread distortion and whitewashing of Classical writings for prudish reasons:

When judging the ancient Greeks by ideas presently held, *not one single* accurate translation of their greatest writers could be left in the hands of a tenth-grade student. If M. Mounet-Sully played his Oedipus role without omissions, the police would have halted his production. If M. Leconte de Lisle had not censored *Theocritos* out of prudence, his version would have been seized the same day it was put on sale. Do we not consider Aristophanes exceptional? But we have fourteen hundred and forty important fragments and comedies from one hundred and thirty-two other Greek poets, some of whom, such as Alexis, Philetas, Strattis, Eubulus, and Cratinus, have left us wonderful verses, and no one has get dared to translate this shameless and sublime collection.¹²⁹

To support his premise, Louÿs published a number of genuine Greek translations, selected for their explicit treatment of themes such as lesbianism, prostitution and nudity. These include not only the Meleager fragments and Lucian dialogues mentioned above but also,

¹²⁷ Louÿs, *Two Erotic Tales: Aphrodite and Songs of Bilitis*, 25.

¹²⁸ Letter to Georges, 7 September 1894, quoted in Venuti, 39. The woman in question was Meryem ben Atala (aka Méryem bent Ali), a young Algerian of the Ouled-Naïl tribe, who lived with Louÿs during his first trip to Algeria, in the summer of 1894. Louÿs dedicated the first edition of the *Chansons de Bilitis* to her and André Gide, who had introduced her to Louÿs. For more on her role as muse for the poems, see Goujon, 130-132; Clive, 102-106.

¹²⁹ Louÿs, *Two Erotic Tales: Aphrodite and Songs of Bilitis*, 25-26.

under the title *Lectures antiques*, a series of shorter works by Procopius, Pindar, Nossis, Aristophanes, and several writers from the *Anthology*.¹³⁰ Goujon suggests that "the goal of Louÿs's translations [was] to restore the original text by freeing it from the censorship to which it had been subjected for generations."¹³¹

Louÿs also explicitly underscored the ways in which previous translators had bowdlerized Ancient texts. The *Lectures antiques*, for example, were prefaced by the following:

The only excuse for such an enterprise is that, by a deplorable habit, we read Greek authors most often in French translation. Now it suffices to examine the most famous of those to admire the zealous attention certain academics apply to correct the original. With them, no more brazen epithets, no more double entendres; over the author whom they deign to embellish, they spread their own personal elegance and especially a "taste" that suppresses or adds phrases at random, when it suits them to cross out or insert something here or there.¹³²

Louÿs prefaced his translation of one of Lucian's dialogue "The Lesbians" with an even more specific critique of contemporary translators:

This little dialogue has shocked all the Hellenists. Wieland never dared translate it. Perrot d'Ablancourt cuts out a hundred details and adds civilities to it. M. Talbot denatures it, now out of decency, now out of ingenuity. Belin de Ballu, wanting neither to deal with it himself, nor leave a blank page in the middle of his translation, simply reproduces Ablancourt's fantasy; but he takes care to add the note: "One should be warned that not a word of this is in the text."¹³³

¹³⁰ Niederauer, 128.

¹³¹ "Tel sera le but des traductions de Louÿs: restituer le texte original en le libérant de la censure à laquelle il fut soumis pendant des générations." Goujon, 90.

¹³² "La seule excuse d'une telle entreprise est que, par une déplorable habitude, on lit le plus souvent les auteurs grecs dans les traductions françaises. Or il suffit d'examiner les plus célèbres d'entre elles pour admirer avec quelle attention zélée certains universitaires s'appliquent à corriger l'original. Avec eux, plus d'épithètes hardies, plus de métaphores à double image; ils répandent sur l'auteur qu'ils daignent embellir une élégance que leur est personnelle et surtout un «goût» qui supprime ou ajoute au hasard des phrases, ce qu'il convient de biffer ou d'introduire ça et là." Quoted in Goujon, 90.

¹³³ Pierre Louÿs, *Œuvres complètes*, 1:198.

Like *Aphrodite* and the *Chansons*, these translations showed Ancient Greece as a society that gave free reign to a wide variety of sexual expression, while demonstrating the ways in which contemporary scholars imposed their own morality on their object of study.

To draw attention to the puritanical mutilation of ancient texts, Louÿs built conspicuous holes into the *Chansons de Bilitis*. He fabricated traces of expurgated poems by listing a number of titles marked as "*non-traduites*" ("untranslated") in *Bilitis*'s table of contents.¹³⁴ All commentators agree the implication is that these poems were too sexually explicit to be published. Louÿs did in fact self-censor his manuscript. After his death, a number of far more sexually explicit *Bilitis* poems were discovered. That in itself is not unusual for Louÿs: for all his major works, he wrote pornographic versions that he never published.¹³⁵ But the *Chansons de Bilitis* is the only one in which the shadow doubles are made visible to the reader – visible by omission, in the disparity between the table of contents and the poems themselves. Louÿs hoped to eventually restore them to the text, as he described in an 1898 letter to an unnamed scholar:

You ask me again what the "untranslated" songs are. They are pieces that are necessary to the composition of the volume and with will be added to it once we have obtained from the French legislator the moral liberty for which I am campaigning.¹³⁶

To date, these additional poems have not been incorporated into the book. They were published posthumously under the separate title *Chansons secrètes de Bilitis*.¹³⁷

Several of the non-secret poems also tell us that we are not getting the whole story.

They clearly point past their boundaries, referring to something that has happened or will

¹³⁴ Interestingly, the "untranslated" titles are completely different in the two editions of the book.

¹³⁵ Goujon, 88.

¹³⁶ "Vous me demandez encore ce que sont les chansons «non-traduites». Ce sont des pièces qui sont nécessaires à la composition du volume et qui s'ajouteront à lui dès que nous aurons obtenu du législateur français la liberté morale pour laquelle je fais campagne." Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 319.

¹³⁷ Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons Secrètes De Bilitis*, with a foreward by G.-C. Serrière ed. (Paris: M. Lubineau, 1938).

happen, but which is never actually represented. Frequently, poems portray the seduction or the afterglow, but leave the encounter itself to our imaginations. For example, the first and only poem to mention Sappho by name, "Psappha" (the archaic form of her name), coyly depicts Bilitis waking up beside her teacher, but with only the vaguest hints of what might have transpired between them.

I rub my eyes . . . It is already daylight, I think. Ah! Who is this near me? . .
. A woman? . . . By Paphia, I had forgotten! . . . Oh, Charites! How ashamed I
am!

To what country have I come, what is this island where love is understood
to be like this? If I were not so exhausted, I would think it some sort of dream
. . . Is it possible that this is Sappho?

She sleeps . . . She is truly beautiful, although her hair was cut like an
athlete. But this extraordinary countenance, this virile chest and these narrow
hips. . .

I want to go before she wakens. Alas! I am against the wall. I must step
over her. I am afraid of brushing against her hip and she will take me again as
I pass.

Similarly, "L'Eau pur du bassin," the ninth poem in the Debussy setting, describes in minute
detail the aftermath of a tryst that is itself never depicted.

Pure water of the pool, serene mirror, tell me of my beauty.

*Bilitis, or whoever you are, Tethys perhaps, or Amphitrite, you are
beautiful, know that.*

*Your face bends downward beneath your thick hair, heavy with flowers and
perfume. Your soft eyelids scarcely open and your thighs are weary from the
movements of love.*

*Your body, fatigued with the heaviness of your breasts, bears the delicate
marks of fingernails and the blue blemish of the kiss. Your arms are reddened
by the embrace. Each line of your skin was loved.*

Clear water of the pool, your freshness brings peace. Receive me, who is truly wearied. Take away the rouge of my cheeks and the sweat of my belly and the memory of the night.¹³⁸

As Niederauer observes, "a fair number of Louÿs's *Chansons de Bilitis* seem to be efforts to see how daring he can be without incurring some official reprimand."¹³⁹

The white spaces between poems act as the equivalent of the censor's asterisks. But while censors typically obscure the traces of their work, Louÿs instead accentuates the marks of erasure. By beginning his poems *in media res*, or ending them abruptly without resolution, he directs the reader's interest to the things he does not show, because he is not allowed to. Louÿs's fragments thus become a way of speaking the unspeakable. His process is similar to the one Harries identifies in the writings of eighteenth century writer Frances Sheridan:

Sheridan's fragmentary procedure, it seems to me, helps her to express what must not be expressed. By gesturing toward experiences that could not be part of any novel she knew, she pushes the association of the feminine and the fragmentary to a new and different level. The gaps in her narrative are . . . signs of the experiences society has repressed, made culturally invisible and untellable.¹⁴⁰

Like Sheridan, Louÿs uses fragments to point out the ways in which the conventions of Western literature force stories to be left incomplete. The paradox is that while Louÿs protested having to make those gaps, the fragmentation they produce also functions as a symbol of the erotic drive Louÿs placed at the centre of his moral/aesthetic theory but was forced to obscure in his published works.

¹³⁸ Louÿs, *Two Erotic Tales: Aphrodite and Songs of Bilitis*, 296.

¹³⁹ Niederauer, 136.

¹⁴⁰ Harries, 148.

Fragments as Desire

Desire knows only shreds and fragments, even if plenitude is its ever elusive mirage."¹⁴¹

– Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The *Canzoniere* and the Language of Self"

The interruptions and discontinuities in *Bilitis* discussed up to this point have all dealt with the fragment as a symbol of loss - through suppression, forgetting or decay. The gaps in her story, however, also point towards that which is missing because it has not yet (and may never) become – that which is wanting. *Les Chansons de Bilitis* is primarily an amorous memoir; the vast majority of the poems are concerned with her loves and passions. In exploring the complex and multivalent relationship between desire and fragmentation, *Bilitis* echoes a number of iconic texts about love.

Bilitis's broken up self-portrait simulates the loss of coherence experienced by the desiring subject: the sensations of melting, coming apart, falling to pieces so often associated with falling in love. As Eugene Goodheart remarks in *Desire and its Discontents*, "desire signifies an unstable and aggressive energy that disintegrates structures of reason, self, morality, convention, all attempts to contain and fix reality."¹⁴² Images of fragmentation have long been associated with love lyrics. In Fragment 130, "And eros the loosener of limbs makes me tremble/ A sweet-bitter unmanageable creature,"¹⁴³ Sappho characterizes sexual desire as "a force so powerful it dissolves the joints and disjoins the body, disarticulating the parts from the whole."¹⁴⁴ Sappho's best-known poem, Fragment 31, likewise depicts sensual passion as disintegrating the self:

¹⁴¹ Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The *Canzoniere* and the Language of the Self," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1976): 294.

¹⁴² Eugene Goodheart, *Desire and its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 2.

¹⁴³ Prins, 113.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

... whenever I catch
sight of you, even if for a moment,
then my voice deserts me

and my tongue is struck silent, a delicate fire
suddenly races underneath my skin,

my eyes see nothing, my ears whistle like
the whirling of a top

and sweat pours down me and a trembling creeps over
my whole body, I am greener than grass
at such times, I seem to be no more than
a step away from death.¹⁴⁵

Writers have long commented on the poem's use of fragmentation as an imitation of the experience of desire. Reynolds formulates it most succinctly:

In the course of this poem Sappho takes her bodily self apart, breaks herself into pieces, dismembers her parts, anatomises herself, and then puts herself back together. And this taking apart replicates the taking apart of her mind, the layering of experiences, past and present, that complicate and enrich her representations of desire, loss, and the memory of desire.¹⁴⁶

The tumult of emotions, the disorientating paralysis of the senses that Sappho describes have been repeated and paraphrased time and time again in texts about desire – by Ovid, Catullus, Longinus, Donne, Shelley, Tennyson, and Barthes, to name only a few. Musicians are particularly familiar with the version by Chamisso as set by Schumann in *Frauenliebe und Leben* ("Seit ich ihn gesehen/ glaub ich blind zu sein"). The image in Sappho's fragment have become so indelibly etched in Western culture that Reynolds can feasibly claim that "Sappho's Fragment 31 stands at the head of all love lyrics, all written expression of desire in language."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Translation by Josephine Balmer, quoted in Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 1-2.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 256.

Just as desire is experienced as fragmenting, so its fervent utterances are seldom orderly and complete. Diderot observed in his *Salon de 1767*, "In the violent throes of passion, one suppressed connections, begins a phrase without finishing it, lets a word escape, cries out and falls silent; and yet I have understood everything: it is the sketch of a discourse. Passion creates only sketches."¹⁴⁸ Diderot both anticipates and confirms Roland Barthes's assessment of the "lover's discourse": "the lover, in fact, cannot keep his mind from racing, taking new measures and plotting against himself. His discourse exists only in outbursts of language, which occur at the whim of trivial, aleatory circumstances."¹⁴⁹ The broken-up discourse of Bilitis's poems resembles the sentences of lover's internal dialogue as Barthes describes them:

Such sentences are matrices of figures precisely because they remain suspended: they utter the affect, then break off, their role is filled. The words are never crazed (at most perverse), but the syntax is . . . Underneath the figure, there is something of the "verbal hallucination" (Freud, Lacan): a mutilated sentence which is generally limited to its syntactical portion ("*Even though you are . . .*" "*If you were still . . .*") Whence the emotion of every figure: even the mildest bears within it the terror of a *suspense* . . .¹⁵⁰

As the protagonist and the fictive author of the *Chansons*, Bilitis was a desiring subject, but as a fictional character, she also became the object of desire. Letters by Louÿs's contemporaries testify that they cast her in that role. For example, the poet Henri de Régnier wrote to Louÿs, "Reading Bilitis has thrown me into erotic raptures which I satisfy at the cost of my honor as an ordinary husband."¹⁵¹ In a similar vein, Nathalie Clifford Barney wrote

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Harries, 107.

¹⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 3.

¹⁵⁰ Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 6.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Venuti, 38.

that Bilitis "gave me rapture wilder and tenderness more tender than any other mistress."¹⁵²

In this context, the fragmentation of the Bilitis text resembles the fetishization of the loved one via a familiar process described by Reynolds:

By definition, desire only ever comes to us piecemeal, in fragments. In fantasy – which is the principal engine of desire – I focus on parts. Your mouth, your beautiful eyes, your hands on my body. Specific, precise, discriminated. Over and over again. Lack, and then excess. My focus is on only one part or action, one movement or touch, which I then reiterate, return to, rehearse in a cycle which endlessly repeats itself in pieces, deferring consummation, resisting the whole.¹⁵³

Another primary canonical text exemplifying the fragmenting aspect of desire is Petrarch's collection of sonnets, the *Canzoniere*, also known as *Rime sparse* (Scattered rhymes), and by the Latin title, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (Fragments of vernacular poetry). Like the *Chansons de Bilitis*, the *Canzoniere* is a series of poems that tell a story, in this case, the story of Petrarch's unrequited passion for Laura. The structure of the two works is so similar that Harries's description of the *Rime sparse* could easily apply to the *Chansons de Bilitis*:

Each poem is the record of a discrete experience, or, perhaps more accurately, the creation of a lyric moment that cannot be sustained. . . . In the *Vita Nuova* Dante connects his poems with a prose narrative, showing his readers how he moved from one state of mind to the next. But in Petrarch's sequence this connective tissue is missing. He treats his dramas of consciousness only as momentary states; though each lyric is highly polished and finished, it is only a shard of experience, isolated and incomplete, with no narrative frame.¹⁵⁴

In the *Rime*, Petrarch's evocation of his beloved Laura splits her not only into hundreds of poems, but into isolated body parts. Rather than praise Laura's beauty, Petrarch catalogs her beauties, focusing on individual features, as Nancy Vickers remarked:

¹⁵² Quoted in Schultz, 395.

¹⁵³ Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 26

¹⁵⁴ Harries, 104.

We never see in the *Rime sparse* a complete picture of Laura. This would not be exceptional if we were considering a single "song" or even a restricted lyric corpus. . . But given an entire volume devoted to a single lady, the absence of a coherent, comprehensive portrait is significant. Laura is always presented as a part or parts of a woman. When more than one part figures in a single poem, a sequential ordering is never stressed. Her textures are those of metals and stones; her image is that of a collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects. Singled out among them are hair, hand, foot and eyes: golden hair trapped and bound the speaker; an ivory hand took his heart away; a marble foot imprinted the grass and flowers; starry eyes directed him in his wandering.¹⁵⁵

Vickers argues further: "The import of Petrarch's description of Laura extends well beyond the confines of his own poetic age: in subsequent times, his portrayal of feminine beauty became authoritative"¹⁵⁶

The depictions of women in the *Chansons de Bilitis* certainly seem to support Vicker's assertion; change the names, and her critique could be about Louÿs. For example, "Pure Water of the Pool," the ninth poem in the Debussy setting, enumerates Bilitis's features without sequential ordering.¹⁵⁷ The tenth poem of the setting, "The Dancing Girl with the Rattles," displays similar descriptive techniques:

You attach the resounding rattles to your graceful hands, dearest
Myrrhinidion, and barely naked out of your robe, you offer your lithe limbs.
How pretty you are, your arms in the air, your loins arched and your breasts
reddened!

You begin - your feet settle, one before the other, hesitate, and then glide
softly. Your body folds like a scarf, you caress your quivering skin and
sensual pleasure inundates your long, swooning eyes.

Suddenly, you strike the rattles together! Arch yourself, your feet pointed
out, shake your loins, fling your legs and let your hands, filled with noise, call
every desire in a ribbon around your twirling body.

¹⁵⁵ Nancy J. Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2, Writing and Sexual Difference (Winter 1981): 266.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted on page 47 above.

Let us applaud with great cries, whether smiling over your shoulder you wiggle your buttocks, convulsing and muscular, or whether you undulate, stretched out, to the rhythm of your memories.

Similar traces of Petrarch can be found throughout *Bilitis*, as in "Mnasidika's Three Beauties," ("Her lips are red as copper, her hair shines blue as steel and her eyes are black as silver"); "Night Words," ("This mouth is mine! and mine alone! . . . These naked arms are mine, this neck, this hair. . ."); and the eponymous poem "Bilitis" ("My hair is black with its own blackness and my lips are red with their own redness. My curls float around me, free like feathers").

The fragment not only reflects the experience of desire, it creates desire; its pull toward the unknown encapsulates the very essence of longing. By showing us a teasing glimpse, the fragment makes us want more, in what Reynolds refers to as "the erotics of the fragment – part known, part hidden – in the erotics of the feminine – part veiled, part guessed."¹⁵⁸ Goodheart has even suggested that desire and fragmentation are inextricably connected: "The gap between desire and its object is insurmountable. Indeed, it is the very gap that nourishes and sustains desire, because its satisfaction would be its extinction."¹⁵⁹

So while Louÿs used devices of fragmentation to condemn the expurgation of Classical texts and to protest the omissions that contemporary censorship standards required him to make, those same holes act as symbols of the very erotic drive he championed. In fact, the construction of *Bilitis* in fragments was arguably an eroticized act, similar to the process Schor identifies in Barthes's textual production:

writing by fragments is for Barthes an intensely pleasurable textual activity and that pleasure is born of the abrupt discontinuity introduced by the fragment: "it is a fantasy of discourse, a gaping of desire" (*RB*, 94). The blank interstices between fragments are to the text what the "intermittences of the

¹⁵⁸ Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 26.

¹⁵⁹ Goodheart, 3.

skin flashing between to articles of clothing" (*PoT*, 10) are to the body: the portals of desire.¹⁶⁰

Louÿs himself described the addition of new poems for the 1897 edition in similar terms:

Today it is three years to the day that I began this little book, and I never resume it without a pleasure that no other manuscript gives me. Since yesterday, I've done six new songs and I've restarted four old ones (unpublished). Now that's work.¹⁶¹

... My life continues the same, except for an increase of work regarding *Bilitis*; I no longer dine except on the corner of the table, beside a pile of books, and I go to bed in the early hours of morning. Truly, it's a volume that has given me great pleasure to write. If I were rich, I wouldn't publish it for another ten years and I'd work on it incessantly. It would never be finished.¹⁶²

The blanks between poems meant that the book could be added to indefinitely, without ever completing the story. Each time Louÿs inserted a new poem into a gap, it only created two more gaps on either side. This open-ended structure afforded Louÿs the pleasure of filling *Bilitis*'s textual holes again and again, without ever exhausting the book's insatiable capacity.

* * *

Under the terminologies devised by Harries, Levinson and Rajan, the *Chansons de Bilitis* is a planned, authorized, unfinished fragment. It was conceived and published with lacunae and disjunctions as essential structural features, in such a way that it would be not only inappropriate, but impossible to make it into a continuous whole. Fragmentation plays a

¹⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 94; idem, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 10; quoted in Schor, 96.

¹⁶¹ "Il y a aujourd'hui trois ans jour pour jour que j'ai commencé ce petit livre et je ne le reprends jamais sans un plaisir qu'aucun autre manuscrit ne me donne. Depuis hier, j'ai fait six chansons nouvelles et j'en ai recommencé quatre anciens (inédites). Voilà du travail." Letter to George, 5 March, 1897. Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 314-315.

¹⁶² "... Ma vie continue la même, à part un surcroît de travail à propos de *Bilitis*; je ne dîne plus que sur un coin de table, à côté d'une pile de livres, et je me couche à des heures matinales. Vraiment, c'est un volume qui m'aura donné bien du plaisir à écrire. Si j'étais riche je ne le publierais pas avant dix ans d'ici et j'y travaillerais sans cesse. Il ne sera jamais terminé." Letter to Georges, 27 October 1897, Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 315.

number of important symbolic roles in this text. The book not only imitates the incompleteness of the historical and literary record from Sappho's time as a generic convention and a gesture of authentication but also depends upon that incompleteness for its very existence. The *Chansons de Bilitis*, and the moral-aesthetic premise that motivated them, are built upon a context of speculative writings, both literary and scholarly, responding to ambiguities created by the ruins of Ancient Greece. Extrapolating from these fragments, *Bilitis* is dependant on Sappho, and a full appreciation of the book requires prior knowledge of Sappho and the conflicting theories that circulated about her during the *fin-de-siècle*. At the same time, by parodying the censorship techniques they employed, *Bilitis* critiques the writings of contemporary Hellenists for introducing even more holes in the record. Finally, like many texts before and after it, *Bilitis* uses fragmentary devices to mimic and provoke in the reader the symptoms of erotic desire. So although fragmentation is not generally considered a feature of Louÿs's style, the case for its central importance in the *Chansons de Bilitis* is overdetermined. It is therefore not surprising that Debussy's incidental music for it should be likewise fragmentary.

CHAPTER 3

DEBUSSY'S *CHANSONS DE BILITIS* INCIDENTAL MUSIC

You are the friend whom I have certainly loved most and I console myself for the lack of your presence by imagining that you are in a *décor* so distant that all hope of communicating with you is impossible.

If someone sometime insists on having seen you, then I, for my part, insist that he is mad. Your sending me your book disturbs the pattern of this dream a little. Imagine! I had tears in my eyes – so strong was my emotion on seeing your handwriting. . . . It is sad, after all. You send me a book and I reply with music. . . . How much more I would have loved a handshake of the old times, alas! Now I can only imagine it. . . . But I am always your true friend.¹⁶³

– Letter from Debussy to Louÿs, 17 June 1903

According to Louÿs, he and Debussy first met at one of Mallarmé's Tuesday *soirées* in 1892.¹⁶⁴ By 1893, Louÿs reported to his brother that the two had become inseparable.¹⁶⁵ Their correspondence reveals a rich and multi-faceted relationship.¹⁶⁶ While they did not always agree – their arguments regarding Wagner were particularly heated – they seem to have discussed everything, from serious debates about art, literature, and music, to light-hearted word play and satire of colleagues and friends, to the most intimate confidences regarding their personal and creative lives. If by 1900, when Debussy began the *Chansons de Bilitis* incidental music, they no longer saw each other regularly due to their marital responsibilities, the period in which Louÿs wrote the original poems, 1894-1897, saw the height of their friendship. Louÿs had invited Debussy on the 1894 trip to Algeria during

¹⁶³ Quoted in Victor Ilyitch Seroff, *Debussy: Musician of France* (London: J. Calder, 1957), 231-232.

¹⁶⁴ Many older biographies of both Louÿs and Debussy speculate that they met at *l'Auberge du clou*, the café where Satie played, or *chez* Edmond Bailly, their common publisher. The discovery of a document by Louÿs subsequently revealed the location of their acquaintance. See Goujon, 104; François Lesure, Claude Debussy, and René Peter, *Claude Debussy Avant Pelléas, Ou, Les Années Symbolistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992), 159; Goujon, 104; Millan, 202-203.

¹⁶⁵ Letter to Georges Louis, 25 November 1893, quoted in Clive, 96.

¹⁶⁶ See Debussy and Louÿs, *Correspondance*; Claude Debussy, "Lettres inédites de Claude Debussy à Pierre Louÿs," *Revue De Musicologie*, 57, no. 1 (1971a): 29-39.

which he wrote most of the *chansons*; he even offered to cover Debussy's expenses for two months if the composer could pay his own ticket.¹⁶⁷ Debussy did not end up accompanying him, but the two were close enough that he was the one to whom Louÿs confided his apartment keys during the trip.

During the years of their friendship, 1892-1904, Debussy seems to have read everything that Louÿs published, including the polemical texts. He was well aware of Louÿs's campaign to liberalize French morals and its inspiration in Classical Antiquity, a period for which they shared an obsession. As Louÿs's close companion and confidant, Debussy was near the centre of the artistic, philosophical and biographical contexts surrounding the work's genesis. Of all the composers who set poems from *Bilitis*, he was uniquely placed to understand Louÿs's philosophy and to appreciate the role of fragmentation in the themes of memory and ruin, scholarship and mystification, and desire and censorship that informed the Sapphic (sub)text of *Bilitis*.¹⁶⁸ "You know me better than anyone," Debussy wrote to Louÿs in 1898, and it is fair to assume that the reverse was equally true.¹⁶⁹

It is hardly controversial to suggest that the *Bilitis* incidental music is unusually fragmentary – virtually all commentators agree on that point. Nor is it uncommon to argue that Debussy took inspiration for his compositional innovations from literary models.¹⁷⁰ We have seen how Louÿs's *Chansons de Bilitis* are thoroughly permeated with a fragmentary

¹⁶⁷ Letter to Debussy, 13 July 1894. Quoted in Debussy and Louÿs, *Correspondance*, 36.

¹⁶⁸ On other contemporary settings of *Bilitis* by Rita Strohl and Charles Koechlin, see Beltrando-Patier, 110-111.

¹⁶⁹ Letter April 1898, quoted in Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy, His Life and Mind* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 1:165.

¹⁷⁰ Paul Dukas asserted that "The most powerful influence on Debussy was that of writers, not composers," quoted in Roger Nichols, *Debussy Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 98. "We know to what degree Debussy's artistic taste was developed and confirmed by his contact with literary, and occasionally pictorial, milieux, far more than musical." ("On sait à quel point le goût artistique de Debussy s'est développé et affirmé au contact de milieux littéraires, à l'occasion picturaux, bien davantage que musicaux.") Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, "Debussy et l'idée d'arabesque musicale," *Cahiers Debussy* 12-13 (1988): 5.

aesthetic. The twelve poems selected for the *musique de scène* create an even more discontinuous framework, as they provide little sense of a narrative arc, beyond tracing a sketchy chronological progression from Bilitis's childhood to maturity. Many of the major people and events from Bilitis's life are referred to obliquely or omitted altogether, so that what little connection existed between the poems is so weakened that only those who have already read the whole book can discern the underlying storyline.¹⁷¹ It is only a small step from here to suggest that Debussy deliberately choose abridged and inconclusive forms for his incidental music because of the text.

The incidental music is not an authorized fragment in Levinson's sense. Debussy chose not to publish this material until he had reworked it into a considerably more unified form of the *Épigraphes antiques*, a decision that has been used to justify claims that the work is aesthetically flawed and to rationalize substantial liberties in its published editions.¹⁷² But what makes this work unusual is how difficult it is to tell whether certain aspects of its fragmentation were deliberate, accidental, or perhaps simply unconscious. Some aspects of discontinuity in the *musique de scène* could easily have been planned, like the many compositional devices that disrupt continuity or thwart closure. Others, like the loss of the celesta part, may well have been unplanned. Whatever the reason, the many different kinds of fragmentation in the *Bilitis* music seem to reinforce and respond meaningfully to the fragmentation of its poetic text.

¹⁷¹ This is due only in part to the fact that such a small portion of the original poems are included – one need only compare Debussy's *Bilitis* songs, which although even smaller in number, clearly outline a simple plot, from Bilitis's initiation into love (*La flûte de Pan*), its ecstatic apotheosis (*La chevelure*) and her subsequent abandonment (*Le Tombeau des Naiades*).

¹⁷² For a detailed discussion of the published editions, see 133-144 below.

Parataxis: Music and Text

the fragment - the 'I say practically nothing and take it back right away'¹⁷³

– Jacques Derrida

One of the most immediately striking features of the *Bilitis* incidental music is the radical brevity of the musical passages interspersed between the narrated poems. The longest passage of uninterrupted music is 21 measures long (in number 12), the shortest, only 2 (in numbers 2 and 7). In many movements, the recitation of the poetry takes considerably longer than the music. While later composers went on to write music that matched *Bilitis* in concision – one thinks of Webern and Kurtág in particular – in 1901 it was unprecedented. Even Schumann's tiniest pieces are monumental in comparison. *Bilitis*'s snatches of melody seem too fleeting, too tenuous to stand on their own.

Although the transience of the music makes it appear dependent on the poetry, it remains separate from the verse, always outside it. In Debussy's song settings of *Bilitis*, by point of comparison, words and music meld seamlessly into a single unit, almost as though the *Chansons* had recovered their hypothetical lost melodies. In the incidental music, on the other hand, the words and music are always separate and discrete, never overlapping, separated by silent intervals. Each time the music begins, the narrator falls mute, just as the instruments are *tacet* whenever it is her turn to speak.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the piece avoids any sense of an orderly, predictable succession because the duration and relative placement of words and music are so irregular. In many movements, the complete poem alternates with the associated music. However, in the numbers 1 and 10, the text is bookended by two passages

¹⁷³ Quoted in Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 134.

