

Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg, Kansas

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

Graduate Recital

JUDITH DAWN LEE, Soprano
CAROL SUE MAXWELL, Pianist

LES VIGNETTES TROUVEES:
THE ART SONGS OF DEBUSSY

Set to Texts of

Banville
Bourget
Baudelaire
Louys

Monday, April 18, 1977

McCray Auditorium

8:00 p.m.

PROGRAM

I

Nuit d'étoiles (1876?) ----- Théodore de Banville
(1823-1891)

Beau soir (1878?) -----

Voici que le printemps)
) (1880-1883)-----

Paysage sentimental)

DEUX ROMANCES

Romance)
) (1891)-----

Les Cloches)

Paul Bourget
(1852-1935)

II

Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire ----- Charles Baudelaire
(1887-1889) (1821-1867)

Le Balcon
Harmonie du soir
Le Jet d'eau
Recueillement
La Mort des amants

III

Chansons de Bilitis (1897) ----- Pierre Louÿs
(1870-1925)

La Flûte de Pan
La Chevelure
Le Tombeau des Nal'ades

This program partially fulfills thesis requirements for
the Master of Music degree program for Miss Lee.

PROGRAM NOTES

Judith Dawn Lee

"Very few musicians of any nationality had greater mastery in creating the mysterious alloy of music and poetry than Debussy. Not only in the prosody of the literary text and in the rhythm of speech, for which he had a prodigious instinct, but also because he attained the deepest concordance between the poetic idea and the musical idea."¹

Among song composers of all countries, Debussy may be considered one of the most personal. He achieved a new style in the setting of poetry and poetic prose—a new sensitivity to fantasy and the shadow moods. For this a new technique of performance had to be found. Vocalists had to become Debussy interpreters in a special sense. (A special order of accompaniment was required.) Debussy songs are not dramatic declarations. They do not tell a story in music nor do they illustrate an episode. They are not in motion, like a drama. For their duration, they are static. All extremes, all attitudinizing, all pumped-up emotions destroy illusion. The texts and notes must be scrupulously enunciated and inflected—there must be no conspicuous underlining of words or phrases. It has been said with wisdom that as much depends on the listener as on the performer. No music could make these poems clear to those not already familiar with their content. The interpreter can only assume such familiarity and employ his musicianship and voice to establish the basic mood.

Debussy's individuality as a song writer began with his choice of poets. With very few exceptions all were his contemporaries, all were Frenchmen. Théodore de Banville (1823–1921), romanticist and symbolist, was the first poet to exert a substantial influence on Debussy. It was Banville's *LA DERNIÈRE PENSÉE DE WEBER* which became Debussy's first published work. Debussy changed the title to *NUIT D'ETOILES*, omitted the second stanza and used the first four lines of the poem as the text for each return of the principal section, in each case complementing it by returning to the home tonality of E flat. Debussy was only a boy of fourteen when he composed this song. It suggests Massenet, but anticipates several elements of his later style: the opening chords of the accompaniment outline an incomplete pentatonic scale; the melody has a pentatonic arabesque at "Et ces ETOILES SONT TES yeux;" there are frequent chords of the ninth on both the dominant and supertonic; and before the final refrain there is a six-measure dominant pedal in a distant key. *NUIT D'ETOILES* is dedicated to Mme. Moreau-Santi, director of a singing class for which Debussy accompanied. The song was purchased for fifty francs by a family acquaintance (Edmund Bulla) and published by his Société Artistique d'Éditions in 1882.

NUIT D'ETOILES

Nuit d'étoiles, sous tes voiles,
Sous ta brise et tes parfums,
Triste lyre qui soupire,
Je rêve aux amours défunts.
La sereine mélancolie
Vient éclore au fond de mon cœur.
Et j'entends l'âme de ma mie
Tressaillir dans le bois rêveur.
Je revois à notre fontaine
Tes regards bleus comme les cieux;
Cettes rose, c'est ton haleine,
Et ces étoiles sont tes yeux.

NIGHT OF STARS

Night of stars, beneath your veils,
Amid your breezes and your scents,
While a sad lyre is sighing,
I dream of my late loves.
Sereine melancholy
Suddenly unfolds at the bottom of my heart,
And I sense the soul of my beloved
Trembling in the dreaming forest.
I see again, in our fountain,
Your glances blue as the skies;
This rose, it is your breath,
And these stars are your eyes.

