

The Language of Enchantment:

Childhood and Fairytale in the Music of Maurice Ravel

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Chapter Five

The genie in the bottle: Creating a musical fairytale

Il était une fois un Roi et une Reine
qui étaient si fâchés de n'avoir point d'enfants, si fâchés qu'on ne saurait dire.
Ils allèrent à toutes les eaux du monde, vœux, pèlerinages, menues dévotions;
tout fut mis en œuvre, et rien n'y faisait...¹

Charles Perrault

5.1 Introduction

While the resonances and rhythms of the French language frequently shaped Ravel's musical phrases and instrumental colours, he also made use of literary forms and idioms on a more fundamental and far-reaching level. In the 'Pantomime' of his Piano Trio (1914), for example, Ravel adopted the complex structure of Indonesian *pantomime* poetry, while in his piano triptych *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), subtly masked and manipulated sonata forms elucidate three extra-musical narratives.² This chapter contends that the three major works in this study were also shaped by literary forms: *Ma mère l'Oye*, the *Trois chansons* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* deliberately engage with the structures and narrative conventions of the fairytale.

Many of these structures and conventions have natural correspondences with musical idioms: patterns of action and reaction, strong narratives, clearly defined forms and a directness and simplicity of expression. In his 'Autobiographical Sketch' Ravel acknowledged the importance of this last facet of the fairytale relative to *Ma mère l'Oye*, a passage reiterated here because of its centrality to the argument:

¹ 'Once upon a time, there lived a king and queen, who were more grieved than words could tell, for they had no children. They tried all the waters of the world, vows, pilgrimages, prayers: they did everything that could be done and all to no avail.' Charles Perrault, 'La belle au bois dormant', in *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye*, ed. Gilbert Roger (Paris: Garnier, 1967), p. 97.

² See Roy Howat, 'Ravel and the Piano', pp. 81-7. As Howat puts it, 'if the analytical language [...] keeps veering towards the picturesque, it is because of how strongly the piece's form acts out its story' (p. 85).

The desire to evoke the poetry of childhood naturally led me to simplify my style and pare down [*dépouiller*] my writing.³

Through discussion of Ravel's construction and manipulation of both musical and dramatic fairytale narratives in the three principal works under investigation here, this chapter also deals with the important questions of how and why Ravel 'pared down' his writing in *Ma mère l'Oye*, and whether he applied similar principles to his other 'fairytale' works. It thus initiates a discussion of the connections between fairytales, an unornamented or *dépouillé* manner of writing, and the 'poetry of childhood', an issue that resonates through later chapters.

5.2 'Once upon a time': constructing a fairytale narrative

The construction and form of the fairytale have been the subject of scholarly appraisal since the first years of the twentieth century. In 1910 Antti Aarne published his *Verzeichnis der Marchentypen*, which took the fairytales published by the Brothers Grimm as the basis for a comprehensive system of classification. Aarne's work was later translated and substantially enlarged upon by Stith Thompson to encompass some 2500 basic fairytale plots; the Aarne-Thompson system remains the standard method of fairytale classification.⁴ The Russian folklorist and structuralist Vladimir Propp responded to Aarne's work with his *Morphology of the folktale* (published in 1928 but not widely known until it appeared in English translation in 1968). Propp argued that Aarne focussed too much on broad fairytale structures, excluding the functions and importance of particular recurrent motifs. He offered instead a tabulated analysis of what he claimed were all the possible motifs and functions of traditional Russian tales (which can be assembled in certain combinations or orders). As he put it:

Just as the characteristics and functions of deities are transferred from one to another, and, finally, are even carried over to Christian saints, the functions of certain tale personages are likewise transferred to other personages. [...] One may say that the number of functions is extremely small, whereas the number of personages is extremely large. This explains the two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and colour, and on the other hand, its no less striking uniformity, its repetition.⁵

³ Maurice Ravel, 'Biographical Sketch', quoted in Orenstein (ed.), *Maurice Ravel: Lettres, écrits, entretiens*, p. 45.

⁴ Antti Aarne, *The types of the folktale: A classification and bibliography*, translated and expanded by Stith Thompson (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961).

⁵ Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: Texas UP, 1968), pp. 20-1.

Although many of Propp's conclusions have subsequently been challenged (they contain numerous generalisations and assumptions that spring from his desire to identify and construct a sort of Ur-fairytale⁶) the work remains a standard point of reference and Propp's central contention, that all fairytales are constructed after similar narrative conventions, is generally accepted. This fairytale narrative typically progresses according to the following basic structure: the scene is set in a distant land, 'once upon a time'; the hero is compelled to leave home and undertake a journey (to reverse a curse or enchantment perhaps, or simply to seek their fortune); there is a magical encounter of some kind, which frequently involves the bestowing of a gift or the promise of aid in return for certain favours; the hero continues to the point of climax, where the villain or curse is directly confronted and broken with the aid of the magical helper or agent; and the hero receives some glorious reward – a perfect spouse, a kingdom, or riches beyond compare.

Supplementing this basic narrative, amongst the most important of fairytale idioms are the particular patterns of action and reaction that shape the stories. We know that any interdiction will be violated – '*don't* open the silver trunk!' or 'you *must* return before nightfall' – just as we know that an animal helped by the hero will turn out to have magical powers or the capacity to somehow smooth their path later in the story. The balance and progression of the narrative is also clearly defined: we are always aware of where we are in the story and can guess what sort of event will happen next, even if we do not know exactly what form it will take.

Propp's reductionist view of the fairytale contrasts with the attitude of scholars like J.R.R. Tolkien, who took issue with those who sought to reduce the vast repertory of fairytales to a single Ur-tale. Good philologist that he was, Tolkien wrote that:

Statements of that kind may express (in undue abbreviation) some element of truth; but they are not true in a fairy-story sense, they are not true in art or literature. It is precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count.⁷

Most fairytales are stripped of unnecessary verbiage and exist with the barest minimum of descriptive detail. Yet, as Tolkien argued, it is the richness inherent in

⁶ See for example Swann Jones, *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination*, pp. 14-15.

⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', p. 123.

those brief details – the flies asleep on the walls in Perrault’s *La Belle au bois dormant*, or the very fact that Cinderella’s slipper was made of glass – that give the stories their life and make them memorable and beloved.

Max Lüthi wrote that ‘the fairytale frees things and people from their natural context and places them in new relationships, which can also be easily dissolved’.⁸ Therefore, just as a king can live in a castle, so can an ogre (or even, in one instance, a giant fish), while a friendless young woman can come to a happy domestic arrangement with seven bachelor dwarves. Rootless or isolated events, places and characters can thus be blended or juxtaposed in innumerable ways, but the tale itself always maintains its integrity and its structure.

These three key elements of the fairytale – clear structures, details that illuminate their narratives, and the juxtaposition and combination of isolated images – may also be seen as characteristic of Ravel’s *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, *Trois chansons* and *Ma mère l’Oye*. Each of these works is shaped by strong narratives that clearly derive from the conventions and idioms of the fairytale. All three juxtapose and combine disparate characters, images and musical material, and all three narratives are enlivened by meticulous, vivid and frequently surprising detail.

L’Enfant et les sortilèges traces a straightforward fairytale plot, which may seem on first glance to lack the high adventure and the many twists and turns of the favourites of the fairytale canon. The Child begins the opera more anti-hero than hero, and while his character develops as the opera progresses, he is never exactly heroic. He fights no dragons, breaks no spells – in fact, he never leaves the confines of his house and garden. Yet the opera has all the classic ingredients of a good fairytale: a fast-moving plot with a consistent and convincing narrative; enchantments, talking animals and a Princess; a protagonist faced with difficulty and danger; and a happy ending with a clear moral. The story of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* is set in motion by one of the commonest of all fairytale premises: an instruction (to work) is disobeyed and the consequences of this violation are severe. The Child’s initial disobedience is annulled by his final act of repentance; that this should take the form of binding a squirrel’s paw when he had previously injured another squirrel is both a structurally apt mirroring of events and a perfect fairytale response.

⁸ Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, p. 77.

L'Enfant et les sortilèges communicates a text, a story that is told directly by performers to audiences. The narrative of the instrumental work *Ma mère l'Oye*, by contrast, is necessarily more subtle. Ravel drew upon four different tales – Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant' and 'Petit Poucet', Mme d'Aulnoy's 'Le serpent vert' ('Laideronnette') and Mme Leprince de Beaumont's 'La Belle et la Bête'. Ravel placed excerpts from the tales as epigraphs to the three middle movements, thus implying that none of the movements is intended to convey the story as a whole, but simply a brief portion of it.⁹ 'Petit Poucet' is headed with Perrault's description of Tom Thumb and his brothers lost in the woods, unable to find their way home as night is falling:

He thought that he would be able to find his way easily using the bread that he had scattered everywhere he passed, but he was surprised when he could not find a single crumb: the birds had come and eaten them all.

In 'Laideronnette', Ravel illustrated Mme d'Aulnoy's description of the princess Laideronnette taking her bath, accompanied by an orchestra of the little Pagodes and Pagodines:

She undressed and got into the bath. Immediately the Pagodes and Pagodines began to sing and play instruments: some had theorbos made of walnut shells, others had viols made of almond shells, for it was necessary to proportion the instruments to their sizes.

'Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête' is the only piece in the set whose epigraph illustrates more than one point of its story:

'When I think of your kind heart, you do not seem so ugly to me.'
 'Oh! Yes my lady, I have a good heart, but I am a monster.'
 'There are many men who are more monstrous than you.'
 'If I had the wit I would make you a grand compliment to thank you, but I am only a Beast.'

'Beauty, will you be my wife?'
 'No, Beast!'

'I die content because I have had the pleasure of seeing you one last time.'
 'No, my dear Beast, you will not die: you will live and become my husband!'
 The Beast disappeared and in his place she saw a prince more beautiful than Cupid himself, who thanked her for releasing him from his enchantment.

Ravel's inclusion of these epigraphs reinforces the importance of the narrative that is threaded through this purely instrumental work. These texts, however, are not

⁹ The opening 'Pavane' has no epigraph but it plainly represents only the century-long sleep of the Princess and not the scenes of her christening or eventual awakening.

necessarily provided for the audience, who must listen without the concrete evidence of words.

In 1912 Ravel combined the five movements of *Ma mère l'Oye* into a short ballet, which opened at the Théâtre des Arts on 29 January 1912. Ravel's scenario demanded, besides the five completed movements, the composition of an additional prelude, an opening scene ('Danse du rouet') and several brief interludes connecting the scenes. The ballet's narrative is shaped around the story of the Sleeping Beauty, who, in the first scene, pricks her finger on the spinning wheel and is prepared by her courtiers for her long sleep. The three central movements become a dream sequence or *divertissement*, stories told at the instigation of the Good Fairy to entertain her as she sleeps. The movements were re-ordered, so that 'La Belle et la Bête' precedes 'Petit Poucet' and 'Laideronnette', an arrangement that suggests a gentle equivalence between the Sleeping Beauty slipping into her deep dreaming and the Beauty who encounters the Beast.¹⁰ Finally, Prince Charming arrives to restore the princess to wakefulness and a 'happy ever after' in the 'Jardin féérique'.

While the ballet created a clear and convincing new story from the five independent movements of *Ma mère l'Oye*, a strong narrative sense also underlies the original suite. As *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* shows, fairytales are frequently made up of a series of episodes that can be treated quite independently: Cinderella at the ball is a very different character from the household drudge sifting lentils from ashes, and the fairy godmother's transformation of pumpkins into coaches and rats into horses occupies a separate sphere from the royal herald's painstaking and decidedly unmagical search for the owner of the glass slipper. The five movements of the *Ma mère l'Oye* suite juxtapose the independence and integrity of these separate episodes with an overarching narrative.

The choice and ordering of the scenes, characters and events of the suite clearly traces the basic fairytale narrative outlined above; that the three central movements take their texts respectively from near the beginning, the middle and the end of their stories

¹⁰ Deborah Mawer suggests that this reordering was also done in order to separate the two tales in which the revelation of love breaks an enchantment (Laideronnette and her Green Serpent have, like the Beast, been disguised by curses): 'In the Comtesse d'Aulnoy's story, at the lifting of curses, a princess and a king are revealed who, having fallen in love, inevitably marry. In turn, this story constitutes an appropriate final dream for Sleeping Beauty – a tale within a tale.' (Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 44.)

heightens this sense of narrative progression. The scene is set in the ‘Pavane’, which gives the air of mystery and distance that is the essence of the ‘once upon a time’ and suggests the laying of an enchantment. ‘Petit Poucet’ sees the hero setting out on a journey or quest, wandering through the woods (the quintessential fairytale location) in need of guidance. The little *pagodes* and *pagodines* of ‘Laideronnette’ provide an encounter that is entirely magical, heightened by the brilliance and exoticism of its key signature of F# major, as far removed as it could possibly be from the C minor of ‘Petit Poucet’. ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’ takes us to the most dark and dangerous part of the quest, where an enchantment is finally broken, and ‘they all lived happily ever after’ in the ‘Jardin féérique’.