¹⁷⁴ There is some controversy regarding relative placement of text and music, which I discuss in detail in pp. 130-131 below.

of music, whereas in the numbers 4 and 10, phrases of music and lines of poetry are erratically interspersed.¹⁷⁵

The *Bilitis* incidental music does not give the impression of a single unified piece but rather two artistic works somewhat uneasily sharing the same space. When music pauses, words interrupt, and vice versa. In the course of a performance, we oscillate back and forth from one text to the other, much as Louÿs's book shifts between the diffracted perspectives of scholarly paratexts and *Bilitis*'s supposedly autobiographical lyrics. Charles Rosen and John Daverio have both commented on the fragmenting effect of paratactic juxtaposition of different types of music in Schumann's piano pieces; in *Bilitis*, however, the feeling of disruption is even more extreme because the break is not merely between two musical ideas, but between two different artistic genres altogether.¹⁷⁶

Ragged edges

For fragments, destined partly to the blank that separates them, find in this gap not what ends them but what prolongs them, or what makes them await their prolongation – what has already prolonged them, causing them to persist on account of their incompleteness. And thus are they always ready to let themselves be worked upon by indefatigable reason, instead of remaining as fallen utterances, left aside, the secret void of mystery which no elaboration could ever fill.¹⁷⁷

– Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

A small piece is not necessarily a fragment: a form may be tiny but complete and a self-contained, like a miniature or an aphorism. A fragment is not defined by its size but by its contents. As Rosen pointed out, a fragment "may be separated from the rest of the

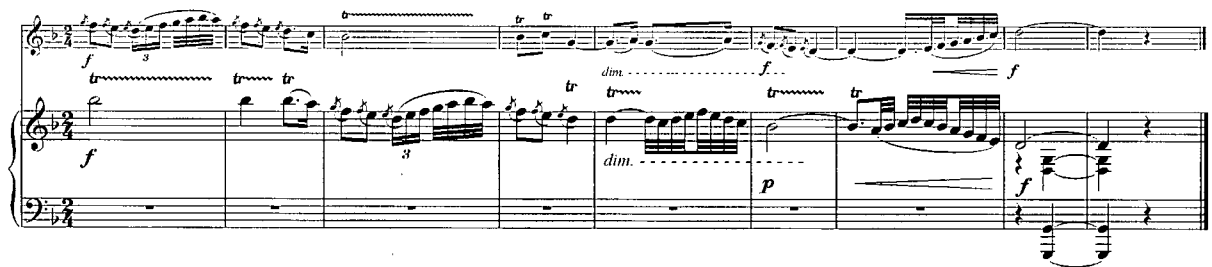
¹⁷⁵ Please see the Appendix to this document, an arrangement of the incidental music for flute and piano. All musical examples in the text of this chapter are taken from this arrangement. The lengthier musical examples will not be reproduced in the text, but rather referred to the Appendix.

¹⁷⁶ Rosen, 98-112; Daverio, 59-62.

¹⁷⁷ Blanchot, 58.

universe, but it implies the existence of what is outside itself not by reference but by its instability. The form is not fixed but is torn apart or exploded by paradox . . . implying a past before the song begins and a future after its final chord."¹⁷⁸ Louÿs's sonnet-like four stanza poems seem to be whole, balanced structures, but as we have seen, their content and context resist closure. Analogously, most of the pieces of the *musique de scène* have a balanced and regular phrase structure, yet seem to break off without finishing, leaning expectantly into the silence beyond the double bar. The pieces of incidental music fit into the spaces between the poems, but they do not fill those gaps.

Various elements of melody, harmony and rhythm conspire to subvert closure in these pieces. In most of the movements, the melodies trail off on a weak beat, while their accompaniments straggle on a few beats more, also breaking off mid-measure. Although virtually all the pieces, despite scrupulously avoiding any traditional sense of major or minor, do establish a clear tonal centre, only numbers 2 and 7 end the melodic lines on the tonic note. Number 2, "Comparaisons," sabotages the sense of an ending by derailing the tonality at the very last instant. The D tonal centre, clearly established during mm. 1-7, is undermined in the end by a G-D open-fifth harmony suddenly entering in the bass at m. 8 (see example 3.1).



Example 3.1. *Chanson de Bilitis* number 2, "Les Comparaisons."

¹⁷⁸ Rosen, 51.

In number 7, the mid-movement break at m. 5, articulated by the convergence of the flute and harp on C-D parallel octaves and a fermata, sounds considerably more resolved than the last bar of the movement. Melody and bass both reach the D tonic at the end, but they arrive on weak beats and at different times, ambiguously harmonized by a G-flat / A-flat dyad (see example 3.2).

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 1 through 4. The second system shows measures 5 through 8. The notation includes a treble clef and a bass clef, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The score features various dynamic markings: *pp* (pianissimo), *p* (piano), *pp<* (pianissimo), *dim.* (diminuendo), *pp* (pianissimo), *p* (piano), *pp* (pianissimo), *più pp* (più pianissimo), and *ppp* (pianississimo). The score includes a mid-movement break at measure 5, articulated by the convergence of the flute and harp on C-D parallel octaves and a fermata. The melody and bass both reach the D tonic at the end, but they arrive on weak beats and at different times, ambiguously harmonized by a G-flat / A-flat dyad.

Example 3.2. *Chanson de Bilitis* number 7, "Le Tombeau sans nom."

In fact, none of the movements that pause for the text part way through make a particularly strong distinction between the type of music used for breaks in the middle of the movement and the type of music used for endings. Number 4, "Chanson," dangles suspended at both mid-movement breaks in mm. 2 and 4, as we might expect (see example 3.3).

Lent et expressif

Même mouvement

Même mouvement

Example 3.3. *Chanson de Bilitis* Number 4, "Chanson."

However, it offers an even less conclusive ending, with off-beat melody notes on the major ninth above the bass, over a major-minor seventh chord in the accompaniment. The rhythm compounds the weak harmonic closure, as the harps introduce a hemiola on the last two beats.

Number 10, "La Danseuse aux Crotales," is more harmonically settled, with an open-fifth accompaniment underscoring both the mid-point break in m. 18 and the ending ten bars later (see example 3.4).

a. *Chanson de Bilitis* Number 10, "La Danseuse aux Crotales," mm. 13-18

This musical score shows measures 13 through 18. The melody is in the upper voice, starting with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a series of eighth notes. The accompaniment is in the lower voice, featuring a steady eighth-note pattern. Dynamics include *f*, *sf*, *dim.*, *p*, *piu p*, and *pp*. The piece ends with a half note G4 in the melody and a half note E3 in the bass.

b. *Chanson de Bilitis* Number 10, "La Danseuse aux Crotales," mm. 23-28.

This musical score shows measures 23 through 28. The melody continues with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a series of eighth notes. The accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern. Dynamics include *f*, *sf*, *p*, *dim.*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The piece ends with a half note G4 in the melody and a half note E3 in the bass.

Example 3.4. Comparison of mid-movement break and ending of *Chanson de Bilitis* number 10.

Yet in both places, the melody dangles unresolved, halting on a major ninth above the bass in m. 16, then on a minor seventh in mm. 27-28. Although the bass line ends in m. 28 by going from a fifth scale degree down to the first, the modal colour frustrates any feeling of dominant/tonic relationship. The rest on the downbeat in the harps add even more to the instability of this ending.

Even comparatively stable endings are subtly undermined. Number 1, "Chant pastoral," begins and ends with the same material, a standard means of conveying closure. From the very first time we hear this tune, though, we are denied closure. The melody sets up a tonal centre around G, but substitutes a C major triad under the last note of the melody (m.

4). This holds off the harmonic resolution until the next beat and propels the melody forward into its repetition (see example 3.5).

a. *Chanson de Bilitis* number 1, "Chant Pastoral," mm. 1-6.

b. *Chanson de Bilitis* number 1, "Chant Pastoral," mm. 17-21

Example 3.5. Comparison of beginning and ending of *Chanson de Bilitis* number 1.

We would expect a more definitive conclusion when this material returns at the end of the movement, but instead the harmonic resolution is once again deferred by the C-G move (mm. 20-21). The imitative tag in the second flute only weakens the arrival of the tonic harmony in the last bar by supplanting the tonic note in the top voice with the more insecure mediant.

These movements all cease without really finishing, stopping with what appears to be more of a middle instead of an ending. Still other movements, like numbers 5 and 6, have comparatively stable endings, but seem to begin in media res. This gesture exemplifies what Rosen calls "the Fragment in its most obvious form – a piece that begins in the middle or does not have a proper grammatical end."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 79.

Numbers 11 and 12 bring back material from earlier movements but subvert the recapitulatory gesture. We normally expect a cyclical thematic return at the end of a multi-movement work to signal closure, either rounding off the form with a triumphant return home (as in Schumann's Piano Quintet), or ushering in a climactic apotheosis (like Beethoven's 5th and 9th Symphonies). The thematic recollections in the final two songs of *Bilitis* function instead as reminders of impermanence, and underscore the larger themes of memory and loss.

Number 11, "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika," depicts Bilitis's longing memories of her estranged wife as she watches two women dancing. The music captures her mood by bringing back the tune from number 7, "Le Tombeau sans nom," the only other movement of the incidental music in which Mnasidika appears (see example 3.6, cf. example 3.2).

Très modéré

Très modéré
aussi léger que possible

pp

p très expressif

pp

pp

ppp

dim.

Example 3.6. *Chanson de Bilitis* number 11, "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika."

Over a new, dance-like rhythmic foundation in the harps, the first flute enters in m. 3 with several repeated, off-beat Ds that grow by m. 5 into the melody from "Le Tombeau sans nom," suggesting the insistent tug of memory moving from the periphery to the centre of consciousness. The melody is still recognizable, but it is coloured by very different harmonies than its initial appearance and distorted through metric transformation and rhythmic augmentation. In m. 11, we expect the flutes to swoop back upward towards a climax on A-flat, as it did the first two times we heard it in mm. 2 and 7 of "Le Tombeau." But the illusion of memory cannot be sustained: the Mnasidika melody instead sags dejectedly downward. Tonal ambiguity also hinders any feeling of resolution in this movement. The Mnasidika melody outlines a whole tone scale centred on D, ending in D minor in mm. 12-13, but the harps play in G Phrygian. Debussy emphasizes the incongruity by assigning conflicting key signatures to the different instruments – no sharps or flats for the flutes versus three flats for the harps. The last bars of this movement are the most disconcerting in all the *Chansons*. Underneath the final melody note, the previously dynamic harp rhythm grinds to a halt in mm. 13-15. Over a G pedal in the second harp, the first harp plays D half-diminished seventh chords that first slow to eighth notes, then are increasingly spaced apart. From m. 14, the first harp replaces the third of the half-diminished seventh (the F) with a doubled root (D), producing a much more ambiguous harmony. When the second harp, with its downbeat bass pedal, drops out in m. 15, this perplexing sonority is left hanging by itself. The convergence of the defamiliarized tune and the disturbingly unresolved accompaniment echoes the poem's last line: "Memory of Mnasidika, it was then that you appeared to me, and everything but your beloved image troubled me."¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ "Souvenir de Mnasidika, c'est alors que tu m'apparus, et tout, hors ta chère image, me fut importun." Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 181. Translation mine.

In the final piece, "La Pluie au matin," Bilitis looks back on her life's work and predicts "those who love after me will sing my strophes together." Debussy conveys this by bringing back in m. 13 the theme from the number 1, "Chant pastoral," a movement that also featured a call to song: "We must sing a pastoral song to invoke Pan, god of the summer wind" (see example 3.7, cf. example 3.5).

The musical score for Example 3.7, "Chanson de Bilitis" number 12, "La Pluie au matin," mm. 12-21, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 12-16) features a flute melody and a harp accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Très modéré" and the mood is "Très soutenu". The flute melody is marked "Retenu" and the harp accompaniment is marked "Très soutenu". The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, *mf*, and *dim.*. The second system (mm. 17-21) continues the flute melody and harp accompaniment, with the flute melody marked "Retenu" and the harp accompaniment marked "Très soutenu". The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, and *ppp*.

Example 3.7. *Chanson de Bilitis* number 12, "La Pluie au matin," mm. 12-21

Marked "*Très soutenu*," the reprised melody is a ghost of its former self. Its tones are no longer sustained on the breath of the flute, but immediately begin their decay after being plucked from the harp strings (mm. 13-15). We have seen how the first movement repeatedly delayed the harmonic resolution by postponing the anticipated G minor tonic triad with a C major triad at mm. 4 and 20. In number 12, the tune closes with a clear final cadence at m.

15. The sense of arrival, though, is undercut by a metric alteration that shifts the final note onto a weak beat. A canon in both augmentation and diminution begins at m. 18 in which the melody disintegrates into smaller and smaller fragments with each successive reiteration. The first harp attempts the melody twice in triplets, first tracing the initial G-G octave ascent (m. 19), but getting only as far as F the second time (mm. 20-21). In the bass, the second harp intones the initial octave ascent from G to G in quarter notes (mm. 18-19). As it repeats (mm. 19-21), it drops the three initial notes of the theme (leaving D-F-G) and then loses the notes from the end of the line one by one (D-F, then finally just D), as though its edges are crumbling away. Superficially, this technique resembles the kind of melodic telescoping Beethoven often used to create a feeling of irresistible forward momentum; here it has the opposite effect. While the opening melody is falling apart in the harps, the first flute plays in counterpoint the tune from the beginning of number 12 (mm. 16-21), which is itself increasingly segmented and interrupted by rests. Rather than finishing, the piece breaks down. The return of the theme both looks back toward its past, and foreshadows its future decay as a ruin.¹⁸¹

Freeze Frames

Tableau vivants were the perfect theatrical form to accompany the incidental music for *Bilitis*. Like Louÿs's poems, they show snapshot depictions of single moments but leave the transitions between them blank.¹⁸² The melodic and harmonic structures of the music create a similar feeling of immobility. Most of the individual pieces are monothematic, with

¹⁸¹ My analysis here owes a large debt to Rosen's comments in *The Romantic Generation* (112-115) on the thematic return in the last song of Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*.

¹⁸² For more on the *tableau vivant* as fragmentary, see the discussion of Lady Hamilton's Attitudes in Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 28-31.

virtually no development or variation. Number 8 has two themes, but both are presented simultaneously in counterpoint, so there is no sense of movement from one to the other. The themes themselves do not sound goal oriented because they studiously avoid using leading tones. Most melodies are built on symmetrical scales, either whole-tone (numbers 4, 7, 9, 11), chromatic (numbers 8 and 12) or pentatonic (numbers 1, 3 and 5).¹⁸³ Like the scales they use, the melodies themselves are often symmetrical, traveling an identical registral distance in both directions.¹⁸⁴ The symmetry may be very straightforward, as in number 4, with the four-note theme mirrored around G and A (see example 3.8 a). Or it may be more complex, as in number 9, which divides the octave into equal thirds – F-sharp / A-sharp / D / F-sharp – then adds an E / G-sharp dyads as neighbours both above and below (see example 3.8 b).

a. Number 4, "Chanson," mm. 1-2.



b. Number 9, "L'Eau pure du bassin," mm. 2-5.



Example 3.8. Some symmetrical melodies in *Les Chansons de Bilitis*.

The harmonic language reinforces the melodic inertia. In *Bilitis*'s sound world, without a single perfect cadence, functional harmony is irrelevant. One can speak of

¹⁸³ In typical Western practice, the pentatonic scale (*do, re, mi, sol, la*) is not used symmetrically, and often maintains dominant and tonic functions. In these pieces, the treatment of the scale makes it symmetrical, either by shifting the tonal centre as in number 1 (*re, mi, sol, la, do, re*), or by emphasizing sections of the scale that are symmetrical as in number 5 (*do, re, mi, sol, la, do, re, mi*). See examples 3.5.

¹⁸⁴ Two of the strongest examples are in melodies we have already mentioned: number 1 with its alternating major seconds and minor thirds, G-A, C-D, F-G (see example 3.5), and number 7 which loops in whole tones from D up to A-flat, down the octave to the A-flat below then back up to D (see example 3.2).

harmonic change in these pieces, but rarely of harmonic progression. Only three of the movements (numbers 1, 10 and 11) have any sense of harmonic direction, and then very little feeling of forward motion. The other movements achieve harmonic stasis by a variety of techniques: some movements maintain a single harmony throughout (numbers 7, 8, 9, and 12 until the thematic return); others oscillate back and forth between two chords (numbers 3, 4, and portions of 10); the remaining movements (numbers 2, 5, and 6) slide almost imperceptibly between chords with so many common tones as to be almost identical. Debussy employs prolonged passages of static harmony in other works, but nowhere else does he sustain it for an entire movement, as the extreme brevity of these pieces allows him to do here.¹⁸⁵

Analogous to the *tableaux vivants* for which they were written, each piece momentarily holds its own stationary pose, frozen within its very limited frame. A musical piece, much like a person, ordinarily moves and changes. When either one stands immobile instead, they seem suspended in an instant captured and extracted out of the normally continuous passage of time. Without transitional material to guide the listener from one sonic tableau to the next, the pieces create a feeling of dislocation. When the music does not go anywhere, there can be no sense of arrival. And without arrival, it is difficult to have closure.

Eternal Recurrence

In my beginning is my end. . . .
. . . In my end is my beginning.

– T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*

¹⁸⁵ See Arthur Wenk, *Claude Debussy and Twentieth-Century Music* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 54-55.

In the seventh movement of *Bilitis*, "Le Tombeau sans nom," Bilitis and her wife Mnasidika visit a monument commemorating the unnamed female lover of Mnasidika's mother. As the two women stand contemplating their predecessors, we have the feeling that this moment has happened before and will happen again. The tomb acts like a numinous mirror, reflecting an image of paired lovers going back generation upon generation. The simple whole-tone melody performs a similar gesture of symmetry and doubling as it loops around D, emphasizes the tritones above and below, ends on the same note as it began, then does the same thing all over again (see example 3.4). Rosen's comments on the first song from *Dichterliebe* apply so perfectly to this piece that they could almost have been written for it:

The form is circular: the opening of each section in turn resolves the previous one and ends, itself unresolved . . . The form goes around only twice, but logically there is no reason for it not to continue indefinitely, and it is part of the wonderful effect that we feel the infinite possibility of return. In this sense the final . . . chord is only the apparent close of a form that has no end, of a *da capo senza fine*; the form is closed on itself, although open to all imaginable realizations.¹⁸⁶

The alternation of music and text in "Le Tombeau sans nom" further reinforces the impression of eternal recurrence. The melodic loop is twice interrupted by the poetry, but each time it picks exactly where it left off. When the music stops a third time, it seems suspended rather than finished, ready to resume again at any moment. It is as though we have briefly tuned in on an ongoing process that began long before and will continue even after it has ceased to be audible.

Other instances of circularity abound in the *musique de scène*. Most melodic ideas are given a literal repetition immediately following their first statement, constructed to give the impression that they could go back again just as easily as go on. Ostinati of varying lengths

¹⁸⁶ Rosen, 44.

figure in almost every piece, sometimes continuing unchanged for the entire course of the movement, as in numbers 3 and 8. Thus even if the melody does not loop back on itself, the accompaniment figures go round and round in circles. Paradoxically, the perception of eternal recurrence inevitably engenders fragmentation, because the infinite is beyond our ken; as Rosen reminds us, "the fragment sets in motion a process to which the end is not in sight."¹⁸⁷

The impression that we are hearing only segments of perpetually repeating patterns is reinforced on the largest scale (if one can even speak of "largest scale" regarding these tiny pieces) in the thematic returns of numbers 1 and 7 in numbers 12 and 11 respectively. Similar to "Le Tombeau sans nom," "Chant pastoral" has a melody which ends with the same note that begins its repetition (see example 3.5). Each time the loop closes, it is ready to go around again, propelled into its reiteration delayed harmonic resolution discussed above. Since neither "Le Tombeau sans nom" nor "Chant pastoral" achieve definitive closure, when they are taken up again in the final two numbers, it is as though they had kept going below the threshold of hearing the whole time, and are simply coming to our attention again.

Fragments and Gamelan

The most consequential result of Debussy's experience with Javanese music came in a reconsideration of music in terms of circular rather than linear progression.¹⁸⁸

– Charles Wenk, *Debussy and Twentieth Century Music*

The compositional choices I have discussed here in relation to the fragment – the use of static harmony, ostinati, repetition, parataxis, symmetrical scales, indistinct phrase

¹⁸⁷ Rosen, 50.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 54.

endings, circular and symmetrical forms, and the avoidance of development, cadences, leading tones, functional harmony and linear goals – are in large part characteristic of Debussy's style. However, in none of his other pieces do they occur with such density and consistency as in the *Chansons de Bilitis* incidental music.¹⁸⁹ It is interesting in light of *Bilitis*'s Greek subject matter that these are precisely the same compositional choices that Charles Wenk has identified as the most significant influence of Javanese gamelan music on Debussy.¹⁹⁰ Wenk mentions the *Bilitis* incidental music only briefly in this regard, but it is worth examining in more detail because it reveals a rich source of associations between Louÿs's poetry, Debussy's incidental music, and fragmentation.¹⁹¹

Enough has been written about Debussy's exposure to gamelan that I will review it only briefly here.¹⁹² The Javanese exhibit at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* recreated a village, or "kampong," in which the performances by a gamelan ensemble with dancers took Paris by storm. Debussy's and Louÿs's friend Judith Gautier enthused:

the whole city was truly infatuated with the Javanese dancers . . . Especially *le Tout-Paris artiste* never tired of the show. We met at the Javanese Kampong almost every day, and we greeted each other with complicit smiles, we squeezed in to find more places around the little tables, where the foam shrank in the beer glasses, where the sorbets melted under distracted spoons. And we listened endlessly to that elusive music . . . So, of all the masterpieces, of all the marvels illustrated by the last Exposition, what the memory, with passion's

¹⁸⁹ The full extent of gamelan influence in *Bilitis* is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper, but would be a fertile avenue for further study. Kiyoshi Tamagawa does discuss the *Six Épigraphes antiques* in some detail in Kiyoshi Tamagawa, "Echoes from the East the Javanese Gamelan and its Influence on the Music of Claude Debussy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin; University of Texas at Austin, 1988), 96-99. The instrumentation, texture, specific and unusual uses of ostinati, repetition, and pentatonicism in the incidental music are even more reminiscent of gamelan, and, I believe, the most thoroughgoing and convincing evidence of Javanese influence in Debussy.

¹⁹⁰ Wenk, 51-65.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 55-56.

¹⁹² See Wenk, 51-65; Tamagawa; Roy Howat, "Debussy and the Orient," in *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*, ed. C. Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Crothers Milner (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 45-82; Mervyn Cooke, "'The East in the West': Evocations of the Gamelan in Western Music," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998) 259-262; Richard Mueller, "Javanese Influence on Debussy's *Fantaisie and Beyond*," *19th-Century Music* 10, no. 2 (fall 1986): 157-186.

illogic, retained most faithfully was the bizarre and seductive vision of those frail dancers.¹⁹³

Debussy spent "many fruitful hours" among this rapt audience, according to Robert Godet.¹⁹⁴

The 1900 exposition presented another gamelan ensemble, and although much less has been written about this exhibit, we know from artist Jacques Émile Blanche that Debussy again went to hear them.¹⁹⁵ The 1900 exposition continued until November, so that when Debussy was asked to write the *musique de scène*, the sounds of gamelan would have been fresh in his ears.

The most detailed contemporary description of these gamelan performances comes from a series of articles published in *Le Ménestrel* in 1889, written by Debussy's friend, the musicologist and critic Julien Tiersot.¹⁹⁶ There are remarkable similarities between the *Bilitis* incidental music and the characteristics of Javanese music as described by Tiersot. He singled out many of the same techniques I discussed above, including two and three note ostinati, lack of tendency tones and functional harmony, and themes that "repeat indefinitely, turning as it were on themselves and linking up without interruption, in the manner of an unending canonic theme."¹⁹⁷ But even more interesting for our purposes is that Tiersot repeatedly characterized gamelan music as sounding unresolved and open-ended. He

¹⁹³ "Toute la ville était véritablement éprise des Danseuses javanaises. . . Le Tout-Paris artiste surtout ne se lassait pas du spectacle. On se retrouvait au Kampong javanais presque chaque jour, et, on se saluait avec des sourires complices, on se serrait pour ajouter des places autour des petites tables, où la mousse des bocks se fanait, où les sorbets fondaient sous les cuillers distraites. Et à n'en plus finir, on écoutait l'insaisissable musique. . . Aussi, de tous les chefs-d'oeuvre, de toutes les merveilles qui illustrèrent l'Exposition dernière, ce que le souvenir, avec l'illogisme de la passion, a gardé le plus fidèlement, c'est la vision bizarre et séduisante de ces frères Danseuses." Judith Gautier and Benedictus, *Les Musiques bizarres à l'Exposition de 1900: Danse Javanaise - Danse du diable* (Paris: Société d'éditions littéraires et artistiques, 1900), 5.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Lockspeiser, *Life and Mind*, 1:113.

¹⁹⁵ J. E. Blanche, "Souvenirs sur Manet et Debussy," *Figaro* (22 June 1932); quoted in Howat, "Debussy and the Orient," 49.

¹⁹⁶ These were later collected in book form as Julien Tiersot, *Musiques Pittoresques: Promenades Musicales à l'Exposition De 1889* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1889), 31-47.

¹⁹⁷ "Ces thèmes se répètent indéfiniment, tournant en quelque sorte sur aux-mêmes et s'enchaînant sans interruption, à la manière d'un thème de canon sans fin." *Ibid.*, 42.

foregrounded elements that Wenk and others do not identify as Javanese influences on Debussy – elements that are in fact not typically Debussian but that do feature prominently in *Bilitis*. Tiersot describes endings that undermine the sense of tonality by breaking off on a wrong-note ending, much like "Chanson" and "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika":

the dance does not conclude with this energetic, animated episode: it resumes its slow pace and, ever winding down, finally stops on a final, unexpected note, without conclusion, leaving the attention suspended, the musical sense unresolved. Our musical amateurs say, "It is not finished." – But what is it that comes to an end in this world? Does not everything begin again? And although this does not happen with us, do we not always find ourselves in the presence of the immutable identity of things? Such, perhaps, is the philosophy behind this Javanese cadence . . . ¹⁹⁸

We have remarked that several movements of *Bilitis* establish a tonal centre throughout a piece, but do not finish on the tonic note in either the melody or the bass. This ambiguity also finds its counterpart in Tiersot's report:

Indeed, the impression of D minor is constant here. I have to add, however, that the final notes ordinarily cast a great deal of vagueness on the overall tonality: even though the key of D may be perfectly established throughout an entire piece, never do we see a single one concluding on this tonic D; the most common final notes of Javanese pieces are A or G. Finally, at the ends of phrases, the large gong . . . sounds with a full and resounding tone the low C, thereby destroying, for our ears accustomed to other harmonic principles entirely, the feeling of tonality for the entire period. ¹⁹⁹

Tiersot's description here is particularly reminiscent of *Bilitis*'s second movement, "Les Comparaisons, with its D tonality and final bass note G (see example 3.1). Tiersot represented this technique as an avoidance of harmonic goals: "Over there, no harmonic cadences of any kind. We have seen how at the end of phrases the lowest instrument of the

¹⁹⁸ Tiersot, quoted in Mueller, 165.

¹⁹⁹ "En effet, l'impression de *ré* mineur y est constante. Il faut ajouter, cependant, que les notes finales viennent, d'ordinaire, jeter beaucoup de vague sur l'ensemble de la tonalité: bien que le ton de *ré* soit parfaitement déterminé pendant tout le cours d'un morceau, jamais l'on n'en voit un seul conclure sur cette tonique *ré*; les notes finales les plus habituelles des morceaux javanais sont *la* ou *sol*. Enfin, à la fin des phrases, le gros *gong* . . . vient faire entendre au grave, d'un son plein et retentissant, la note *do*, détruisant ainsi, pour nos oreilles habituées à de toutes autres principes harmoniques, le sentiment tonal de la période toute entière." Tiersot, 37.

orchestra sounds a note foreign to the key of the music."²⁰⁰ Even the static poses of the *tableaux vivants* correspond to Tiersot's description of the Javanese dancers as "almost immobile."²⁰¹

In drawing a correlation between fragmentary elements in *Bilitis* and gamelan techniques as characterized by Tiersot and Wenk, I do not mean to imply that gamelan music is itself inherently incomplete or inconclusive. In fact, the feature that Tiersot especially singles out as undermining closure – the sounding of a previously unheard note in the lowest gong at the end of a piece – is precisely the signal that announces finality to listeners familiar with gamelan idioms.²⁰² As Alain Renoir has pointed out, our perception of an object as fragmentary is heavily culturally mediated.²⁰³ Tiersot's commentary belies a strongly Eurocentric bias, and in regards to determining how the gamelan at the 1889 *Exposition* actually sounded, it has limited value. For the very same reason, however, it can be an extremely useful tool in conveying how *fin-de-siècle* French listeners heard gamelan. Moreover, it opens the door toward explaining how and why Debussy would have drawn connections between music and poetry that were thousands of years apart and half a world away.

A comparison of documents by Tiersot, Debussy, and Louÿs reveals a shared worldview that has come to be known as Orientalism, first theorized by Edward Said in his groundbreaking book of the same name. Said's insights allow us to trace a complex web of associations between Louÿs's writings about his ancient Greek heroine on the one hand and

²⁰⁰ "Là-bas, point de cadences harmoniques, de quelque espèce qu'elles soient. Nous avons vu qu'à la fin des phrases l'instrument le plus grave de l'orchestre fait entendre une note étrangère au ton de la musique." Ibid., 38.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 31.