¹ The Interpretation of French Song, Pierre Bernac, 1970, Praeger Publ., New York.

In this same period Debussy was attracted to the poetry of Paul Bourget (1852-1935) who was a literary critic, novelist and the author of *LES AVEUX*, a collection of poems of which Debussy set seven. However, only three have been published: *BEAU SOIR*, *VOICI QUE LE PRINTEMPS* and *PAYSAGE SENTIMENTAL*. Debussy was only fifteen or sixteen when he wrote *BEAU SOIR*, and the music is marked by the aesthetics of the period, that of Massenet. It is very well written for the voice and the melodic line matches the literary text admirably. Debussy shares, musically, the poet's desire to be happy on this beautiful evening, but he feels a premonition of death. We, too, are but travelers.

BEAU SOIR

Lorsque au soleil couchant les rivières sont roses,
Et qu'un tiède frisson court sur les champs de blé,
Un conseil d'être heureux semble sortir des choses.
Et monter vers le cœur troublé.
Un conseil de goûter le charme d'être au monde,
Cependant qu'on est jeune et que le soir est beau,
Car nous nous en allons comme s'en va cette onde,
Elle à la mer, nous au tombeau.

BEAUTIFUL EVENING

*When, in the setting sun, the streams are rosy,
And when a warm breeze floats over the fields of grain,
A counsel to be happy seems to emanate from all things
And rise toward the troubled heart;
An advice to enjoy the pleasure of being alive,
While one is young and the evening is beautiful,
For we shall go as this wave goes,—
It, to the sea; we, to the grave.*

VOICI QUE LE PRINTEMPS and *PAYSAGE SENTIMENTAL* were not published until 1903. Reminiscences of Borodin and Massenet have been found floating through these early evocations of nature. Vallas, one of Debussy's biographers, refers to the theme of *VOICI QUE LE PRINTEMPS* as being possibly of Russian origin.

VOICI QUE LE PRINTEMPS

Voici que le printemps, ce fils léger d'avril,
Beau page en pourpoint vert brodé de roses blanches.
Paraît leste, fringant et les poings sur les hanches,
Comme un prince acclamé revient d'un long exil.
Les branches des buissons verdissent étroite
La route qu'il poursuit en dansant comme un fol;
Sur son épaule gauche il porte un rossignol,
Un merle s'est posé sur son épaule droite.
Et les fleurs qui dormaient sous les mousses des bois
Ouvrent leurs yeux où flotte une ombre vague et tendre;
Et sur leurs petits pieds se dressent, pour entendre
Les deux oiseaux siffler et chanter à la fois.
Car le merle siffle et le rossignol chante;
Le merle siffle ceux qui ne sont pas aimés,
Et pour les amoureux languissants et charmés,
Le rossignol prolonge une chanson touchante.

HERE IS SPRING

*Here is Spring, that nimble son of April,
Handsome in a green doublet embroidered with white roses.
He appears agile, dapper and, his fists on his hips,
Like a prince, welcomed upon his return from a long exile.
The branches of the green bushes border
The road which he follows, dancing in a frenzy;
On his left shoulder he carries a nightingale,
A blackbird perches on his right.
And the flowers which slept under the moss of the woods
Open their eyes as a faint and gentle shadow floats by;
And on their little feet they stretch upward, to hear
The two birds whistling and singing in unison,
For the blackbird whistles and the nightingale sings;
The blackbird whistles for those who are unloved,
While for lovers, languishing and enchanted,
The nightingale spins out a moving song.*

PAYSAGE SENTIMENTAL

Le ciel d'hiver, si doux, si triste, si dormant,
Où le soleil errait parmi des vapeurs blanches,
Était pareil au doux, au profond sentiment
Qui nous rendait heureux mélancoliquement
Par cet après-midi de baisers sous les branches.
Branches mortes qu'aucun souffle ne remuait,
Branches noires avec quelque feuille fanée.
Ah! que ta bouche s'est à ma bouche donnée
Plus tendrement encore dans ce grand bois muet,
Et dans cette langueur de la mort de l'année,
La mort de tout sinon de toi que j'aime tant,
Et sinon du bonheur dont mon âme est comblée,
Bonheur qui dort au fond de cette âme isolée,
Mystérieux, paisible et frais comme l'étang
Qui pâlisait au fond de la pâle vallée.