5.3 ‘And so he set out upon a journey’

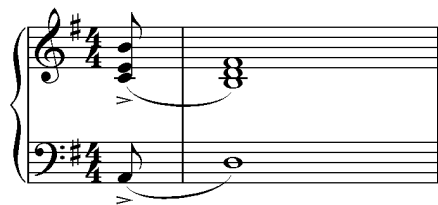
The idea of a journey leading to some kind of transformation or revelation is central to many fairytales. Protagonists journey into the unknown, beyond the safety of home and the family. This theme has an endless appeal to listening children, for it stimulates the creative imagination – who knows what could be lurking in the woods? The journey also allows children to enjoy the challenges and terrors of unfamiliar lands, secure in the knowledge of the happy ending and in the comforts of home and the family. There is the added appeal of the final transformation: beast into prince, ash-bound Cinderella into radiant princess. These transformations and revelations perhaps help children to imagine processes of growth and development, a magical sort of ‘when I grow up’. The transformations may be larger-than-life and impossible but they are nevertheless symbolic of the possibilities inherent in the child.

The journey is also a fairytale motif with a natural musical correspondence: imagery of travel is often used to describe the development of motives and gestures and the manipulation of larger forms to create tension, expectation and final satisfying arrival. In a traditional fairytale the maintenance of the *status quo* is important: one might return to one’s home but see it with new eyes, or a milkmaid who marries a prince will turn out to have been a princess all along. Similarly, many musical works end with the initial trouble or problem resolved (the second subject returns in the tonic), and the world resumes a happy normality. This sense of large-scale resolution is easily discerned in *Ma mère l’Oye*, whose shimmering C major final movement, ‘Le jardin

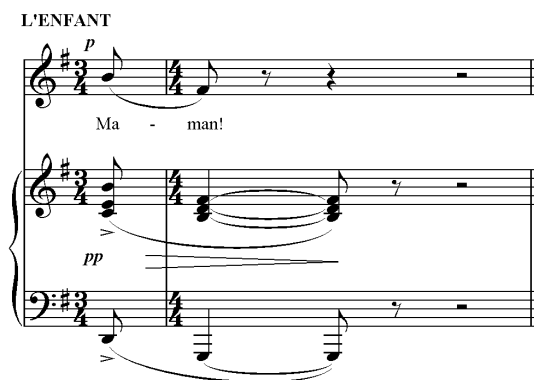
féérique’, gently resolves the A Æolian poignancy of the ‘Pavane’. A similar sense of broad musical mirroring shapes the conclusion of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*. In the concluding moments of the opera, the wandering oboe melody that opened the work returns, identical but for the addition of two solo violins, a blending of orchestral timbres that neatly encapsulates the reconciliation of the Child with his world, as Chapter Six explores. The final bar sees a reprise of the cadence particularly associated with Maman. However, where in the first scene this cadence functioned effectively as an imperfect progression (a ii-V bass), in the last bar of the opera it becomes V-I, a perfect cadence. The modal colouring in each progression, with an ersatz relative minor ending the imperfect cadence (B minor for D major), lets Ravel maintain exactly the same harmony (and falling melodic fourth) above the bass each time.¹¹ The final resolution is unexpected but so fitting it could not be otherwise.

Example 5.1 *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*: the ‘Maman’ cadence

a. Opening scene, Fig. 3+3: Imperfect cadence



b. Final bars, Fig. 154+2: Perfect cadence



¹¹ This results in a major seventh chord to end the opera (Ex. 5.1b), a final dissonance that is one of Ravel’s compositional signatures. Roy Howat notes that almost three-quarters of Ravel’s solo piano pieces ‘open or close (or both) with a prominent minor second or major seventh clash’ (‘Ravel and the piano’, p. 76). Examples of concluding major seventh/minor second clashes include *Jeux d’eau*, the last movement of the *Sonatine* and the ‘Menuet’ from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

The Child of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* may not go journeying in a physical sense, but his story nevertheless traces the path of the traditional wandering hero, who meets all sorts of magical characters in his quest. The journey itself, however, is internalised, symbolised in the Child's own path towards repentance. The Child's binding of the squirrel's paw is a moment of symbolic transformation, a revelation of the hero's true nature that has the same dramatic function as the breaking of an enchantment. The Child thus experiences the magical transformation of fairytales expressed not as outward beauty or wealth but in inner reactions and behaviours: by the end of the opera the animals sing 'He is good, the Child, he is wise...' At the end of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* the Child is still a Child, but through his repentance and newfound maturity the world has changed for the better.

Themes of journeying and transformation are central to each of the four individual stories that Ravel drew upon in *Ma mère l'Oye*: the Prince traverses the woods to wake the Sleeping Beauty, Petit Poucet and his brothers go on a journey that will eventually result in the rewards of seven-league boots and wealth beyond compare; and the Beauty passes through the woods to the abode of the Beast/Prince. Cursed with ugliness by a malicious fairy at her christening, Laideronnette ('Little Ugly') goes to live in a secluded castle, but one day finds an abandoned boat that carries her across the sea to the fantastic land of the Pagodes and Pagodines, where she meets her Serpent/Prince. The wandering melodies of 'Petit Poucet' and the encounters with exoticism in 'Laideronnette' immediately convey a sense of exploration and travel.

In 'La Belle et la Bête', Ravel presents not merely the Beast, but the Beauty too undergoing a process of growth and revelation. When the Beauty's theme (A) returns in bar 106 it is superimposed upon the grumblings of the Beast (B). Ravel had used a similar device in 'Laideronnette', but in that case the black-note pentatonicism of both A and B sections ensured the consonance of their combination. In this case, the gentle modal harmonies of the A section are distorted and darkened by the chromatic movement of the Beast's theme, heightening the tension and suggesting perhaps the Beauty's internal struggles, as well as her final desperate quest to find and rescue the Beast. Here, together with the traditional fairytale journey, we find the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images: Beauty and Beast, lyrical waltz and grumbling discord.

Ravel would do something very similar a decade and a half later, when he superimposed a Teacup's *chinoiserie* in F upon the G♭ foxtrot of a Wedgwood Teapot.

When Ravel wrote his own fairytales for the *Trois chansons* of 1914-15, he drew upon images of travel and exploration once more. Nicolette goes wandering in the fields where she meets her wolf, page and ugly lord, while the singer of 'Trois beaux oiseaux' travels vicariously through the birds themselves. In 'Ronde', however, the young people are first told not to go into the woods at all, and finally they make the decision not to go there anyway, since the magical creatures have abandoned it. The journey itself is thus disallowed and the story is stalled almost before it begins. This denial of our expectations is symbolic of the clever and ironic manipulation of the fairytale narrative that characterises the *Trois chansons*.

5.4 'À simplifier ma manière et à dépouiller mon écriture'

Literary fairytales are notable for their clarity of form, character and expression. There are no shades of grey in fairytales, no uncertainty of structure, perspective or motif. Notwithstanding their ritual elegance, the language of the stories is generally simple and straightforward. Sentences are usually brief and direct; there are no circumlocutory phrases and few long words. Characters are rapidly sketched but instantly identifiable and their predilection to good or evil is never in doubt.¹² The princess 'as good as she was beautiful', the 'poor but honest' woodcutter, the jealous ugly stepsister – we have all encountered these characters and can recognise them as soon as they appear.

Ravel acknowledged the importance of clarity, simplicity and restraint in his own summation of *Ma mère l'Oye*, as quoted above.¹³ While these qualities can also be traced in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and the *Trois chansons*, this *dépouillement* was inflected in very different ways across each of these three works.

Pianistically straightforward (although demanding in interpretative and ensemble terms), *Ma mère l'Oye* is characterised by its open, sparse textures. The four voices in

¹² The more complex Child of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, initially rebellious and finally 'good', is inside his fairytale but not of it, as Chapter Six explores.

¹³ As a verb, his word *dépouiller* may be best translated as 'to strip [back]', or 'pare down'; as an adjective (*dépouillé*) and in the poetic sense, the closest rendering is perhaps 'unornamented'.

the final bars of the ‘Pavane’ are spread across four octaves, while the reprise of the opening melody in bars 60-67 of ‘Petit Poucet’ is doubled across not one octave but two, allowing a remarkable sense of spaciousness. Perhaps the best demonstration of the suite’s *dépouillé* quality is the fact that it telescopes into a piano solo with very few alterations or omitted notes. The effect of these open textures is a sense of straightforwardness and honesty. Nothing can be hidden here, and there is neither illusion nor trickery.

Perhaps most importantly, Ravel achieves his ‘unornamented’ effect through the reduction of melodic material to the barest minimum. In each of the movements of *Ma mère l’Oye*, there is a continual sense of development and expansion from a small motivic cell. This quality – a musical voyage of discovery – again mirrors the journeying of the fairytale. The ‘Pavane’ is based entirely on the simple modal motif of the first bar which is repeated, loosely inverted and effectively augmented across the entire movement, the recurring tie across the half-bar acting as a referential anchor (Ex. 5.2).

Example 5.2 ‘Pavane de la belle au bois dormant’

a. Bar 1 (tonic)



b. Bar 5: Outline of bar 1 inverted (modal dominant)



c. Bar 9: Elaboration of a and b combined (implied relative major)



‘Petit Poucet’ is characterised by its relentlessly vague flow of melody, which wanders unchecked by the irregular and almost arbitrary barlines, accompanied by restless quavers that refuse to settle in any key. However, despite this seemingly loose

construction, the movement's melodic material is tightly focused. Both of the principal motives (A, bars 4-8, and B, bars 12-15) present a fragment of melody that is immediately reprised in altered form (A/, bars 9-11 and B/, bars 15-19, Ex. 5.3), both are characterised by their melodic descent from V to I, and both offset their general 'geotropism'¹⁴ with upward steps. Bars 19-22, labelled in Example 5.3 as A/B, complete the B trope by recalling A/ with their higher pitch, matching time signatures and downward melodic slopes.

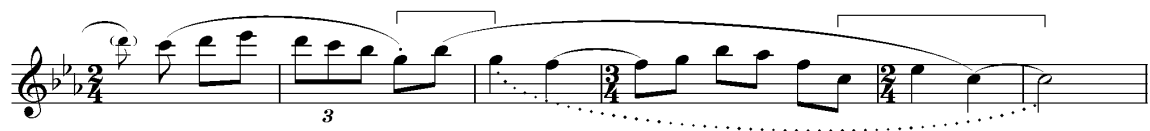
Example 5.3 'Petit Poucet', bars 4-11 (A) and 12-21 (B) (melody only)

[Descending V to I melodic motion shown by dotted slurs; stepwise pairs shown in brackets.]



This congruity of melodic material is typified in the climactic central passage (Ex. 5.4), which uses elements of both tropes and is approached through sequential repetition of the three-note rising figure that pervades trope A above (Example 4.1 above constitutes the reprise of this sequential passage, bars 55-58). The climax is launched by the three-note figure (bar 33), followed by a single triplet group whose rhythm echoes bar 17 (trope B). The metric shifts and descending figuration of bars 9-11 and 19-21 are then recalled across bars 35-38 (indicated by the dotted slur), while the toggling thirds (bracketed) recall bars 12-13.

Example 5.4 'Petit Poucet', bars 33-38 (melody only)

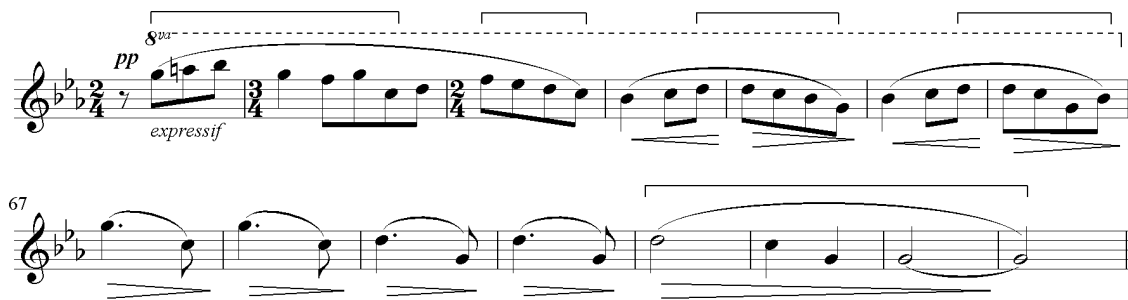


¹⁴ A term used by Vladimir Jankélévitch and Edward Lockspeiser in describing the tendency of Debussy's melodies to curl downwards (*Debussy et le mystère* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1949), pp. 89–100, *Debussy: his life and mind* (London: Cassell, 1965; reprinted Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 237–9).

While in the ‘Pavane’ Ravel progressively elaborated his opening motif, at the end of ‘Petit Poucet’ he did the reverse. His initial melody is here pared back to its barest outline, defined by a falling fifth and its intermediate step in bar 72 (Ex. 5.5.).