²⁰² Jennifer Lindsay remarks that "the big gong, which has every gamelan note in its rich overtones, has the fullness of an ending chord in Western music." Jennifer Lindsay, *Javanese Gamelan: Traditional Orchestra of Indonesia*, 2d ed. (Singapore; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 48.

²⁰³ Alain Renoir, "Fragment: An Oral-Formulaic Nondefinition," in *Fragments-Incompletion & Discontinuity*, 41.

Debussy's and Tiersot's writings on contemporary Javanese music on the other. A close examination of this seemingly incongruous pairing shows that tropes of fragmentation permeate the Orientalist viewpoints of all three, creating yet another link between Debussy's gamelan stylings and Louÿs's book. Orientalism, as Said reminds us, "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our world.'"²⁰⁴ So, much like Tiersot's analysis of gamelan, the attitudes I will discuss below are primarily useful in deciphering the mindset of Debussy and his French colleagues, as opposed to actually describing any of the cultures that they marked as Oriental.

Orientalism as Synecdoche

It is hot, the light is amazing, and all the women resemble Bilitis, at least the little girls do.²⁰⁵

– Letter to Debussy from Louÿs in Algeria, 1894

In defining the rest of the world as Other relative to a European Subject, Orientalism tends to conflate a wide variety of cultures across both space and time. It enabled a kind of temporal telescoping by defining Europe as a land of progress and evolution in opposition to an unchanging, perpetually primitive Orient. As Said observed, nineteenth-century Western Europeans typically conceived of the Orient as "static, frozen, fixed eternally. The very possibility of development, transformation, human movement – in the deepest sense of the word – is denied the Orient and the Oriental."²⁰⁶ As such, any image or experience of the Orient became a synecdoche for all of Oriental history: a fragment representing the temporal whole. Louÿs's writings comparing Bilitis to the young woman he hired as a prostitute during

²⁰⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 12.

²⁰⁵ Letter to Debussy, 31 July 1894, quoted in Grayson, 119.

²⁰⁶ Said, 208.

his trip to Algeria make this quite explicit. In the annotations he inscribed under the dedication to "M.b.A." on his brother's first edition copy of *Les chansons de Bilitis*, Louÿs wrote:

(Meryem bent Ali) a bird's name. Born in 1878 in Ouled-Djellal . . . came to live with me on my trip to Constantine. Was the reason I began Bilitis all over again in her image, from the first day I saw her . . . She was a marvel of grace, delicacy and antique poetry.²⁰⁷

For Louÿs, the relationship between the women of nineteenth-century Algeria and Archaic Greece went beyond individual similarity to an actual equivalence, as he reported to his brother:

Through the Arab women of the Algerian South (they are not Moors), I understood, I saw the women of Classical Antiquity *living* in 1894. That's why Bilitis is truer, more ancient and more alive than Chrysis [the heroine of *Aphrodite*].²⁰⁸

Analogously, the writings of both Tiersot and Debussy contend that gamelan music reflected ancient practices that had remained unchanged from the earliest times. Despite his professed admiration for Javanese music, Tiersot still thought of it as primitive and unevolved. He described gamelan as "the long practice of an art that has never been modified,"²⁰⁹ in contrast to a dynamic progress he perceived in European music:

while for us, the art of harmony has seen a magnificent development in a few centuries, for these peoples, on the contrary, it seems to have remained

²⁰⁷ "(Meryem bent Ali) un nom d'oiseau. Née en 1878 à Ouled-Djellal . . . est venue habitée avec moi pendant mon séjour à Constantine. A été cause que j'ai recommencé entièrement Bilitis d'après elle, à partir du jour où je l'ai vue . . . Elle était une merveille de grâce, de délicatesse et de poésie antique." Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 258.

²⁰⁸ "Par les femmes arabes du sud algérien (ce ne sont pas les mauresques), j'ai compris, j'ai vu *vivre* les femmes antiques, en 1894. C'est pour cela que Bilitis est plus vraie et plus antique et plus vivante que Chrysis." Letter to Georges Louis, 16 December 1916, quoted in Niederauer, 234.

²⁰⁹ "La longue pratique d'un art qui ne s'est modifié jamais," Tiersot, 37.

stationary since its origins; it has, for that reason, preserved an absolutely rudimentary character.²¹⁰

Debussy, on the other hand, evaluated gamelan favourably compared to European music, but he still exhibited a rather patronizing "noble savage" stereotyping of the Javanese as untouched by civilization. He compared gamelan to the music of a great European composer – but a composer hundreds of years in the past:

There have been, and there still are, despite the disorders civilisation brings, charming little peoples who learned music as simply as one learns to breathe. Their conservatory is the eternal rhythm of the sea, the wind in the leaves, the thousand little noises which they listen to carefully, without ever looking in arbitrary treatises. Their traditions only exist in very old songs and dances to which each one of them, century after century, brought his respectful contribution. Nevertheless, Javanese music observes an art of counterpoint next to which that of Palestrina is mere child's play. And if we listen, without European prejudices, to the charm of their "percussion," we are forced to admit that ours is nothing but the barbarous noise of a travelling circus.²¹¹

This sense of the timeless eternal provides yet another metaphorical association for the static harmony, non-developmental syntax and circular structures in Debussy's incidental music, as well as the stop-motion images of the *tableaux vivants*.

Orientalism conflated not only distant time periods but also widely divergent cultures into a vast, undifferentiated Other, according to a belief that "Orientals were almost everywhere nearly the same,"²¹² as Said observed:

²¹⁰ "Tandis que chez nous l'art de l'harmonie a pris en peu de siècles un magnifique développement, chez ces peuples, au contraire, il semble être demeuré stationnaire dès les origines; il a, par le fait, conservé un caractère absolument rudimentaire." Ibid., 37.

²¹¹ "Il y a eu, il y a même encore, malgré les désordres qu'apporte la civilisation, de charmants petits peuples qui apprennent la musique aussi simplement qu'on apprend à respirer. Leur conservatoire c'est : le rythme éternel de la mer, le vent dans les feuilles, et mille petits bruits qu'ils écoutèrent avec soin, sans jamais regarder dans d'arbitraires traités. Leurs traditions n'existent que dans de très vieilles chansons, mêlées de danses, où chacun, siècle sur siècle, apporta sa respectueuse contribution. Cependant, la musique javanaise observe un contrepoint auprès duquel celui de Palestrina n'est qu'un jeu d'enfant. Et si l'on écoute, sans parti pris européen, le charme de leur « percussion », on est bien obligé de constater que la nôtre n'est qu'un bruit barbare de cirque forain." Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits: Edition complète de son oeuvre critique*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 223-224.

²¹² Said, 37.

in formulating a relatively uncomplicated idea, say, about Arabic grammar or Indian religion, the Orientalist would be understood (and would understand himself) as also making a statement about the Orient as a whole . . . it was commonly believed that the Orient hung together in some profoundly organic way.²¹³

Under the influence of this ideology, a person or a practice from one Oriental culture was assumed to represent its counterpart in all other Oriental cultures. So Louÿs compared his Algerian companion Meryem not only to his ancient heroine Bilitis, but also to a widely divergent range of women, past and present:

Meryem is the prettiest, most graceful, most delicate being I have ever seen. She is astonishingly like a little Javanese girl. . . But she is also American Indian, and at times Virgin Mary, and even Tyrian courtesan, beneath her jewelry that is the same as that in ancient tombs.²¹⁴

Today, it seems wildly incongruous to juxtapose figures that are so disparate, but to Louÿs's contemporaries it was not only plausible but unremarkable. Tiersot's description of the audience response to the Javanese dancers bears an almost uncanny resemblance to the above passage by Louÿs:

According to his literary preferences, each compares them to some heroine of a novel of his choice: one imagines Salammô, another the little Queen Rarahu; one of my fellow music critics even declared that these sacred, contemplative and almost immobile dances reminded him of *Parsifal*. One of the four dancers in particular . . . is the living image of a little Indian divinity. There is another who is named Tamina, almost Pamina of the *Magic Flute*: this association with Mozart's masterpiece, with its mysterious ceremonies and its invocations to Osiris and Isis, does not seem out of place here.²¹⁵

²¹³ Ibid., 255.

²¹⁴ "Meryem est l'être le plus joli, le plus gracieux, le plus délicat que j'aie encore vu. Elle est étonnamment petite javanaise. . . Mais elle est aussi Indienne d'Amérique, et par moments Vierge Marie, et encore courtisane tyrienne, sous ses bijoux qui sont les mêmes que ceux des Tombeaux antiques." Letter to Gide, 10 August 1894, Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 258-259.

²¹⁵ "Suivant ses préférences littéraires, chacun les compare à quelque héroïne de roman de son choix: tel songe à Salammô, tel autre à la petite reine Rarahu; il est même un de nos confrères de la presse musicale à qui ces danses sacrées, au caractère contemplatif et presque immobiles, ont, il l'a déclaré, rappelé *Parsifal*. Un des quatre Danseuses, surtout . . . donne l'impression vivante d'une petite divinité de l'Inde. Il en est une autre qui s'appelle Tamina, presque Pamina de la *Flûte enchantée*: ce souvenir du chef-d'oeuvre de Mozart, avec ses mystérieuses cérémonies, ses invocations à Osiris ou à Isis, ne me semble pas être déplacé ici." Tiersot, 31.

The Orientalist tendency to homogenize different cultures was common in music also.

Ralph P. Locke has observed that

in works that construct visions of the non-Western world and its inhabitants: Rameau's *Les Indes galantes*, Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, Verdi's *Aida*, Strauss's *Salome*, Puccini's *Turandot* . . . general stylistic aberrations are often applied indiscriminately by composers to vastly different geographical settings.²¹⁶

As Kiyoshi Tamagawa has already pointed out, Debussy likewise employed his musical references to gamelan without cultural specificity, applying pseudo-Javanese techniques in pieces with titles that referred to other Eastern but non-Javanese cultures:

However specific their original sources of inspiration, the final titles of most of his Oriental pieces, such as *Pagodes*, *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut* and *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune* carry no geographic connotations; the unfinished ballet *No-jali*, nominally Chinese or at least Formosan in its setting was to have incorporated a "Malayan gamelan." Clearly, when Debussy did call in reminiscences of the gamelan for purposes of conveying up exotic atmosphere, it was a generalized, mysterious East he sought to evoke.²¹⁷

So under a logic by which Meryem could be simultaneously identified with both Bilitis and a "little Javanese girl," it made perfect sense to use gamelan techniques to set the *Chansons*.

Orientalism and Eros

What requires a little more explanation is how Archaic Greece could come under the umbrella of Orientalism for Louÿs and Debussy. In the dualistic construct of Orient versus Occident, Ancient Greece typically falls squarely in the Occidental camp. According to Said,

Salammbô is the heroine of the eponymous Flaubert novel set in Carthage (in what is now Tunisia). Queen Rarahu figures in Pierre Loti's novel *Le mariage de Loti*, set in Tahiti.

²¹⁶ Ralph P. Locke, "Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saens's *Samson Et Dalila*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 3 (Nov 1991): 261.

²¹⁷ Tamagawa, 107.

"Orientalism and Hellenism are radically incomparable"²¹⁸ in that Orientalism envisions a vilified Other against which the Occident was defined, whereas Hellenism venerates Ancient Greece as a model – if not *the* model – to which all European civilizations aspired.

However, in the Orient/Occident binary, sex was mapped squarely onto the Oriental.

As Said observed:

the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex. We may as well recognize that for nineteenth-century Europe, with its increasing *embourgeoisement*, sex had been institutionalized to a very considerable degree. On the one hand, there was no such thing as "free" sex, and on the other, sex in society entailed a web of legal, moral, even political and economic obligations of a detailed and certainly encumbering sort. . . . the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or traveled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest.²¹⁹

Louÿs himself clearly subscribed to this view. We have seen how he valued Oriental literatures specifically for their "solemn and admirably beautiful pages" of erotic writing. Moreover, his writings about Northern Africa and the women he met there show sexual tourism as a primary motive for travel. His enthusiastic description of Meryem to Debussy is clearly in this vein:

We met over there a young personage of sixteen, whose morals are extremely depraved, and whose name sounds like that of a little bird, Meryem bent Ali . . . she is from that Arab tribe . . . where the girls earn their dowry through disreputable means; nevertheless, she knows French so well that, at a certain moment (that I cannot, in all decency, specify precisely), she breathed out, "Tarrarraboum!! There it is!!"²²⁰

Since Louÿs portrayed an Ancient Greece that accepted and honoured sexual practices that his contemporary society viewed as immoral if not criminal, his Greece became

²¹⁸ Said, 342.

²¹⁹ Said, 190.

²²⁰ Letter from Louÿs to Debussy, 31 July 1894, quoted in Julie McQuinn, "Exploring the Erotic in Debussy's Music," in 117-136. *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 127.

marked as Oriental. Goujon suggests that "this Orientalized Greece allowed Louÿs to develop his theories about love and to exalt sensuality and voluptuousness."²²¹ In *Bilitis* and *Aphrodite*, Louÿs perpetuated the stereotype conflating the Orient with sex. However, by attributing a purportedly Oriental characteristic to the paragon of Western Civilization, he at the same time undermined a central distinction between East and West, and thereby threatened to expose the artificiality of the dualistic construct. His critics expended much effort to restore the binary division by claiming Louÿs did not show the "true" Greece. For example, poet and critic Charles Maurras wrote:

Two or three times at the beginning and upon the decline of Hellenism, it happened that Asia (the Syrian Asia, the Jewish Asia,) contaminated the soil of Greece. It is precisely on these eras that the author of *Aphrodite* obligingly dwells. Alexandria haunts him.²²²

The controversy was widespread. Niederauer points out: "As a result of *Aphrodite*, the pages of most French literary periodicals discussed, for many months, the problems of whether Louÿs was an Alexandrian or an Athenian and how his ideals could be reconciled with the more traditional, austere view of antiquity."²²³ While Louÿs insisted that *Aphrodite's* morals were not limited to Alexandria but pervaded all of ancient Greek history, he freely admitted that for the *Chansons*, "I applied myself to giving the book less a Hellenistic than an Asiatic character, according to my preferences and the biography of Bilitis."²²⁴

It is not surprising, then, that in order to communicate the transgressive sexuality at the heart of Louÿs's vision of Ancient Greece, Debussy should not draw on anything

²²¹ "Cette Grèce orientalisée permettait à Louÿs de développer ses théories amoureuses et d'exalter sensualité et volupté." Goujon, 92.

²²² "A deux ou trois reprises au début et sur le déclin de l'hellénisme, il est arrivé que l'Asie (l'Asie syrienne, l'Asie juive,) a souillé la terre de Grèce. C'est justement à ces époques de faiblesse que l'auteur d'*Aphrodite* s'est arrêté complaisamment. L'Alexandrie le hante." Quoted in Niederauer, 154.

²²³ Ibid., 155.

²²⁴ "Je me suis attaché à donner au livre un caractère moins hellène qu'asiatique, selon mes préférences et la biographie de Bilitis." Letter to an unknown scholar, 14 May 1898, Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 319.

identifiably Greek but rather something broadly Oriental. After all, he had no direct experience of Ancient Greek music he could use as a model. He did however hear gamelan as erotic: he described it to Louÿs as "the Javanese music, able to express every shade of meaning, even unmentionable shades."²²⁵ Debussy's use of gamelan to set *Bilitis*, like Louÿs's association between Meryem ben Atala and his fictional heroine, are simply part of a long tradition that Said identifies as

an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex. . . a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient. And indeed, the motif itself is singularly unvaried. . . Why the Orient still seems to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies is something on which one could speculate.²²⁶

Writing on Bizet, Susan McClary has remarked:

Nineteenth-century Europeans habitually projected onto racial Others the erotic qualities they denied themselves. . . . *Carmen* participates fully in this brand of exoticism, as do a remarkable number of Bizet's other compositions: he seemed to have been able to rise to his creative heights principally when provided with exotic subject matter. He usually expended little effort in trying to ascertain what the music of the ethnic group in question actually sounded like: the identity of the group was not so important as the fact that it was exotic with respect to Europe."²²⁷

Similarly, Christopher Palmer and Philip Brett have written at some length about Britten's use of gamelan sonorities for the erotically charged moments in his operas including *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Prince of the Pagodas* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, culminating in his most homoerotic and pervasively gamelan-influenced work, *Death in Venice*.²²⁸

²²⁵ Letter to Louÿs, 22 January 1895, quoted in Mueller, 158.

²²⁶ Said, 188.

²²⁷ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 63.

²²⁸ Christopher Palmer, "The Colour of the Music," in *Benjamin Britten, the Turn of the Screw*, ed. Patricia Howard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 101-125; Philip Brett, "Eros and Orientalism in Britten's Operas," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 235-256.

Said, McClary, and others argue the eroticisation of the Orient was a projection of undesirable urges onto the Other, a way of marking them as inferior and justifying their eventual conquest. Louÿs's participation in the phenomenon suggests, however, that it could be the exact opposite strategy. After all, Louÿs was not condemning but promoting the freer expression of sexuality he attributed to both Orientals and the Ancients. Biographer Jean-Paul Goujon confirms that Louÿs's attribution of Orientalist sensuality onto Classical Greece was not censorious but prescriptive:

Fundamentally, Greece was to him something analogous to what the Orient had been to Flaubert: an exemplary fantasy, the opportunity to project his own dreams onto an already legendary historical past, where time seemed to stand still. However, unlike the author of *Salammbô*, Louÿs did not hesitate to extract from his study of Antiquity an ethic and a way of life.²²⁹

The Greek settings of *Bilitis* and *Aphrodite* was intended not to put their (im)morality at a safe distance but rather to lend it credibility by association.

What the Orient and Ancient Greece ultimately shared was their inaccessibility: the nineteenth-century European could only gain a partial experience of them through texts and artworks or through international exhibitions and tourism. As such, Thomas McFarland argues that the long ago and the far away became symbolically interchangeable symbols of longing: "The always distant country could be removed in time, as with the Romantic mania for the medieval (what Uhland calls '*ein phantastischer Wahn des Mittelalters*'), or removed in space, as with the Romantic preoccupation with the oriental."²³⁰ Like their Classicist counterparts, Orientalist scholars used the blanks in their limited outsiders' knowledge as fields for conjecture and invention, which were presented as authoritative fact.

²²⁹ "Au fond, la Grèce fut pour lui quelque chose d'analogue à ce qu'avait été l'Orient pour Flaubert: un fantasme exemplaire, l'occasion de projeter ses propres rêves sur un passé historique déjà fabuleux, où le temps semblait immobile. Toutefois, Louÿs s'empresse, contrairement à l'auteur de *Salammbô*, de tirer de son étude de l'Antiquité une éthique et un art de vivre." Goujon, 90.

²³⁰ McFarland, 8.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the relationship between fragmentation and the erotic – how the fragment generates desire by offering a tantalizing glimpse of something that only heightens the aura of mystery. Perhaps, then, one of the reasons the Orient was so consistently sexualized was because it was unattainable, and any experience of it was necessarily fragmentary. Ali Behdad in his post-colonial study of nineteenth century literary travelers, presents the Orient's mystery and eros as inextricably bound together in "the opposing poles of orientalist representation: obscurity surrounding the object of representation and an insatiable desire for unveiling inherent in representational practice."²³¹ He goes on to state it more explicitly:

The orientalist traveler is also impelled by the epistemophilic desire to expose what he finds hidden, a desire that in this case is coupled with an erotic urge to see the imaginary nakedness behind the veil. Nerval's wish to "*soulever un coin du voile austère de la déesse de Saïs*" must be read as both a metaphoric statement about his desire to see beyond the surfaces and a more literal wish to tear the veils of the Oriental women in a voyeuristic attempt to see their hidden bodies.²³²

Missing parts

The most obvious instance of fragmentation in Debussy's incidental music is, of course, the lost celesta part. The fate of that part remains a complete enigma. Just before the premiere, Debussy promised Louÿs, "the slim and rapid manuscript of the music to the *Chansons de Bilitis* belongs to you from now on."²³³ However, we have no way of knowing what that manuscript looked like – whether it consisted of a complete score or only the instrumental parts. In fact, we don't even know if a celesta part was ever written out at all.

²³¹ Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 19.

²³² Ibid., 22-23.

²³³ "Le manuscrit mince et rapide de la musique des *Chansons de Bilitis* t'appartient désormais." Letter from Debussy to Louÿs, 31 January 1901, Debussy and Louÿs, *Correspondance*, 159.

Léon Vallas, when he assembled the surviving parts into a score, wrote on the title page, "The celesta part appears to have been improvised by Debussy on the spot."²³⁴ Others, however, believe the part was originally notated in a full score that has since been lost. Dirk Hamoen is the most emphatic on this count:

The proposition that Debussy should have improvised the celesta part is unlikely for several reasons. The extant fragments survived as cue notes in the flute parts. Furthermore, since Debussy gave the manuscript to his friend Louÿs as a gift, it would have been very uncivil to present something incomplete. The fact that it was not among Louÿs' surviving papers is not odd either; Louÿs was extremely untidy and other things have also been known to be temporarily missing or lost altogether.²³⁵

None of the factors Hamoen cites, however, preclude the possibility of an improvised celesta part. The cues in the flute parts could easily have been incorporated into an improvisation. Improvisers in every genre have been known to build their extemporizations around predefined cues, for example the chord progressions of a jazz lead sheet, the melodic lines of an ornamented repeat, or the final trill of a cadenza. Hamoen's dismissal of Louÿs as untidy is distinctly at odds with Louÿs biographer Goujon's portrayal of a man who not only kept but meticulously classified everything. Goujon described the scene that confronted Louÿs's widow and secretary when they set out to inventory Louÿs's library after his death:

It was enough to terrify you: thousands of books, and piles of manuscripts, notes and letters. Louÿs had religiously conserved all the letters he had received since childhood, including those he had written to Georges over thirty years and which had been returned to him upon the latter's death. All of it was methodically filed and formed an extraordinary personal journal. . . . Then there were all the manuscripts: not only those of Louÿs's published

²³⁴ Quoted in Hamoen, 19. The review of the premiere (reproduced in full in Debussy and Louÿs, *Correspondance*, 195-196) does not say that Debussy was at the celesta, though it does name him as the composer. The only apparent basis for Vallas's claim that Debussy improvised the celesta part is that part's absence among the surviving manuscript.

²³⁵ Hamoen, 19.

works, which, bound in white vellum, stood next to those of Tinan, Gide and Wilde, in a special cabinet.²³⁶

So where was the *Bilitis* manuscript, if not among all these meticulously preserved documents? We can of course only speculate. Louys's papers were split up and sold in a completely unsystematic way, and *Bilitis* is not the only valuable document whose whereabouts are still unknown. I believe it is worth considering the possibility that the manuscript that Debussy gave to Louÿs may be the same one now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, given by Louÿs to Lily Debussy.²³⁷ In light of the fragmentary aesthetic of Louÿs's text and the ways in which Debussy's music responds to and echoes that fragmentation, it would not have been at all "uncivil" for the composer to present the manuscript in this unfinished form. Louÿs constructed *Bilitis* with a discontinuous narrative that, like Sappho's scattered fragments, had to be pieced together. It would be only fitting for Debussy to have given him the incidental music atomized in its individual parts rather than amalgamated into a unified score. The very title *Chansons de Bilitis* evokes the lost melodies of Sappho's lyrics. How appropriate then that the composition setting these songs without music should also be partially incomplete. In the last movement, "The Morning Rain," *Bilitis*

²³⁶ "Lorsque, en juin 1925 . . . ils se mirent à inventorier la bibliothèque et les papiers laissés par Louÿs. Il y avait de quoi être épouvanté: des milliers de livres, et des monceaux de manuscrits, de notes et de lettres. Louÿs avait religieusement conservé depuis son enfance toutes les lettres qu'il avait reçues, tout comme celles qu'il avait écrites pendant trente ans à Georges et qui lui avait été restituées à la mort de celui-ci. Tout cela était méthodiquement classé et formait un extraordinaire journal intime. . . . Puis il y avait tous les manuscrits: non seulement ceux des oeuvres publiées de Louÿs, qui, reliés en vélin blanc, figurait à côté de ceux de Tinan, de Gide et de Wilde, dans un meuble spécial." Goujon, 370.

²³⁷ While this is, granted, pure conjecture, it is just as plausible a scenario as assuming that Louÿs lost the manuscript, when he so obsessively archived everything else. Given the short time frame from conception to performance, Debussy cannot have made many copies of the incidental music, and it seems almost certain that he kept one for himself from which he drew the *Six Épigraphes antiques*. As Vallas pointed out, the 1901 performance could easily have taken place with only the extant parts. The copyists could have taken those parts directly from Debussy's sketches; there is no reason to believe that he ever made another score apart from that. Louÿs expressed a strong desire to do what he could for Lily Debussy after the break-up of her marriage to Claude. Louÿs not only contributed to the fund set up for her support, but also offered to take her in until she found a permanent place to live. If anything, it is more believable that she obtained such a potentially valuable unpublished manuscript from the friend who wanted to help her than from the husband who threw her out without ceremony and only begrudgingly ceded alimony after a long and acrimonious legal battle.

writes "The rain, drop by drop, makes holes in my song;" the absent celesta part actually creates a hole through each song.

So many other gestures of fragmentation permeate both the poems and the music, is it not worth contemplating that Debussy may have withheld the celesta part as yet another structural symbol of dissolution? Such a ploy would have corresponded to his temperament. Debussy's long time friend René Peter described him as injecting a sense of play into everything:

His playfulness was a deeply ingrained habit and invaded everything he did. He was playing a game when he used to roll the tobacco of his cigarettes in a sheet of ungummed paper and then flatten it all the way along, without moistening it or ever spilling more than the tiniest speck of the contents. He was playing a game when he won the Prix de Rome by applying a set of old-fashioned tricks, because having the Prix de Rome was rather fun! His whole style is playful; he juggles with grammar, paradoxes and unexpected expressions which suddenly and for no good reason disrupt the train of thought . . . 'You weren't expecting me, but here I am!' . . . Even the piano became, beneath his spatulate fingers, an arena for his crazy jokes: Chopin's 'Funeral March' was turned into something wild and uproarious, or else *En revenant de la revue* [a popular satirical tune] was transformed into a funeral march.²³⁸

The correspondence between Louÿs and Debussy was likewise full of irony, puns and parody, including many humorous musical pieces.²³⁹ Given the spirit of serious play inherent in Louÿs's mystification, it would have been entirely consistent for Debussy to respond with a similar textual game.

The absence of the celesta part, however, does not need to have been deliberate in order to be aesthetically meaningful. We have seen how Sappho's poetry has become indelibly associated with its own disintegration, and how the resulting issues of transmission,

²³⁸ René Peter, quoted in Nichols, 130.

²³⁹ Of particular interest in this context is a letter from Debussy to Louÿs dated 23 June 1901. It is a one page melodrama poking fun at André Gide, including satirical quotes of a Chopin Mazurka (identified as Opus 3745) and the Lutheran chorale *Ein Feste Burg*. Lockspeiser, *Life and Mind*, 1:173-174. Lockspeiser reproduces the letter in an illustration facing page 193.

memory, and loss are therefore central metaphors in the reception of her work, although she could never have foreseen it. The significance of "unplanned" or "unauthorized" fragmentation is even greater when the artwork concerned already deals with themes of discontinuity in other ways. Marjory Levinson emphasizes this with reference to P.B. Shelley's final poem, "The Triumph of Life," which although it

owes [its] truncation to a historical accident (the poet's death), critics almost without exception address the irresolution of Shelley's poem as a doctrinal and formal issue . . . (Shelley's idealistic dualism, his theory of aesthetic production, "The Triumph"'s particular mode of anticlosure, the argument or vision of the poem) . . . That is to say, one feels that "The Triumph" . . . not only "works" in its fragmentary condition, but that its success would be of a different kind, or greatly diminished, or entirely obstructed were anything added to it. . . One activates a mechanism that discovers aesthetically usable irresolution in a particular poem because one anticipates a higher yield from the work thus construed: a more precise and/or inclusive experience of meaning.²⁴⁰

Louÿs went to great lengths to make his book appear to be an authentic ruin. With the loss of the celesta part, the incidental music takes one step further toward Wilde's "perfect representation" by actually becoming one.

Bilitis's missing celesta part blurs the line between "planned" and "unplanned" fragments. In its ambiguity, it raises the same questions as Louÿs's mystification about artifice and nature, fiction and fact, and how we decide which is which. We will probably never know whether it was intended as part of the work's diverse schemes to undermine closure and continuity, or whether it was simply a casualty of history. The very act of weighing the evidence regarding the vanished celesta part tangibly reminds us that memory is never an unbroken narrative, that any image we form of the past is inevitably a reconstruction, and that all history, as it attempts to fill in the blanks, involves some measure of speculation.

²⁴⁰ Levinson, 6-7.

CHAPTER 4

DEBUSSY'S SIX ÉPIGRAPHES ANTIQUES

My outing yesterday was to go see poor Mme Debussy, who shot herself in the chest October 13 after being abandoned by her husband. The bullet went through her stomach twice, and couldn't be recovered. Nevertheless, the operation was a success, and the poor woman seems to be out of danger, but she has been left penniless and homeless . . . The husband left with a forty-something Jewish woman, Mme S. Bardac . . . I wrote Louise to ask her if we could take the poor woman in at our place, at least for a couple of weeks, until she can find a place.²⁴¹

– Letter from Louÿs to his brother Georges, 4 November 1904

In 1904, when Debussy left his first wife Lily for socialite Emma Bardac, he found himself vilified in the press and ostracized by virtually everyone he knew. This was not Debussy's first public disgrace involving a love triangle. Ten years earlier, soprano Thérèse Roger broke off their engagement when she discovered that he was still living with his mistress, Gaby Dupont. Then too, Debussy lost a great many friends in the scandal, including Ernest Chausson, at that time his most influential supporter. Louÿs had staunchly defended Debussy in 1894, showing a loyalty that would cement their relatively new relationship:

A young man can't simply dismiss like a housemaid a mistress who has lived with him for two years, who has shared his penury without complaint, and with whom he has no reproach except that he has grown tired of her and he is getting married. . . . I know of nothing more painful than to see so dishonoured in eight days a man whom one cares for and esteems immeasurably, who has been miserable for fifteen years, and who sees all doors closing to him just at the moment when people are beginning to notice that he has genius.²⁴²

²⁴¹ "Ma sortie d'hier a été pour aller voir la pauvre Mme Debussy, qui s'est tiré un coup de revolver dans la poitrine le 13 octobre après avoir été abandonnée par son mari. La balle a traversé deux fois l'estomac et n'a pas pu être retrouvée. L'opération a pourtant bien réussi et la malheureuse paraît hors d'affaire, mais elle restera sans un sou et sans gîte . . . Le mari est parti avec une juive de quarante et quelques années, Mme S. Bardac . . . J'ai écrit à Louise pour lui demander si elle voulait bien que nous recueillions la pauvre femme chez nous, au moins pendant quelques semaines, jusqu'à ce qu'elle ait trouvé une situation." Quoted in Millan, 252.