SENTIMENTAL LANDSCAPE

*The wintry sky, so soft, so sad, so sleepy,
Through which the sun wandered among white mists,
Resembled the gentle, deep feeling
Which made us happy, yet a little melancholy,
On that afternoon of kisses beneath the boughs,
Lifeless boughs, not stirred by any breath of air,
Dark boughs, with a few faded leaves.
Oh, how your lips gave themselves to mine
Even more tenderly in that wide silent wood,
And in that languor of the year's death,—
The death of everything, except you, whom I love so much,
And except happiness, which overflows my heart,—
Happiness which lies dormant in the depth of this lonely
soul,
Mysterious, peaceful and cool as the pond
Which grew pale in the depths of the pale valley.*

ROMANCE and LES CLOCHES are two mélodies which were originally given to the publisher Durand with the single title DEUX ROMANCES. The manuscripts are dated 1891 but the Massenet-like character of the music, the style, the aesthetic, as well as the choice of poems, would rather indicate that they belong to a period seven or eight years earlier. In LES CLOCHES the ringing of the bells which is heard all through the mélodie evokes for the poet and the musician memories of past happiness.

ROMANCE

L'âme évaporée et souffrante,
L'âme douce, l'âme odorante
Des lis divins que j'ai cueillis
Dans le jardin de ta pensée,
Ou donc les vents l'ont-ils chassée,
Cette âme adorable des lis?
N'est-il plus un parfum qui reste
De la suavité céleste
Des jours où tu m'enveloppais
D'une vapeur surnaturelle,
Faites d'espoir, d'amour fidèle,
De béatitude et de paix?

ROMANCE

*The fleeting and suffering soul,
The gentle soul, the fragrant soul
Of those divine lilies which I gathered
In the garden of your thoughts,
Whither have the winds driven it,
That adorable soul of the lilies?
Is there no fragrance remaining
Of the heavenly loveliness
Of those days when you enveloped me
In a celestial haze,
Fashioned of hope, of faithful love,
Of blessedness and of peace?*

LES CLOCHES

Les feuilles s'ouvraient sur le bord des branches,
Déliatement.
Les cloches tintaient, légères et franches,
Dans le ciel clément.
Rythmique et fervent comme une antienne,
Ce lointain appel
Me remémorait la blancheur chrétienne
Des fleurs de l'autel.
Ces cloches parlaient d'heureuses années,
Et, dans le grand bois,
Semblaient reverdir les feuilles fanées,
Des jours d'autrefois.

THE BELLS

*The leaves opened along the length of the branches,
Delicately.
The bells were ringing, lightly and clearly,
Beneath the fair sky.
Rhythmical and fervent as a hymn,
This distant call
Brought to my mind the Christian whiteness
Of the flowers of the Altar.
These bells were telling of happy years,
And, in the deep forest,
The faded leaves seemed green again,
As in days long past.*

III

During his sojourn at the Villa de Médicis in Rome in 1886, Debussy became acquainted with the poetry of the critic and symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). He chose five poems from Baudelaire's LES FLEURS DU MAL which had been published in 1857 and for which Baudelaire was prosecuted and fined for offenses to public morals. The theme of LES FLEURS DU MAL is the antagonism between the evil and good by which man is torn. Debussy's CINQ POÈMES DE BAUDELAIRE, dedicated to Etienne Dupin, were written at the time of his pilgrimage to Bayreuth (1888). "Wagnerism" was dominating the whole of Western music, and the obvious influence of the Bayreuth visit is apparent in these mélodies. The same melodic phrase is used as a refrain each time a line of the text recurs, but the accompaniment is varied. Some commentators have termed this refrain a "leit motif", but it is hardly that. LE BALCON is one of the earliest songs to contain extensive examples of the whole-tone scale. The pattern of the scale's appearances anticipates Debussy's later

practice of associating it with elements of darkness, obscurity, sleep. LE BALCON is the impassioned and mystical appeal of a lover to his mistress. He ardently expresses the hope that their happiness will rise again like the setting suns they saw from a balcony on summer evenings.