Example 5.5 ‘Petit Poucet’, bars 60-75 (melody only)

[Outlined falling fifths shown in brackets]



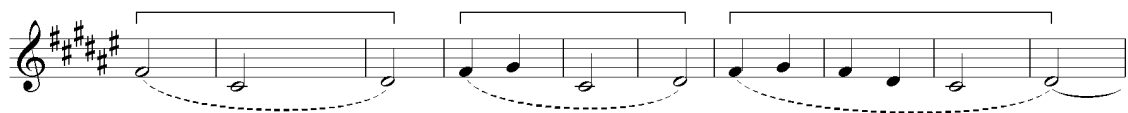
Ravel employs the same technique of skeletal *dépouillement* in ‘Laideronnette’. While the black-key pentatonicism gives the movement a natural unity, a more compelling basis for its melodic organisation can be found in the three notes F#-C#-D#. This motif, outlined across the opening melodic statement (Ex. 5.6a), is highlighted explicitly in the central gong-like passage (Ex. 5.6b).

Example 5.6 ‘Laideronnette’

a. Bars 9-13



b. Bars 65-7



This central (B) passage in fact traces with surprising exactitude the contours of the opening section’s arabesques, a direct example of Ravel’s *dépouillé* technique in action. Example 5.7 demonstrates the relationship of the two passages; the comparison is tabulated in Table 5.1.

Example 5.7 ‘Laideronnette’, *dépouillement* of A (bars 9-64) in B (bars 65-130)

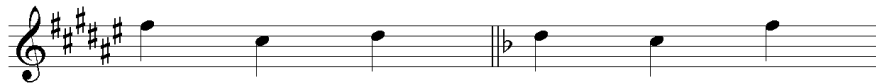
The musical score consists of six systems of staves. Each system has two staves: the top staff is labeled 'A' and the bottom staff is labeled 'B'. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. Dashed lines connect corresponding notes between the A and B staves across the systems, illustrating the 'dépouillement' (stripping away) of the A passage into the B passage. The A passages are more rhythmically active and ornamented, while the B passages are more melodic and stripped down.

Table 5.1 Comparison of A and B passages of ‘Laideronnette’

A	B
Bars 9-13 Figuration based around core F#-C#-D# motif. Heard three times, progressively more ornamented.	Bars 65-77 Repetition and development of F#-C#-D# motif. Heard three times, progressively more ornamented.
Bars 13-16 Sense of inversion of preceding phrase Downward movement across an octave.	Bars 79-89 Sense of inversion of preceding phrase (compare particularly bars 74-77 and 82-85). Downward movement across an octave
Bars 16-23 Repetition and extension of bars 9-16	Bars 89-104 Repetition and extension of bars 65-77.
Bars 24-31 Transition	[no direct equivalent]
Bars 32-37 Phrase begins with repeated C# (ornamented with D#), followed by a figuration that is immediately inverted	Bars 105-118 Phrase begins with repeated A#, followed by a figuration that is immediately inverted.
Bars 38-64 Opening fourth + second motif heard in retrograde (bars 38-39) Movement around a pivot note (bars 40-41). Bars 38-41 repeated in bars 42-45. Concluding figurations in bars 56-65 suggest a compression of the opening motif.	Bars 119-134 Bars 119-123 present bar 38 in inversion. Movement around a pivot note (bar 124). Bars 119-123 repeated and modified in bars 125-130. Bars 131-134 conclude by returning to opening motif; A and B heard together from Bar 136.

That same pervading three-note motif (F#-C#-D#), shorn of its sharps and turned into retrograde, then becomes none other than the main theme of ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’ (Ex. 5.8).¹⁵

Example 5.8 Characteristic three-note motifs of (left) ‘Laideronnette’ and (right) ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’



In ‘La Belle et la Bête’, this three-note pattern occurs twice within the first nine-note phrase, with an octave variant (Ex. 5.9):

Example 5.9 ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’, bars 5-8



This defining motivic combination of a second and a fourth recurs consistently throughout the Beauty’s music. It also has a hidden correspondence in the Beast’s subject, which appears on a first glance unrelated to that of the Beauty. In fact the motive is built on the diminished form of the same two intervals, minor seconds (one spelt as a diminished octave) and a meticulously-spelt diminished fourth (Ex. 5.10).

Example 5.10 ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’, bars 49-53



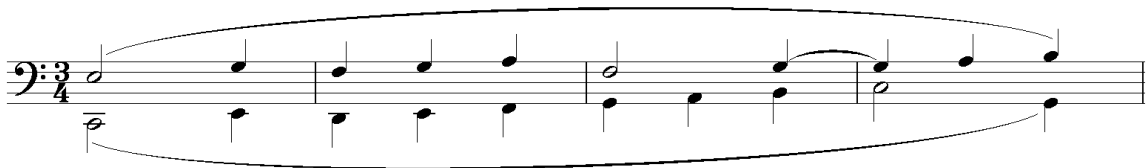
The expansiveness and the continually unfolding melody of ‘Le jardin féérique’ recall ‘Petit Poucet’. However, in its constant repetition of a single important rhythmic figure – a sarabande-like $\frac{3}{4}$ ♩. ♩. ♩ in which the stress falls on the second beat – the movement harks back to the opening of the suite and the haunting suspensions of the

¹⁵ Ravel used a similar retrograde mirroring of melodic material across the third and fourth movements of his Piano Trio. See Roy Howat, ‘Thinking music: An analytical study of Ravel’s Piano Trio’, *Piano* 15:1 (Jan-Feb 2007), pp. 36–39.

‘Pavane’, a gesture that serves to bridge the two outer movements. The melodic material of ‘Le jardin féérique’ is as focused as that of the other four movements. Particularly notable are the recurring scalic figures, and the inversion and reprise of the key motif of bars 14-19 across bars 40-50, accompanied in bars 40-43 of the *seconda* by the rising tenths of the opening bars (Ex. 5.11).

Example 5.11

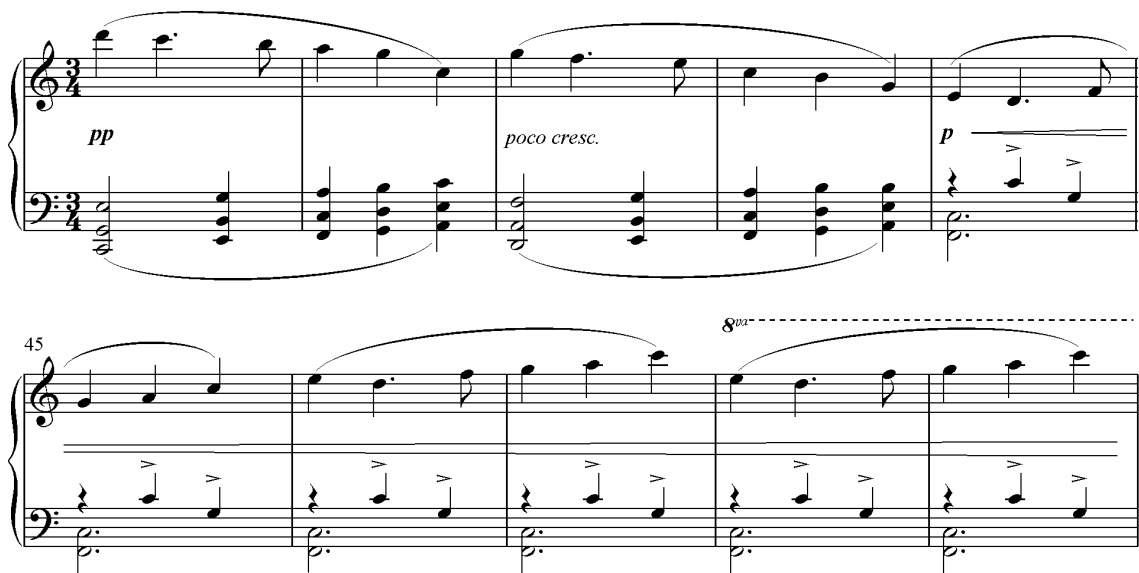
a. ‘Le jardin féérique’, bars 1-4, *seconda* (ascending tenths)



b. ‘Le jardin féérique’, *prima* (right hand only), bars 16-17 (also heard an octave lower in bars 14-15 and an octave higher in bars 18-19)



c. ‘Le jardin féérique’, bars 40-50, *prima* (melody only) and *seconda*: inversion and reprise of 5.14b combined with rising tenths of 5.14a



Ravel's exploration and continuous development of these small melodic fragments give each movement coherence and a strong sense of independence, a trait that reflects not only the distinctive characters of their fairytales but also the integrity of episodes within the tales themselves.

This autonomy of melodic material, combined with Ravel's close-knit forms, might seem to preclude a sense of unity across the suite as a whole. Nevertheless, the reverse is the case. These five incomplete and seemingly disparate images – the sleep of a Princess, little boys lost in a wood, the magical orchestra of tiny jewelled figures, the conversations of the Beauty and the Beast, and an enchanted garden – combine in *Ma mère l'Oye* to communicate, not only the broad fairytale story, as outlined above, but also a tautly coherent musical narrative.

An initial musical connection can be traced through the use of modal melodies in all five movements.¹⁶ The 'Pavane' uses the Aeolian mode and the opening melody of 'Petit Poucet' is Dorian. 'Laideronnette' uses not the Byzantine modes but the airy pentatonic scale, while the opening melody of 'La Belle et la Bête' is Lydian. 'Le jardin féérique' is the only movement anchored mainly in the Ionian major, but it is coloured by a Phrygian tint at the start of its central passage. The 'Pavane', 'Petit Poucet' and 'Laideronnette' also make expressive use of chromatic pendulums in the tenor voice, as Example 5.12 demonstrates.¹⁷

¹⁶ This technique is by no means specific to *Ma mère l'Oye*; modal melodies and motifs colour much of Ravel's compositional output. See Roland-Manuel, *Ravel*, pp. 112-114.

¹⁷ Ravel's model here may have been Emmanuel Chabrier's 'Idylle' (from the *Pièces pittoresques* of 1880), bars 17-23 and 26-31; Roy Howat has noted the connection between 'Idylle' and the 'Pavane' ("Musique adorable": à la découverte d'Emmanuel Chabrier', *The Art of French Piano Music*).

Example 5.12 Chromatic pendulums in tenor voice

a. 'Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant', bars 5-8

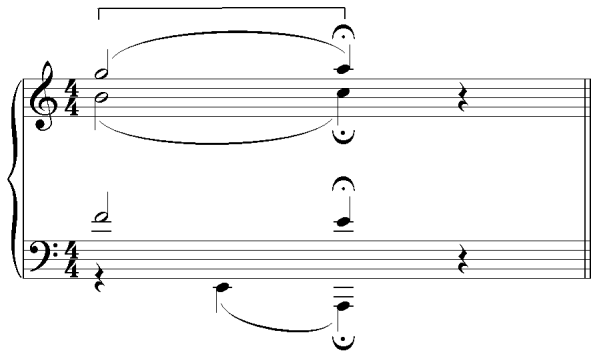
b. 'Petit Poucet', bars 68-71

c. 'Laideronnette', bars 46-49

The modal G-A of the final cadence of the 'Pavane' moves easily into 'Petit Poucet', which begins with the same two notes; the raised A \sharp is a particularly noticeable flicker of bright colour here (Ex. 5.13a and 5.13b). The chiming melody in the right hand of the seconda in bars 50-52 of 'Le jardin féérique' also repeats the G-A movement that closed the 'Pavane' (Ex. 5.13c), a gesture that strengthens the relationship already existing between their shared white-key modalities.

Example 5.13

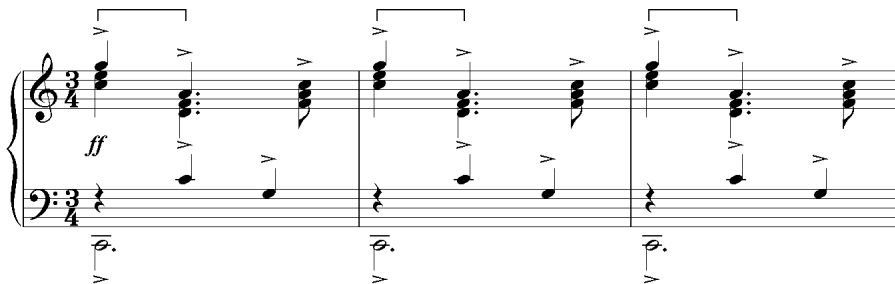
a. 'Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant', bar 20



b. 'Petit Poucet', bars 1-2, *seconda*



c. 'Le jardin féérique', bars 50-52, *seconda*



That Ravel intended these affinities, set within quiet but solid 'bookend' links, is suggested by the ballet version of *Ma mère l'Oye*, whose 'Prelude' blends fragments of the 'Pavane' and 'Le jardin féérique' (Ex. 5.14). The fluid movement from these motives into a fragment of 'Petit Poucet' in bars 20-21 further demonstrates the inbuilt relations of these seemingly independent themes. This passage is recalled in a later interlude linking 'Laideronnette' to 'Le jardin féérique'.

Example 5.14 ‘Prélude’, *Ma mère l’Oye* (ballet), bars 14-21

The musical score for Example 5.14, 'Prélude' from *Ma mère l'Oye*, consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (bars 14-21) is marked '1er Mouvt' and includes dynamics 'p' and 'pp'. It features a melodic line in the right hand with a triplet of eighth notes and a descending line in the left hand. The second system (bars 18-21) includes dynamics 'p' and 'pp', and is marked 'expressif'. It features a melodic line in the right hand with a triplet of eighth notes and a descending line in the left hand. The score is divided into sections labeled 'Le jardin féérique', 'Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant', 'Pavane', and 'Petit Poucet'.