²⁴² "Un jeune homme ne peut pas renvoyer comme une femme de chambre une maîtresse que a vécu deux ans avec lui, qui a partagé sa misère, sans se plaindre, et à laquelle il n'a pas de reproche sinon qu'il est las d'elle et

A decade later, however, the poet was appalled at how cruelly Debussy handled the break-up. Louÿs sided with Lily and severed all ties with "the husband," as he coolly refers to Debussy in his letter to Georges. Their friendship came to an abrupt and irrevocable end.

The elopement changed everything for Debussy. Scholars invariably describe it as a "turning point"²⁴³ or the beginning of "a new life."²⁴⁴ On the one hand, it "meant separation from all his old friends, a complete rupture with his past life and all the ties of his youth,"²⁴⁵ as Léon Vallas portrayed it. On the other, it meant entry into the upper class, moving into "the aristocratic neighbourhood of the Bois de Boulogne, where gracious living prevailed,"²⁴⁶ as pianist Maurice Dumesnil described it. Robert Orledge characterizes Debussy's change in lifestyle as a "transformation from the poor left-wing Bohemian of the 1890's to the apparently wealthy bourgeois in his well-appointed and luxuriously furnished house on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne."²⁴⁷ Perhaps encouraged by his new milieu, Debussy's later critical writings reflect a considerable turn toward tradition. The musician himself acknowledged that his days as a radical were far behind him, musing, "it is strange how dreams of Progress lead one to become conservative."²⁴⁸

In this new stage of life, Debussy experienced increasing difficulties composing. He complained of toiling in "the factories of Nothingness" ("les usines de Néant").²⁴⁹ Embroiled in perpetual legal battles, he was now responsible for a child and a wife whose alimony and

qu'il se marie. . . . Je ne connais rien de plus pénible que de voir ainsi déshonorer en huit jours un homme qu'on aime, and qu'on estime infiniment, qui a été malheureux quinze ans et qui se voit fermer toutes les portes au moment où l'on commence à s'apercevoir qu'il a du génie." Letter from Louÿs to Mme de Saint-Marceaux, 22 March 1894, quoted in François Lesure, *Claude Debussy: Biographie Critique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), 151-152.

²⁴³ Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 5th ed. (London: Dent, 1980), 88; Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 249.

²⁴⁴ Lesure, *Biographie Critique*, 251; Seroff, 272.

²⁴⁵ Vallas, 169.

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Nichols, 158.

²⁴⁷ Robert Orledge, "Debussy the Man," in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, 10.

²⁴⁸ Deirdre Donnellon, "Debussy as Musician and Critic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, 53.

²⁴⁹ Orledge, "Debussy the Man," 11.

inheritance could not maintain her in the style to which she was accustomed: "domestic demands of a past luxury that one can't understand have become impossible to support," as he complained to his publisher, Jacques Durand.²⁵⁰ In order to meet his financial obligations the composer resorted to editing the works of past masters, conducting, or re-orchestrating and recycling his earlier pieces. He wrote to Durand, "I'm afraid I'll be accused of scraping the bottoms of my drawers."²⁵¹ By 1907, even the most ardent of *Debussystes*, Emile Vuillermoz, publicly criticized his hero in *la Nouvelle Presse*:

Sincere admirers of the creator of "Pelléas" – who daily increase in numbers – have long been deploring the silence of their favourite composer. From the depths of his no doubt laborious retreat, M. Debussy does not condescend to send them anything but old compositions that have been lying by, and revivals or republications of early works. These old productions, under new titles and in new shapes, are being systematically passed in review to the great sorrow of musical epicures who are partial to first editions and unpublished works.²⁵²

The *Six Épigraphes antiques* appeared at the peak of the composer's paralysis. According to Roy Howat: "We know from Debussy's letters and other reports, that in 1913-1914 Debussy was in the grip of a creative crisis."²⁵³ The sole entirely new work he would write that year was a short piano piece, the *Berceuse héroïque*.

Debussy's reengagement with the *Chansons de Bilitis* in 1914 therefore should not be read as a desire to revisit that particular work, but rather as the product of a desperate situation. It is clear that the composer returned to the incidental music with a considerably different perspective from when he first composed it. Instead of deepening the interpretation

²⁵⁰ "Les exigences domestiques d'un ancien luxe, dont on ne comprends pas qu'il est devenu impossible à soutenir," 15 July 15 1913. Claude Debussy, *Lettres, 1884-1918*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Hermann, 1980), 241.

²⁵¹ "J'ai peur de me voir accusé de râcler le fond de mes tiroirs," letter to Durand, 20 March 1906, quoted in Lesure, *Biographie Critique*, 288.

²⁵² Émile Vuillermoz, *La Nouvelle Presse*, 3 March 1907, quoted in *Ibid.*, 288.

²⁵³ Howat, "Debussy and the Orient," 68.

of Louÿs's verse, the new piece shows every sign of distancing itself from the text and its fragmentary aesthetic.

What's in a name?

The origins of the *Six Épigraphe*s *antiques* remained hidden during the composer's lifetime. Debussy does not appear to have told anyone that they were a reworking of the *Chansons de Bilitis*, nor did anyone who attended the premiere of the *Chansons* seem to draw the connection fourteen years later. The link between *Bilitis* and the *Épigraphe*s was not common knowledge prior to Léon Vallas's 1933 biography of the composer.²⁵⁴ After all, Debussy had renamed the set as a whole as well as changing the names of all the movements (see table 4.1). With every overt reference to Louÿs or *Bilitis* erased from the piano pieces, only the most alert reader could have seen a connection between the two works. Once the relationship between the *Épigraphe*s and the *Chansons* was revealed, scholars naturally tried to link the piano pieces to specific poems. At first glance, this seems a relatively straightforward task. Though Debussy did not retain any of the movement titles exactly, all but movements I and III show a clear enough derivation from their precursors. The source for the title of the first *épigraphe* is also reasonably obvious, taken from the first line of "Chant pastoral": "Il faut remercier Pan, dieu du vent d'été" (We must give thanks to Pan, god of the summer wind). But with the title of the third *épigraphe*, *Pour que la nuit soit propice*, the attempt to trace simple correspondences proves problematic. The title has no obvious counterpart in the *Chansons de Bilitis*, neither in Debussy's *musique de scène*, nor in Louÿs's book. Scholars have nevertheless tried to connect it to *Bilitis*, but the fit remains awkward,

²⁵⁴ Vallas, 254.

Table 4. 1. Comparison of Movement Titles

<i>Chansons de Bilitis</i> movement titles	<i>Six Épigraphe</i> s antiques movement titles
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Chant pastoral" (Pastoral Song) 2. "Les Comparaisons" (Comparisons) 3. "Les Contes" (Stories) 4. "Chanson" (Song) 5. "La Partie d'osselets" (The Game of Knuckle-bones) 6. "Bilitis" 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom" (The Nameless Tomb) 8. "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes" (The Egyptian Courtesans) 9. "L'Eau pure du bassin" (Pure Water of the Basin) 10. "La Danseuse aux crotales" (The Dancer with Crotales) 11. "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika" (Memory of Mnasidika) 12. "La Pluie au matin" (The Morning Rain) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. <i>Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été</i> (To invoke Pan, God of the Summer Wind) II. <i>Pour un tombeau sans nom</i> (For a Nameless Tomb) III. <i>Pour que la nuit soit propice</i> (So that the Night will be Propitious) IV. <i>Pour la danseuse aux crotales</i> (For the Dancer with Crotales) V. <i>Pour l'égyptienne</i> (For the Egyptian) VI. <i>Pour remercier la pluie au matin</i> (To Thank the Morning Rain)

Notes: To reflect the difference in scale, the movements of the *Chansons de Bilitis* are shown in quotation marks while the movements of the *Six Épigraphe*s antiques are italicized.

demonstrated by the fact that scholars have attached this movement to not one but three different poems. Henri Borgeaud (and Edward Lockspeiser, following his lead) links it to the second movement of the incidental music, "Les comparaisons," on the grounds that among the pieces included in the first set, its text bears the most resemblance to the new title.²⁵⁵ Frank Dawes, in his survey of Debussy's piano music, claims its source as "Hymne à la nuit" (Hymn of the Night), a poem from Louÿs's book that was not even included in the incidental music but that has a similar title to the third epigraph.²⁵⁶ David Orledge relates *Pour que la nuit* to the fourth number of the original, "Chanson," even though that poem has no

²⁵⁵ Lockspeiser, *Life and Mind*, 1:176; Debussy and Louÿs, *Correspondance*, 196.

²⁵⁶ Dawes, 53.

relationship whatsoever to the new title, because that movement is the unambiguous source of most of the musical material.²⁵⁷

Using the music to draw a connection to the original poetry would seem logical, but a close examination of the sources for the material in the *Épigraphes* merely raises more puzzling contradictions (see table 4.2).²⁵⁸ Two of the *Épigraphes* combine material from several different *chansons*. *Pour que la nuit soit propice* briefly refers to material from two movements other than "Chanson": the middle section combines the theme from number 9, "L'Eau pure du bassin" with the grace note figure from "Chanson," while the coda is loosely based on number 2, "Les Comparaisons." Similarly, *Épigraphie II, Pour un tombeau sans nom*, blends several different *chansons*, inserting extended passages from number 11, "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika," and number 8, "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," into material derived chiefly from number 7, "Le Tombeau sans nom." Numbers 7 and 11 do have close affinities – both poems are primarily concerned with Bilitis's great love, Mnasidika, which Debussy evoked musically by using the augmentation of the melody from "Le Tombeau" in "Le Souvenir." No similarly strong connection unites the other poems brought together in the second and third *Épigraphes*. So which poems should be associated with these movements? All of them? Or just the poem whose music figures most significantly? We come across a different ambiguity in *Épigraphie V, Pour l'Égyptienne*. Its title is clearly derived from *chanson* number 8, "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," the music from that *chanson* is not used at all in *Pour l'égyptienne*; rather it is prominently featured in *Pour un Tombeau sans nom*, a

²⁵⁷ Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 248.

²⁵⁸ Basic comparative tables of the two works have been published in Hirsbrunner, 433 and Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 248-249 but these do not account for the thematic material in the *Six Épigraphes antiques* measure by measure.

Table 4. 2. Sources of thematic material for the *Six Épigraphes antiques*

<i>Épigraphie</i>	<i>Derivation from Chansons de Bilitis</i>
I. Pour remercier Pan, dieu du vent d'été mm. 1-16 mm 17-30 mm. 31-36	Title: first line of 1. "Chant pastoral" 1. "Chant pastoral," mm. 1-16 1. "Chant pastoral," mm. 15-16, developed 1. "Chant pastoral," mm 17-21
II. Pour un tombeau sans nom mm. 1-2 mm. 3-4 mm. 5-6 mm. 7-12 mm. 13-24 mm. 25-27 mm. 28-32 mm. 33-35	Title: 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom" 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 1-2 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 6-7, bass 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 3-5 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 6-10 unrelated 11. "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika," mm. 5-12 8. "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," mm. 5-9 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," m. 1
III. Pour que la nuit soit propice mm. 1-11 m. 12 mm. 13-14 mm. 15-16 m. 17 mm. 18-20 mm. 21-23 m. 24 mm. 25-26 mm. 27-29 m. 30	Title: unrelated 4. "Chanson," mm. 1-10 unrelated 9. "L'Eau pure du bassin," m. 2 / 4. "Chanson," m. 1 4. "Chanson," m. 12 4. "Chanson," m. 6 unrelated 4. "Chanson," m. 9 unrelated 4. "Chanson," mm. 8-9 2. "Les Comparaisons," mm. 6-7 (loose derivation) 4. "Chanson," m. 9
IV. Pour la danseuse aux crotales mm. 1-14 mm. 15-16 mm. 17-18 mm. 19-28 mm. 29-41 mm. 42-47 mm. 48-51 mm. 52-61	Title: 10. "La Danseuse aux crotales" 10. "La Danseuse aux crotales," mm. 1-14 10. "La Danseuse aux crotales," mm. 24 & 12 unrelated 10. "La Danseuse aux crotales," mm. 1-10 unrelated 10. "La Danseuse aux crotales," mm. 1-6 unrelated 10. "La Danseuse aux crotales," mm. 19-28
V. Pour l'Égyptienne mm. 1-50	Title: 8. "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes" all unrelated
VI. Pour remercier la pluie au matin mm. 1-4 mm. 5-6 mm. 7-14 mm. 15-16 mm. 17-50 mm. 51-54 mm. 55-62	Title: 12. "La Pluie au matin" unrelated 12. "La Pluie au matin," mm. 2-3 unrelated 12. "La Pluie au matin," mm. 2-3 unrelated 12. "La Pluie au matin," m. 9, developed 12. "La Pluie au matin," mm. 13-21

link that further confuses any attempt to trace a one-to-one relationship between music and verse.

When the *Chansons de Bilitis* were remade into the *Six Épigraphe*s antiques, the genre of the work changed from dramatic to instrumental music. Without the poetry, the pieces no longer carry the same specific referential meanings. In the *Chansons*, the distorted thematic recollections in numbers 11 and 12 had a clear symbolic function relating to the themes of memory and loss in their respective poems.²⁵⁹ This disappears in the *Épigraphe*s. With the theme from "Le Tombeau sans nom" and its recall in "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika" now both in the same movement, the augmented form of the theme from "Le Souvenir" becomes simply a varied recapitulation instead of a memory of a past love. Stripped of its poetic references to future generations singing Bilitis's songs, the thematic recall at the end of *Pour remercier la pluie au matin* no longer evokes any irony, just a vague reminiscence. Whereas the crumbling end of the last *chanson* referenced ruin and decay, the recollection in the *épigraphe* feels more like a comforting conclusion.

The contradictory references between the music and the text combined with the jumbling together of unrelated movements make the *Six Épigraphe*s antiques intractably difficult to map onto specific poems. Rather than trying to force a match between musical and poetic components that just don't quite fit, I would like to suggest that it is inappropriate to directly associate the *Six Épigraphe*s with Louÿs's poems. The evidence indicates that despite their musical parentage, the *Épigraphe*s no longer function as a setting of the *Chansons de Bilitis*.

If we examine the title changes, we see that Debussy removed not only Louÿs's and Bilitis's names, but also Mnasidika's, and with them any unmistakable reference to the

²⁵⁹ See pages 65-68 above.

poems. "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes" became simply *Pour l'égyptienne*, eliminating the one word with a specifically sexual connotation. The new nomenclature gives the work a very different flavour, as Escher has remarked:

Although in the titles of five movements Debussy refers to titles used by Pierre Louÿs or particular lines of poetry, he has generalised them by slight changes in such a way that the anecdotal element and above all – any anecdotal eroticism is eliminated . . . The creative impulse which once more impelled Debussy in this case is called – to use Nietzsche's splendid phrase – *Eros der Ferne*.²⁶⁰

The new pieces maintain an exotic air, but they are reticent about the erotic. Though the derivation of the titles is plain enough once one knows to look for it, none but the most dedicated Louÿs fan would be able to discern the relation from the titles alone. The premiere of the incidental music, with its nude *tableaux vivants*, was a benchmark in Louÿs's morality campaign, and could only be performed for a carefully selected private group.²⁶¹ The piano pieces, on the other hand, are uncontroversially suitable for a general audience.

It is worth noting that of the many "revivals or republications of early works" bemoaned by Vuillermoz, none of those other pieces were subjected to such fundamental revision. Debussy certainly did not have to delete the poetry when he made the *Chansons de Bilitis* into piano pieces. Many composers recognize the literary inspirations of instrumental pieces by printing them in the score or as programme notes – Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit: 3 Poèmes pour piano d'après Aloysius Bertrand* is one significant contemporary example. Moreover, other Debussy instrumental pieces based on extramusical artworks do acknowledge their sources, either through their titles, like *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (based on Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*), or by other means, like *La Mer*, which was inspired by a Hokusai print that Debussy featured as the cover illustration of the score. So

²⁶⁰ Escher, 63.

²⁶¹ Niederauer, 159.

why did Debussy create new titles and remove any direct reference to the poetry from the *Six Épigrapbes antiques*? I argue that it was neither an oversight, nor a simple cosmetic change. It seems plausible that the poetry was not accidentally omitted but rather deliberately suppressed, severed from its music in order to quash any association with a poet from whom the composer had become bitterly estranged.

Open and closed

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. . . . Again a beautiful object, whether it by a living organism or any whole composed of parts, must not only have an orderly arrangement of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude . . . Hence a very small animal organism cannot be beautiful; for the view of it is confused, the object being seen in an almost imperceptible moment of time.²⁶²

– Aristotle, *Poetics*

Just as the *Six Épigrapbes antiques* withdraw from the eroticism of Louÿs's poetry, they retreat from the compositional technique that acted as its most powerful symbol, namely the incidental music's radical fragmentation. The individual movements of the *Épigrapbes* are all much longer than those of the incidental music, though they would still be considered miniatures (or epigrams) by any ordinary standard. The shortest of the *Épigrapbes*, *Pour que la nuit soit propice*, at 30 measures is nearly twice as long as the most extended musical passage in the *Chansons*. However, it is not merely the larger scale but rather how the movements have been prolonged that makes these pieces sound complete and self-sufficient.

²⁶² Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. N. G. L. Hammond (Aarhus, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001), 31.

Particularly interesting are the ways in which the *Épigraphes* provide closure at precisely the spots where the *Chansons* withheld it, often by extremely simple means.

All of the five incidental music movements selected as the primary framework for the piano pieces already contain more than one section, which makes them easier to expand into larger pieces (see table 4.2). Four of these – numbers 1, 4, 7 and 10 – are the *chansons* in which the music is broken up and interspersed with the poetry. The musical flow of the piano pieces, uninterrupted by spoken word, is naturally far more continuous. The other prominently featured *chanson*, number 12, has continuous music but is clearly divided into two parts, the movement itself (mm. 1-12) and the thematic recollection from the first movement (mm. 13-21). The break between these sections is significant enough that the poem was inserted between them in the 1954 revival of the work, a practice Arthur Hoérée followed in his 1971 edition for Jobert.²⁶³ Most of the *chansons* in which the music is continuous (numbers 3, 4, 5 and 9) are eliminated entirely from the later set. Those that remain are either barely touched upon (numbers 9 and 11) or relegated to secondary functions as codas (numbers 2 and 8). Two of these are altered so substantially (numbers 2 and 9) that it is debatable whether the material in the *Épigraphes* is actually derived from them or not (see example 4.1).²⁶⁴

Right from the very beginning of the *Épigraphes antiques* it is apparent that the aesthetic has changed from that of the *Chansons de Bilitis*. The melody of the "Chant pastoral" is kept unchanged in *Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été*, but it is reharmonized

²⁶³ Claude Debussy and Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Arthur Hoérée (Paris: Jobert, 1971), 35-56.

²⁶⁴ Examples are all taken from Claude Debussy, *Six Épigraphes Antiques: Transcrits Pour Piano à Deux Mains Par l'Auteur*, ed. Ernst-Günter Heinemann (Munich: G. Henle, 1995) rather than the better-known four hands arrangement Debussy published simultaneously. The notes of two versions are substantially the same: although the solo piano version omits many doublings, surprisingly little material was cut to accommodate the two fewer hands.

a. Number 2, "Les Comparaisons."

Musical score for Number 2, "Les Comparaisons." The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment. The right hand has a melodic line with trills and slurs, while the left hand provides a harmonic foundation with chords and moving lines. Dynamics include *f*, *dim.*, and *p*.

b. III. *Pour que la nuit soit propice*, mm. 27-30

Two systems of musical notation for movement III, "Pour que la nuit soit propice", measures 27-30. The first system shows measures 27-29 with complex melodic lines in the right hand and supporting bass in the left. The second system shows measure 30, which includes a *retenu* (sustained) section. Dynamics include *f*, *sfz*, and *p*.

c. Number 9, "L'Eau pure du bassin," mm. 1-3

Three measures of musical notation for Number 9, "L'Eau pure du bassin". The right hand features a simple, flowing melody, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *pp* and *p*.

d. III. *Pour que la nuit soit propice*, mm. 13-14

Two systems of musical notation for movement III, "Pour que la nuit soit propice", measures 13-14. The first system shows measures 13-14 with a piano accompaniment. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and dynamics like *pp effacé*, *p*, and *p marqué*. The left hand has a steady accompaniment. The second system shows measures 13-14 with a piano accompaniment. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and dynamics like *p* and *p marqué*. The left hand has a steady accompaniment.

Example 4.1. Parallel passages from numbers 2 and 9 and movement III.

with a stepwise progression of thirds in mm. 4-6, which are later expanded to triads in mm. 8-9 (see Example 4.2).

a. Number 1, "Chant Pastoral," mm. 1-9

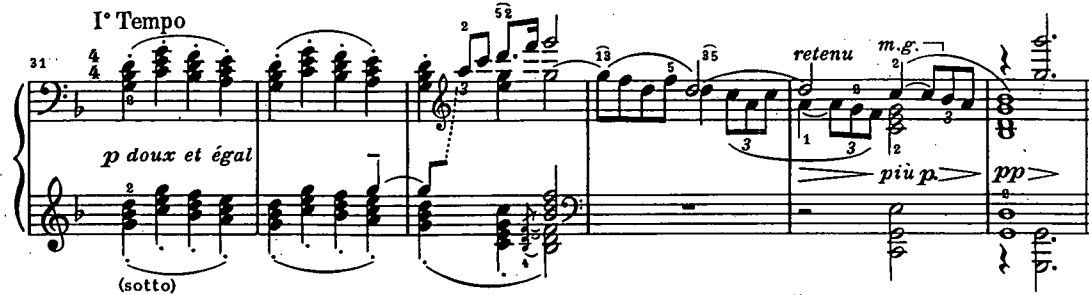
b. I. Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été, mm. 1-9

Example 4.2. Parallel passages from number 1 and movement I.

The linear movement of the accompaniment in the *épigraphe* creates a much greater sense of direction than the wandering chords of the *chanson*. Moreover, since the accompaniment now begins on the second beat of the bar in m. 4, it allows the melody to resolve onto the G tonic on the downbeat instead of undercutting it with a C major harmony, as occurred in m. 4 the "Chant pastoral."²⁶⁵ In the space originally dedicated to the recitation of the poetry, *Pour invoquer Pan* inserts instead a central section of music, set off in the score by double bars.

²⁶⁵ See pp. 64-65 above.

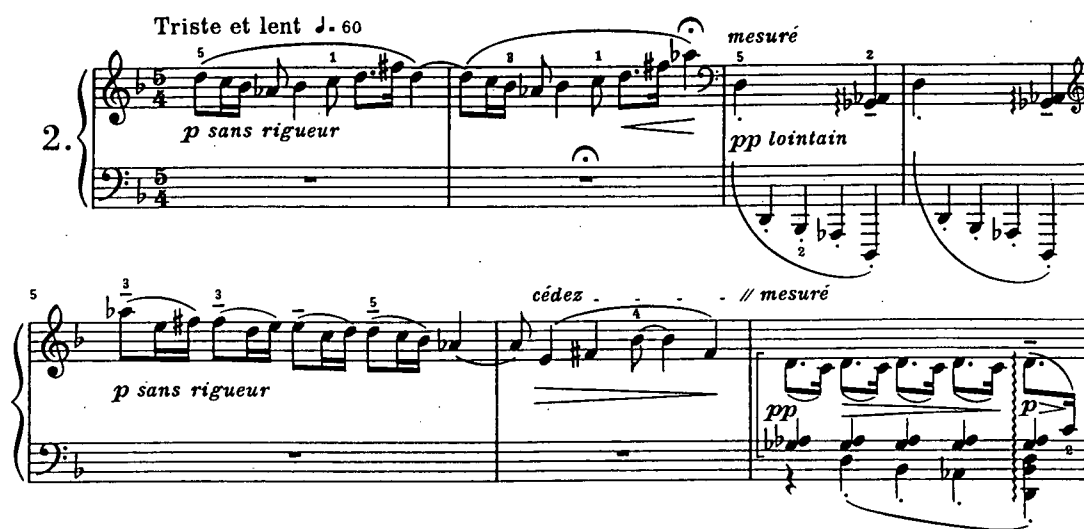
The last measure of the first section is spun out in the fourteen bars that follow (mm. 17-30) before returning to a reiteration of the main theme. The resulting form is a basic ABA', with a developmental middle section, and a truncated reprise, completely at odds with the terse syntax of the *chanson*. The last few bars of the *épigraphe* replicate the *chanson* exactly, except for the addition of octave Gs in the high and low registers on the second beat of the last measure (see example 4.3, cf. example 3.5).



Example 4.3. Movement I, *Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été*, mm. 31-36.

The change is tiny, but it is remarkable how much it increases the sense of finality and resolution; there is no more question here of looping back to the beginning and continuing in a perpetual loop, as there is in "Chant Pastoral."

The second movement of the *Épigraphes*, *Pour un tombeau sans nom*, fills in the original gaps left for the poetry (now mm. 3-4 and 7) with the accompaniment bass motive taken from mm. 6-7 of "Le Tombeau sans nom" (see example 4.4, cf. example 3.2 above). While the effect is still discontinuous, it richly demonstrates how much more disruptive the paratactic juxtaposition of music and text is compared to that of contrasting musical ideas. Whereas the main theme of "Le Tombeau sans nom" turned back on itself in an infinitely repeatable loop that joined the end back to the beginning, *Pour un tombeau sans nom* replaces the last measure of the theme (m. 6) with new material that opens outward. While the altered phrase hardly sounds final, it no longer implies a circularity, and leads onward



Example 4.4. Movement II, *Pour un tombeau sans nom*, mm. 1-7.

just as easily as turning back. The inconclusive ending of "Le Tombeau sans nom" is placed in the middle of the piece (m. 12), just before the double bar where new material enters. Where this phrase once trailed off into silence, here it functions as a transitional passage. Hearing it lead effortlessly into a new section really brings home the fact that it never really sounded like an ending, but rather a segue into something that never came. Like the first *épigraphe*, *Pour un tombeau* is roughly ternary in form, again adding a new middle section (mm. 12-24) and featuring a truncated reprise (mm. 25-27). When the first theme returns at m. 25, it is in the augmented, downward turning version from the "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika." The transformation is less noticeable here than in the *Chansons* because the rhythmic, dance-like accompaniment from "Le Souvenir" is replaced by ominous low thirds similar in mood to the first section of the movement. The change in the accompaniment also neatly avoids the unsettling dissonant ending in mm. 13-15 of "Le Souvenir." The theme leads instead to a coda (mm. 28-35) that uses chords taken from the new middle section to underpin the falling chromatic melody from number 8, "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes." The

original ostinato accompaniment for this melody emerges at m. 31. Its four descending whole tones (D to A-flat) match the first four notes of the *tombeau* melody, and effortlessly integrate the themes of the two *chansons*. The end of "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes" left the melody hanging on a ninth above the bass and continued the ostinato right up until the end, calling an arbitrary halt to a music that sounded like it could have continued on indefinitely. The last bars of *Pour un tombeau* (mm. 33-35) neatly finish that unresolved passage by adding a little tag that pairs the chords from the *épigraphe*'s middle section with the opening theme and leaves the melody on the fifth above the bass, a much more settled ending than that of "Les Courtisanes" (see example 4.5).

a. Number 8, "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," mm. 8-10.

b. II. *Pour un tombeau sans nom*, mm. 32-35

Example 4.5. Parallel passages from number 8 and movement II.

Similar to the preceding movement, *Pour que la nuit soit propice* converts its primary source material into an opening section. The *chanson* used in *Pour que la nuit*, "Chanson"

structurally resembles the *chanson* used in *Pour un tombeau*, "Le Tombeau sans nom": both begin with two very short passages of music that alternate with a few lines of poetry, then close with longer musical passages. There is, though, a telling difference in the treatment these receive in the *Épigraphes*. *Pour un tombeau* fills those mid-movement gaps, whereas *Pour que la nuit* makes no attempt to do so. It simply ignores the first break after m. 2 and proceeds straight on to the next measure (see example 4.6).

Lent et expressif ♩.. 48

Example 4.6. Movement III, *Pour que la nuit soit propice*, mm. 1-5.

By contrast the second break after m. 4 becomes a full bar rest in the *épigraphe*. If the pianist adheres to the metronome marking of 48 beats per minute for the dotted quarter note, the silence lasts two and a half seconds – the most noticeable residual trace of the holes in the *Chansons*.²⁶⁶ It is a remarkable moment, and all the more difficult to sustain because the piano pieces preserve so little impression of fragmentation. The inconclusive ending of

²⁶⁶ The Henle edition calls for a 6/8 time signature for m. 5, but the Dover edition keeps the 12/8 time signature from the beginning, which makes this silence a full five seconds long. Claude Debussy, *Etudes, Children's Corner, Images Book II, and Other Works for Piano* (New York: Dover, 1992), 94.