LE BALCON

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,
O toi, tous mes plaisirs! ô toi, tous mes devoirs!
Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,
Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,
Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon,
Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeur rose,
Que ton sein m'était doux!
Que ton cœur m'était bon!
Nous avons dit souvent d'impérissables choses
Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon
Que les soleils sont beaux par les chaudes soirées!
Que l'espace est profond! que le cœur est puissant!
En me penchant vers toi, reine des adorées,
Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang.
Que les soleils sont beaux par les chaudes soirées!
La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison,
Et mes yeux dans le noir devinaient tes prunelles,
Et je buvais ton souffle, O douceur, ô poison!
Et tes pieds s'endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles,
La nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison.
Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses,
Et revis mon passé blotti dans tes genoux.
Car à quoi bon chercher tes beautés langoureuses
Ailleurs qu'en ton cher corps et qu'en ton cœur si doux?
Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses!
Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis.
Renaîtront-ils d'un gouffre interdit à nos sondes
Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajeunis
Après s'être lavés au fond des mers profondes
O serments! ô parfums! ô baisers infinis!

THE BALCONY

*Mother of remembrances, mistress of mistresses,
O you, my every pleasure! O you, my every obligation!
You will recall the beauty of caresses,
The peacefulness of home, and the charm of evenings;
Mother of remembrances, mistress of mistresses,
Evenings lighted by the glow of the coals,
And evenings on the balcony, veiled by rosy mist,—
How sweet your breast seemed to me!
How kind your heart seemed to me!
We often spoke of imperishable things
On those evenings, lighted by the glow of the coals.
How beautiful was the sun on torrid evenings!
How vast is space! How powerful is the heart!
Leaning toward you, Queen of all adored ones,
I imagined that I breathed the fragrance of your blood.
How beautiful is the sun on torrid evenings!
The night became close, as if surrounded by walls,
And my eyes in the darkness sought out your eyes,
And I imbibed your breath, O sweetness, O venom!
And your feet became numb in my brotherly hands;
The night became close, as if surrounded by walls.
I know the art of evoking happy moments,
And I saw again my past, playing about your knees . . .
For why should one search for your languorous beauty
Any place except in your dear body and in your gentle heart?
I know the art of evoking happy moments!
Those vows, those perfumes, those endless kisses,
Were they reborn out of a depth beyond our reach,
As the rejuvenated sun rises again into the sky,
After it has bathed at the bottom of deep oceans?
O vows! O fragrance! O endless kisses!*

HARMONIE DU SOIR takes the form of a "pantoum", a Malayan verse pattern in which the second and fourth lines of each stanza become the first and third lines of the following stanza. Baudelaire's poem differs from the Malayan "pantoum" in one important respect. In the "pantoum" the last line repeats the first so that the poem becomes an endless circle. In HARMONIE DU SOIR, by contrast, the last line represents a point of arrival, the culmination of two converging trains of thought. Debussy preserves the poetic form of the oriental "pantoum" in his song setting, composed in 1889, the year of his encounter with Eastern music at the Paris Exposition. Just as the repeated lines of poetry take on different shades of meaning as different lines surround them, so the musical setting of these lines changes in repetition, either by transposition or by an alteration of the accompaniment. As in LE BALCON the chromaticism suggests a Wagnerian influence. In an evening reverie a lover turns to thoughts of the loved one to escape the chill of nothingness and the vague sadness of Nature.

HARMONIE DU SOIR

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige,
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir,
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige.
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir,
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige,
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir,
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige.
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.—
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir.

EVENING HARMONY

*Now comes that time when, trembling on its stem,
Each flower exhales fragrance like a censer;
The sounds and perfumes whirl in the evening air,
A melancholy waltz and a languorous intoxication.
Each flower exhales fragrance like a censer,
The violin vibrates like a heart in distress,
A melancholy waltz and a languorous intoxication,
The sky is sad and beautiful, like a great altar;
The violin vibrates like a heart in distress,
A tender heart, which abhors the vast and somber void!
The sky is sad and beautiful, like a great altar,
The sun has drowned in its own blood, which is congealing.
A tender heart, which abhors the vast and somber void,
Recalls all memories of the luminous past.
The sun has drowned in its own blood, which is congealing,—
My memory of you shines like a monstrance.*

LE JET D'EAU was also composed in 1889; however, there is less of Wagner and more of Borodin in the setting of this erotic lyric, with its dissonances, its seconds, its transparent flow. In the sparkling play of a fountain a lover sees mirrored the fierce intensity and the subtle melancholy of his passion.