The combination of melodic major second and perfect fourth that defines the melodic material of ‘Laideronette’ and ‘La Belle et la Bête’ also pervades the other three movements. Sometimes the major second lies within the fourth (as in the opening bars of ‘La Belle et la Bête’), and sometimes it leads into it (as in Example 5.2b and the end of Example 5.5 above). ‘Le jardin féérique’ explores the three-note motif in a different combination; an ascending or descending second is followed by a third moving in the same direction, so the interval of a fourth is implicit between the first and last notes of the motif (see Example 5.11 above). The fourth is made explicit, however, in the tolling left hand of the *seconda* across the last 12 bars of the movement (see Example 4.2). These paired intervals can thus be seen as the prevailing motivic gesture of the entire suite, subtly giving the work its essential melodic coherence.

5.5 The third wish

Threefold patterns, repetitions and gestures are a key element of fairytale narrative. A genie will give three wishes, the third sister is the most beautiful, we must watch Cinderella’s two stepsisters unsuccessfully try on the glass slipper before Cinderella slips it on to her foot, and although the woodcutter and his wife twice fail to lose Petit

Poucet and his brothers in the woods, we know very well that their third attempt will be successful. The third time is always the moment of transfiguration.

This typical fairytale construction has obvious musical applications. The archetypal construction of (for example) two 2-bar phrases, identical or sequential, followed by a four-bar phrase that takes the previous material and expands or transforms it in some way, can be found in examples spanning three centuries and innumerable composers, works and genres. On a broader scale, the prevalence of ternary forms (the *da capo* aria, the minuet and trio, even sonata form¹⁸) demonstrates our natural affinity with tripartite structures: the third part may be simply a repetition of earlier material, or it may, in the case of sonata form, transform that material in order to take the piece to its most effective conclusion.

In his 1977 study of the fairytale, F. André Favat described the importance of narrative patterns of repetition and contrast in words that could apply equally to a Mozart symphony: important for their role in filling out the narrative, repetitive gestures also heighten tension and postpone its release, ‘which upon final resolution makes for enhanced pleasure’.¹⁹ In Mme Leprince de Beaumont’s *La Belle et la Bête*, the Beast asks Beauty to marry him every night before she retires. Her continued refusals set up the expectation that is eventually fulfilled when, seeing him apparently dead, she acknowledges and declares her love for him. Ravel’s representation of the story emphasises this narrative device: ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’ is almost entirely comprised of supplicating phrases that are repeated and transformed. Ravel makes extensive use of the archetypal construction of paired short phrases, identical or sequential, followed by a longer, consolatory phrase, as Example 5.15 demonstrates. The sense of supplication is emphasised by the way each threefold sequence progressively stretches its intervals and melodic range and, more subtly, by the way the local threefold sequences then form a larger threefold sequence (systems 2, 3 and 5 in Example 5.14; the movement’s opening section concludes just a few bars later).

¹⁸ While sonata form originated from binary structures, its exposition-development-recapitulation pattern may also be read as tripartite.

¹⁹ Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. 52.

Example 5.15 ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’, bars 2-39, *prima*, showing supplicative sequences

Ravel then inverts this technique of phrase expansion to build the two climaxes across bars 85-105 and 128-144 (Ex. 5.16). Here, the four-bar phrases that commence the build-up and *accelerando* (bars 85-88 and 128-131) are reduced in bars 93-4 and 136-7 to two bars, then at 97 and 140 to a single bar. This threefold fragmentation and diminution of the melodies, a direct inversion of their expansion in the A section, compellingly directs tension towards the crux of the movement – just as a skilful storyteller would do.²⁰ The large-scale mirroring here also encapsulates the alternate elaboration and *dépouillement* of melodic material in the ‘Pavane’, ‘Petit Poucet’ and ‘Laideronnette’.

²⁰ Ravel would return to this technique in ‘Ronde’, where the four-bar phrases (‘Des farfadets et des incubes, des ogres, des lutins / Des faunes, des follets, des lamies, diables, diablots, diabolotins) are reduced to two-bar motifs (Des chèvre-pieds, des gnomes, des démons / Des loups-garous, des elfes, des myrmidons) and then to one-bar groups (Des enchanteurs et des / mages, des stryges, des / sylphes, des moines bour- / rus, des cyclopes) and finally to half-bars (des djinns, gobe/lins, korri/gans, nécro/mans, kobolds). Here not only do the lengths of phrases reduce, but their melodic compass as well: the four-bar phrases span a fifth, the two-bar groups a fourth, the bar-long groups a third and the half-bar groups only a second.

Example 5.16 ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’, bars 128-144, *prima*

By his choice of epigraph (the Beast’s unsuccessful proposal) Ravel reinforces the link between these literary and musical patterns of repetition and contrast.

Ravel employs ternary forms for four of the five movements in *Ma mère l’Oye* (the exception is the arch-form ‘Petit Poucet’), a pattern that builds up a compelling large-scale rhythm through the suite. Tripartite structures and threefold gestures are also central to the *Trois chansons* and *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*. Nicolette encounters three characters (big bad wolf, beautiful page, ugly lord) in her journeying, just as three birds of Paradise bear messages from the absent lover. In both songs, the third encounter is decisive, just as the third verse of the third song, ‘Ronde’, brings the final disillusionment: the young people will not go back to the woods of Ormonde, because the magical creatures have been frightened away.

In *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* we find not only a proliferation of ternary-structured scenes (discussed in Chapter Six) but also thrice-repeated ‘magic words’ that act as invocations. As the Child rampages around his room, he cries ‘Je suis méchant, méchant, méchant!’, then ‘Je suis libre, libre, méchant et libre!’ These threefold iterations of crucial words – *méchant* and *libre* – set the *sortilèges* in motion; they are the ‘magic words’ that summon the wondrous events. As Steven Huebner points out, it is not coincidental that the Squirrel’s little aria later returns to the idea of freedom – ‘Le ciel libre, le vent libre, mes libres frères au bord d’un vol’ [‘The free sky, the free wind, my free brothers on the edge of flight’].²¹ Again the word *libre* sounds three times, and here too it works magic: the Child acknowledges his loneliness and calls for his mother with another threefold reflection (‘Ils s’aiment... ils m’oublient... je suis seul... [‘They

²¹ Steven Huebner, ‘Ravel’s Child: Magic and Moral Development’, in *Musical Childhoods and the Cultures of Youth*, ed. Susan Boynton and Roe-Min Kok, (Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan UP, 2006), p. 86.

love each other... they have forgotten me... I am alone]), before the explosive single-word invocation ‘Maman!’ unleashes the animals’ rage. Similarly, *méchant* is then heard from the animals in a threefold crescendo of menace as they turn on the Child: ‘C’est le méchant, c’est le méchant à la cage! C’est le méchant au filet!’

The other crucial word of *L’Enfant les sortilèges* is *Maman*. Although Maman never actually appears on stage (all we see of her in the opening scene, according to Colette, is a very large skirt), her presence is felt throughout the entire opera. The Child uses the word ‘Maman’ three times, and each invocation has a distinct and significant dramatic effect. In the first scene the words ‘J’ai envie de metre Maman en pénitence’ [‘I want to put Maman in the corner’] conclude the Child’s opening statement and perfectly encapsulate his rebellious state of mind. At the end of the Squirrel’s aria, the appearance of the two Cats, lovingly entwined on the garden wall, brings the Child to a full realisation of his loneliness and misery and he calls for his mother ‘in spite of himself’ (as seen above). Where once the Child’s wish to ‘put Maman in the corner’ had typified the height of his desires, the word now encapsulates his desolation and desperate need for aid. The moment of Maman’s symbolic apparition (a light appearing in the house) is signalled by a threefold iteration of her cadence in its original form, played at last by the full orchestra (Ex. 5.17).

Example 5.17 ‘Maman cadence’ stated by full orchestra (Fig. 149+3)



The Child’s third and final voicing of ‘Maman’ is an affirmation of love and tenderness. Here, in the opera’s final bar, the word ‘Maman’ is sung to the ‘Maman cadence’ (discussed in Section 5.3 above, Example 5.1) for the first and only time; with this reconciliation of word and gesture the third and last invocation of this ‘magic word’ becomes the opera’s apotheosis.

5.6 ‘Towards an elegant simplicity’ : *dépouillement* in the *Trois chansons* and *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*

Like *Ma mère l’Oye*, the *Trois chansons* are diminutive in scale and constructed on tightly knit patterns. However, in the piano suite, generally unhurried tempi, open textures and long melodic lines create a sense of breadth that belies the small dimensions of each movement. In the songs, the relaxed atmosphere of *Ma mère l’Oye* is replaced by concentrated intensity and a terseness remarkable even in the output of a composer not given to wasting notes. ‘Nicolette’ has met her wolf and page and eloped with her lord within two minutes. ‘Trois beaux oiseaux’ is a little more expansive but is still completed well within three minutes. The text of ‘Ronde’ contains more than 250 words, yet it too takes less than two minutes to sing.

Ma mère l’Oye always has time for reflection, to savour harmonies or enjoy the unfolding of a melody. The conclusion of ‘Le jardin féérique’, six slow bars of unequivocal and luxuriant C major, is unthinkable in the context of ‘Nicolette’ or ‘Ronde’. ‘Nicolette’ sustains no harmony longer than a bar (and that only at the two cadence points in each verse) and arrives at its final, entirely unexpected A major *tierce de Picardie* via an unconventional flattened mediant. While Ravel set the tempo of ‘Ronde’ at $\text{♩} = 132$, the song should be taken, according to Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, ‘as fast as possible’.²² The resolution of its increasingly chaotic polyphony through the hard-edged clarity of the final bars is decided but fleeting: the resolution of dominant to tonic in the last bar lasts only a beat and is gone with something like a concerted yell. There is no moment of respite in the song; each verse elides into the next with no pause for contemplation.

This sense of compression is as much melodic as harmonic. Throughout the set Ravel’s setting of his text is almost entirely syllabic, the music always driven by the words. The slow eight-bar phrases of ‘Trois beaux oiseaux’, with their syllabic setting and clear movement from tonic to dominant and back again, bear little resemblance to the rambling melodies of ‘Petit Poucet’, while the lengthy and irregular phrases of the Beauty’s half of her conversation with the Beast demonstrate an openness and generosity quite removed from the miserly and insistent regularity of ‘Nicolette’.

²² Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel et nous*, p. 211.

As he wrote the *Trois chansons* in the winter of 1914-15, Ravel was attempting to join the French army. He was fully aware of the possible consequences of such a commitment – if not death, then incapacitation, physical or creative. Hélène Jourdan-Morhange wrote that Ravel hated and feared death with an unusual intensity and that he never willingly spoke of it.²³ However, like all those who lost friends, lovers or relatives or who themselves served, Ravel had to come to terms directly with mortality during the years of the Great War. Vera Brittain summed up the emotions of a generation in her *Testament of Youth*:

France was the scene of titanic, illimitable death, and for this very reason it had become the heart of the fiercest living ever known to any generation. Nothing was permanent; everyone and everything was always on the move; friendships were temporary, appointments were temporary, life itself was the most temporary of all.²⁴

While a direct and conscious link between a wartime awareness of mortality and the fleeting harmonies of ‘Nicolette’ cannot be sustainably argued, the brusqueness of the *Trois chansons* do seem to reflect something of the compression and intensity of the war years.

Each of Ravel’s *Trois chansons* opens in what we may easily term a *dépouillé* style. The first verse of ‘Nicolette’ is almost entirely homophonic and its harmonies clear (if piquant), while the two-voice modal counterpoint of the first bars of ‘Trois beaux oiseaux’ recalls that of the ‘Pavane de la belle au bois dormant’. The light textures of ‘Ronde’, where the soprano line is punctuated by the other three voices only at the beginnings and ends of phrases, also hints at this characteristically simple and direct expression. Having sketched a sort of Renaissance purity to begin each song, Ravel’s *dépouillé* textures rapidly become more complex and bitingly ironic. The harmonies of ‘Nicolette’ are coloured with piquant seconds that, by the last verse, suggest atonality, or at least incompetent performance: the basses slip and slide in semitones beneath the tenor melody as if unable to pitch their notes. The colours of ‘Trois beaux oiseaux’ become richer and darker, and in the final verse the jarring effect of chromatically descending lines is directly symbolic of the death of the absent lover. Finally, the clear declamation that begins each verse of ‘Ronde’ is gradually overtaken by chaotic polyphony, in which the words themselves are subsumed in a barrage of consonants and

²³ Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel et nous*, pp. 45, 251.

²⁴ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Fontana, 1979), p. 372.

the straightforward quavers are heard against galloping triplets. This constant juxtaposition of clear, open textures and straightforward harmonies with more complex polyphony and harmonic clashes reinforces the conflict inherent in Ravel's poetry, where themes of fantasy and fairytale are bound by rigid rhyme and metre.