"Chanson" at m. 11 becomes a transition into the new middle section (mm. 13-24), once again demonstrating how the original music pointed onward into the silence after it rather than closing off the piece. As in *Pour invoquer Pan*, the middle section develops material from the first part of the movement, but it provides less contrast. The entire movement is dominated by the lower neighbour grace note motive from the first measure of number 4, "Chanson" (see example 3.7 a), which is always in whole tones in the first section, but primarily in semi-tones in the middle section. In mm. 13-14 the theme in parallel thirds from *chanson* number 9, "L'Eau pure du bassin," melds with the grace note motive (see example 4.1c and d). The central section is set apart by an ostinato of repeated B's in the middle register. In the *Chansons*, the use of ostinati creates harmonic stasis, either sustaining a single chord (as in numbers 7, 8, 9 and 12) or oscillating between two chords (as in numbers 3 and mm. 5-10 of 4, the latter of which is reproduced in mm. 6-11 of *Pour que la nuit*). In contrast, the middle section of *Pour que la nuit* is harmonically very active, even with the repeated B's. Once again, the movement closes with a truncated return of the first theme (25-26), but the articulation of the ternary form is somewhat ambiguous at this point because the melodic material is all so closely related. On the one hand, several elements suggest a formal articulation in m. 21: the end of the B ostinato, the return of the static harmony over the low D-flat that anchored most of the first section, and especially the indication "*au mouvement*" after the "*cédez*" marked at the end of m. 20, since as Roy Howat reminds us, "indicated tempo stretching in this repertoire usually has a structural rather than a locally expressive function."²⁶⁷ On the other hand, the grace note motive in m. 21 is still outlining the semi-tones of the middle section, and the first literally reprised whole-tone material does not arrive

²⁶⁷ Roy Howat, "Debussy's Piano Music: Sources and Performance," in *Debussy Studies*, ed. Richard Langham Smith (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 80.

until m. 25, taken not from the beginning but the end of the first section (see m. 25, cf. m. 9). There is a definite sense of ternary form, but the exact moment of recapitulation is blurred. The brilliant melismas of the coda (mm. 27-29), loosely related to the second *chanson* "Les Comparaisons," provide a culminating sense of momentum toward a final reiteration of the grace note motive, while the bass pedal on A-flat prepares the way for the final D-flat in a pseudo dominant-tonic relationship. Like the previous *épigraphe*, *Pour que la nuit* trades out the original melodic ending of a dissonant ninth above the bass for a more settled perfect fifth.

Pour la danseuse aux crotales, like *Pour invoquer Pan*, is based on a *chanson* in which the poetry was bookended by two passages of music. Again, Debussy keeps the outer sections and inserts music between them into the space once occupied by words. This movement, however, uses the peculiarities of its source *chanson*, number 10 "La Danseuse aux crotales," to build a more complex form than *Pour invoquer Pan* (see table 4.2 above). At 28 bars, "La danseuse" is the longest of the *chansons*. Though it is still so brief that it sounds through-composed, it has a form of ABCA' poetry BC (see table 4.3).

Table 4. 3. Form of *chanson* 12, "La Pluie au matin."

Section	A	B	C	A'	poetry	B	C
mm.	1-6	7-10	11-14	15-18		19-22	23-28

The first section contains three distinct musical ideas: the broken chords and two note slurs of mm. 1-6 (A), the oscillating neighbour figures of mm. 7-10 (B), and the trills, thirty-second note runs and brilliant chords of mm. 11-14 (A), followed by a brief codetta at mm. 14-18 using the first idea (A') (see example 4.7).



Example 4.7. Number 10, "La Danseuse aux crotales," first section, mm. 1-18.

The ten-bar second section of the *chanson* omits the first idea, but returns to the second and third in varied forms. The fourth movement of the *Épigraphes* retains the first fourteen measures almost exactly, but replaces the codetta with a new one loosely derived from the third idea. The music added in the middle twice returns to the beginning, restating the first two ideas at mm. 19-28 and 42-47, and surrounds these passages with new material in mm. 29-41 and 48-51. The resulting piece, structured ABC-ABD-AEBC, has more of a rondo design than a ternary form (see table 4.4).

Table 4. 4. Form of movement IV *Pour la danseuse aux crotales*

Section	A	B	C	A	B	D	A	E	B	C
mm.	1-6	7-10	11-18	19-24	25-28	29-41	42-47	48-51	52-55	56-61

Despite being the most formally developed of the *Épigraphes*, *Pour la danseuse* also retains a remnant of fragmentation: the "A" theme (mm. 1, 19 and 42) and one of the new melodies (m. 33) begin with rests, so that the preceding sections break off abruptly into silence. The conclusion, though, backs away from these fragmentary touches. With no more than a

minimal rhythmic shift in the bass from its model, *Pour la danseuse* provides a downbeat in the final bar, making its conclusion sound far more grounded and definite (see example 4.8).

a. Number 10, "La Danseuse aux crotales," mm. 23-28.

b. Movement IV, *Pour la danseuse aux crotales*, mm. 57-61

Example 4.8. Comparison of final measures of number 10 and movement IV.

Pour remercier la pluie au matin preserves very little from its source *chanson*.²⁶⁸ The main body of the movement uses only the briefest snippets of "La Pluie au matin." The melodies in this *épigraphe* are built from the simplest of materials, have vague shapes, and seldom repeat exactly, qualities that limit the role of the thematic material in shaping the form of the piece. The structure is articulated instead by the accompanying ostinati. At the beginning of the movement, Debussy replaces the B-G grace note ostinato from the *chanson* with a two beat chromatic sixteenth note pattern that beautifully evokes the sound of rain (see example 4.9).

²⁶⁸ The fifth *épigraphe* will not be discussed in detail because it does not take any music from the *Chansons de Bilitis*, beyond the opening theme's vaguely similar contour to the main theme of "Chanson pastoral." It conforms to the truncated ABA' structure of most of the other movements of the *Épigraphes*.

a. Ostinato in number 12, "La Pluie au matin," mm. 1-4



b. Ostinato in movement VI. *Pour remercier la pluie au matin*, mm. 1-2



Example 4.9. Comparison of opening measures of number 12 and movement VI.

This accompaniment figure pervades most of the movement, but it is replaced by different ostinati at mm. 11-14 and 21-28, giving the piece an ABACA form up until the thematic recollection of the opening movement at m. 55. The original *chanson* moved into to the coda with a melodic leap of a tritone, a transition so abrupt that Escher even asserted that a measure must be missing.²⁶⁹ In the *épigraphe*, the transition into the coda is softened by adding a measure of ostinato, so that the thematic recall is now introduced by a gentle, downward, chromatic slide (see example 4.9). The thematic return from the first movement is altered so as to give the set as a whole a greater sense of finality and closure. The gradual breaking up of the theme in the bass line of "La Pluie au matin" (see example 4.10a, mm. 18-21, discussed in Chapter 3) is replaced in the *épigraphe* by a simple repetition, lacking only the last note as it turns to the final cadence (see example 4.10 b, mm. 58-62). Both cadential points in the coda are rhythmically shifted so that the resolutions now land on downbeats

²⁶⁹ "It would require an extra bar in between, but once that were inserted the two passages would link up." Letter from Escher to Lucienne de Hoog-Bouwman, 26 December 1971, quoted in Hamoen, 21.

a. Number 12, "La Pluie au matin," mm 12-21

12 *Très modéré* *Retenu*

p *Très modéré* *p* *più p* *p* *Retenu* *pp* *pp* *pp*

pp *p* *Très soutenu* *mf* *p* *dimp.* *pp* *pp* *ppp*

VI. Pour remercier la pluie au matin, mm. 53-62

53 *più p* *cédez* //

55 *p* *80* *4* *4* *5* *4* *3* *2* *2* *3* *2* *1*

57 *au mouvt* *più p* *4* *3* *3*

60 *pp* *m.g.* *4* *m.g.* *2* *m.g.* *pp*

Example 4.10. Comparison of final measures of number 12 and movement VI.

(compare mm. 15 and 21 of the *chanson* "La Pluie au matin" to mm. 57-58 and 61-62 of *Pour remercier la pluie au matin*). The change of one note in the cadence from mm. 57-58 also makes it significantly more final than its counterpart in m. 15 of the *chanson*: the final chord of m. 57 has a C in the alto voice instead of a D, which adds a seventh and gives the progression a dominant to tonic feel, rather than the original static move between inversions of the tonic.

In summary, the piano pieces meet the Aristotelian requirements for a whole: they all have a beginning, a middle and an end, an orderly arrangement of parts, and are of a certain magnitude. No longer mere fleeting snatches of melody, these multi-section compositions sound complete and self-sufficient. The circular loops of the *chansons* are opened up to lead onward instead of folding back upon themselves. In this more expanded format, *ostinati* and static harmonies no longer continue for the entire length of a movement. They instead become sections in a larger whole. These pieces feature traditional form, like the works Debussy wrote in 1915, as he finally broke out of his creative block to compose the twelve piano études and late instrumental sonatas. Even the movement titles of the *Épigraphes*, all beginning with the word "pour," are reminiscent of the titles of the études (*Pour les cinq doigts*, *Pour les tierces*, *Pour les quartes*, etc.).

The changes wrought in the *Épigraphes* highlight by contrast the deeply inconclusive forms of the incidental music. Some of those changes are so simple that they clearly show that Debussy could easily have made the *Chansons* sound more like miniatures and less like fragments if he had so wished. The radically inconclusive endings of the original demand greater effort and imagination, whereas the newer, altered versions tend to be more conventional, and thus more readily conceived. Comparing these two works makes it quite

obvious that the *Chansons* are fragmentary not because Debussy didn't have time to finish them, but because he wanted them that way.

The Limits of a Friendship

This way of killing time "à la Mytilène" is all very nice in books; but me, you know, I am for positive things . . . and regular things. . . . This little genre of amusement without any result means nothing to me. I find it silly! . . . null and void. I make love, beautiful love, all naked, all simple, far too lofty and respectable a thing to let all that unnecessary monkey business in it revolt me in my heart and under my skin!²⁷⁰

– Debussy to René Peter in 1898

Ideological estrangement does not necessarily accompany a severed friendship. We have seen, for example, how Wilde's ideas continued to exercise a strong influence on Louÿs long after the two men bitterly parted company. It is not surprising, however, that the mature Debussy drew back from the moral and aesthetic radicalism of the *Chansons de Bilitis*. Even at the height of his friendship with Louÿs, the evidence suggests that the composer did not altogether agree with the poet's ideas, though it is plain that he thoroughly understood them, as shown by his sensitive settings of the *Chansons* in both the songs and the incidental music. Debussy's lifestyle in his earlier years was hardly conventional, as the Thérèse Roger debacle demonstrated. In Louÿs, he found a friend who did not judge him for it, because the writer's own lifestyle was far more unorthodox. There is every indication that Louÿs lived to the fullest the liberalizing ideas he espoused in his writings; ever the obsessive classifier, he even

²⁷⁰ "Ces manières de tuer le temps «à la Mytilène» font très gentiment dans les livres; mais moi, tu sais, je suis pour les choses positives... et régulières... Ce petit genre d'amusement sans résultat ne me dit rien. Je trouve ça bête!... nul et non avenu. Je fais de l'amour, du bel amour, tout nu, tout simple, une chose beaucoup trop haute et respectable pour que tout ce qui en est l'inutile singerie ne me révolte pas dans mon cœur, sous ma peau!" quoted in René Peter, *Claude Debussy: Édition augmentée de plusieurs chapitres et de lettres inédites de Claude Debussy* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), 53. Mytilene was the capital city of Lesbos. Peter does not give a date for this conversation. However, they discuss only *La Flûte de Pan* and *La Chevelure* from the *Trois chansons de Bilitis*, it seems that *Le Tombeau des Naiades* was not yet composed, and they mention that Louÿs was in Egypt, so that would presumably place the exchange some time in early 1898.

documented his activities with journals and photos.²⁷¹ As a friend, Debussy too accepted him as he was, but there is little to suggest that the composer shared in this part of his life. Others did: writers Jean de Tinan and André Lebey formed a notorious trio with Louÿs, known for their all-night debauches through the Latin Quarter. Debussy rarely joined them, and reportedly partook in only their more innocent activities.²⁷² Louÿs's letters to Debussy are filled with tales of seduction; Debussy's letters in return joke about his friend's adventures but almost never relate any of his own. Years later, Louÿs would reflect:

I never knew a man who was less of a womanizer than Debussy. In 1896 he was thirty five, handsome, very masculine and extremely passionate; and in fifteen or twenty years of love life he had known only five women, one of whom (Mme Hochon) had violated him. So, five in all. Not a single casual encounter.²⁷³

So while the young Debussy's morals were enough to shock the bourgeois, they did not come close to the counter-cultural extremes championed by Louÿs.

One might be tempted to attribute the difference in their behaviour merely to Debussy's reserve or social awkwardness, were it not for several statements attributed to him. René Peter recounted conversations in which the composer expressed a decidedly different moral standard from Louÿs, and even an ambivalent attitude toward the *Chansons de Bilitis*. Discussing Debussy's taste in literature, Peter reported:

He held *Mademoiselle de Maupin* to be an irritating example of suppressed vice, vice for consumption by young girls; he only just brought himself, on

²⁷¹ Goujon, 85.

²⁷² See Lesure, *Biographie Critique*, 161.

²⁷³ "Je n'ai jamais connu d'homme moins coureur que Debussy. En 1896 il avait trente-cinq ans, était bel homme, très mâle et fort ardent; et en quinze ou vingt ans de vie amoureuse il n'a connu que cinq femmes, dont une (Mme Hochon) l'avait violé. Donc, cinq en tout. Jamais une femme de rencontre.," Letter of 28 December, 1915, quoted in *Ibid.*, 420.

this front, to excuse the *Chansons de Bilitis*, for their grace and the frankness of their language . . . and even then, not all of them!²⁷⁴

Peter portrayed a man with a distaste for excess who set Louÿs's poems with great reservations:

By the same inclination that attracted him to children's games, anything in them that might cross the line became an object of indignation, almost horror, to him. . . . The three songs of Pierre Louÿs that he brought to life with his delightful music (*la Flûte de Pan*, *la Chevelure*, *le Tombeau des Naiades*) are those rare ones in the work in which love is evoked only in its most ritual, most natural, one might even say its most ingenuous practices. One senses that he chose them with care, according to his own rules, taking pains never to lower himself to extol the games of that deceptive island.²⁷⁵

Even with their carefully selected content, Lockspeiser suggests that "Debussy appears to have been peculiarly loath to allow the performance of these songs."²⁷⁶ According to Peter, Debussy's qualms were even reflected in the music itself. When Peter told him the dissonance that accompanies the last word of *La Flûte de Pan* was disconcerting, the composer responded:

'You're right,' he declared, after repeating the exquisite dissonance two or three times. 'And so much the better! That'll teach the young reprobate to let her lover kiss her while he's teaching her the flute, and then tell stories to her mother! Anyway, I owed her that for all the trouble she gave me. The little minx!'²⁷⁷

Debussy's outburst is clearly in jest, but, as with many jokes, it contains an element of truth. The poems he selected for the *Trois chansons de Bilitis* are all taken from the first

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Nichols, 139. *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, by Théophile Gautier, portrays a cross-dressing woman, and is frequently compared to the *Chansons de Bilitis* for its treatment of lesbianism. See Louÿs's comment on that novel on page 34 above.

²⁷⁵ "Par l'attrait même qu'exerçaient sur lui les jeux enfantins, tout ce qui en pouvait oser franchir les limites lui devenait objet d'indignation, presque d'horreur. . . . Les trois chansons de Pierre Louÿs qu'il anima de son adorable musique (*la Flûte de Pan*, *la Chevelure*, *le Tombeau des Naiades*) sont des très rares de l'oeuvre où ne soit évoqué l'amour qu'en ses pratiques les plus rituelles, les plus « nature », on pourrait dire presque même les plus candides. On sent qu'il les choisit avec soin, selon ses rigueurs, en se gardant de s'abaisser jamais à célébrer les jeux de l'île mensongère." Peter, 53-54.

²⁷⁶ Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 65.

²⁷⁷ From the memoirs of René Peter, quoted in Nichols, 131.

section of the book recounting Bilitis's childhood, so that Bilitis experiences no tutelage under Sappho, no marriage to Mnasilika, and no life as a temple courtesan. While today, the poems from this initial section are the most controversial because they deal with Bilitis's sexual experiences before she turned sixteen, in Debussy's time this was not nearly as taboo a subject as the lesbianism in the second section. Even Louÿs worried about publishing it, telling his brother "I will only sign Bilitis by my initials, because the second part is of a *morale très peu normale* and it will certainly draw comments if the volume is successful."²⁷⁸ By truncating her biography, the song cycle turns Bilitis's story into a cautionary tale about a young girl who undergoes her sexual awakening in the first song, experiences ecstatic union in the second, but pays for it as she is left abandoned and disillusioned in the third. The severe moral of the story could not be more incongruous with Louÿs's paean to free sexual expression as the gateway to intellectual and artistic greatness. Debussy's letter to Louÿs on the publication of the book's second edition likewise shows an attitude very different from that of the poet, though it is couched in complementary terms:

The *Chansons de Bilitis*. . . in marvellous language contains everything there is of gentleness and cruelty in passion so that the most voluptuous people are forced to recognize the childishness of their games vis-à-vis the terrible and seductive Bilitis.²⁷⁹

This is a far cry from Louÿs's characterization of the book as "an idyll."

Peter's recollections may unlock a puzzle that has long baffled Debussy and Louÿs scholars. H.P. Clive sums it up:

It is astonishing, in view of their close friendship and their frequent attempts at artistic collaboration, that the latter should ultimately have yielded no richer

²⁷⁸ "Je ne signerai Bilitis que de mes initiales, parce que la seconde partie est d'une morale très peu normale et m'attirerait certainement des observations au cas où le volume aurait du succès." Letter from Louÿs to Georges, end of 1894, quoted in Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, 311-312.

²⁷⁹ Seroff, 161-162.

results than the setting of three of the *Chansons de Bilitis* and some incidental music for a dramatic presentation of the same work.²⁸⁰

If Debussy had misgivings about his friend's moral philosophies, it makes sense that most of their collaborative efforts came to naught, since Louÿs's campaign to liberalize society was so central to his work. How much of a barrier this was is plainly apparent in their correspondence regarding their longest running project, a fairy-tale adaptation under the working title of *Cendrelune*. The story depicted a pious young girl who is tempted by fairies and eventually succumbs. Louÿs observed, "You see it's pretty impious, but impious just like Bilitis is licentious, that is to say, with perfect ingenuousness."²⁸¹ The two artists could not, however, agree on the scenario. Concerned that the libretto was too daring, Debussy kept proposing revisions that would, as Millan puts it, "emphasize the moral solidity of the heroine, so that she ends up triumphing over the fairy queen."²⁸² Louÿs came up with several counter proposals, but when Debussy persisted in cleaning them up, the poet eventually quit, saying:

I hope that we are good enough friends that you will not "read between the lines" of what I am going to say. There is nothing between the lines, and underneath there is only affection. Write *Cendrelune* YOURSELF. You are perfectly capable of it. With all the changes to this little libretto, it has become completely foreign to me. As it is, I can not develop it any more. This religiosity, this triumph of the lily over the rose and of modesty over love – it's all Hebrew to me.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Clive, 125.

²⁸¹ "Tu vois c'est assez impie, mais impie comme Bilitis est licentieuse, c'est à dire avec une parfaite candeur." Letter from Louÿs to Debussy, 19 April 1895, quoted in Lesure, *Biographie Critique*, 235.

²⁸² "Mieux valait, réaffirma t'il, souligner la solidité morale de l'héroïne de sorte que celle-ci finisse par triomphe de la reine des fées." Millan, 235.

²⁸³ "J'espère que tu es assez mon ami pour ne pas «lire entre les lignes» de ce que je vais te dire. Entre les lignes il n'y a rien, et dessous il n'y a que des choses affectueuses. Ecris TOI-MÊME *Cendrelune*. Tu en es parfaitement capable. A force de faire des changements à ce petit livret, il m'est devenu complètement étranger. Tel qu'il est, je ne pourrais plus le développer. Cette religiosité, ce triomphe du lys sur la rose et de la pudeur sur l'amour, – c'est de l'hébreu pour moi." Letter from Louÿs to Debussy, 12 May 1895, quoted in Ibid., 235.

Tellingly, Louÿs altered the cliché, replacing his beloved Greek with Hebrew to symbolize the Judeo-Christian morals that he disparaged, and that he now attributed to Debussy.

So although their differing outlooks on sex do not appear to have gotten in the way of their friendship, they do seem to have impeded their attempts at collaboration. I submit that what made their collaborations on the *Chansons de Bilitis* possible was the text's fragmentary structure. The discontinuous forms of *Bilitis* are unique in Louÿs's output, responding specifically to issues of textual transmission, hoax conventions and Sappho scholarship, as we have seen. It was precisely this fragmentation that allowed Debussy to easily pluck poems out of context for his three songs, reshaping them into a story more to his liking. In the incidental music, where he didn't (and couldn't) choose the texts, their holes and gaps gave him space to explore gestures of stillness, truncation and discontinuity – gestures pointed at in other works, but nowhere else ventured to the same extreme.

When he picked up the incidental music again in 1914, Debussy may have recalled that the *Trois chansons* had to wait several years before they were premiered, even though they scrupulously avoided the book's more audacious poems.²⁸⁴ One singer, Jeanne Raunay, had rejected them on the grounds that "Bilitis's morals seem to her incompatible with her august talent."²⁸⁵ The poems for the incidental music were far more explicit. The premiere at *Le Journal* took place despite threats of prosecution from conservative Senator René Bérenger, but the performance at the *Variétés* never materialized, perhaps for the same reason.²⁸⁶ What Debussy needed from the *Épigraphes* was a saleable commodity, not another scandal. Moreover, Debussy the family man had even less affinity for Louÿs's revolutionary morality.

²⁸⁴ Written in 1897-1898, they were premiered on 17 March 1900 by Blanche Marot with Debussy at the piano.

²⁸⁵ "La morale de Bilitis lui semble incompatible avec son haut talent." Clive, 165.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 171-172.

Debussy would not be the only artist who, later in life, returned to youthful works and smoothed over their more radical tendencies. Fragmentation, in particular, seems to be a frequent casualty of this practice. Robert Schumann's 1850-51 revisions of his early piano works, for example, fall into this camp. His first version of the *Davidsbündlertänze*, opus 5, signed each of the pieces by Florestan or Eusebius or both. The revision removes these extramusical/autobiographical references, and adds several repeats to make the construction more symmetrical. His *Symphonic Etudes*, opus 13, were initially published with several quirky and unpredictable passages that erupted intrusively into the flow of the music. He later chose to replace them with unobtrusive material that fits seamlessly into its surroundings.²⁸⁷ Charles Rosen has also revealed that an earlier revision of Schumann's *Fantasie in C Major* similarly regularized its structure. The third movement originally broke off into silence, from which a second *An die ferne Geliebte* quotation emerged, echoing the first movement's coda. In reworking the finale, Schumann cut the second statement of the song and papered over it with the now standard, simple, chordal ending that closes off the piece instead of pointing beyond it.²⁸⁸ In all of these works, Schumann took the spontaneous, fantastic impulses of his earlier conception and normalized their irregularities into balanced, rational constructions.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's most famous poem, "Kubla Khan," underwent an analogous transformation. Marjorie Levinson points out that Coleridge wrote it in two phases. The first version, written in 1797-98, contained the surreal, fantastic evocation of Xanadu, featuring paratactic juxtaposition of images, abrupt shifts in perspective, and an

²⁸⁷ See Ernst Hettrich, "Schumanns frühe Klavierwerke und ihre späteren Fassungen," in *Schumann in Dusseldorf: Werke-Texte-Interpretationen. Bericht über das 3. Internationale Schumann-Symposium am 15. und 16. Juni 1988 im Rahmen des 3. Schumann-Festes, Dusseldorf*, ed. Bernhard R. Appel (London: Schott, 1993), 25-36.

²⁸⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the original ending of the *Fantasie*, see Rosen, 110-111.

inconclusive ending, followed by a brief explanatory note: "This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed, in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of Opium taken to check a dysentery."²⁸⁹ When Coleridge published it in 1816 under the title "Kubla Khan, or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment," he added an extended preface that blames his failure to recall the whole poem on an interruption by "a person on business from Porlock," excuses the unfinished appearance of the poem, and claims he published it "rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed *poetic* merits."²⁹⁰ The first stage of composition celebrates the unconscious as a powerful creative force; the second, by containing and critiquing the first, constitutes "final endorsement of a controlled and thoroughly conscious poetics."²⁹¹ For Levinson, this indicates:

Coleridge revises and prints "Kubla Khan" in 1816 in order to *recant* his youthful extremism and to celebrate the virtues of a rational authoritarian control . . . The 1816 "Kubla Khan" represents Coleridge's effort to reclaim for a more sober or sadder maturity a document born of his errant youth.²⁹²

Debussy's *Six Épigrapbes antiques* belong to this category of works, begun in one frame of mind but completed in another. When Debussy first conceived these melodies for the *Bilitis* incidental music, he cared deeply for Louÿs as a friend and was highly motivated to find common artistic ground despite their philosophical differences. The result was the most formally radical piece in his oeuvre, which in its very structure reflects and reinforces the central themes in Louÿs's book with almost uncanny sensitivity. When the composer returned to this material in the *Épigrapbes*, it was ten years after the writer had cut him out of his life, and he had no compelling reason to remain faithful to the spirit of the earlier work.

²⁸⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan," in Duncan Wu, ed. *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 2d ed. (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1998), 462.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 522.

²⁹¹ Levinson, 111.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 112-113.

The gaps and holes he had built into *Bilitis* gave Debussy space to reinterpret and recontextualize the music years later. Much like Sappho scholars exploited fragmentation to deny the aspects of her work that made them uncomfortable, this project allowed the composer to step back into his own past and rewrite a discomfiting part of it.

For Debussy, musical form was a part of musical feeling – we see that in his critique of Roberto Viñes's performance of the second series of *Images*, "he doesn't yet feel their architecture clearly, and despite his incontestable virtuosity is distorting their expression."²⁹³ The rounded, closed forms of the *Épigraphes* may indeed indicate a will to completion, but that process fundamentally changes the source material, in which fragmentation carries an inherent symbolic function. The more unified and coherent piano pieces are undeniably beautiful, but they bear virtually no discernable trace of the elements that made the incidental music such a perfect embodiment of the poems.

²⁹³ Howat, "Debussy's Piano Music," 85.

CHAPTER 5

RATIONALE FOR A NEW TRANSCRIPTION

In a biography of Claude Debussy, I found a listing of a work composed by him in 1900 that was never published. It was incidental music to be played during the recitation of 12 poems by Pierre Louys [sic] from his cycle of 143 poems called "Chansons de Bilitis". . .

"Bilitis," as Debussy referred to it in a letter to Louys [sic], received one performance in February of 1901. For some reason, Debussy then put the work aside and the score was lost. . . . I was determined to unearth this composition.

I spent three years trying to find a copy through publishers, other musicians, and libraries. I finally found a photostat of someone's hand written copy in Belgium. The owners graciously loaned it to me.²⁹⁴

– Donald Peck, Preface to *Bilitis*

The obscure reference, the lost text, the difficult search, the unique manuscript of unknown provenance unearthed in a distant land – the preface to Donald Peck's arrangement of *Bilitis* reads like the introduction to a manuscript fiction. Indeed, the *Bilitis* incidental music survives in a form similar to the classical texts from which Louys drew his original inspiration: a tattered manuscript with a hole running through it from beginning to end. To engage with the *Bilitis* incidental music is to excavate like an archaeologist, piecing together clues from copies or descriptions in secondary sources.

In the Introduction, I discussed Rajan's distinction between the "incomplete" – works "which it is possible and proper to complete" and the "unfinished" – works "which have evolved in such a way as to make it improper to finish them."²⁹⁵ He argues that:

²⁹⁴ Donald Peck, preface to Claude Debussy and Pierre Louys, *Bilitis*, ed. Donald Peck (New York: Bourne Co, 1979), 1.

²⁹⁵ See pp. 11-12 above; Rajan, 44.

The impropriety is relative. An unfinished work might be a work which it would be possible to finish and which might be satisfactory in its finished state. But that state should be less satisfactory than the state in which the author chose to leave it.²⁹⁶

Debussy clearly thought it was possible and proper to finish the rough edges and tie up the loose ends of the *Bilitis* fragments, fundamentally changing them as he turned them into the organically unified *Six Épigraphes antiques*. Yet the *Chansons de Bilitis* have continued to have a life of their own, even for those who find them less satisfactory than the piano pieces. Escher, for example, while emphatically insisting that Debussy "would never have had them published in this form," nevertheless felt compelled to produce a reconstruction of them.²⁹⁷ *Bilitis* exerts an enduring fascination, and its success is of an entirely different kind than the piano pieces derived from it. Majority critical opinion may reproach *Bilitis* for being fragmentary, but that fragmentation is a large part of its appeal. I would therefore suggest that although it is not the "state in which the author chose to leave it," the *Chansons de Bilitis* incidental music is "unfinished" rather than "incomplete" in Rajan's sense.

It has always been assumed that in order to perform the piece, it must be completed – much as other more famous unfinished pieces like Mozart's Requiem or Schubert's Symphony no. 10 have been reconstructed.²⁹⁸ I believe, however, that the piece is most effective and most deeply symbolic of Louÿs's text if all of its holes are left intact – including the missing celesta part. We have seen how Debussy consistently thwarted closure in this

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 44.