LE JET D'EAU

Tes beaux yeux sont las, pauvre amante!
 Reste longtemps sans les rouvrir,
 Dans cette pose nonchalante où t'a surprise le plaisir.
 Dans la cour le jet d'eau qui jase
 Et ne se tait ni nuit ni jour,
 Entretient doucement l'extase
 Où ce soir m'a plongé l'amour.
 La gerbe d'eau qui berce
 Ses mille fleurs,
 Que la lune traverse
 De ses pâleurs,
 Tombe comme une averse
 De larges pleurs.
 Ainsi ton âme qu'incendie
 L'éclair brûlant des voluptés,
 S'élançe, rapide et hardie
 Vers les vastes cieus enchantés.
 Puis, elle s'épanche, mourante
 En un flot de triste langueur,
 Qui par une invisible pente
 Descend jusqu'au fond de mon cœur.
 O toi, que la nuit rend si belle,
 Qu'il m'est doux, penché vers tes seins,
 D'écouter la plainte éternelle
 Qui sanglote dans les bassins!
 Lune, eau sonore, nuit bénie,
 Arbres qui frissonnez autour,—
 Votre pure mélancolie
 Est le miroir de mon amour.

THE FOUNTAIN

*Your beautiful eyes are weary, my poor beloved!
 Rest a while without opening them,
 In this carefree pose
 In which pleasure has come upon you.
 In the courtyard, the fountain which chatters
 And never ceases, day or night,
 Sustains sweetly the ecstasy
 In which love has engulfed me tonight.
 The column of water which rocks
 Its thousand flowers,
 Which the moon penetrates
 With its pale light,
 Falls like a shower
 Of large tears.
 And so your soul, setting aflame
 The fiery lightning of desire,
 Leaps quickly and fearlessly
 Toward the vast, enchanted skies.
 Then it diffuses, dying
 In a wave of sad languor
 Which, by way of an invisible incline,
 Descends to the depths of my heart.
 Oh, you, whom the night makes so beautiful,
 I find it sweet, leaning against your bosom,
 To listen to the eternal lament
 That sobs in the fountain.
 Moon, sonorous water, blessed night,
 Trees trembling all about,—
 Your pure melancholy
 Is the reflection of my love.*

RECUEILLEMENT was completed circa 1888 and is a complete contrast to the sensual atmosphere of LE JET D'EAU. Debussy emphasizes the separation between those to whom night brings peace and those to whom it brings anxiety. It is not simply night which approaches; it is the night at the end of Life, an allegory for the death of Sorrow. Intimations of mortality pervade the text. Night comes for all mortals but the poet urges his Sorrow to accept it with equanimity and leads her away from the multitude of mortals who, driven by the "whip of Pleasure", gather only flowers of remorse. The obscurity and oblivion which accompany the whole-tone scale seem well suited to express resignation toward approaching death, while the piquant quality of the chromatic scale can well be applied to the "whip of Pleasure".

RECUEILLEMENT

Sois sage, ô ma douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille;
 Tu réclamaïs le soir: il descend, le voici!
 Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville.
 Aux uns portant la paix, aux autres le souci.
 Pendant que des mortels la multitude vile,
 Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci,
 Va cueillir des remords dans la fête servile.
 Ma douleur, donne moi la main,
 Viens par ici, loin d'eux.
 Vois se pencher les défunes Années
 Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées.
 Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant,
 Le soleil moribond s'endormir sous une arche;
 Et, comme un long linceul trainant à l'Orient,
 Entends, ma chère, entends la douce nuit qui marche.

INTROSPECTION

*Be wise, oh my sorrow, and behave more calmly;
 You wished for the evening: it descends, it is here!
 A dark haze envelopes the city,
 Bringing to some peace, to others anxiety.
 While the base multitude of mortals,
 Under the whip of Pleasure, that merciless executioner,
 Will suffer the pangs of remorse at the lowly feast,
 Sorrow of mine, give me your hand,
 Come hither, far away from them.
 See the dead years leaning
 Over the balconies of heaven, in faded garments.
 See scornfully smiling Regret emerge from the depths of
 the waters,
 The dying sun going to sleep beneath an arch;
 And, like a long shroud trailing towards the East,
 Hear, my beloved, hear the gentle night approaching.*

LE JET D'EAU was also composed in 1889; however, there is less of Wagner and more of Borodin in the setting of this erotic lyric, with its dissonances, its seconds, its transparent flow. In the sparkling play of a fountain a lover sees mirrored the fierce intensity and the subtle melancholy of his passion.

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 Et, comme un long linceul trainant à l'Orient,
 Entends, ma chère, entends la douce nuit qui marche.