In the breadth and intensity of its emotional content, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* shares something of the concentrated effect of the *Trois chansons*: it covers as much ground as a four- or five-act grand opera, and all within three quarters of an hour. Yet there is a concomitant return to the flowing lyricism and (apart from certain necessarily frantic moments) the gentle, danceable tempi of *Ma mère l'Oye*. How does this immense – by Ravelian standards – and complex work respond to Ravel's assertion that capturing the 'poetry of childhood' necessitates a pared-down, unornamented manner of writing? Ravel writes for a large cast and for all the instruments of the symphony orchestra of his time, plus extras: celesta, piano/luthéal, slide-whistle and an expanded percussion section that includes tam-tam, rattle, cheese-grater and wood-block. In her article on the opera Christine Prost suggested that Ravel's large orchestra has the effect of muddying the texture and obscuring the dramatic effect:

We might wonder whether [Ravel] loses in emotional intensity what he gains in colour, and if the imaginary world of the child could not have been more poetically evoked with less direct and realistic material and with a more restrained and carefully chosen instrumental ensemble. Might Ravel have become a prisoner of his *métier*?²⁵

In answer to this assertion, it can be observed that the 'grand orchestre symphonique' is in fact heard *tutti* on very few occasions: at the end of the Fire's aria, at the end of the Cat's duet, and at the invocation and appearance of Maman. Only once, during the height of the animals' fury, is the full orchestra pitted against the singers. Many of the episodes are accompanied by what is almost a chamber ensemble, albeit one of infinite variety. The duet of the Fauteuil and Bergère, for example, is accompanied primarily by the piano/luthéal, and the interjections of other instruments are only fragmentary; the Child's one aria is accompanied by three solo violins, whose pulsing chords are doubled alternately by clarinet, oboe, horn and bassoon. Across the opera, many sparsely-textured passages hint at *Ma mère l'Oye*, notably the unaccompanied fourths and fifths of the wandering oboe melodies of the opening, the 'Laideronnette'-like chimes after the duet of the Cup and Teapot, and the beginning of the Princess's aria which is

²⁵ Christine Prost, 'Maurice Ravel: *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*', *Analyse Musicale* 21 (1990), p. 78.

accompanied by just a solo flute, a passage that also recalls the spare counterpoint of Ravel's post-war *Sonate pour violon et violoncelle*.²⁶ As Seiji Ozawa (who conducted the opera's 1979 season at the Opéra Garnier in Paris) put it:

Ravel used the orchestra in the manner of an Oriental painter – a single stroke, no more than the barest necessities...²⁷

The effect of this restrained but deliberately 'artificial' orchestration (that is, full of artifice) was noted by two reviewers of the opera's 1926 Parisian première:

Ah, but it is edifying to see this man, rich to the point of superabundance [in the techniques, gestures and colours of orchestration] voluntarily restrain his writing [*se dépouiller*] to move towards an elegant simplicity, to liberate the lines, lighten the orchestra. [...] Ravel's orchestra, regardless of its richness, has always shown the most aerial lightness.²⁸

The final chorus, hemmed with echoes of the *Sonate pour violon et violoncelle*, develops and blossoms in an unornamented [*dépouillée*] limpidity.²⁹

Ravel and Colette were not attempting to evoke Prost's 'imaginary world of the child': they were depicting a story that, for the Child, is *real*, and that takes place around and about him. There is therefore no need of abstraction or symbolism, and Ravel's 'direct and realistic' material gives the opera its dramatic impact. Everything seems bigger to a child, as Colette's stage directions make clear. The more 'restrained' ensemble for which Ravel orchestrated *Ma mère l'Oye* could not have had the terrifying power that sustains the vengeful animals, while the Wedgwood Teapot, without the harsh realism of the orchestral whip and cheese grater, might have been misty and dreamlike. Schillmöller writes appealingly that in his orchestration (and the variety of musical idioms he employs), Ravel may be described as 'playing with all his materials like a child with his toys'.³⁰ Continually varied yet *dépouillé* (the word revealingly used by both reviewers quoted above), the orchestration conveys the opera's fairytale storyline and paints the Child's world in colours as vivid as a child's imagination. And

²⁶ Barbara Kelly discusses the concept of *dépouillement* with specific reference to this sonata: see 'Ravel after Debussy: Inheritance, Influence and Style' in *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, contexts and legacies*, pp. 174, 180.

²⁷ Seiji Ozawa, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges', in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, theatre programme (Opéra Garnier, Paris, May 1979).

²⁸ Maurice Brilliant, in *Le Correspondant*, 25 February 1926, quoted in *Maurice Ravel, 1875-1975* (Paris: Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique, 1975), p. 78.

²⁹ Jean Marnold, 'Musique' [Review of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*], *Le Mercure de France* 186:666 (15 March 1926), p. 703.

³⁰ Mathias Schillmöller, *Maurice Ravels Schüsselwerk*, p. 111.

yet – and hence – to the audience, the *sortilèges* are as real as the Child himself, just as they are real *to* the Child. It is Ravel’s orchestra that gives the *sortilèges* their personalities and a believable existence.

5.7 Conclusion

The regular structures and clearly defined idioms of fairytale offered Ravel great scope for development and manipulation. The movements of *Ma mère l’Oye* are as independent as the stories upon which they are based, yet they are also given a unifying narrative through their organisation, motivic connections and structural affiliations. The episodic construction of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* similarly allows for the juxtaposition of small, enclosed scenes with an overreaching dramatic shape. The expansion and integration of these episodes becomes a key expressive device to trace the development of the Child, a process that will be examined in detail in Chapter Six. The opera presents a detailed portrait of its eponymous Child, set within a contemporary fairytale in which traditional elements – the prohibition-violation motif, threefold invocations, magic and animism, transformation and the happy ending – combine with a more sophisticated and psychological complexity that invokes the *zeitgeist* of the 1920s (and will be discussed in Chapter Eight).

The *Trois chansons*, *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* and *Ma mère l’Oye* each, in their different ways, make use of a pared-down or *dépouillé* style, through the reduction of melodic material to the barest outlines or ideas, through small, enclosed forms (which are compressed to the point of terseness in the *Trois chansons*), and through finely tuned, chamber-like orchestration in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*. The simplicity, clarity and diminutive scale of the literary fairytale provided a literary as well as an expressive basis for Ravel’s exploration of *dépouillé* techniques in his own fairytale-based *enfantines*.

Reynaldo Hahn, reviewing the ballet première of *Ma mère l’Oye* in *Comœdia*, questioned the validity of this approach:

Everything is simplified, synthesised, stylised, purified, stripped back [*dépouillé*] to the point where it can sometimes appear rather [too] light.³¹

³¹ Reynaldo Hahn, in *Comœdia*, 2 February 1912, quoted in Marcel Marnat, *Ravel* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), p. 326.

Hahn suggested intriguingly that, ‘You will think that nothing could be less naïve, less childish, less ‘Tales of Mother Goose’ than this pretty ballet of M. Maurice Ravel...’: he concluded that the ballet was characterised by ‘the most artificial absence of artifice’. While allowances should be made here for a musical aesthetic and a critical voice deliberately and provocatively opposed to those of Ravel, Hahn’s assessment is nonetheless remarkable, since it seems to reflect on not only *Ma mère l’Oye* but the broader tradition of musical *enfantines*, which are characteristically straightforward and unornamented in form, texture and melodic construction.

Just three years after the première of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, W. Wright Roberts would lament that the musical *enfantines* of his generation were bound by the cultures of the external and material. However, in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* as in *Ma mère l’Oye* (the opera’s nursery setting notwithstanding), Colette and Ravel wrote not of the paraphernalia of childhood – the toys and games, the cosy nursery scenes – but of something more elemental: perception, experience and memory. Ravel himself said that his ‘pared down’ writing in *Ma mère l’Oye* was necessitated not by the small hands and limited technical capacity of the Godebski children, but by his desire to evoke the ‘poetry of childhood’. Was his *dépouillement* then aimed at a certain fundamental verity? Was Ravel saying, ‘Here, stripped of all adornment, all verbosity and sentimentality, is an image of the essential nature of childhood as I see it, through the shimmering mirror of the fairytale’?

Chapter Six

‘A big, small world’:

Musical and dramatic structure in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*

Les Boîtes à joujoux sont en effet des sortes de villes dans lesquelles les jouets vivent comme des personnes. Ou bien les villes ne sont peut-être que des boîtes à joujoux dans lesquelles les personnes vivent comme les jouets.¹

André Hellé

6.1 Introduction

For all the themes of childhood and fantasy in Ravel’s music, there are few actual portraits of children. The only child-figure in *Ma mère l’Oye* is Petit Poucet, but the movement is a narrative rather than a character-sketch. Similarly, there are ‘young people’ in ‘Ronde’, but we know nothing of them save their penchant for the woods of Ormonde. This absence of ‘real’ children is not limited to Ravel’s music. The Romantics gave us the abstract, universal Child, idealised and quasi-sacred; the well-behaved young people of Schumann’s *Kinderscenen* could be classified thus. The French composers of the busy, vital Third Republic seemed particularly drawn to musical depictions of nurseries and family life – witness *Jeux d’enfants*, *Dolly* and *Children’s Corner*. Although the latter works were written for and about two particular little girls, they are perhaps less portraits than interiors, or landscapes with figures. It is perhaps surprising that amidst the wealth of music written about childhood from the mid-nineteenth century into the twentieth, very few works attempt to paint musical portraits of children themselves.

L’Enfant et les sortilèges, the most detailed and realistic of musical depictions of a single child, simultaneously places its protagonist in a Third Republic nursery and gives him no name but that abstract *Enfant*. Yet he is anything but an abstract or idealised

¹ ‘Toyboxes are in effect sorts of towns in which toys live like people. Or perhaps towns are nothing but toyboxes in which people live like toys.’ André Hellé, *La Boîte à Joujoux*.

figure: he is distinctive, individual, energetic and noisy, with a voice, a mind and a will of his own. The opera is therefore remarkable both in the context of Ravel's catalogue and within the prevailing musical and cultural aesthetic.

Most remarkably of all, the Child of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* grows up. His character changes across the course of the opera, and this alone sets him apart, not only from other musical child-characters but also from the general run of operatic protagonists. As the curtain rises the Child, 'Six or seven years old', as Colette stipulates, is bored and restless, rebellious and then consumed by rage. He is a little tyrant, focused entirely on his own desires and without a thought for the impact of his actions on the world around him. Xavier Léon, reviewing the opera in *Le Ménestrel*, described him as 'the 'standard' type of modern child: badly raised, lazy and bad-tempered, already leaning towards all the harmful instincts of the human race, in love with destruction and cruelty'.² This 'modern child' is placed within a fairytale narrative, in which he learns to understand his world and to live in it with compassion and kindness. How does the transformation occur? There is a series of key moments of realisation for the Child in which a new stage of maturity is foreshadowed or attained. Concurrently the development of larger-scale ideas offers an over-arching unity. These broad structures and these brief moments – this 'big, small world' – between them bind the opera together.

A detailed individual portrait, the Child's character also points us towards broader truths that, while they may be extrapolated into universality ('...all the harmful instincts of the human race'), perhaps more directly reflect something of Ravel's own imagery of childhood. What takes place on stage is real for the Child as it is real for the audience, but the story itself is fantastic, a fairytale according to every definition of the term. Here, as in the *Trois chansons* and *Ma mère l'Oye*, Ravel interweaves fairytale and reality, imagination and sensation, to create a portrait of childhood that depicts the Child's physical environment in precise and colourful detail – the 'material' preoccupations of childhood – whilst shaping the perspective of the audience about the focused vision of an inner world.

² Xavier Léon, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges' [review], *Le Ménestrel* 87:14 (1925), p. 166. Jean Boutiller, reviewing the première in the journal *L'Enfant*, also praised the opera for its realism, and its presentation of a child familiar to parents everywhere – a child capable of 'laziness, lies, brutality, even ferocity' beneath an angelic exterior'. (Boutiller, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges: Fantaisie lyrique de Madame Colette et de M. Maurice Ravel', p. 186.)

6.2 A Child of his time

By his very existence, the Child of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* is an unusual figure. The children who flit through Romantic operas appear less as living beings than as symbols: innocence, purity, sacrifice, nostalgia, truth, helplessness. Significantly, they are usually mute, unable to express emotions, thoughts or desires of their own. The mute child becomes the vehicle for the expression of adults. Inarticulate and powerless, the child is a bargaining tool, a hostage or an appeal to the conscience. Operas with mute children – Bellini's *Norma* and Verdi's *I due foscari*, for example – reflect the Romantic ideal of the child as a quasi-sacred being, free from the corruption and the power-lust of adulthood.³ The most famous mute child is Puccini's Sorrow (Dolore), from *Madame Butterfly* (1904). By his very name Sorrow is a symbol; Butterfly produces him to try to convince Sharpless that Pinkerton will not have forgotten her (bargaining tool), she agrees to give him up to his father (sacrifice), and she tells him to go and play, binding his eyes before she kills herself (innocence). In 1919, as Ravel was beginning work on *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Richard Strauss was writing for an offstage 'chorus of unborn children' in *Die Frau ohne schatten*. These unreal, unseen children are projections of the fears and desires of the opera's adult protagonists – but, as Elizabeth Giuliani observes, Strauss merely makes explicit what his predecessors had already intimated.⁴ Sorrow, Norma's children and Lucrezia's have no more concrete existence than the disembodied voices of the unborn.