²⁹⁷ Rudolf Escher, unpublished draft of essay, quoted in Hamoen, 23. Escher's reconstruction is published as Claude Debussy and Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis: For Reciter, Two Flutes, Two Harps and Celesta, 1901: Stage Music to Accompany the Recitation of Twelve Poems by Pierre Louÿs*, ed. Rudolf Escher (Amsterdam: Donemus, 1991)

²⁹⁸ These reconstructions are not necessarily in the style of the original work. For example, in his orchestral piece *Rendering*, Berio takes the fragments of Schubert's Tenth Symphony and fills in the gaps with his own music in a way that emphasizes the empty spaces and the loss they imply. See David Metzer, "Musical Decay: Luciano Berio's *Rendering* and John Cage's *Europera 5*," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 125, no. 1 (2000)

work, reflecting the fragmentary elements in Louÿs's book. I have further suggested that the lack of the celesta part is equally meaningful and was perhaps even a deliberate textual game. In this context, I will argue that reconstructing the celesta part of the *Chansons de Bilitis* incidental music is not only inappropriate, but unnecessary for performance. In order to test this hypothesis, I will review the fragmentary sources, examine the existing reconstructions, critique their effectiveness, and suggest a way in which the piece can be performed without attempting to complete it.

The Fragments

We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some given date.²⁹⁹

– Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

We cannot speak of an *Urtext* for the *Chansons de Bilitis*. No autograph score of the *musique de scène* exists. The earliest source we have is the original instrumental parts for the 1901 performance – two harp parts and a single part with music for both flutes – housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.³⁰⁰ Nor are the parts entirely autograph sources, as a substantial portion was written out by copyists. Even the extent to which these parts are in Debussy's hand is disputed. Lesure claims only number 11 and some dynamic markings in the flutes part are in Debussy's hand. Hirsbrunner and Hamoen say several parts of the second harp part are also in Debussy's hand: the notes, dynamic marks and key signatures in

²⁹⁹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1977), 42; quoted in Harries, 9.

³⁰⁰ I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Alexandra Laederich and the Centre de Documentation Claude Debussy at the Bibliothèque Nationale for granting me access to these parts, which are catalogued under CDMS-10.01.

number 3 (key signatures only in the last two systems), the last section of number 4, all of number 10 and number 12 except for the last four bars.³⁰¹ Arthur Hoérée, editor of the Jobert edition, states that the parts are "by the composer's hand for the greater part."³⁰² I agree with Hamoen and Hirsbrunner's assessments, but would add that Debussy appears to have edited the entire second harp part, as there are dynamic and expressive markings in his hand penciled onto almost every page of it. This would make sense, since he notated more the second harp part himself, so he would likely have spent more time looking at it than the other parts. It would also be consistent with Roy Howat's observation that "the profusion of performing indications is something of an added layer in the notation, sometimes not completed until proof stage."³⁰³ Also in Debussy's hand are the two celesta cues written into the flutes part of numbers 8 and 12 (see example 5.1).

a. celesta cue in number 8, "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," m. 1 of flutes part



b. celesta cue in number 12, "La pluie au matin," m. 1 of flutes part



Example 5.1 Celesta cues for number 8 and number 12

³⁰¹ Hirsbrunner, 432; Hamoen, 20. Hirsbrunner gives page numbers rather than movement numbers – page 13 of the flutes part, page 12 of the first harp part, and pages 4, 5 and 10-12 of the second harp part – but these are the same passages that Hamoen identifies. Hamoen reproduces several pages of the parts on pages 19, 20 and 24 of his article in *Key Notes*: the second harp part for numbers 3, 4 and 5; the flutes part for number 11; mm. 6-7 of the second flute part of number 7; and the first two measures of the flute parts for numbers 8 and 12, which contain the celesta cues – the only surviving traces of that instrument in this piece.

³⁰² Quoted in *Ibid.*, : 20.

³⁰³ Howat, "Debussy's Piano Music," 79.

The relative placement of text and music is plainly marked in all three instrumental parts for half of the movements. Numbers 4 and 7 give text cues showing the last words declaimed before the instruments enter, while numbers 1, 2, 3, and 11 are marked unambiguously "*avant la Récitante*" (before the reciter), or "*après la Récitante*" (after the reciter). In the other six movements, however, the instructions regarding ordering are not so clear. The only clues in numbers 6 and 12 to indicate how the text and music go together are the titles, which identify which poem is used, but not when it should be spoken. Perhaps even more confusing is the instruction "*pendant le tableau*" (during the tableau) given in numbers 5, 8, 9, and 10. Hamoen interprets this indication to mean "during the poem," insisting that music and text were to be performed simultaneously, as in a melodrama.³⁰⁴ For support, he cites the review of the premiere in *Le Journal* and Rudolf Escher's interpretation of it:

"Graceful music, ingeniously archaic, composed by M. de Bussy, Prix de Rome, accompanied the voice of Mlle. Milton, creating a soothing rhythm whose charm enhanced the classical beauties of the poem." Escher's comment on this is: "From this it can be deduced that the music – to at least some extent – was performed as a melodrama simultaneously with the spoken verses."³⁰⁵

In his edition published later, Hamoen retreated somewhat from this position:

Melodrama (spoken text accompanied by music) is one possibility, but the considerable discrepancy between the lengths of the text and the music make it unlikely that an exact effect was intended in every case. The indication could also be taken quite literally to mean that the music plays while the public (before or after the verse?) looks at the *tableau vivant*.³⁰⁶

Since only four movements are marked "*durant le tableau*," it may imply that in the other movements the *tableau vivants* were to be held during the narration, in which case the models would be moving to their next pose while the music played. Unfortunately, this still

³⁰⁴ Hamoen, 20.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., : 24.

³⁰⁶ Hamoen, preface to Debussy and Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Escher, 4.

does not tell us whether the text should be spoken before, after or during the music in the movements with this indication.

Several other factors suggest a consecutive, rather than a concurrent, presentation of music and text. First, it would be consistent with the French historical tradition of melodrama, in which sections of text were typically separated by self-contained musical pieces; the practice of composing continuous music to underlie the text comes from the German melodrama tradition.³⁰⁷ Second, other pieces in which Debussy did call for simultaneous narration and music, for example the melodrama parodying Gide that he mailed to Louÿs, and the incidental music for Gabriel D'Annunzio's *Le Martyre de St Sébastien*, clearly indicate the placement of the spoken word in the score.³⁰⁸ Finally, Debussy's own criticism of his earlier *Bilitis* songs suggests he had a textual motivation for keeping narration and music separate:

Would you tell me, now, what my three little musics could add to the pure and simple hearing of your text? Nothing at all, my friend; I'd even say they clumsily scatter the listener's emotions.

Truly, what good is it to harmonize the voice of Bilitis in either major or minor, since she has the most persuasive voice in the world? – You will say, "why did you make the music?" That, old man, is something else . . . It's for other *décors*; but believe me, when Bilitis is there, let her speak all by herself.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ See Peter Branscombe, "Melodrama," in *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 20 October 2006) <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

³⁰⁸ Regarding Debussy's 23 June 1901 letter to Louÿs, see note 77 in Chapter 3 above, and Lockspeiser, *Life and Mind*, 1:193.

³⁰⁹ "Veux-tu me dire, maintenant, ce que viendraient ajouter me trois petites musiques à l'audition pure et simple de ton texte? Rien du tout, mon vieux; je dirais même que cela disperserait maladroitement l'émotion des auditeurs.

À quoi bon, vraiment, accorder la voix de Bilitis soit en majeur, soit en mineur, puisqu'elle a la voix la plus persuasive du monde? – Tu me diras, « pourquoi as-tu fait de la musique? » Ça, vieux loup, c'est autre chose... C'est pour d'autres décors; mais crois-moi, quand Bilitis est là, laissons-la parler toute seule... Letter from Debussy to Louÿs, 16 October 1898, quoted in Louÿs, 331.

The secondary literature raises other uncertainties regarding the number and ordering of the pieces performed in the 1901 premiere. These questions are more easily resolved. The review of the performance published in *Le Journal*, as David Grayson points out, lists only ten *chansons*, leaving out numbers 4 and 11. A letter from Louÿs to his brother only two weeks before the premiere mentions only eleven.³¹⁰ The surviving parts, however, show clearly that Debussy composed twelve pieces for the occasion. The *Journal* review also reverses the order of numbers 8 and 9. Grayson argues – not entirely convincingly – that the altered order is more musically effective, and claims:

The question of order raised by the review is pertinent, however, since the numbering of the *chansons* in two of the three parts (flutes and harp 1, but not harp 2) was altered in a manner consistent with the review, with the order of Nos. 8 and 9 reversed. True, a subsequent effort was made to reinstate the original order, but it was done incompletely, and with ambiguous results.³¹¹

To my eye, the parts themselves are not at all ambiguous in this regard. In the flutes part, the digit "8" is crossed out beside the title "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," and "8 tacet" is written in. Then, beside the title of "L'Eau pure du bassin," "9 tacet" is scribbled out, then written in again. In the first harp part of "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," the "8" before the title is crossed out, a "9" is written above that, but crossed out even darker more emphatically, and beside that, "8" is written in again. The numbering in the second harp part is unchanged. It seems quite clear that the marginal notes suggesting a reversed order were mistakes, likely jotted down in rehearsal, which were subsequently corrected, except for the "8 tacet" added to the flutes part. Moreover, the original ordering follows the sequence in which the poems appear in Louÿs's book, which in itself is a compelling enough reason to maintain it.

³¹⁰ Grayson, 123.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

The most puzzling contradiction in the parts occurs in number 11. The flute and second harp parts for this movement are both fourteen measures long, but the first harp part adds one more measure, in which it plays the straggly, off-beat, half-diminished seventh chord that makes this ending so irregular (see example 3.4 above). One might be tempted to blame this on a copyist's error, were it not for the fact that this is the one movement entirely notated by Debussy. There are three possible explanations for this inconsistency: either he accidentally added one bar too many for the first harp, or one too few for the flutes and second harp, or he decided to cut m. 15 from those two parts instead of writing out a full bar rest at the end. To me the last option seems most likely. Since these parts were used for the 1901 performance, the extra bar in the first harp would certainly have come up – that last, lonely, unresolved chord is not the kind of moment that passes unnoticed. We know that Debussy was involved in the rehearsals, whether he in fact played the celesta part or not.³¹² If the extra chord was an error, surely the harpist would have crossed it out. On the other hand, the lack of a full-bar rest at the end of the other parts would not affect the performance at all. If anything, this discrepancy between the parts makes this movement seem even more of a fragment, and is in keeping with the discrepancy between the key signatures in the flutes and harps. The variance in the length of the parts is, strangely enough, not mentioned in any of the secondary literature, but it does have an impact on the *Bilitis* reconstructions.

The Reconstructions

Perhaps an even better image for Sappho than the blank page is the palimpsest. There does exist a text for Sappho, but it is so thickly written over

³¹² Debussy and Louÿs, *Correspondance*, 157-159.

with critical accumulation that it is almost impossible to make out the words beneath.³¹³

– Holt N. Parker, "Sappho Schoolmistress,"

Like Sappho's poems, the *Bilitis* incidental music is a palimpsest, overwritten not only by the older Debussy in 1914, but also by copyists, performers, conductors, and editors. It might as well be a simulacra – we have only copies, with no way to find our way back to an original. The available versions of the piece add more layers still – not only the reconstructions of the celesta part, which we would expect, but also quite a few other accretions, as though the impossibility of determining an *Urtext* implies permission to add on even more.

There are three available reconstructions of the *Bilitis* incidental music. The first attempt was completed Boulez in 1954, commissioned by Debussy biographer Léon Vallas. This version is unpublished, and can be viewed only in the Bibliothèque Nationale.³¹⁴ The manuscript was probably used as the conductor's score for the 4 February 1954 performance, because it contains a great many new markings of the sort that musicians typically pencil in while rehearsing a work. For example, the tempo marking "*Assez vite*" was added at the head of number 2 where the parts have no tempo indication; the "*p*" at the beginning of number 5 is crossed out in the flutes, and "*mf*" written in instead, presumably to deal with the instrumental balance; the word "*enchaîner*" is written at the bottom of 3 and 9 as a reminder

³¹³ Parker, 168.

³¹⁴ The Bibliothèque Nationale keeps the Boulez/Vallas score together with the 1901 parts. The title page, first page of number 8, and mm. 6-7 of the flute parts for number 7 of the Boulez/Vallas score are reproduced in Hamoen, 19, 21 and 24. A facsimile attributed to Boulez is available from the Library at University of California, Berkeley, but it is does not reproduce the manuscript held in the Bibliothèque Nationale, but rather a secondary manuscript copy of it, written by an unidentified hand. This copy does contain a number of errors, in phrasing, dynamics and notes, including several that are already crossed out and corrected on the score. The poems, moreover, are substantially shortened and in some cases radically expurgated, removing all the most sexually explicit passages. See Claude Debussy and Pierre Boulez, "*Chansons de Bilitis*," Facsimile copy from microfilm of mss. photographed by U. C. Photographic Service, No. 10907, Jean Gray Hargrove Music Library, University of California, Berkeley, S. N.

that the movements that follow begin with music, not text; and text cues are added for the movements that did not have them, with the German instructions "*vorher*" or "*nachher*" ("before" or "after"). In number 11, the key signature of the flute parts is changed to match the harps, normalizing the contradiction in the parts. The most significant addition is at m. 12 of number 12, "La Pluie au matin." A fermata is added above the last note, and the words "Que je suis triste et seule ici," from the third stanza of the poem, are written in with indications that the rest of the poem should be inserted before the theme from "Chant pastoral" returns in m. 13. The insertion of a break and the inclusion of text at this point directly contradicts all three 1901 parts, which may not say where the text should be read, but do clearly indicate that the music continues uninterrupted for the length of the movement. The Boulez/Vallas score also contains a few omissions. Some of these are fairly small, for example, a number of dynamic marks are missing, and the indication "*Retenu*" is left out for the last four bars of number 12. More serious are the notes that have been left out of numbers 3 and 11.

In m. 9 of number 3, the Boulez/Vallas score omits the dyad G/B-flat in the first harp part (see example 5.2 a). With this error, the movement fades out almost *al niente* instead of finishing on a solid root position triad (see example 5.2 b). In number 11, the Boulez/Vallas score omits the C from the final two chords in mm. 14-15 of the first harp part (see example 5.2. c). The resulting bare tritone is significantly more jarring than the harmony Debussy wrote (see example 5.2 d).

Boulez's celesta part is generally very dense. He expanded the two celesta cues in numbers 8 and 12 into ostinati that continue throughout the movements, with some variation in figuration. In number 12, he also added a continuous B-G-B-G sixteenth-note ostinato up

a. Number 3, "Les Contes," mm. 7-9, transcribed from the Boulez/Vallas score.

7

più p

più p

enchaîner

b. Number 3, "Les Contes," mm. 7-9, transcribed from the 1901 performance parts.

più p

pp

più p

pp

a. Number 11, "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika," mm. 12-15, transcribed from the Boulez/Vallas score.

12

pp

pp

ppp

d. Number 11, "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika," mm. 12-15, transcribed from the 1901 performance parts.

12

pp

pp

ppp

Example 5.2. Comparison between the endings of numbers 3 and 11 in the Boulez/Vallas score and the 1901 performance parts.

an octave from the offbeat grace note third figure from the celesta cue. In only two movements, numbers 1 and 8, does he restrict himself to doubling notes found in the extant parts – and in number 8, the original celesta cue already dictated that. He borrowed material from the *Six Épigraphe antiques* only for number 4, replicating closely the first section of *Pour que la nuit soit propice*. For the other eight movements (numbers 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11) the celesta part contains new material, which is based on the harmonies of the extant parts, and is almost never motivically related. This new material is highly polyrhythmic, creating a nearly constant texture of 2 against 3, or 3 against 4. Elaborate flourishes with up to eleven notes to the beat create even more complex rhythmic clashes. By contrast, the original parts are much more sparing in their use of polyrhythm, with 2 against 3 and 3 against 4 patterns appearing only in numbers 3, 4 and 8. Complex subdivision of the beat occurs only twice, the septuplets in mm. 8 and 20 of number 10, and these are accompanied by quarter notes. Boulez's pervasive rhythmic complexity seems out of place.

The second version was completed by Arthur Hoérée for the Jobert edition of 1971.³¹⁵ Newly added dynamics and expressive markings are scarce compared to the Boulez/Vallas score, not surprising since this is a published edition as opposed to a rehearsal score. The few additions there are fall into two categories. First, adjustments are made to bring discrepancies between the parts into line, for example the change of key signature in the flutes to match the harps in number 11. Second, lines are added that correspond to material included in the *Épigraphe antiques*. Hoérée explains this by saying:

These *Épigraphe* constitute the subsequent development of some of the pieces that the show at *Le Journal* illustrated. We can draw certain elements

³¹⁵ Claude Debussy and Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Arthur Hoérée (Paris: Jobert, 1971).

of the accompaniment from them, which are authentic because they come from the author himself.³¹⁶

Like Boulez, Hoérée puts all the corresponding accompaniment figures from *Pour que la nuit soit propice* in the celesta part for number 4, "Chanson." But he also adds the tempo marking "*Triste et lent*" from *Pour un tombeau sans nom* to "Le Tombeau sans nom," and the sixteenth note ostinato from *Pour remercier la pluie au matin* to mm. 6-9 and 19-21 of "La pluie au matin." For the rest of the movements, Hoérée pretty much restricts the celesta to doubling the other parts, with occasional rhythmic variations. He expands the celesta cue for number 8 into a continuous ostinato, but uses octave doublings and register changes to build to a climax in m. 5, where the first flute enters.

Hoérée also takes from Boulez the idea of inserting the poem in number 12 just before the thematic recall at m. 13, though he replaces Boulez's fermata with the instruction "*Céder*" and writes a *caveat* in the preface:

The last of these *chansons*, "La Pluie au Matin," does not carry any indication specifying the place of the text. In the present edition, we have inserted it between the double bar and the reprise of the initial theme "Très modéré." We propose this possibility among many others.³¹⁷

Hoérée, however, also alters without any such warning the text placement in number 4, in direct contradiction to the original cues. The 1901 parts unequivocally call for one stanza of the poem between the first two snippets of music, and the other three stanzas in the next pause. Hoérée balances the structure instead, placing two stanzas in each of the gaps. The formatting of the text is also changed from Louÿs's prose paragraphs to a more poetic looking

³¹⁶ "Ces *Epigraphes* constituent le développement ultérieur de certaines des pièces qui illustraient le spectacle du Journal. On peut y puiser certains éléments d'accompagnement, ceux-ci authentiques puisque de l'auteur." Arthur Hoérée, preface to Debussy and Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Hoérée, 5.

³¹⁷ "La dernière de ces Chansons, «La Pluie au Matin», ne comporte pas d'indication précisant la place du texte. Dans la présente édition, nous l'avons intercalé entre la double barre et la reprise du thème initial «Très modéré». Nous proposons cette éventualité parmi d'autres possibles." Arthur Hoérée, preface to *Ibid.*, 3.

versification. Louÿs's choice of formatting, though, was not a coincidence. The lack of versification referred to the fifth-century papyrus rolls printed in columns without any punctuation, spaces between words, or articulation of the verses.³¹⁸

The most recent version of *Bilitis* was published by Donemus Amsterdam in 1991, edited by Hamoen and based on the reconstruction by Escher.³¹⁹ Escher had no access to the original performance parts, and drew his version from Hoérée's edition for Jobert and from the *Six Épigraphe*s antiques.³²⁰ Escher was sharply critical of Hoérée's approach:

It is a typically amateurish mistake to think that the celesta ought to have as many melismas and chords as possible in the *highest* registers. Even in orchestral works Debussy never uses the celesta in this way; in chamber music he would have been even more economical with high-pitched tinklings. As I said: there is far too much celesta. In some of the pieces the instrument could be done away with altogether and in others it can be reduced to a few passages or even just a few notes.³²¹

The Boulez celesta part is even denser and busier than the Hoérée. As might be expected, Escher wrote the sparsest celesta part of all the published edition, leaving it *tacet* for all of numbers 7, 10 and 11, and for the last section of 4. At the same time, he also departs the most from the original incidental music. In keeping with his strongly stated preference for the *Épigraphe*s, Escher changes the *Chansons* to resemble the later work as much as possible. His alterations are not limited to the celesta part – he also changes the other instrumental parts and even the structure of the individual *Chansons* to match the piano pieces. For

³¹⁸ We know that Louÿs was aware of this practice because he used the format for some of the *Chansons secrètes de Bilitis*. Goujon reproduces one of these in his biography of Louÿs (88):

IC IBI ENSOU VENT JEM ESU ISACC OU PLEEA VEC MAC HEREBI LITIS L'AY ANT MIS ET
OUTENU EJEL 'ETEND AISL ESJAMBES OU VERTE SETAP RESL UIA VO IR TRI PO TELES FESSES
ETL EC UL JEMET TAI SMATE TEEN TRE SES CU ISSES ET JELA SUC AISLE NTE ME NT AVEN
CAN DE URAL OR SEL LED ONNA IT DE GRAN DES SEC OUSS ES DE TOU TELA CRO UPE ET DAN
SUN SPA SME ELL ES EM ETTA ITA JOUIR AJOUIR AJOUIR

³¹⁹ Claude Debussy and Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis: For Reciter, Two Flutes, Two Harps and Celesta, 1901: Stage Music to Accompany the Recitation of Twelve Poems by Pierre Louÿs*, ed. Rudolf Escher (Amsterdam: Donemus, 1991). Hamoen's article in *Key Notes* discusses in detail the preparation of this edition.

³²⁰ Hamoen consulted the original parts and made minor alterations to Escher's reconstruction to prepare it for publication. See D.J. Hamoen, foreward to *Ibid.*, 4.

³²¹ Escher, unpublished letter, quoted in Hamoen, "Fiction, Facts and a New Face "21.

example, in mm. 4-9 and 12-14 of number 1, "Chant pastoral," the original harp chords are replaced by the stepwise progression from *Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été* (see example 4.2). In number 7 (mm. 5 and 10) the progressing melody from *Pour un tombeau sans nom* replaces the circular one from *Le tombeau sans nom*." (see example 4.4, cf. example 3.2). There are also extra measures of the accompaniment ostinati added to numbers 7 (m. 6) and 12 (mm. 1 and 14 – here also, Escher uses the sixteenth note ostinato from the *Épigraphes*, rather than the grace note figure from the *Chansons*) to make them correspond to their piano counterparts. The rationale for such practices are summed up by Hamoen in his preface:

In view of the fact that preparations for the first performance of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* were chaotic and hurried, there is obviously no compulsion for a modern performance to be strictly consistent.³²²

Each of the three versions has its problems. Boulez's celesta part is not stylistically coherent with Debussy's flute and harp parts, and its complex, active rhythms detract especially from the more introspective movements like number 7 and 9. Moreover, the performance directions from the 1954 revival are so thick that it is hard for a performer to sort out what comes from the parts and what was added on afterwards. Hoérée's practice of simply doubling the other parts in the celesta, on the other hand, adds little in the way of interest, and only thickens the texture. Most problematic is Escher's solution of modeling his version closely on the piano pieces, an approach shared to lesser degrees by the other two versions. We cannot assume that the piano pieces tell us anything about *Bilitis*'s celesta part. Even a cursory comparison of the two works shows that the original flute and harp material is often radically reworked in the later pieces, so we should expect that the celesta material – if indeed it ever existed in any kind of concrete form – would be equally transformed.

³²² Hamoen, foreward to Debussy and Louÿs, *Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Escher, 4.

Furthermore, if we truly want to respect Debussy's final intentions, then we must question whether we should reconstruct and perform the incidental music at all. Why not simply accept that he did not authorize the incidental music, and his ultimate version of *Bilitis* is a set of six pieces for piano without text? If, on the other hand, we take these as two distinct works that share thematic material but not aesthetic goals, then to use the later pieces as a source for completing the earlier, even in a limited way, is questionable at best.

Rationale for a New Transcription.

How is it possible adequately to take account of the aleatory, contingent, layered, disturbing incoherence and fragmentariness of the preservation of these poems? A crucial question for the presentation of the Sapphic text has always been how to represent the absences, the holes, the gaps in the poetic object; how does a publisher, without sanitizing, rectifying, fetishizing, print these fragments, show the tears, frangible edges, erasures, abrasions? Sappho herself persists elusively always as an absent source . . . as an origin we can never know. Her texts, as we receive them, insist on the impossibility of recapturing the lost body.³²³

– Page DuBois, *Sappho is Burning*

Since incompleteness and ruin are such central concerns of both the text and the music of *Chansons de Bilitis*, what is the effect of replacing the missing portions? In a sense, the editions that reconstruct the celesta part perform an erasure: they conceal the loss of the celesta part and thereby suppress the issues it raises surrounding memory, history, and the problems of transmission. By creating a seamless surface, the reconstructions hide the role of the editor – the listener or even the performer can easily forget that the music is not all by Debussy. These reworkings are akin to the many editions of Sappho that hide the textual gaps and attempt to give her fragments the illusion of closure and unity.

Page Dubois reminds us that another approach is possible:

³²³ DuBois, 28-29.

Clacissists receive antiquity in pieces, as fragments. . . . One way of responding to this recognition is to pursue a dream of wholeness, transparency, perfect access to what we desire to know through such scholarly practices as "conjectures," imagining a word that might once have been where there is now a gap. . . . Another is to accept the partiality of our experience, to seek, even as we yearn for more – more fact, more words and artifacts, more lines of Sappho, more poems of Sappho – to read what we have in light of who we are now.³²⁴

How then, if we let go of our dream of wholeness for *Bilitis* and accept her tattered, discontinuous state as an intrinsic and necessary part of her meaning, how do we reflect that in performance? I considered performing the *Chansons* in the original instrumentation, leaving the celesta silent when nothing is written for it, but that approach seemed not only impractical, but rather precious – more in the spirit of Satie or even Cage than Debussy. Improvisation fills up the holes in the work just as surely as a written reconstruction, at least from the audience's perspective.

Transcription seemed the most appropriate option. It makes it explicit to the audience that they are hearing a counterfeit copy – as indeed any edition of this work is inevitably a fabrication in some regard. Thus a transcription is a fake in the spirit of the original:

Louÿs demonstrated that translation can be a form of historical scholarship, that it can constitute a scholarly invention of the classical text for the modern reader, but that unlike most scholarship it does not conceal its true status as an invention or its historical invention from the classical text. . . . Louÿs expected his readers to recognize that he was not presenting ancient poems, but modern derivations.³²⁵

Louÿs's book was inspired by a poet whose work survives only in fragments, presented as the translation of a non-existent original. It seems only appropriate to present the music for it as a transcription of an only partially surviving original.

³²⁴ Ibid., 64.

³²⁵ Venuti, 40.

Flute and piano is the obvious instrumentation choice for a transcription of the *Chansons*, as evidenced by the fact that there are already two published arrangements for flute and piano under the *Bilitis* name. Both of these stem from entirely different aesthetic approaches than my own. *Bilitis*, arranged by Karl Lenski, is in fact not a transcription of the incidental music, as the title suggests, but rather of the *Six Épigraphes antiques*, except for the last movement, which is based on "La Pluie au matin" from the incidental music.³²⁶

Donald Peck's *Bilitis* arrangement raises many of the same issues as the reconstructions discussed above.³²⁷ It would appear that the "photostat of someone's hand written copy" that Peck found in Belgium is from the same manuscript copy of the Boulez reconstruction available in facsimile at University of California, Berkeley. Peck's transcription cuts the poems in exactly the same places as the Berkeley manuscript, as well as omitting the notes from numbers 3 and 12 that the Boulez/Vallas score missed. Peck seems unaware of the issues surrounding the transmission of the work. He does not acknowledge that the poems are incomplete, nor does he discuss the loss of the celesta part. He frequently prioritizes the celesta in his transcription, eliminating notes from the flutes or harps in favour of material from the apocryphal celesta part. He takes greater liberties with the score than any of the reconstructions, frequently changing not only phrase, articulation, dynamic and expressive markings, but also on occasion pitches, rhythms and even structural elements. For example, in number 3, "Les Contes," he stops the after the first 5 measures, inserts the poem, then starts the music again from the beginning. Similarly, in number 12, "La Pluie au matin," he extends the one-bar introduction before the flute melody enters, suggesting that it be repeated *ad libitum* for the duration of the recitation of the poem, after which the movement

³²⁶ Claude Debussy and Pierre Louÿs, *Bilitis: For Flute and Piano*, ed. Karl Lenski (Wien: Universal Edition, 1984), 20.

³²⁷ Claude Debussy and Pierre Louÿs, *Bilitis*, ed. Donald Peck (New York: Bourne Co, 1979).

proper proceeds. At the conclusion of that movement, he adds an entire new movement as an epilogue, in the form of an abridged version of the first movement, so that the thematic recall happens not just once, but twice. He also transcribes the entire celesta part untransposed, apparently unaware that the celesta sounds up an octave from the written pitch.

My transcription seeks to follow the extant parts for flutes, harps and narrator as closely as possible. The flute plays the first flute part, with two exceptions. In number 2, the flute takes the second part, so that it begins and ends with the more prominent melody. In mm. 7-8 of number 10, the flute again plays the second flute part so that the triplets continue unbroken. The other three parts are all given to the piano. The texture is transparent enough that not too many notes have to be left out – the most significant omission is in mm. 6-11 of number 4, where the first harp plays alternating triplets between middle C and the F below, which could not be reached in one hand together with the bass line that the transcription does preserve. Passages that are awkward, but possible, for the pianist (for example number 3 mm. 3-4, or number 8 mm. 4-7), are altered minimally or not at all. The two celesta cues in numbers 8 and 12, which appear to establish ostinati, are continued and extended for the duration of those pieces, but otherwise no attempt is made to reconstruct the celesta part. Fingerings, including potential passages for crossed hands (as in number 9 m. 7), are not marked in the score, following Debussy's comments in the *Etudes*:

Prescribing one fingering cannot be consistently suitable for different hand structures. . . . Our old Masters – I should specify *our* admirable clavecinists – never indicate fingerings, no doubt trusting the ingenuity of their contemporaries. To mistrust that of modern virtuosos would be unseemly. . . . "One is never better served than by oneself."