INTROSPECTION

*Be wise, oh my sorrow, and behave more calmly;
 You wished for the evening: it descends, it is here!
 A dark haze envelopes the city,
 Bringing to some peace, to others anxiety.
 While the base multitude of mortals,
 Under the whip of Pleasure, that merciless executioner,
 Will suffer the pangs of remorse at the lowly feast,
 Sorrow of mine, give me your hand,
 Come hither, far away from them.
 See the dead years leaning
 Over the balconies of heaven, in faded garments.
 See scornfully smiling Regret emerge from the depths of
 the waters,
 The dying sun going to sleep beneath an arch;
 And, like a long shroud trailing towards the East,
 Hear, my beloved, hear the gentle night approaching.*

LA MORT DES AMANTS was composed in 1887 and was, therefore, actually the first of the CINQ POÈMES in order of composition. It is a song in strophic form and is the least Wagnerian of the five songs. LA MORT DES AMANTS is an apotheosis of passion, in which two souls burn out like twin torches in the flame of their final hours together. Mirrored in their supreme unity, they are awakened by an angel. Baudelaire exploits the traditional metaphor in which love complements death and enlists the language of sensual pleasure to speculate about death. In a personal reinterpretation of Roman Catholic theology, Baudelaire suggests that just as the sexual impulse is renewed after the act of love, so the spirit is reanimated after death.

LA MORT DES AMANTS

Nous aurons des lits pleins d'odeurs légères,
Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux;
Et d'étranges fleurs sur des étagères,
Écloses pour nous sous des cieus plus beaux,
Usant à l'envi leurs caleurs dernières;
Nos deux cœurs seront deux vastes flambeaux,
Qui réfléchiront leurs doubles lumières
Dans nos deux esprits, ces miroirs jumeaux.
Un soir fait de rose et de bleu mystique
Nous échangerons un éclair unique,
Comme un long sanglot tout chargé d'adieu,
Et plus tard un ange, entrouvrant les portes,
Viendra ranimer, fidèle et joyeux,
Les miroirs ternis et les flammes mortes.

THE DEATH OF LOVERS

*We shall have beds scented with faint perfumes,
Divans sunken like tombs,
And strange flowers on the shelves,
Unfolding for us beneath skies more lovely,
Vying with each other, in their expiring fires;
Our two hearts will be two great torches,
Reflecting their double light
In our two spirits, these twin mirrors.
On an evening spun of rose and mystic blue
We shall exchange a single lightning flash,
Like a long sob charged with parting,
And later, an angel, opening the gates,
Will restore to life, faithful and joyful,
The tarnished mirrors and the extinct flames.*

IV

For nearly a decade beginning around 1893 Debussy's closest friend was Pierre Louÿs. The only music to emerge from the decade of friendship is that associated with the CHANSONS DE BILITIS, one of the most celebrated literary hoaxes of the nineteenth century. Early in 1895 Louÿs published what purported to be a French translation of an ancient Greek poetess named Bilitis. It deceived even scholars. The first of three poems which Debussy set to music from the Bilitis collection was LA FLÛTE DE PAN. The choice of this poem reflects Debussy's attraction to the flute as an instrument of pure melody. By modal harmonies Debussy invokes the pagan spirit of Greece. At the outset is a charming example of the whole-tone scale. Sustained by a mobile accompaniment of alternating common chords, a syrinx-like melody ensues. This leads into a rhythmically more complex section, where the text refers to the chant of the green frogs. A declamatory passage in which the accompaniment employs a succession of fifths brings back, for the conclusion, the flute refrain of the opening.

LA FLÛTE DE PAN

Pour le jour des Hyacinthies,
Il m'a donné une syrinx faite
De roseaux bien taillés,
Unis avec la blanche cire
Qui est douce à mes lèvres comme le miel.
Il m'apprend à jouer, assise sur ses genoux;
Mais je suis un peu tremblante.
Il en joue après moi, si doucement
Que je l'entends à peine.
Nous n'avons rien à nous dire,
Tant nous sommes près l'un de l'autre;
Mais nos chansons veulent se répondre,
Et tour à tour nos bouches
S'unissent sur la flûte.
Il est tard;
Voici le chant des grenouilles vertes
Qui commence avec la nuit.
Ma mère ne croira jamais
Que je suis restée si longtemps
À chercher ma ceinture perdue.