Two young princes made a more decisive impact upon the operatic stage. Act IV of Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* includes a long scene between the young prince Feodor, his nurse and Boris himself. Feodor shares stories with the nurse then plays a clapping game. He examines a map of Russia and Boris commends him and tells him to study hard. Feodor exists more as a prism to refract the events going on about him and to lighten the conscience of his father than as an active participant in the drama. He is a child amongst adults, a fragile onlooker upon an existence he cannot entirely

³ In *Norma*, Norma's two children are almost killed by their mother, who fears they will be taken as slaves to Rome and wants to take revenge on her unfaithful lover. In Verdi's *I due foscari*, Lucrezia uses her two children to try to release their father from his sentence of exile; they kneel before the Doge of Venice and beg for mercy.

⁴ Giuliani, 'La musique et l'enfance', p. 61.

understand. Yet, like the child of *The Nursery*, Feodor has some of the qualities of the ‘real boy’: he is intelligent, lively and endowed with wit and humour.⁵

Of crucial dramatic importance to Claude Debussy’s (and Maurice Maeterlinck’s) *Pelléas et Mélisande* is the scene between Golaud and his young son Yniold, whom he uses to spy on Pelléas and Mélisande (Act III, Scene 5 of the opera).⁶ In *Pelléas* we see again the child representing innocence, unable to comprehend the behaviour and the motivations of the adults about him; the child injured, a victim of circumstances he cannot control. Yet there is a deeper significance to Yniold, in terms of both the work itself and the development of the operatic child. If the other characters seem to move through their own dreamscapes, interacting only obliquely with each other and with the real world, Yniold alone remains firmly grounded in reality. He has a child’s directness and focus on the moment at hand, he speaks in terms of concrete actions and events and he responds to his father’s questioning with readiness and simplicity, even if he does not understand what he is being asked to observe.

With a more complex personality and a clearer voice than either Yniold or Feodor, the protagonist of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* is perhaps the first operatic child to seem *real*, no eternal child-figure but an individual and very material little being. He is the sole child to exist as the central and exclusive focus of his opera, to be given such depth of characterisation and to grow up as the work progresses. He is granted the enclosed, fantastic vision of the child in a world that is entirely his own, a world of which he is the centre and that no adult can truly penetrate. Recognition of this duality – a human Child in a fantastic universe – is central to an understanding of the opera. In his extended study, Mathias Schillmöller contrasts *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* with Debussy’s *Children’s Corner* and *La Boîte à joujoux*, arguing that the latter works stress the importance of the everyday world (‘material’ toys and childish preoccupations) while Ravel’s explorations of childhood are located entirely in the world of fantasy.⁷ This appraisal, whilst partially tenable (as previous chapters have explored), is nevertheless overly simplistic: the interactions of fantasy and reality,

⁵ While *Boris Godunov* received its Paris première in 1908 (and was reprised in 1913), it had been well-known in Parisian musical circles since the 1890s; the Conservatoire had held a vocal score since 1874.

⁶ Ravel famously attended every one of the 29 performances in the opera’s 1902 première season (Larner, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 71).

⁷ Schillmöller, *Maurice Ravels Schlüsselwerk*, p. 222.

between the real Child and his *sortilèges*, underpin the opera's conception, and indeed resonate in all Ravel's *enfantines*.

These interactions are sharpened by the opera's visual realisation, in which the vision of the Child becomes the vision of the audience. Colette's stage directions make this explicit in the opera's first scene:

Enter Maman (or rather as much as can be seen of her, with the very low ceiling and the entire scale of all the furnishings and all the objects in exaggerated dimensions in order to make more striking the smallness of the Child).

As we see the physical world through the Child's eyes, so the naivety of the wandering oboe figurations combined with the ethereal contrabass melody draws us into his inner world, and his actions, thoughts and emotions become easily comprehensible.

The Child's physical and conceptual centrality is reinforced by his strong literal and metaphorical grasp of his surroundings. Ravel and Colette's *enfant terrible* is in fact the first empowered child on the operatic stage. With his body he destroys and then repairs: his actions impact upon his world. He listens and speaks to things, rends and tears, embraces, binds them, hides behind them. He has the capacity to communicate, first his boredom and rage, then his bewilderment and fear, and finally his remorse and compassion. A true Child of the twentieth century, he can hold centre stage as the curtain rises, cataloguing in the plainest of language his desires and frustrations. Here Ravel captures the natural inflections of a childish voice, much as *The Nursery* had done half a century earlier (Ex. 6.1). The Child is first heard singing softly and dreamily to himself, as children do. He begins with a decided negative – 'J'ai pas envie de faire ma page' ['Don't want to do my lesson']. A complete statement, the phrase ends with a decisively descending minor third. The word *pas* [not] receives the natural inflection of a sulky child, the lowest note in the phrase. From this point the Child moves quickly into the realm of the imagination: 'J'ai envie d'aller me promener' ['I want to go for a walk'], he sings, a happy but unrealistic alternative that ends with the questioning inflection of an ascending fourth. The climax of the next phrase, 'J'ai envie de manger tous les gâteaux' ['I want to eat up all the cakes'] is emphatically directed towards the word *tous* [all]. Getting carried away, the Child goes on: 'J'ai envie de tirer la queue du chat et couper celle de l'Écureuil! J'ai envie de gronder tout le monde! J'ai envie de

mettre Maman en pénitence.’ [‘I want to pull the cat’s tail and cut off the squirrel’s! I want to scold everyone! I want to put Maman in the corner.’]. In Ravel’s setting, his increasingly ambitious demands and growing excitement are mirrored in phrases that span successively broader intervals. ‘J’ai envie de gronder tout le monde!’ ascends to the word *monde* [‘the world’; ‘everybody’, in this context], which is not only the climax of that phrase, but the highest note heard so far. The concluding phrase is a direct response to the preceding line, mirroring its ascent though a seventh with a descent across an octave. The final ‘en pénitence’ could not more plainly express bad-tempered rebellion, with its determined accents on even the final weak *-ce*.

Example 6.1 Child’s monologue, Fig. 2

L'ENFANT

J'ai pas en - vie de faire ma pa - ge, J'ai en - vie d'al - ler me pro - me - ner, J'ai en -
 vie de man - ger tous les gâ - teaux. J'ai en - vie de ti - rer la queue du chat Et de cou -
 per cel - le de l'É - cu - reuil! J'ai en - vie de gron - der tout le
 mon - de! J'ai en - vie de met - tre Ma - man en pé - ni - ten - ce.

The Child’s conversational tone contrasts dramatically with the more lyrical *sortilèges* who are to come. More importantly, his matter-of-fact speech communicates directly with the audience, drawing them easily into his story.

The Child is the only human figure to appear in full, and he remains onstage for the entire opera. Maman is lovingly summoned at the work’s conclusion, but she does not return to the stage. It is the image of the Child – ‘alone, erect, pale and luminous in a halo of moon and dawn’, upon which the curtain falls. The Child is never endowed with a name and even his gender is only lightly sketched⁸; he and the *sortilèges* are identified

⁸ Deborah Mawer suggests that the opera’s change of title, from the original *Divertissement pour ma fille* (*Divertissement for my daughter*; Ravel objected on the grounds that *he* had no daughter) necessitated a change in gender, that the Child became male as a result of this change (Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 71). However, the Child was never intended to be a depiction of Colette’s daughter Bel-Gazou.

only as types of things – Teapot, Squirrel, Princess – and not as named individuals. This is entirely in keeping with fairytale tradition: if fairytale heroes and heroines are granted names, they are usually only a reflection of a key element of their character, or, more often, their physical appearance (Laideronnette [Little Ugly], Petit Poucet [Tom Thumb], and the Belle of ‘The Beauty and the Beast’, for example). More profoundly, the Child’s namelessness renders him, in this case, not an abstract but an utterly individual creation. Unable, at first, to understand his place in a broader environment, he needs no other name than *L’Enfant* because his world is created around him.

Colette’s detailed descriptions of the set of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* firmly locate the Child within a time, place and even social class. She stipulates, ‘A Norman house, old, or, better, old-fashioned’, and the room in which the first half of the opera takes place is furnished with a fine armchair and Louis XV *bergère*, a Comtoise clock, a Wedgwood teapot and a Chinese cup: all suggest a comfortably situated family and a Child who has never known want. The Child goes to school or perhaps is schooled at home; if there are no maids or nurses in the house, he is loved, cherished and rather spoiled, punished ‘for his own good’ by his Maman, who cares enough about him to teach him to consider the consequences of his actions.

Raised in the close family life of the Third Republic, the Child is a scion of the new middle class and the central focus of his home and family. He would have had his photograph taken for his mother’s locket, he would have been a devotee of the toyshops of Paris and he probably learnt the piano. An early commentator astutely acknowledged the Child’s material ties to a time and place: Paul Bechert, reviewing the 1929 Viennese production for *The Musical Times*, wrote that the opera depicted ‘a big, small world, seen through the eyes of a child; a French child to be sure, and decidedly one of the twentieth century’.⁹ The contrast between the brightly coloured world of this Child and Yniold’s misty and mysterious Allemonde¹⁰ could not be more clearly defined.

Throughout the opera characters are referred to generically and gain gender only through the gendered nouns of the French language. The Fire, *le Feu*, is a masculine noun but the character is decidedly feminine, played by a coloratura soprano wearing flowing veils; the Frog, meanwhile, is called *la Rainette* (a feminine noun), but is sung by a baritone. *Enfant*, too, is a masculine noun; the Child therefore seems to be masculine only by default. The episode of the Princess is the only one to define him as male (‘...you could have been my Prince of the Rosy Crest’); the rôle is usually played by a (female) mezzo-soprano, and so he appears onstage as an essentially androgynous figure.

⁹ Paul Bechert, ‘Musical notes from abroad: Vienna’, *The Musical Times* 70:1036 (June 1929), p. 558.

¹⁰ The name *Allemonde* is a double entendre: while it suggests *Allemande/Allemagne* (German/Germany), it also derives from *le monde* (the world), an appropriately Symbolist piece of nomenclature.

Musically, too, the Child is more closely bound to his era than any other character. Over the course of the opera, Ravel evokes a myriad of musical idioms and eras: ‘a smooth blending of styles from Bach up to... Ravel!’, he called it.¹¹ The Child himself takes no part in the ‘out-of-time’ episodes of the Fauteuil and Bergère, the Fire and the Shepherds and Shepherdesses, nor in the strangely dislocated foxtrot of the Cup and Teapot. His destructive rage makes extended use of bitonality; if the opposition of black- and white-key piano arpeggios has a *Petrushka*-like effect, the orchestration (winds, percussion and piano) calls to mind the brittle post-war textures of *Les Six*. The passage is the most harmonically challenging and determinedly ‘modern’ of the opera.

Nowhere is this articulate, aware and powerful character seen in clearer perspective than when he is contrasted with another operatic child of 1925, that of Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*. In the latter’s final scene, *Wozzeck*’s child plays in the street as other children come and bustle him off to see the murdered body of his mother. Although this child does have a voice, he can use it only to sing ‘hopp! hopp!’ as he plays. Here once more is the innocent child, an as-yet-unknowing victim who lacks the capacity to understand and engage with his surroundings. By contrast, the Child of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* is no hostage to fortune but a living being with the ability – and, by the work’s conclusion, the wisdom – to shape his own destiny.

6.3 ‘The Getting of Wisdom’: structural and emotional development

Over the course of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, the Child is successively recalcitrant, destructive, bewildered, frightened, impassioned, sorrowful and finally repentant, good and kind. After his initial rebellion, each of the injured *sortilèges* appears with a lesson to teach him. While these successive moments and stages of the Child’s growth and realisation are clearly expressed through the libretto and dramatic action, his development is realised more profoundly through evolving musical forms, melodic and harmonic gestures and Ravel’s precise and colourful orchestration. Thus, even when the Child isn’t singing or involved in the action, we are still aware of this process of development, refracted through the other characters.

¹¹ Maurice Ravel, unsigned interview in *Le Gaulois*, 20 March 1925, quoted in Orenstein (ed.), *Maurice Ravel: Lettres, écrits, entretiens*, p. 349.

As the curtain rises, the Child's understanding of the world is enclosed and intensely concentrated: he is the axis about which everything else revolves. This self-centeredness is reflected in the musical structures that Ravel employs through much of the first half of the opera. The first scene clearly establishes this pattern. The opening passage, despite the aimless nature of its wandering oboe figurations, is in fact divided neatly into three eleven-bar segments by their near-strophic repetition. On second iteration of the oboe melody, (at Rehearsal Figure 1) the contrabass is woven into the texture, and on the third (Figure 2) the Child begins to sing. The entrance of Maman interrupts the pattern: had she not appeared to set the chain of events in motion, one feels that the Child might have carried his repeating cycle into a static eternity.