Let us find our own fingerings!³²⁸

³²⁸ Claude Debussy, *Etudes, Children's Corner, Images Book II, and Other Works for Piano*, 112.

In the same spirit, phrasing, dynamics and articulation are carefully reproduced from the 1901 parts. Nothing is added, even in places where the indications may not be feasible in this instrumentation, as for example the crescendos over sustained notes in the piano in mm. 1 and 3 of number 6. This transcription leaves it up to the performer to decide how best to achieve the desired effect, rather than speculating about it at the editorial level. This approach stems from the philosophy that the *Chansons de Bilitis* incidental music is most effective in its fragmentary state, leaving the beholder's share to the audience. Ultimately, the validity of this premise can only be determined in performance. So:

Here is Bilitis, bare.

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Appendix A

Les Chansons de Bilitis

incidental music

**by Claude Debussy (1901)
on poems by Pierre Louÿs**

Arranged for Flute & Piano
by Rachel Iwaasa (2005)

No. 1. Chant pastoral.

avant la Récitante

Modéré

Modéré

5

cresc. *f*

9

f *dim.* *rit.* *dim.*

12 **A tempo**

p **A tempo** *p*

15

molto dim. *p* *rit.* *pp* *ppp*

Il faut chanter un chant pastoral, invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été. Je garde mon troupeau et Sélénis le sien, à l'ombre ronde d'un olivier qui tremble.

Sélénis est couchée sur le pré. Elle se lève et court, ou cherche des cigales, ou cueille des fleurs avec des herbes, ou lave son visage dans l'eau fraîche du ruisseau.

Moi, j'arrache la laine au dos blond des moutons pour en garnir ma quenouille, et je file. Les heures sont lentes. Un aigle passe dans le ciel.

L'ombre tourne, changeons de place la corbeille de fleurs et la jarre de lait. Il faut chanter un chant pastoral, invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été.

17

un peu plus lent

p *p* *pp*

un peu plus lent

p *p* *pp*

No. 2. Les Comparaisons.

Bergeronnette, oiseau de Kypris, chante avec nos premiers désirs! Le corps nouveau des jeunes filles se couvre de fleurs comme la terre. La nuit de tous nos rêves approche et nous en parlons entre nous.

Parfois, nous comparons ensemble nos beautés si différentes, nos chevelures déjà longues, nos jeunes seins encore petites, nos pubertés rondes comme des cailles et blotties sous la plume naissante.

Hier je luttai de la sorte contre Melanthô, mon aînée. Elle était fière de sa poitrine qui venait de croître un mois, et, montrant ma tunique droite, elle m'avait appelée Petite enfant.

Pas un homme ne pouvait nous voir, nous nous mîmes devant les filles, et, si elle vainquit sur un point, je l'emportait de loin sur les autres. Bergeronnette, oiseau de Kypris, chante avec nos premiers désirs!

après la Récitante

The first system of the musical score is in 2/4 time. The vocal line (treble clef) begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic, featuring a triplet of eighth notes and a trill. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) also starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic, with the right hand playing a trill and the left hand providing a simple harmonic support. The system concludes with a trill in the vocal line.

The second system of the musical score begins at measure 5. The vocal line starts with a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking, followed by a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment also begins with a *dim.* marking, then shifts to a piano (*p*) dynamic. The system ends with a forte (*f*) dynamic in both parts, featuring a trill in the vocal line and a final chord in the piano.

No. 3. Les Contes.

Je suis aimée des petits enfants; dès qu'ils me voient, ils courent à moi, et s'accrochent à ma tunique et prennent mes jambes dans leurs petits bras.

S'ils ont cueilli des fleurs, ils me les donnent toutes; s'ils ont pris un scarabée, ils le mettent dans ma main; s'ils n'ont rien, ils me caressent et me font asseoir devant eux.

Alors ils m'embrassent sur la joue, ils posent leurs têtes sur mes seins; ils me supplient avec les yeux. Je sais bien ce que cela veut dire.

Cela veut dire: « Bilitis chérie, redis-nous, car nous sommes gentils, l'histoire du héros Perseus ou la mort de la petite Hellé. »

après la Récitante

Assez vif et très rythmé

f

Assez vif et très rythmé

f

4

3 *3* *3* *3* *p*

3 *3* *3* *3* *dim.* *3* *3* *3* *p*

7

più p *pp*

più p *3* *pp* *3*

The musical score is for a piano piece titled 'No. 3. Les Contes.' It is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-3) is marked 'Assez vif et très rythmé' and 'f'. The second system (measures 4-6) continues the 'Assez vif et très rythmé' tempo and 'f' dynamic. The third system (measures 7-9) is marked 'più p' and 'pp'. The score features various musical notations including triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings. The page number 155 is at the bottom right.

No. 4. Chanson.

avant la Récitante

Lent et expressif

pp *pp* < >

Lent et expressif

pp *pp* < >

« Ombre du bois où elle devait venir, dis-moi, où est allée ma maîtresse? — Elle est descendue dans la plaine. — Plaine, où est allée ma maîtresse? — Elle a suivi les bords du fleuve.

pp

p *p* *pp*

— Beau fleuve qui l'as vue passer, dis-moi, est-elle près d'ici? — Elle m'a quitté pour le chemin. — Chemin, la vois-tu encore? — Elle m'a laissé pour la route.

— O route blanche, route de la ville, dis-moi, où l'as tu conduite? — A la rue d'or qui entre à Sardes. — O rue de lumière, touches-tu ses pieds nus? — Elle est entrée au palais du roi.

— O palais, splendeur de la terre, rends-la-moi! — Regards, elle a des colliers sur les seins, et des houppes dans les cheveux, cent perles le long des jambes, deux bras autour de la taille. »

après la Récitante

Même mouvement

5

p

Même mouvement

pp

2

7

p

pp

2

9

f

pp

più pp

f

2

pp

2

più pp

ppp

No. 5. La Partie d'osselets.

Comme nous l'aimions toutes les deux, nous l'avons joué aux osselets. Et ce fut une partie célèbre. Beaucoup de jeunes filles y assistaient.

Elle amena d'abord le coup de Kyklôpes, et moi, le coup de Sôlon. Mais elle le Kallibolos, et moi, me sentant perdue, je priais la déesse!

Je jouai, j'eus l'Épiphénôn, elle le terrible coup de Khios, moi l'Antiteukhos, elle le Trikhias, et moi le coup d'Aphrodité qui gagna l'amant disputé.

Mais la voyant pâlir, je la pris par le cou et je lui dis tout près de l'oreille (pour qu'elle seule m'entendit): « Ne pleure pas, petite amie, nous le laisserons choisir entre nous. »

pendant le tableau

Vif

The musical score is written for piano and features three systems of music. The first system begins with a treble clef staff and a piano (p) dynamic, marked 'très léger' and 'Vif'. The piano accompaniment starts with a bass clef staff. The second system continues the piece, marked 'dim.' (diminuendo) and 'sfz' (sforzando). The third system begins with a treble clef staff and a piano (p) dynamic, marked 'p' and 'pp' (pianissimo). The piano accompaniment continues with a bass clef staff. The score concludes with a final measure marked 'ppp' (pianississimo).

No. 6. Bilitis.

Une femme s'enveloppe de laine blanche. Une autre se vêt de soie et d'or. Une autre se couvre de fleurs, de feuilles vertes et de raisins.

Moi, je ne saurais vivre que nue. Mon amant, prends-moi comme je suis: sans robe ni bijoux ni sandales, voici Bilitis toute seule.

Mes cheveux sont noirs de leur noir, et mes lèvres sont rouge de leurs rouge. Mes boucles flottent autour de moi libres et rondes comme des plumes.

Prends-moi telle que ma mère m'a faite dans une nuit d'amour lointaine, et si je te plais ainsi, n'oublie pas de me dire.

Très modéré et tempo rubato

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It begins with a tempo marking of "Très modéré et tempo rubato". The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

First System: The vocal line starts with a half rest, followed by a melodic phrase marked *f* (forte) and *dim.* (diminuendo), ending with a half note marked *p* (piano). The piano accompaniment begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) chord, followed by a melodic line marked *f* and *dim.*, and ends with a half note marked *p*. There are fermatas over the final notes of both staves.

Second System: The vocal line features a series of triplet eighth notes, alternating between *f* and *p*. The piano accompaniment also features triplet eighth notes, with a *f* marking in the first measure and *p* in the second. There are fermatas over the final notes of both staves.

Third System: The vocal line continues with triplet eighth notes, marked *più p* (pianissimo). The piano accompaniment also features triplet eighth notes, marked *più p*. There are fermatas over the final notes of both staves.

No. 7. Le Tombeau sans nom.

Mnasidika m'ayant prise par la main me mena hors des portes de la ville, jusqu'à un petit champ inculte où il y avait une stèle de marbre. Et elle me dit: « Celle-ci fut l'amie de ma mère. »

Alors je sentis un grand frisson, et, sans cesser de lui tenir la main, je me penchai sur son épaule, afin de lire les quatre vers entre la coupe creuse et le serpent:

« Ce n'est pas la mort qui m'a enlevée, mais les Nymphes des fontaines. Je repose ici sous une terre légère avec la chevelure coupée de Xantho. Qu'elle seule me pleure. Je ne dis pas mon nom. »

Longtemps nous sommes restées debout, et nous n'avons pas versé la libation.
Car comment appeler une âme inconnue d'entre les foules de l'Hadès?

pendant le tableau

The musical score consists of two systems, measures 6 through 10. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The notation includes a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) at measure 6, *pp* (pianissimo) at measure 7, *piu pp* (pianissimo) at measure 9, and *ppp* (pianissimo) at measure 10. The score ends with a double bar line at the end of measure 10.

6 *p*

pp

8 *piu pp* *ppp*

piu pp

No. 8. Les Courtisanes Égyptiennes.

Je suis allée avec Plango chez les courtisanes égyptiennes, tout en haut de la vieille ville. Elles ont des amphores de terre, des plateaux de cuivre et des nattes jaunes où elles s'accroupissent sans effort.

Leurs chambres sont silencieuses, sans angles et sans encoignures, tant les couches successives de chaux bleue ont émoussé les chapiteaux et arrondi le pied des murs.

Elles se tiennent immobiles, les mains posées sur les genoux. Quand elles offrent la bouillie elles murmurent: « Bonheur. » Et quand on les remercie, elles disent: « Grâce à toi. »

Elles comprennent le hellène et feignent de le parler mal pour se rire de nous dans leur langue; mais nous, dent pour dent, nous parlons lydien et elles s'inquiètent tout à coup.

pendant le tableau

Assez animé

The musical score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system is marked 'Assez animé' and 'mf'. It features a treble and bass staff. The treble staff contains a series of eighth-note triplets, while the bass staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system is marked 'p expressif' and begins with a measure rest. It continues with similar triplet patterns in the treble and eighth-note accompaniment in the bass. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, dynamics, and articulation marks.

5

f

7

f

p

decresc.

9

p

pp

più p

pp

Retenu

Retenu

No. 9. L'Eau pure du bassin.

« Eau pure du bassin, miroir immobile, dis-moi ma beauté. — Bilitis, ou qui que tu sois, Téthys peut-être ou Amphitritê, tu es belle, sache-le.

« Ton visage se penche sous ta chevelure épaisse, gonflée de fleurs et de parfums. Tes paupières molles s'ouvrent à peine et tes flancs sont las des mouvements de l'amour.

« Ton corps fatigué du poids de tes seins porte les marques fines de l'ongle et les taches bleues du baiser. Tes bras sont rougis par l'étreinte. Chaque ligne de ta peau fut aimée.

— Eau claire du bassin, ta fraîcheur repose. Reçois-moi, qui suis lasse en effet. Emporte le fard de mes joues, et la sueur de mon ventre et le souvenir de la nuit. »

pendant le tableau

Modéré

The musical score is written for piano in 6/4 time, marked 'Modéré'. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 1-3) features a treble staff with a melody of eighth notes and a bass staff with chords and a melodic line starting in measure 2. Dynamics include *pp* in the first measure and *p* in the second. The second system (measures 4-6) continues the melody, with a *p* dynamic in measure 4 and a crescendo leading to a *f* dynamic in measure 6. The third system (measures 7-8) shows a change in the treble staff melody, with a *p* dynamic in measure 7 and a *pp* dynamic in measure 8. The bass staff continues with sustained chords and a melodic line.

No. 10. La Danseuse aux crotales.

avant la Récitante

Modéré. Tempo rubato

Modéré. Tempo rubato *p*

pp *pp*

6 *p* *p*

10 *f* *sfz* *f*

14 *sf* *dim.* *p* *più p* *pp*

The musical score is written for a single melodic line and piano accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Modéré. Tempo rubato'. The score is divided into four systems. The first system (measures 1-5) features a melodic line with triplets and a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern. The second system (measures 6-9) continues the melodic line with more triplets and a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern. The third system (measures 10-13) features a melodic line with a forte (f) dynamic and a piano accompaniment with a forte (f) dynamic. The fourth system (measures 14-17) features a melodic line with a forte (sf) dynamic and a piano accompaniment with a forte (sf) dynamic. The score concludes with a piano (pp) dynamic.

Tu attaches à tes mains légères tes crotales retentissants, Myrrhinidion ma chérie, et à peine nue hors de ta robe, tu étires tes membres nerveux. Que tu es jolie, les bras en l'air, les reins arqués et les seins rouges!

Tu commences: tes pieds l'un devant l'autre se posent, hésitent, et glissent mollement. Ton corps se plie comme une écharpe, tu caresses ta peau qui frissonne, et la volupté inonde tes longs yeux évanouis.

Tout à coup, tu claques des crotales! Cambre-toi sur tes pieds dressés, secoue les reins, lance les jambes et que tes mains pleines de fracas appellent tous les désirs en bande autour de ton corps tournoyant.

Nous, applaudissons à grands cris, soit que, souriant sur l'épaule, tu agites d'un frémissement ta croupe convulsive et musclée, soit que tu ondules presque étendue, au rythme de tes souvenirs.

pendant le tableau

19

22

25

dim. *pp* *ppp*

No. 11. Le Souvenir de Mnasidika.

Elles dansaient l'une devant l'autre, d'un mouvement rapide et fuyant; elles semblaient toujours vouloir s'enlacer, et pourtant ne se touchaient point, si ce n'est du bout des lèvres.

Quand elles tournaient le dos en dansant, elles se regardaient, la tête sur l'épaule, et la sueur brillait sous leur bras levés, et leurs chevelures fines passaient devant leurs seins.

La langueur de leurs yeux, le feu de leurs joues, la gravité de leurs visages, étaient trois chansons ardentes. Elles se frôlaient furtivement, elles pliaient leurs corps sur les hanches.

Et tout à coup, elles sont tombées, pour achever à terre la danse molle . . . Souvenir de Mnasidika, c'est alors que tu m'apparus, et tout, hors ta chère image, me fut importun.

après la Récitante

Très modéré

Très modéré

aussi léger que possible

p très espressif

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part features a dense texture of chords and arpeggios. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with a similar texture. The third system shows the vocal line with a long note and a decrescendo marking, and the piano part with a more rhythmic accompaniment. The score is marked with various dynamics including *pp*, *p*, and *dim.*

12

pp

ppp

No. 12. La Pluie au matin.

La nuit s'efface. Les étoiles s'éloignent. Voici que les dernières courtisanes sont rentrées avec les amants. Et moi, dans la pluie du matin, j'écris ces vers sur le sable.

Les feuilles sont chargées d'eau brillante. Des ruisseaux à travers les sentiers entraînent la terre et les feuilles mortes. La pluie, goutte à goutte, fait des trous dans ma chanson.

Oh! Que je suis triste et seule ici! Les plus jeunes ne me regardent pas; les plus âgés m'ont oubliée. C'est bien. Ils apprendront mes vers, et les enfants de leurs enfants.

Voilà ce que ni Myrtalê, ni Thaïs, ni Glikéra ne se diront, le jour où leurs belles joues seront creuses. Ceux qui aimeront après moi chanteront mes strophes ensemble.

Modéré

p très espressif et très soutenu.

Modéré

pp

5

p

9

p *p* *pp*

13 **Très modéré**

Très modéré

p *Très soutenu* *mf* *p* *dim.* *pp*

17 **Retenu**

più p *p* *pp* *pp* *pp*

Retenu

pp *ppp*

APPENDIX B:
EXCERPT FROM *LES CHANSONS DE BILITIS* INCIDENTAL MUSIC
(PARIS:JOBERT, 1971), 6.

I. - CHANT PASTORAL

Modéré

1^{ère} Flûte
 2^{ème} Flûte
 1^{ère} Harpe
 2^{ème} Harpe
 Célésta

Modéré

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall
Sunday, September 30, 2001
8:00 p.m.

DOCTORAL RECITAL*
RACHEL KIYO IWAASA, Piano

Le Tombeau de Beethoven

Fantasia on an Ostinato (1985)

John Corigliano
(1938-)

Piano Sonata No. 4: After Beethoven (1997, rev. 2000)

Mark Williams
(1958-)

- I. Chorale, Passacaglia and Cartoon on the Beethoven Sonatas
- II. We Will Meet Again in Paradise
- III. Dance of the Iron Whims

Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 26

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

- I. Andante con Variazioni
- II. Scherzo: Allegro molto
- III. Marcia Funebre sulla morte d'un Eroe
- IV. Allegro

- INTERMISSION -

Fantasie in C Major, Op. 17

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

- I. Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen
- II. Mäßig: Durchaus energisch
- III. Langsam getragen: Durchweg leise zu halten

* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Musical Arts
with a major in Piano.

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with a major in Piano.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall

Wednesday, May 1, 2002

12:00 p.m.

DOCTORAL CHAMBER RECITAL*
RACHEL KIYO IWAASA, PIANO

Linea (1973)

Luciano Berio
(1925-)

El Sol del Sur (1996)

Tobin Stokes
(1966-)

Part I

Part II

Part III

Erica Crinó, *piano*
Salvador Ferreras, *percussion*
Vern Griffiths, *percussion*

- INTERMISSION -

C'est l'extase

Green

Spleen

from *Ariettes oubliées*

Romance

Claude Debussy
(1862-1916)

Trisha Loewen, *soprano*

Sonata in G minor, Opus 19 for cello and piano

Lento - Allegro moderato

Allegro scherzando

Andante

Allegro mosso

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)

Bo Peng, *cello*

* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Musical Arts
with a major in Piano.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall

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Allegro mosso

Bo Peng, *cello*

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall
Tuesday, June 14, 2005
8:00 p.m.

DOCTORAL RECITAL*
RACHEL IWAASA, Piano

Quelquefois, à l'ombre de la nuit... au lointain... (1991-92)

Brian Cherney
(b. 1942)

Gaspard de la nuit (1908)

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

- I. Ondine
- II. Le gibet
- III. Scarbo

- INTERMISSION -

Sonata no. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

- I. Maestoso: Allegro con brio ed appassionato
- II. Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Musical Arts with a major in Piano.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Recital Hall
Tuesday, June 14, 2005
8:00 p.m.

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RACHEL IWAASA, Piano

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* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Musical Arts with a major in Piano.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
Gessler Hall
Sunday, December 17, 2006
8:00 p.m.

DOCTORAL LECTURE-RECITAL*

RACHEL KIYO IWAASA, Piano

Lecture: Fragmentation and Eros in Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis* and
Six Épigraphe antiques

- INTERMISSION -

Six Épigraphe antiques, for piano, two hands

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

- I. *Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été* (To invoke Pan, God of the Summer Wind)
- II. *Pour un tombeau sans nom* (For a Nameless Tomb)
- III. *Pour que la nuit soit propice* (May the Night be Fabourable)
- IV. *Pour la danseuse aux crotale* (For the Dancer with Crotale)
- V. *Pour l'égyptienne* (For the Egyptian Woman)
- VI. *Pour remercier la pluie au matin* (To Thank the Morning Rain)

Les Chansons de Bilitis

Claude Debussy
arr. for flute and piano by Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa

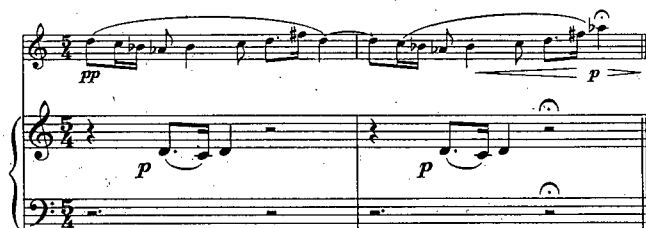
1. *Chant pastorale* (Pastoral Song)
2. *Les Comparaisons* (Comparisons)
3. *Les Contes* (Stories)
4. *Chanson* (Song)
5. *La Partie d'osselets* (The Game of Knuckle-bones)
6. *Bilitis*
7. *Le Tombeau sans nom* (The Nameless Tomb)
8. *Les Courtisanes égyptiennes* (The Egyptian Courtesans)
9. *L'Eau pure du bassin* (Pure Water of the Basin)
10. *La Danseuse aux crotale* (The Dancer with Crotale)
11. *Le Souvenir de Mnasidika* (Memory of Mnasidika)
12. *La Pluie au matin* (The Morning Rain)

Mark McGregor, flute

* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree
with a major in Piano Performance.

No. 7. Le tombeau sans nom.

Mnasidika, taking me by the hand, led me through the gates of the town to a little wild field where there was a marble monument. She said to me: "This woman was my mother's lover."



I felt a great shiver, and, still holding her hand, leaned on her shoulder, to read the four verses between the hollow cup and the serpent:

"It is not Death that carried me away, but the Nymphs of the fountains. I rest here under the light earth with locks cut from the hair of Xantho. Let her alone weep for me. I do not speak my name."



For a long time we remained standing and we did not pour the libation. For how do you call an unknown soul from among the hordes of Hades?



Pour un tombeau sans nom

[illegible]

18

pp *piu pp* *per - den -*

23

pp *étouffé* *m. d.*

27

pp effleuré *comme une plainte lointaine*

30

sempre pp

33

très retenu *piu pp* *m. g.* *perdendo*

Pour un tombeau sans nom and its source material from the *Chansons de Bilitis*

II. Pour un tombeau sans nom

- | | |
|----|-----------|
| A | mm. 1-2 |
| | mm. 3-4 |
| | mm. 5-6 |
| | mm. 7-12 |
| B | mm. 13-24 |
| A' | mm. 25-27 |
| | mm. 28-32 |
| | mm. 33-35 |

Title : 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom"

7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 1-2
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 6-7, bass
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 3-5
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 6-10
unrelated
11. "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika," mm. 5-12
8. "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," mm. 5-9
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," m. 1

1. Chant Pastorale

Il faut chanter un chant pastoral, invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été.
Je garde mon troupeau et Sélénis le sien, à l'ombre ronde d'un
olivier qui tremble.

Sélénis est couchée sur le pré. Elle se lève et court, ou cherche
des cigales, ou cueille des fleurs avec des herbes, ou lave son
visage dans l'eau fraîche du ruisseau.

Moi, j'arrache la laine au dos blond des moutons pour en garnir
ma quenouille, et je file. Les heures sont lentes. Un aigle passe
dans le ciel.

L'ombre tourne, changeons de place la corbeille de fleurs et la
jarre de lait. Il faut chanter un chant pastoral, invoquer Pan, dieu
du vent d'été.

1. Pastoral Song

We must sing a pastoral song to invoke Pan, God of the summer
wind. I watch my flock, and Selenis watches hers, in the round
shade of a trembling olive-tree.

Selenis is lying on the meadow. She gets up and runs, or hunts
grasshoppers, or picks flowers and grasses, or washes her face in
the cool brook.

Me, I pluck the wool from the blonde backs of my sheep to
supply my distaff, and I spin. The hours are slow. An eagle
passes in the sky.

The shadow moves; let us move the basket of flowers and the
crock of milk. We must sing a pastoral song to invoke Pan, god
of the summer wind.

2. Les Comparaisons

Bergeronette, oiseau de Kypris, chante avec nos premiers désirs!
Le corps nouveau des jeunes filles se couvre de fleurs comme la
terre. La nuit de tous nos rêves approche et nous en parlons entre
nous.

Parfois, nous comparons ensemble nos beautés si différentes, nos
chevelures déjà longues, nos jeunes seins encore petites, nos
pubertés rondes comme des cailles et blotties sous la plume
naissante.

Hier je luttais de la sorte contre Melanthô, mon aînée. Elle était
fière de sa poitrine qui venait de croître un mois, et, montrant ma
tunique droite, elle m'avait appelée Petite enfant.

Pas un homme ne pouvait nous voir, nous nous mîmes devant les
filles, et, si elle vainquit sur un point, je l'emportais de loin sur
les autres. Bergeronette, oiseau de Kypris, chante avec nos
premiers désirs!

2. Comparisons

Little thrush, bird of Cyprus, sing with our first desires! The new
body of young girls blooms with flowers like the earth. The night
of all our dreams approaches and we talk about it among
ourselves.

Sometimes we compare our different beauties, our hair already
long, our young breasts still small, our puberties round like quails
nestled under nascent down.

Yesterday I competed against Melantho, my older sister. She was
proud of her breasts, which had grown in a month, and, pointing
at my flat tunic, she called me Little Child.

No man could see us, we stood naked in front of the other girls,
and, if she won on one point, I surpassed her by far on the others.
Little thrush, bird of Cyprus, sing with our first desires!

3. Les Contes

Je suis aimée des petits enfants; dès qu'ils me voient, ils courent à
moi, et s'accrochent à ma tunique et prennent mes jambes dans
leurs petits bras.

S'ils ont cueilli des fleurs, ils me les donnent toutes; s'ils ont pris
un scarabée, ils le mettent dans ma main; s'ils n'ont rien, ils me
caressent et me font asseoir devant eux.

Alors ils m'embrassent sur la joue, ils posent leurs têtes sur mes
seins; ils me supplient avec les yeux. Je sais bien ce que cela veut
dire.

Cela veut dire: « Bilitis chérie, redis-nous, car nous sommes
gentils, l'histoire du héros Perseus ou la mort de la petite Helle. »

3. Stories

I am loved by little children; as soon as they see me they come
running and cling to my tunic, and grab my legs with their tiny
arms.

If they have gathered flowers, they give them all to me; if they
have caught a beetle, they put it in my hand; if they have nothing,
they stroke me and sit me down in front of them.

Then they kiss my cheek, they rest their little heads upon my
breasts; they beg me with their eyes. I know just what this means!

It means: "Dear Bilitis, tell us again, because we are being good,
the story of the hero Perseus, or the death of little Helle."

4. Chanson

«Ombre du bois où elle devait venir, dis-moi, où est allée ma maîtresse? — Elle est descendue dans la plaine. — Plaine, où est allée ma maîtresse? — Elle a suivi les bords du fleuve.

— Beau fleuve qui l'as vue passer, dis-moi, est-elle près d'ici? — Elle m'a quitté pour le chemin. — Chemin, la vois-tu encore? — Elle m'a laissé pour la route.

— O route blanche, route de la ville, dis-moi, où l'as tu conduite? — A la rue d'or qui entre à Sardes. — O rue de lumière, touches-tu ses pieds nus? — Elle est entrée au palais du roi.

— O palais, splendeur de la terre, rends-la-moi! — Regards, elle a des colliers sur les seins, et des houppes dans les cheveux, cent perles le long des jambes, deux bras autour de la taille. »

5. La Partie d'osselets

Comme nous l'aimions toutes les deux, nous l'avons joué aux osselets. Et ce fut une partie célèbre. Beaucoup de jeunes filles y assistaient.

Elle amena d'abord le coup de Kyklôpes, et moi, le coup de Sôlon. Mais elle le Kallibolos, et moi, me sentant perdue, je priais la déesse!

Je jouai, j'eus l'Épiphénôn, elle le terrible coup de Khios, moi l'Antiteukhos, elle le Trikhias, et moi le coup d'Aphrodité qui gagna l'amant disputé.

Mais la voyant pâlir, je la pris par le cou et je lui dis tout près de l'oreille pour qu'elle seule m'entendît: « Ne pleure pas, petite amie, nous le laisserons choisir entre nous. »

6. Bilitis

Une femme s'enveloppe de laine blanche. Une autre se vêt de soie et d'or. Une autre se couvre de fleurs, de feuilles vertes et de raisins.

Moi, je ne saurais vivre que nue. Mon amant, prends-moi comme je suis: sans robe ni bijoux ni sandales, voici Bilitis toute seule.

Mes cheveux sont noirs de leur noir; et mes lèvres sont rouges de leur rouge. Mes boucles flottent autour de moi libres et rondes comme des plumes.

Prends-moi telle que ma mère m'a faite dans une nuit d'amour lointaine, et si je te plais ainsi, n'oublie pas de me dire.

4. Song

Shadow of the wood where she should have come, tell me, where did my mistress go? — She went down to the plain. — Plain, where did my mistress go? — She followed the banks of the river.

— Beautiful river who saw her pass, tell me, is she nearby? — She left me for the path. — Path, do you still see her? — She left me for the road.

— Oh, white road, road to the city, tell me, where did you lead her? — To the golden street, which enters Sardis. — Oh street of light, do you touch her bare feet? — She entered the King's palace.

— Oh, palace, splendor of the world, give her back to me! — Look! she has necklaces upon her breasts, crests in her hair, a hundred pearls along on her legs, and two arms around her waist.

5. The Game of Knuckle-bones

Since we both loved him, we played at knucklebones for him. It was a famous match. Many girls came to watch.

She led at first with the cast of Cyclops, and I, the cast of Solon. Then she threw Kallibolos, and I, feeling lost, I prayed to the Goddess.

I played, I got the Epiphenon, she the terrible cast of Kios; I the Antiteukos and she the Trikias; and I the cast of Aphrodite which won the disputed lover.

But seeing her grow pale; I took her by the neck and whispered in her ear (so no one else could hear), "Don't cry, darling, we'll let him choose between us."