THE FLUTE OF PAN

*On this day of Hyacinthus,
He has given me a pipe made
Of well-cut reeds,
Joined together with the white wax
That is as sweet as honey on my lips.
He teaches me to play, while I sit on his knees;
But I tremble just a little.
He plays it after me, so softly
That I can hardly hear him.
We have nothing to say,
So close are we to one another;
But our songs want to harmonize,
And gradually our lips
Are united on the flute.
It is late;
Here is the chant of the green frogs
That begins with the night.
My mother will never believe
That I stayed out so long
In search of my lost belt.*

LA CHEVELURE is the most passionate and the most human of the Bilitis set. Pan tells Bilitis of his dream and of their ecstatic fusion of body and soul. It is a dream of ecstatic love sounding strangely archaic by the use of reiterated notes in the vocal line.

LA CHEVELURE

Il m'a dit: "Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé.
 J'avais ta chevelure autour de mon cou.
 J'avais tes cheveux comme un collier noir
 Autour de ma nuque et sur ma poitrine."
 "Je les caressais, et c'étaient les miens;
 Et nous étions liés pour toujours ainsi,
 Par la même chevelure, la bouche sur la bouche,
 Ainsi que deux lauriers n'ont souvent qu'une racine."
 "Et peu à peu, il m'a semblé,
 Tant nos membres étaient confondus,
 Que je devenais toi-même,
 Ou que tu entrais en moi comme mon songe."
 Quand il eut achevé,
 Il mit doucement ses mains sur mes épaules,
 Et il me regarda d'un regard si tendre,
 Que je baissai les yeux avec un frisson.

THE TRESSES

*He told me: "Last night I dreamed.
 I had your tresses around my neck.
 I wore your locks like a dark chain
 Around my neck and on my breast.
 I caressed them and they were my own;
 And we were thus forever united,
 By the same tresses, lips upon lips,
 As two laurels often have but one root.
 And gradually, it seemed to me,
 So much were our limbs entwined,
 That I became you,
 Or that you entered into me, like my dream."
 When he had finished,
 He gently laid his hands upon my shoulders,
 And he looked at me with a glance so tender
 That I cast down my eyes and trembled.*

In LE TOMBEAU DES NAIADES the chantlike voice part moves forward, as across a fresco or a frieze, with the accompaniment conspiring to give it the solemnity of a slow march. A glacial snowscape, an evocation of crystal colours of drift-ice and icicles, is depicted. Where do they lead, these mysterious footsteps marked out across the snow? Bilitis is following the lonely trail of the faun to the distant tomb of the naiads. The song illustrates each stage of her slow, shivering pursuit, and the reward at the end is the sight not of any trace of the laughing naiads, but of the infinitely wide and pale expanse of a wintry sky reflected through the great blocks of ice which Pan has hewed from the naiads' tomb. The fervour of Bilitis is transformed in this music into a remote, icy and colourless disillusionment.

LE TOMBEAU DES NAIADES

Le long du bois couvert de givre, je marchais;
 Mes cheveux devant ma bouche
 Se fleurissaient de petits glaçons,
 Et mes sandales étaient lourdes
 De neige fangeuse et tassée.
 Il me dit: "Que cherches-tu?"
 Je suis la trace du satyre.
 Ses petits pas fourchus alternent
 Comme des trous dans un manteau blanc.
 Il me dit: "Les satyres sont morts.
 Les satyres et les nymphes aussi.
 Depuis trente ans, il n'a pas fait un hiver aussi terrible.
 La trace que tu vois est celle d'un bouc.
 Mais restons ici, où est leur tombeau."
 Et avec le fer de sa houe il cassa la glace
 De la source où jadis riaient les naïades.
 Il prenait de grands morceaux froids,
 Et les soulevant vers le ciel pâle,
 Il regardait au travers.

THE TOMB OF THE NAIADS

*I wandered along the frost-covered woods;
 My hair, blowing before my mouth,
 Was adorned with tiny icicles,
 And my sandals were heavy
 With soiled clods of snow.
 He asked me: "What are you looking for?"
 I follow the trace of the Satyr.
 His little hoofprints alternate
 Like holes in a white coat.
 He told me: "The Satyrs are dead,
 The Satyrs and also the Nymphs.
 In thirty years there has been no winter as terrible as this.
 The hoofprint which you see is that of a buck.
 But let us stay here, on the site of their tomb."
 And with the iron of his hatchet he broke through the ice
 Of the spring where the Naiads once had laughed.
 He took large frozen pieces,
 And, holding them toward the pale sky,
 He peered through them.*