Maman's scene comprises two ten-bar sections that frame a central passage half that length, while the Child's rage falls into a ternary structure of similarly exact proportions, as Table 6.1 demonstrates. The first scene as a whole thus falls into three sections, each defined in turn by a tightly-knit tripartite structure. Although they are musically unrelated, the fact that the outer sections belong to the Child alone defines a ternary dramatic sequence that serves both to unite the scene and to set it apart from what follows.

Table 6.1 Organisation of Scene 1

Passage	Bars	Action	Musical material
A1	11		Oboe figurations
A2	11	Curtain rises	Oboe figurations, contrabass melody
A3	11	Child sings	Oboe figurations, contrabass melody, Child sings
A	10	Maman enters	'Maman cadence'
B	5	Maman's punishment	Allegro; dissonance
A	10	Maman urges repentance	'Maman cadence' (falling fourth becomes tritone)
A	17	'I don't care!'	Child's figurations based around falling fourth
B	41	Child wreaks havoc	Orchestral; bitonality
A	17	'I'm free, naughty and free!'	Child's figurations based around falling fourth

Taking its cue from the behaviour of the Child, the music for each of the *sortilèges* in the first half of the opera is complete in itself, inward-looking and non-referential.

The Armchair and Bergère, the Clock, the Cup and Teapot, the Fire and the Shepherds and Shepherdesses all employ ternary forms of varying degrees of development; Table 6.2 summarises the structure and content of these scenes.

Table 6.2 Organisation of Scenes 2-6

Passage	Bars	Action	Musical material
Chairs			
A	11	Minuet	Piano/luthéal accompaniment, clear G minor tonality
B	9	Trio	Appoggiatura figures, woodwind and pizzicato strings; chromatic movement masks tonality
A	14	Minuet	Piano/luthéal accompaniment, clear G minor tonality
Clock			
A	15	‘Ding, ding, ding...’	Driving rhythms, strong accents, trumpet triads
B	28+2	‘I who sounded the sweet hours...’	More lyrical; sustained bass notes
A/	9	Begins reprise of A; machinery runs down	Driving rhythms, strong accents
Cup/Teapot			
[introduction]	12	Conversation	Fragments of foxtrot
A	15	Teapot’s solo	‘Foxtrot’ in G-
B	20	Cup’s solo	‘chinoiserie’ in F
A+B	30	Dance	Both passages heard simultaneously
Transition	25	Sun setting; ‘Oh my beautiful Chinese cup’	Pentatonic figurations
Fire			
-	8	Fire rises out of the grate	Piano arpeggios
A	14	‘I light the good but I burn the bad!’	♩ ♪ ♪ ♪ accompaniment figurations
B	15+2	[Coloratura figurations]	♩ ♪ ♪ ♪ accompaniment figurations
A	5	[Coloratura figurations]	♩ ♪ ♪ ♪ accompaniment figurations
B	5	[Coloratura figurations]	♩ ♪ ♪ ♪ accompaniment figurations
Cadenza	17	‘Beware!’	[unaccompanied]
A	11	Fire pursues Child, who hides.	In subdominant (F); <i>accelerando</i>
Coda	18	Dance of Fire and Cinders; Evening falls; Child sings ‘I’m scared’	Rising chromatic chords; Child’s phrases set a tritone apart.
Shepherds/shepherdesses			
A	46	Farewell!	A Aeolian
B	43	Dance	A major
A/	8 + 16	Farewell!	A aeolian (brief reprise only)

The characters who make the least reference to the Child have notably more enclosed structures. The Armchair and Bergère challenge the Child's security and self-importance by ignoring him completely. They dance an elegantly clumsy Minuet that is reprised almost unchanged after a central, Trio-like passage. By contrast the Clock, who does directly (if briefly) address the Child ('laissez-moi au moins passer!' ['At least let me pass!']), sketches a sort of ternary form, but when he attempts a reprise of the A section (Figure 27) his machinery runs down and he is unable to complete it. The Clock confronts the Child more directly with his wrongdoings: he staggers helplessly about the room, unable to stop himself from chiming repeatedly. The nostalgic, regretful quality of the central passage of his aria introduces for the first time the idea of 'what might have been': had the Child not torn out his pendulum, he could have continued to sound the hours, each like the other forevermore.

While the Teapot affects a threatening manner, and the Tasse 'threatens him with his pointed and gilded fingers', their duet makes no reference to the Child and is carried on quite independently of him. Their scene too has a perfectly balanced ternary structure: the foxtrot of the Teapot is followed by the F major *chinoiserie* of the Cup, then the two dance as their themes are heard simultaneously in an extraordinary piece of bitonal superimposition. The duet of the Cup and the Teapot is not in itself particularly instructive but it does prompt the Child to a moment of reflection: 'O ma belle Tasse chinoise...' ['Oh, my beautiful Chinese Cup...'] he murmurs, 'stricken' [*aterré*], as they disappear. As Example 6.2 shows, his line is accompanied by a celesta figuration that simultaneously echoes the pentatonic fourths accompanying the Cup's solo and the opera's opening texture (notably from bar 5 onwards). Now in slow $\frac{3}{4}$, the celesta progression is simultaneously more purposeful and more reflective. The direction *aterré* bears a twofold meaning, for the Child is not only stricken with fear and wonder by the enchantments, but for the first time begins to realise the damage he has wrought.

Example 6.2

a. Oboe figurations, bars 1-7

b. Celesta figurations, Fig. 30+7

LA TASSE 31

p espressivo, portando

Keng-ça - fou Mah - jong, Keng - ça - fou, Puis' - kong-kong -

Celesta *p*

c. Child's reflection, Fig. 37

L'ENFANT, atterré

p

Oh! ma bel - le tas - se chi - noi - se!

Celesta

French-Swiss child psychologist Jean Piaget used the term ‘egocentric’ to describe the thinking of ‘Preoperational’ children (in the age range 2-7 years): such children can only view the world ‘in terms of their own perspective’.¹² Our Child here, aged 6-7, stands on the boundary between Piaget’s Preoperational and Operational Periods (the

¹² Robert Siegler and Martha Alibali, *Children’s Thinking* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986/2005), p. 40.

latter encompasses the ages of 6-7 to 11-12 years). A key factor in the shift from the Preoperational to the Operational stage is the development of the ability to take on different perspectives and understand processes of transformation.¹³ At this key moment, the Child's appropriation of the Cup's figuration suggests that he is learning to see from the Cup's perspective: he is beginning to grow up.

While the Armchair and Bergère, the Clock and the Cup and Teapot almost ignore the Child, who watches them in silent wonder, the Fire confronts him directly with his wrongdoing. The episode's unremitting rhythmic pulse reinforces the uncompromising nature of her reproaches: there can be no escape from the message she bears. The first character since Maman to employ the familiar *tu* form (the Clock used the formal *vous*), she is also the first to confront him with his wrongdoings: 'You have brandished the poker, upset the kettle, scattered the matches... you have insulted all the friendly gods who keep the fragile barrier between you and unhappiness'. The Fire threatens the Child not with deprivation, as did the Chairs ('No more cushions for his sleep...'), but with personal injury: 'Beware... you will melt like a snowflake on her scarlet tongue!' Ravel uses the upper limits of the soprano voice, reinforcing the episode's sense of imminent danger, while the Fire's 'hard' consonant and vowel sounds also enhance her power and menace, as Chapter Four demonstrated.

Perhaps as a consequence of these more direct interactions with the Child, the Fire's aria is much less structurally defined than the preceding scenes. It traces an expanded ternary form (ABABA, with a cadenza), whose formal flexibility is reinforced by its shifting tonality: while the earlier ternary scenes have decisive conclusions in their tonic keys, the Fire's opening material returns for the last time not in the tonic of C major but in F. This unexpected shift to the subdominant leads us into an extended coda in which the Fire dances with the 'grey, rippling and mute' Cinders. The Fire finally falls asleep in the arms and veils of the Cinders, and 'shadows pervade the room', for the evening has fallen. This movement from day into twilight (marking the conclusion of the Fire's aria) is of obvious significance in the dramatic construction of the opera. It also serves to lead the listener out of the enclosed ternary forms of the afternoon and towards the more fluid structures that characterise the evening scenes.

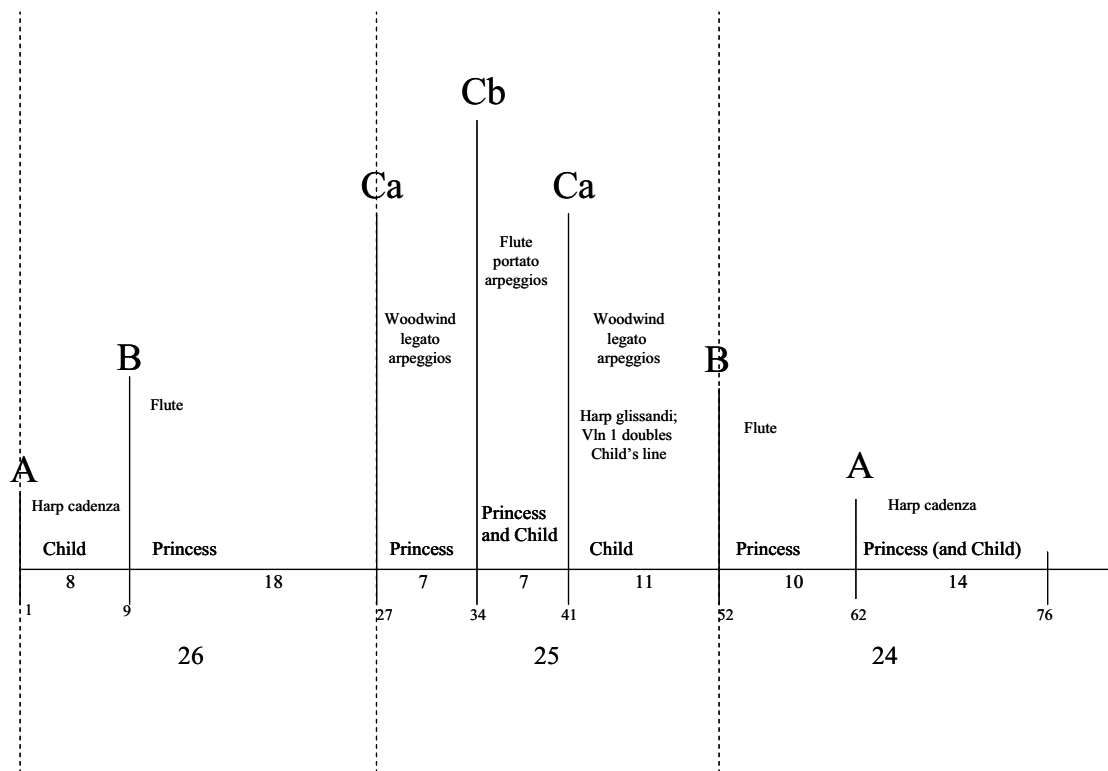
¹³ Steven Huebner also applies Piagetian theories in his analysis of the opera ('Ravel's Child'). However, he fails to consider the importance of the Child's age as indicated by Colette, and thus does not clearly distinguish between Piaget's Preoperational and Operational phases, an oversight that weakens his discussion.

Like the Clock, who wistfully recalled the ‘hour when the naughty Child was born’, the Shepherds and Shepherdesses remember the Child’s happy infancy: it was to them he gave his first smile. Unlike the Clock, though, they look forward to a grim future: ‘nous n’irons plus sur l’herbe mauve, pâître nos verts moutons...’ [‘never again will we pasture our green sheep upon the purple grass...’] they sing, and their dance ‘expresses their grief at being separated’. As he watches their lament for a lost idyll that had seemed to them eternal, the Child is being unconsciously prepared for the next scene. The foreshortened ternary form of the pastorale flows almost without pause into the appearance of the ‘adorable fairytale Princess’, who will awake in the Child an awareness of mortality and loss – who will cause him, in fact, to experience all the emotions of which his *sortilèges* have been singing. Listening to the Princess’s monologue, the Child begins to understand the nature of love: ‘You have sought me in the heart of the rose and in the perfume of the white lily...’ Yet with this knowledge comes the realisation that the damage he has wrought has banished her from his dreams forever. While the Clock was the first to evoke ‘what might have been’, it is the Princess who drives the realisation home: had the Child not destroyed her book, he could have become her ‘Prince of the Rosy Crest’. Despite – or perhaps because of – all the force of his destructive actions, he is too weak to defend her against the ‘wicked enchanter’ of the tale. He cries desperately for a sword with which to defend her, but ‘the floor opens under her’ and she disappears beneath the earth, leaving the Child ‘alone and desolate’.

This intensely dramatic and significant scene is also a moment of structural transition. The ternary form of the earlier scenes here broadens into a fully developed and meticulously balanced arch form (ABCBA), illustrated in Table 6.3. Appearing over harp arpeggios (A; Figure 62), the Princess’s opening monologue (B; Figure 62+8) is accompanied by a solo flute, the sparse textures serving to reinforce her fragile, unreal existence. The more richly orchestrated central (C) passage (Figure 65) is the emotional core of the scene and itself divides into three subsections to create a small inner arch. The heart of the passage (Figure 66) is a dialogue between Child and Princess, who lament the loss of the magical talismans of bluebird and necklace. The Child’s newfound ability to love and his burgeoning desire to protect and cherish, rather than harm, are reflected in both the expansive and lyrical nature of the scene and its broader formal design. However, he is still confined by mirrored structures: the arch

form may be more expansive, but it still returns us to the same place we began. The Princess laments the Child's inability to defend her against the wicked enchanter, accompanied once more by a solo flute (B), then we hear once again the harp arpeggios of the A section as Sleep and Night reclaim her.