6. Bilitis

One woman wraps herself in white wool. Another clothes herself in silk and gold. Another covers herself in flowers, green leaves and grapes.

Me, I can only live naked. My lover, take me as I am; without a dress or jewels or sandals, here is Bilitis, bare.

My hair is black with its own blackness, and my lips are red from their own redness. My curls float around me as free and round as plumes.

Take me as my mother made me in a distant night of love, and if I please you like this, don't forget to tell me so

7. Le Tombeau sans nom

Mnasidika m'ayant prise par la main me mena hors des portes de la ville, jusqu'à un petit champ inculte où il y avait une stèle de marbre. Et elle me dit: « Celle-ci fut l'amie de ma mère. »

Alors je sentis un grand frisson, et, sans cesser de lui tenir la main, je me penchai sur son épaule, afin de lire les quatre vers entre la coupe creuse et le serpent:

« Ce n'est pas la mort qui m'a enlevée, mais les Nymphes des fontaines. Je repose ici sous une terre légère avec la chevelure coupée de Xantho. Qu'elle seule me pleure. Je ne dis pas mon nom. »

Longtemps nous sommes restées debout, et nous n'avons pas versé la libation. Car comment appeler une âme inconnue d'entre les foules de l'Hadès?

8. Les Courtisanes Égyptiennes

Je suis allée avec Plango chez les courtisanes égyptiennes, tout en haut de la vieille ville. Elles ont des amphores de terre, des plateaux de cuivre et des nattes jaunes où elles s'accroupissent sans effort.

Leurs chambres sont silencieuses, sans angles et sans encoignures, tant les couches successives de chaux bleue ont émoussé les chapiteaux et arrondi le pied des murs.

Elles se tiennent immobiles, les mains posées sur les genoux. Quand elles offrent la bouillie elles murmurent: « Bonheur. » Et quand on les remercie, elles disent: « Grâce à toi. »

Elles comprennent le hellène et feignent de le parler mal pour se rire de nous dans leur langue; mais nous, dent pour dent, nous parlons lydien et elles s'inquiètent tout à coup.

9. L'Eau pure du bassin

« Eau pure du bassin, miroir immobile, dis-moi ma beauté. — Bilitis, ou qui que tu sois, Téthys peut-être ou Amphitrité, tu es belle, sache-le.

« Ton visage se penche sous ta chevelure épaisse, gonflée de fleurs et de parfums. Tes paupières molles s'ouvrent à peine et tes flancs sont las des mouvements de l'amour.

« Ton corps fatigué du poids de tes seins porte les marques fines de l'ongle et les taches bleues du baiser. Tes bras sont rougis par l'étreinte. Chaque ligne de ta peau fut aimée.

« — Eau claire du bassin, ta fraîcheur repose. Reçois-moi, qui suis lasse en effet. Emporte le fard de mes joues, et la sueur de mon ventre et le souvenir de la nuit. »

7. The Nameless Tomb

Mnasidika, taking me by the hand, led me through the gates of the town to a little wild field where there was a marble monument. She said to me: "This woman was my mother's lover."

I felt a great shiver, and, still holding her hand, leaned on her shoulder, to read the four verses between the hollow cup and the serpent:

"It is not Death that carried me away, but the Nymphs of the fountains. I rest here under the light earth with locks cut from the hair of Xantho. Let her alone weep for me. I do not speak my name."

For a long time we remained standing and we did not pour the libation. For how do you call an unknown soul from among the hordes of Hades?

8. The Egyptian Courtesans

I went with Plango to the Egyptian courtesans, at the very top of the old city. They have jars of earth and copper trays and yellow mats where they crouch effortlessly.

Their rooms are silent, without angles or corners, as so many successive coats of blue lime have blunted the cornices and rounded the foot of the walls.

They sit motionless, hands on their knees. When they offer porridge they murmur: "Happiness." And when you thank them they say, "Thanks to you."

They understand Greek, but pretend to speak it badly so they can laugh at us in their own language; but we, a tooth for a tooth, speak Lydian and they suddenly grow anxious.

9. Pure Water of the Basin

"Pure water of the basin, immobile mirror, tell me of my beauty. — Bilitis, or whoever you are, Tethys perhaps, or Amphitrite, you are beautiful, know that!

"Your face leans out beneath your thick hair, dense with flowers and perfumes. Your languid lids can barely open, and your thighs are weary from the movements of love.

"Your body, tired with the weight of your breasts, bears the subtle marks of fingernails and the blue stains of kisses. Your arms are reddened by the embrace. Every line of your skin has been loved."

"— Pure water of the basin, your coolness refreshes. Receive me, who is weary indeed. Take away the rouge from my cheeks, the sweat from my belly and the memory of the night."

10. La Danseuse aux crotales

Tu attaches à tes mains légères tes crotales retentissants, Myrrhinidion ma chérie, et à peine nue hors de ta robe, tu étires tes membres nerveux. Que tu es jolie, les bras en l'air, les reins arqués et les seins rouges!

Tu commences: tes pieds l'un devant l'autre se posent, hésitent, et glissent mollement. Ton corps se plie comme une écharpe, tu caresses ta peau qui frissonne, et la volupté inonde tes longs yeux évanouis.

Tout à coup, tu claques des crotales! Cambre-toi sur tes pieds dressés, secoue les reins, lance les jambes et que tes mains pleines de fracas appellent tous les désirs en bande autour de ton corps tournoyant.

Nous, applaudissons à grands cris, soit que, souriant sur l'épaule, tu agites d'un frémissement ta croupe convulsive et musclée, soit que tu ondules presque étendue, au rythme de tes souvenirs.

11. Le Souvenir de Mnasidika

Elles dansaient l'une devant l'autre, d'un mouvement rapide et fuyant; elles semblaient toujours vouloir s'enlacer, et pourtant ne se touchaient point, si ce n'est du bout des lèvres.

Quand elles tournaient le dos en dansant, elles se regardaient, la tête sur l'épaule, et la sueur brillait sous leur bras levés, et leurs chevelures fines passaient devant leurs seins.

La langueur de leurs yeux, le feu de leurs joues, la gravité de leurs visages, étaient trois chansons ardentes. Elles se frôlaient furtivement, elles pliaient leurs corps sur les hanches.

Et tout à coup, elles sont tombées, pour achever à terre la danse molle... Souvenir de Mnasidika, c'est alors que tu m'apparus, et tout, hors ta chère image, me fut importun.

12. La Pluie au matin

La nuit s'efface. Les étoiles s'éloignent. Voici que les dernières courtisanes sont rentrées avec les amants. Et moi, dans la pluie du matin, j'écris ces vers sur le sable.

Les feuilles sont chargées d'eau brillante. Des ruisseaux à travers les sentiers entraînent la terre et les feuilles mortes. La pluie, goutte à goutte, fait des trous dans ma chanson.

Oh! Que je suis triste et seule ici! Les plus jeunes ne me regardent pas; les plus âgés m'ont oubliée. C'est bien. Ils apprendront mes vers, et les enfants de leurs enfants.

Voilà ce que ni Myrtalé, ni Thaïs, ni Glikéra ne se diront, le jour où leurs belles joues seront creuses. Ceux qui aimeront après moi chanteront mes strophes ensemble.

10. The Dancer with Crotales

You fasten your reverberant crotales to your light hands, Myrrhinidion my dear, and no sooner are you out of your dress, than you stretch your wiry limbs. How pretty you are, arms in the air, back arched and breasts reddened!

You begin: one before the other, your feet settle, hesitate, and slide softly. Your body furls like a scarf, you caress your shuddering skin and pleasure inundates your long, swooning eyes.

Suddenly you clack your crotales! Draw yourself up on tip-toe, shake your loins, fling your legs. May your hands full of noise call every desire to band around your whirling body.

We applaud wildly, whether, smiling over your shoulder, you shake with a quiver your convulsive and muscular rear, or whether you undulate, almost fully outstretched, to the rhythm of your memories.

11. Memory of Mnasidika

They danced one in front of the other in a swift and fleeting movement; they seemed always to want to embrace, and yet never touched, except by the tip of their lips.

When they turned their backs while dancing, they looked at each other, heads over their shoulders, sweat shining beneath their raised arms, and their fine hair passed in front of their breasts.

The languor of their eyes, the fire in their cheeks and the gravity of their faces, were three ardent songs. They furtively brushed against each other, they bent their swaying bodies at the hip.

And suddenly they fell, to finish their languid dance upon the earth... Memory of Mnasidika, it was then that you appeared to me, and everything but your beloved image troubled me.

12. The Morning Rain

The night fades. The stars recede. Now the last courtesans have gone home with their lovers. And I, in the morning rain, I write these verses in the sand.

The leaves are weighed down with sparkling water. The streams along the pathways wash away earth and dead leaves. The rain, drop by drop, makes holes in my song.

Ah, how sad and lonely I am here! The younger ones don't look at me; the older ones have forgotten me. That's all right. They will learn my verses, and the children of their children.

Here is something neither Myrtale, nor Thaïs, nor Glykera will say, the day their lovely cheeks are hollow. Those who will love after me will sing my songs together.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Gessler Hall

Sunday, December 17, 2006

8:00 p.m.

DOCTORAL LECTURE-RECITAL*

RACHEL KIYO IWAASA, Piano

Lecture: Fragmentation and Eros in Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis* and
Six Épigraphe antiques

- INTERMISSION -

Six Épigraphe antiques, for piano, two hands

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

- I. *Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été* (To invoke Pan, God of the Summer Wind)
- II. *Pour un tombeau sans nom* (For a Nameless Tomb)
- III. *Pour que la nuit soit propice* (May the Night be Favourable)
- IV. *Pour la danseuse aux crotales* (For the Dancer with Crotales)
- V. *Pour l'égyptienne* (For the Egyptian Woman)
- VI. *Pour remercier la pluie au matin* (To Thank the Morning Rain)

Les Chansons de Bilitis

Claude Debussy
arr. for flute and piano by Rachel Kiyo Iwaasa

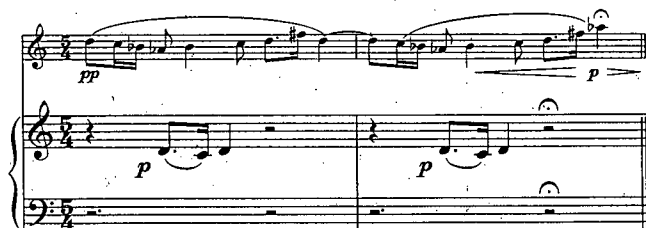
1. *Chant pastorale* (Pastoral Song)
2. *Les Comparaisons* (Comparisons)
3. *Les Contes* (Stories)
4. *Chanson* (Song)
5. *La Partie d'osselets* (The Game of Knuckle-bones)
6. *Bilitis*
7. *Le Tombeau sans nom* (The Nameless Tomb)
8. *Les Courtisanes égyptiennes* (The Egyptian Courtesans)
9. *L'Eau pure du bassin* (Pure Water of the Basin)
10. *La Danseuse aux crotales* (The Dancer with Crotales)
11. *Le Souvenir de Mnasidika* (Memory of Mnasidika)
12. *La Pluie au matin* (The Morning Rain)

Mark McGregor, flute

* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree
with a major in Piano Performance.

No. 7. Le tombeau sans nom.

Mnasidika, taking me by the hand, led me through the gates of the town to a little wild field where there was a marble monument. She said to me: "This woman was my mother's lover."

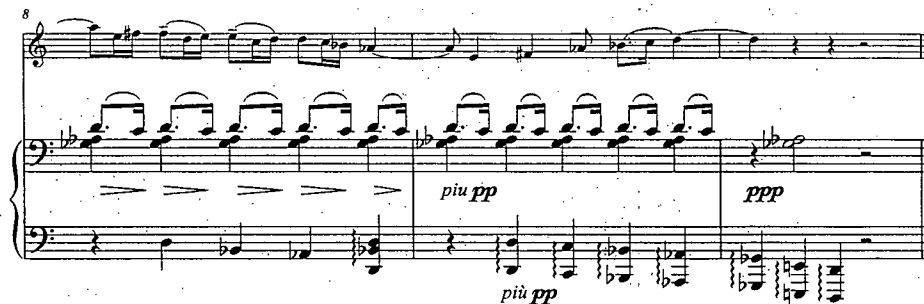


I felt a great shiver, and, still holding her hand, leaned on her shoulder, to read the four verses between the hollow cup and the serpent:

"It is not Death that carried me away, but the Nymphs of the fountains. I rest here under the light earth with locks cut from the hair of Xantho. Let her alone weep for me. I do not speak my name."



For a long time we remained standing and we did not pour the libation. For how do you call an unknown soul from among the hordes of Hades?



Pour un tombeau sans nom

Triste et lent J. 60

2. *p sans rigueur* *mesuré* *pp lointain*

p sans rigueur *cédez* *// mesuré* *pp* *p*

p *pp* *pp* *pp* *pp*

più p *m.d.* *più pp* *pp* *pp*

pp *pp* *pp*

18

pp *piu pp* *per - den -*

23

pp *étouffé* *m. d.*

27

pp effleuré comme une plainte lointaine

30

sempre pp

32

très retenu *piu pp* *m. g. perdendo*

Pour un tombeau sans nom and its source material from the *Chansons de Bilitis*

II. Pour un tombeau sans nom

- | | |
|----|-----------|
| A | mm. 1-2 |
| | mm. 3-4 |
| | mm. 5-6 |
| | mm. 7-12 |
| B | mm. 13-24 |
| A' | mm. 25-27 |
| | mm. 28-32 |
| | mm. 33-35 |

Title : 7. "Le Tombeau sans nom"

7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 1-2
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 6-7, bass
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 3-5
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," mm. 6-10
unrelated
11. "Le Souvenir de Mnasidika," mm. 5-12
8. "Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," mm. 5-9
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom," m. 1

1. Chant Pastoral

Il faut chanter un chant pastoral, invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été.
Je garde mon troupeau et Sélénis le sien, à l'ombre ronde d'un
olivier qui tremble.

Sélénis est couchée sur le pré. Elle se lève et court, ou cherche
des cigales, ou cueille des fleurs avec des herbes, ou lave son
visage dans l'eau fraîche du ruisseau.

Moi, j'arrache la laine au dos blond des moutons pour en garnir
ma quenouille, et je file. Les heures sont lentes. Un aigle passe
dans le ciel.

L'ombre tourne, changeons de place la corbeille de fleurs et la
jarre de lait. Il faut chanter un chant pastoral, invoquer Pan, dieu
du vent d'été.

1. Pastoral Song

We must sing a pastoral song to invoke Pan, God of the summer
wind. I watch my flock, and Selenis watches hers, in the round
shade of a trembling olive-tree.

Selenis is lying on the meadow. She gets up and runs, or hunts
grasshoppers, or picks flowers and grasses, or washes her face in
the cool brook.

Me, I pluck the wool from the blonde backs of my sheep to
supply my distaff, and I spin. The hours are slow. An eagle
passes in the sky.

The shadow moves; let us move the basket of flowers and the
crock of milk. We must sing a pastoral song to invoke Pan, god
of the summer wind.

2. Les Comparaisons

Bergeronette, oiseau de Kypris, chante avec nos premiers désirs!
Le corps nouveau des jeunes filles se couvre de fleurs comme la
terre. La nuit de tous nos rêves approche et nous en parlons entre
nous.

Parfois, nous comparons ensemble nos beautés si différentes, nos
chevelures déjà longues, nos jeunes seins encore petites, nos
pubertés rondes comme des caillies et blotties sous la plume
naissante.

Hier je luttai de la sorte contre Melanthô, mon aînée. Elle était
fière de sa poitrine qui venait de croître un mois, et, montrant ma
tunique droite, elle m'avait appelée Petite enfant.

Pas un homme ne pouvait nous voir, nous nous mîmes devant les
filles, et, si elle vainquit sur un point, je l'emportais de loin sur
les autres. Bergeronette, oiseau de Kypris, chante avec nos
premiers désirs!

2. Comparisons

Little thrush, bird of Cyprus, sing with our first desires! The new
body of young girls blooms with flowers like the earth. The night
of all our dreams approaches and we talk about it among
ourselves.

Sometimes we compare our different beauties, our hair already
long, our young breasts still small, our puberties round like quails
nestled under nascent down.

Yesterday I competed against Melantho, my older sister. She was
proud of her breasts, which had grown in a month, and, pointing
at my flat tunic, she called me Little Child.

No man could see us, we stood naked in front of the other girls,
and, if she won on one point, I surpassed her by far on the others.
Little thrush, bird of Cyprus, sing with our first desires!

3. Les Contes

Je suis aimée des petits enfants; dès qu'ils me voient, ils courent à
moi, et s'accrochent à ma tunique et prennent mes jambes dans
leurs petits bras.

S'ils ont cueilli des fleurs, ils me les donnent toutes; s'ils ont pris
un scarabée, ils le mettent dans ma main; s'ils n'ont rien, ils me
caressent et me font asseoir devant eux.

Alors ils m'embrassent sur la joue, ils posent leurs têtes sur mes
seins; ils me supplient avec les yeux. Je sais bien ce que cela veut
dire.

Cela veut dire: « Bilitis chérie, redis-nous, car nous sommes
gentils, l'histoire du héros Perseus ou la mort de la petite Helle. »

3. Stories

I am loved by little children; as soon as they see me they come
running and cling to my tunic, and grab my legs with their tiny
arms.

If they have gathered flowers, they give them all to me; if they
have caught a beetle, they put it in my hand; if they have nothing,
they stroke me and sit me down in front of them.

Then they kiss my cheek, they rest their little heads upon my
breasts; they beg me with their eyes. I know just what this means!

It means: "Dear Bilitis, tell us again, because we are being good,
the story of the hero Perseus, or the death of little Helle."

4. Chanson

«Ombre du bois où elle devait venir, dis-moi, où est allée ma maîtresse? — Elle est descendue dans la plaine. — Plaine, où est allée ma maîtresse? — Elle a suivi les bords du fleuve.

— Beau fleuve qui l'as vue passer, dis-moi, est-elle près d'ici? — Elle m'a quitté pour le chemin. — Chemin, la vois-tu encore? — Elle m'a laissé pour la route.

— O route blanche, route de la ville, dis-moi, où l'as tu conduite? — A la rue d'or qui entre à Sardes. — O rue de lumière, touches-tu ses pieds nus? — Elle est entrée au palais du roi.

— O palais, splendeur de la terre, rends-la-moi! — Regards, elle a des colliers sur les seins, et des houppes dans les cheveux, cent perles le long des jambes, deux bras autour de la taille. »

5. La Partie d'osselets

Comme nous l'aimions toutes les deux, nous l'avons joué aux osselets. Et ce fut une partie célèbre. Beaucoup de jeunes filles y assistaient.

Elle amena d'abord le coup de Kyklôpes, et moi, le coup de Sôlon. Mais elle le Kallibolos, et moi, me sentant perdue, je priais la déesse!

Je jouai, j'eus l'Épiphénôn, elle le terrible coup de Khios, moi l'Antiteukhos, elle le Trikhias, et moi le coup d'Aphrodité qui gagna l'amant disputé.

Mais la voyant pâlir, je la pris par le cou et je lui dis tout près de l'oreille pour qu'elle seule m'entendît: « Ne pleure pas, petite amie, nous le laisserons choisir entre nous. »

6. Bilitis

Une femme s'enveloppe de laine blanche. Une autre se vêt de soie et d'or. Une autre se couvre de fleurs, de feuilles vertes et de raisins.

Moi, je ne saurais vivre que nue. Mon amant, prends-moi comme je suis: sans robe ni bijoux ni sandales, voici Bilitis toute seule.

Mes cheveux sont noirs de leur noir, et mes lèvres sont rouges de leur rouge. Mes boucles flottent autour de moi libres et rondes comme des plumes.

Prends-moi telle que ma mère m'a faite dans une nuit d'amour lointaine, et si je te plais ainsi, n'oublie pas de me dire.

4. Song

Shadow of the wood where she should have come, tell me, where did my mistress go? — She went down to the plain. — Plain, where did my mistress go? — She followed the banks of the river.

— Beautiful river who saw her pass, tell me, is she nearby? — She left me for the path. — Path, do you still see her? — She left me for the road.

— Oh, white road, road to the city, tell me, where did you lead her? — To the golden street, which enters Sardis. — Oh street of light, do you touch her bare feet? — She entered the King's palace.

— Oh, palace, splendor of the world, give her back to me! — Look! she has necklaces upon her breasts, crests in her hair, a hundred pearls along on her legs, and two arms around her waist.

5. The Game of Knuckle-bones

Since we both loved him, we played at knucklebones for him. It was a famous match. Many girls came to watch.

She led at first with the cast of Cyclops, and I, the cast of Solon. Then she threw Kallibolos, and I, feeling lost, I prayed to the Goddess.

I played, I got the Epiphenon, she the terrible cast of Kios; I the Antiteukos and she the Trikias; and I the cast of Aphrodite which won the disputed lover.

But seeing her grow pale; I took her by the neck and whispered in her ear (so no one else could hear), "Don't cry, darling, we'll let him choose between us."

6. Bilitis

One woman wraps herself in white wool. Another clothes herself in silk and gold. Another covers herself in flowers, green leaves and grapes.

Me, I can only live naked. My lover, take me as I am; without a dress or jewels or sandals, here is Bilitis, bare.

My hair is black with its own blackness, and my lips are red from their own redness. My curls float around me as free and round as plumes.

Take me as my mother made me in a distant night of love, and if I please you like this, don't forget to tell me so

7. Le Tombeau sans nom

Mnasidika m'ayant prise par la main me mena hors des portes de la ville, jusqu'à un petit champ inculte où il y avait une stèle de marbre. Et elle me dit: « Celle-ci fut l'amie de ma mère. »

Alors je sentis un grand frisson, et, sans cesser de lui tenir la main, je me penchai sur son épaule, afin de lire les quatre vers entre la coupe creuse et le serpent:

« Ce n'est pas la mort qui m'a enlevée, mais les Nymphes des fontaines. Je repose ici sous une terre légère avec la chevelure coupée de Xantho. Qu'elle seule me pleure. Je ne dis pas mon nom. »

Longtemps nous sommes restées debout, et nous n'avons pas versé la libation. Car comment appeler une âme inconnue d'entre les foules de l'Hadès?

8. Les Courtisanes Égyptiennes

Je suis allée avec Plango chez les courtisanes égyptiennes, tout en haut de la vieille ville. Elles ont des amphores de terre, des plateaux de cuivre et des nattes jaunes où elles s'accroupissent sans effort.

Leurs chambres sont silencieuses, sans angles et sans encoignures, tant les couches successives de chaux bleue ont émoussé les chapiteaux et arrondi le pied des murs.

Elles se tiennent immobiles, les mains posées sur les genoux. Quand elles offrent la bouillie elles murmurent: « Bonheur. » Et quand on les remercie, elles disent: « Grâce à toi. »

Elles comprennent le hellène et feignent de le parler mal pour se rire de nous dans leur langue; mais nous, dent pour dent, nous parlons lydien et elles s'inquiètent tout à coup.

9. L'Eau pure du bassin

« Eau pure du bassin, miroir immobile, dis-moi ma beauté. — Bilitis, ou qui que tu sois, Téthys peut-être ou Amphitrité, tu es belle, sache-le.

« Ton visage se penche sous ta chevelure épaisse, gonflée de fleurs et de parfums. Tes paupières molles s'ouvrent à peine et tes flancs sont las des mouvements de l'amour.

« Ton corps fatigué du poids de tes seins porte les marques fines de l'ongle et les taches bleues du baiser. Tes bras sont rougis par l'étreinte. Chaque ligne de ta peau fut aimée.

« — Eau claire du bassin, ta fraîcheur repose. Reçois-moi, qui suis lasse en effet. Emporte le fard de mes joues, et la sueur de mon ventre et le souvenir de la nuit. »

7. The Nameless Tomb

Mnasidika, taking me by the hand, led me through the gates of the town to a little wild field where there was a marble monument. She said to me: "This woman was my mother's lover."

I felt a great shiver, and, still holding her hand, leaned on her shoulder, to read the four verses between the hollow cup and the serpent:

"It is not Death that carried me away, but the Nymphs of the fountains. I rest here under the light earth with locks cut from the hair of Xantho. Let her alone weep for me. I do not speak my name."

For a long time we remained standing and we did not pour the libation. For how do you call an unknown soul from among the hordes of Hades?

8. The Egyptian Courtesans

I went with Plango to the Egyptian courtesans, at the very top of the old city. They have jars of earth and copper trays and yellow mats where they crouch effortlessly.

Their rooms are silent, without angles or corners, as so many successive coats of blue lime have blunted the cornices and rounded the foot of the walls.

They sit motionless, hands on their knees. When they offer porridge they murmur: "Happiness." And when you thank them they say, "Thanks to you."

They understand Greek, but pretend to speak it badly so they can laugh at us in their own language; but we, a tooth for a tooth, speak Lydian and they suddenly grow anxious.

9. Pure Water of the Basin

"Pure water of the basin, immobile mirror, tell me of my beauty. — Bilitis, or whoever you are, Tethys perhaps, or Amphitrite, you are beautiful, know that!

"Your face leans out beneath your thick hair, dense with flowers and perfumes. Your languid lids can barely open, and your thighs are weary from the movements of love.

"Your body, tired with the weight of your breasts, bears the subtle marks of fingernails and the blue stains of kisses. Your arms are reddened by the embrace. Every line of your skin has been loved."

"— Pure water of the basin, your coolness refreshes. Receive me, who is weary indeed. Take away the rouge from my cheeks, the sweat from my belly and the memory of the night."

10. La Danseuse aux crotales

Tu attaches à tes mains légères tes crotales retentissants, Myrrhinidion ma chérie, et à peine nue hors de ta robe, tu étires tes membres nerveux. Que tu es jolie, les bras en l'air, les reins arqués et les seins rouges!

Tu commences; tes pieds l'un devant l'autre se posent, hésitent, et glissent mollement. Ton corps se plie comme une écharpe, tu caresses ta peau qui frissonne, et la volupté inonde tes longs yeux évanouis.

Tout à coup, tu claques des crotales! Cambre-toi sur tes pieds dressés, secoue les reins, lance les jambes et que tes mains pleines de fracas appellent tous les désirs en bande autour de ton corps tournoyant.

Nous, applaudissons à grands cris, soit que, souriant sur l'épaule, tu agites d'un frémissement ta croupe convulsive et musclée, soit que tu ondules presque étendue, au rythme de tes souvenirs.

11. Le Souvenir de Mnasidika

Elles dansaient l'une devant l'autre, d'un mouvement rapide et fuyant; elles semblaient toujours vouloir s'enlacer, et pourtant ne se touchaient point, si ce n'est du bout des lèvres.

Quand elles tournaient le dos en dansant, elles se regardaient, la tête sur l'épaule, et la sueur brillait sous leur bras levés, et leurs chevelures fines passaient devant leurs seins.

La langueur de leurs yeux, le feu de leurs joues, la gravité de leurs visages, étaient trois chansons ardentes. Elles se frôlaient furtivement, elles pliaient leurs corps sur les hanches.

Et tout à coup, elles sont tombées, pour achever à terre la danse molle . . . Souvenir de Mnasidika, c'est alors que tu m'apparus, et tout, hors ta chère image, me fut importun.

12. La Pluie au matin

La nuit s'efface. Les étoiles s'éloignent. Voici que les dernières courtisanes sont rentrées avec les amants. Et moi, dans la pluie du matin, j'écris ces vers sur le sable.

Les feuilles sont chargées d'eau brillante. Des ruisseaux à travers les sentiers entraînent la terre et les feuilles mortes. La pluie, goutte à goutte, fait des trous dans ma chanson.

Oh! Que je suis triste et seule ici! Les plus jeunes ne me regardent pas; les plus âgés m'ont oubliée. C'est bien. Ils apprendront mes vers, et les enfants de leurs enfants.

Voilà ce que ni Myrtalé, ni Thaïs, ni Glikéra ne se diront, le jour où leurs belles joues seront creuses. Ceux qui aimeront après moi chanteront mes strophes ensemble.

10. The Dancer with Crotales

You fasten your reverberant crotales to your light hands, Myrrhinidion my dear, and no sooner are you out of your dress, than you stretch your wiry limbs. How pretty you are, arms in the air, back arched and breasts reddened!

You begin: one before the other, your feet settle, hesitate, and slide softly. Your body furls like a scarf, you caress your shuddering skin and pleasure inundates your long, swooning eyes.

Suddenly you clack your crotales! Draw yourself up on tip-toe, shake your loins, fling your legs. May your hands full of noise call every desire to band around your whirling body.

We applaud wildly, whether, smiling over your shoulder, you shake with a quiver your convulsive and muscular rear, or whether you undulate, almost fully outstretched, to the rhythm of your memories.

11. Memory of Mnasidika

They danced one in front of the other in a swift and fleeting movement; they seemed always to want to embrace, and yet never touched, except by the tip of their lips.

When they turned their backs while dancing, they looked at each other, heads over their shoulders, sweat shining beneath their raised arms, and their fine hair passed in front of their breasts.

The languor of their eyes, the fire in their cheeks and the gravity of their faces, were three ardent songs. They furtively brushed against each other, they bent their swaying bodies at the hip.

And suddenly they fell, to finish their languid dance upon the earth. . . Memory of Mnasidika, it was then that you appeared to me, and everything but your beloved image troubled me.

12. The Morning Rain

The night fades. The stars recede. Now the last courtesans have gone home with their lovers. And I, in the morning rain, I write these verses in the sand.

The leaves are weighed down with sparkling water. The streams along the pathways wash away earth and dead leaves. The rain, drop by drop, makes holes in my song.

Ah, how sad and lonely I am here! The younger ones don't look at me; the older ones have forgotten me. That's all right. They will learn my verses, and the children of their children.

Here is something neither Myrtale, nor Thaïs, nor Glykera will say, the day their lovely cheeks are hollow. Those who will love after me will sing my songs together.