Table 6.3 Organisation of Scene 7 (Princess)



In stark contrast to the Child's early bitonal outbursts, his poignant little aria, 'Toi, le cœur de la rose', remains within the peaceful tonality of E \flat major (with a brief excursion into G minor). The aria falls into a loosely binary arrangement (9+11 bars), a more open structure that signals the Child's move away from the restrictive and repetitive forms of the early part of the opera. Ravel also abandons the naturalistic text-setting of the opening scene for pure lyricism, a direct indication of what the Child has learnt from the sustained and graceful melodic lines of the Princess. 'Toi, le cœur de la rose' conveys the Child's realisation that all he has left of his Princess is a golden hair on his shoulder and 'the fragments of a dream'. Saint-André writes, 'According to Valéry, the destruction of the dream is a step towards achieving knowledge'.¹⁴ In the Child's only aria of the opera he begins to understand the nature of loss and loneliness.

¹⁴ Pascal Saint-André, 'Argument: *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*', *L'Avant-scène Opéra* 127 (January 1990), p. 57.

The aria is a moment of respite, the eye of the storm and the point about which the opera spirals. It is surely no coincidence that it straddles the precise centre of the work, appearing on pp. 50-51 of the 101-page piano-vocal score and occurring around the 22-24 minute mark of an opera some 45 minutes in duration.

On Ravel's own admission, the Child's aria owes a debt of inspiration to Massenet's *Manon*.¹⁵ Of a similarly nostalgic, sorrowful character, 'Toi, le cœur de la rose' shares the tempo marking of Manon's own aria 'Adieu, notre petite table', together with its *sostenuto* indication and its simple triadic accompaniment. Despite the different modality, the harmonies and textures are strikingly similar and there are occasional echoes of Massenet's melodic contours (Ex. 6.3; compare in particular bar 4 of 'Adieu, notre petite table' with bar 10 of 'Toi, le cœur de la rose').

Example 6.3

a. Massenet, 'Adieu, notre petite table' (*Manon*), bars 1-5

Andante (Sans lenteur) ♩ = 63
(avec émotion et simplicité) *p* *espressivo*

A dieu, no-tre pe - ti - te ta - ble, Qui nous ré - u - nit si sou vent!...

pp *sempre sost. assai*

b. 'Toi, le cœur de la rose', bars 1-3 (Fig. 73)

Andante ♩ = 63
L'ENFANT *pp*

Toi, le coeur de la ro - se,

pp *sostenuto*

¹⁵ Marnat (ed.), *Ravel: Souvenirs de Manuel Rosenthal*, p. 31.

c. 'Toi, le cœur de la rose', bars 10-12 (Fig. 74)

The musical score for 'Toi, le cœur de la rose' (bars 10-12) is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is for the vocal line, and the bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a long note, followed by the lyrics 'Tu ne m'as laiss - sé, comme un ray - on de lu - ne,'. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand, also marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

This gentle Massenet pastiche seems to reinforce the Child's strong connections to his own time and place. Gazing across the barrier of the First World War, Ravel invokes the most popular of French *fin-de-siècle* operatic composers as the Child himself looks back in regret, and laments the ending of a dream. That this music now belongs to days that have irretrievably vanished is made explicit at the end of the little aria, when a harshly dissonant chord heralds the appearance of the Petit Vieillard, Mr Arithmetic. The transition is abrupt and complete: the time for nostalgia is past.

After this scene, there is no return to enclosed ternary forms. The Petit Vieillard and his chorus of numbers might have attempted it: they set up two contrasting ideas, the four-bar phrases of 'Deux robinets coulent...' (Figure 75) and the 2x2-bar settings of the outrageous sums ('Quatr'et quatre? Dix-huit!'; Figure 80). After each of these passages, then a brief transition ('Millimètre, centimètre...'; Figure 83), we hear the A section again – but at this point we lose control: Mr Arithmetic cannot stop but breaks out once more into his sums, the round becomes *folle* and is driven to the point where it can only shatter and disintegrate completely.

Like the duet of the Cup and Teapot, the Arithmetic scene brings comic relief, albeit frenetic and bewildering; it is a *tour de force* of wordplay and virtuosic declamation. Yet its ever-building intensity is terrifying too, and as Mr Arithmetic and his chorus of numbers spiral out of control, the Child, overwhelmed, falls to the ground. As Example 6.4 demonstrates, there are striking similarities between the music of this scene and the uprising of the animals against the Child, the penultimate scene of the second half of the opera, just as Arithmetic is of the first half. Both passages are fast-paced and furious, with an ever-growing sense of impending chaos. In each episode the orchestra makes use of chromatic and step-wise movement around the pivot note C as the tension

increases. Both use the rhythm and driving energy of repeated words with distinctive consonant sounds (‘quatre et quat’ and ‘cinq et sept’ for the numbers; ‘Unissons-nous!’ for the animals); and both end with *fff* climaxes, from which voices and orchestra plummet into obscurity and which cause the Child to collapse. Implicit in the libretto and made explicit in Ravel’s score, here again we find a large-scale reciprocity of events and gestures that echoes the characteristic sequences of fairytale events.

Example 6.4 Movement around pivot notes

a. Arithmetic scene, Fig. 91



b. Animals’ rising, Fig. 138+4



On this occasion, the Child is recalled to himself by the appearance of the two Cats, and the hesitancy with which he approaches them proves that he has already learnt some crucial lessons: he is no longer so sure of himself and there is a new humility in his words and actions. The Cats reject the Child, spitting at him then turning away and ignoring him completely. The only *sortilèges* to eschew human speech completely, they are mysterious and unapproachable, excluding the Child completely from their duet.¹⁶ In watching them, however, we sense a budding awareness of sexuality that builds upon the first flutter of romantic love granted to the Child by the Princess. As Richard Langham Smith puts it:

¹⁶ The scene recalls a letter written to Colette in 1904 by her mother Sido (after the publication of *Sept dialogues de bêtes*): ‘Cats are divine creatures and for that very reason are misunderstood. Truly there are only a few souls above the ordinary run of mortals who can really discern all the mysteries of a cat’s character; as for their physical beauty, it’s beyond everything’. (Quoted in Roger Senhouse, ‘Introduction’, to *My Mother’s House and Sido*, trans. Una Vincenza Troubridge and Enid McLeod (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1953), p. 15.)

[The Child] has now been challenged by fundamental adult feelings within: firstly by tumescent stirrings of adolescent love for the Princess; and secondly by the raw spectacle of the two cats, a stroke of genius on Ravel's part, for it is not just funny, it is raunchy.¹⁷

This scene too pulls us away from ternary forms, but in a different direction. It is based on a solitary motif which is continuously developed (but not repeated) until it too reaches a pitch that cannot be sustained, and we suddenly find ourselves in the garden. Table 6.4 summarises the content and structure of these scenes.

Table 6.4 Organisation of Scenes 8-9

Passage	Bars	Action	Musical material
Arithmetic			
A	46	Arithmetic problems	4 bar phrases
B	24	Crazy sums	2x2 bar phrases
[transition]	14	'Millimetre, centimetre...'	Accelerando
A	27	Arithmetic problems	Incomplete phrases break in on each other; gradual <i>accelerando</i> leads to collapse and disintegration
B	40	Crazy sums	
[coda]	28	Numbers vanish; Child falls to the ground	<i>Prestissimo</i> ; chromatic descent
Transition	18	'Oh, my head!'	Fragments of Cat's music
Cats			
A	16	Duet	Continuous development of opening motif

As Schillmöller points out, the relative brevity of the interior scenes and their kaleidoscopic musical and stylistic idioms can, in performance, seem as bewildering to the listener as they do to the Child on stage (an effect Ravel undoubtedly intended).¹⁸ However, if these scenes could be described as a quilt of disparate – but not uncomplementary – patches, then the Garden scene is a single tapestry into which the Child himself is woven. Set beneath the light of the full moon, Ravel creates, as Colette stipulates, 'music of insects, of frogs, of toads, of the laughter of owls, of the murmurs of the breeze and of nightingales'. The Child opens his arms and sings, 'Ah, what joy to find you again, Garden!' Renouncing the desire to maim and destroy, he is finally welcoming the world and drawing it to himself. The line places him firmly within the

¹⁷ Richard Langham Smith, 'Ravel's operatic spectacles: *L'Heure* and *L'Enfant*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, p. 205.

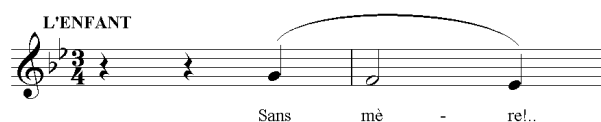
¹⁸ Schillmöller, *Maurice Ravel's Schüsselwerk*, p. 108.

scene: he sees himself no longer as a separate entity but as a part of a broader environment.

The Child is then recalled to the consequences of his actions, first by the groans of the ‘bleeding’ Trees, and then by the widowed dragonfly and bat. ‘Moved with pity’, he rests his cheek against the trunk of the big tree: his first true act of love and repentance. The tense, hemiola-laden waltz of the Bat makes the Child realise that by his killing of the Bat’s mate, the baby bats have been left with no mother to take care of them. Ravel makes the impact of the Child’s wrongdoing absolutely plain: the Child’s ‘Sans mère!’ [‘without a mother!’] is echoed by the Bat’s ‘C’est ta faute!’ [‘It’s your fault!’], ornamented with an octave transposition (Ex. 6.5).

Example 6.5 Melodic mirroring between Child and Bat

a. The Child, Fig. 115+6



b. The Bat, Fig. 116+6



The Child has gradually been coming to realise the damage he has wrought, but now his action and its consequences confront him inescapably. ‘C’est ta faute!’ is the last line the Bat sings: the waltz comes to an abrupt halt and the subsequent full bar of silence drives home the devastating effect of the Child’s actions. A similar moment of stunned realisation occurs at the end of the Dragonfly’s aria as the Child, horrified, whispers, ‘The dragonfly that I caught, pierced with a pin against the wall... Ah!’

Despite the penetrating impact of these scenes, it is the lyrical Squirrel who sweeps away the Child’s last defences. He returns to warn the Frogs against the Child, who had kept him in a cage and pricked him with his metal pen. The Child tries to excuse himself to the Squirrel – ‘The cage, it was so I could better see your quickness, your

four little paws, your beautiful eyes.’ But the Squirrel answers, ‘Yes... do you know what my fine eyes reflected? The free sky, the free wind, my free brothers, leaping as if winged... Look at what they reflected, my fine eyes, all glistening with tears!’ As Chapter Five outlined, the repetition of the word *libre* [free] here recalls the Child’s earlier declaration ‘Je suis libre, libre, méchant et libre!’, and prompts a vital revelation. The Child had initially thought himself free, just as he had thought himself strong, then, as the opera progresses, he realises that not only is he too weak to defend the Princess but his bad behaviour has trapped him in his own cage: he is bound and confined by the consequences of his actions.¹⁹ The Squirrel’s words make this awareness explicit and complete; the Child, consumed with loneliness and remorse, calls ‘in spite of himself’ for his mother.

The Child’s ‘Maman!’ is a pivotal moment, for it incites the animals’ rage. Although the Child now truly regrets his actions, he must make some kind of physical reparation in order for his repentance to be acknowledged. He achieves this by binding the paw of the wounded squirrel before collapsing. As they bear the Child towards the house and the light, the animals sing a gentle fugue in his praise (‘He is good, the Child, he is wise, he is kind...’): the Child’s newfound maturity has now been recognised by his world.

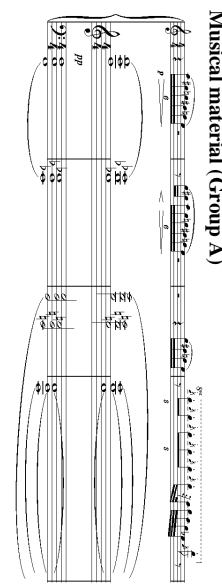
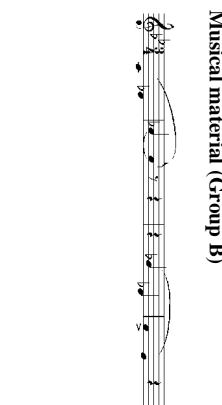

6.4 In the Garden

Matching the Child’s growing awareness and tenderness in the Garden, the second half of the opera sees much greater integration of not only characters but also musical motives and structures. The animals, instead of appearing and disappearing in turn like the inanimate *sortilèges*, all remain on stage.²⁰ Musically, the first half of the scene (until the moment of the Animals’ uprising) is given broad structural unity through commonalities of rhythm, metre and melodic material. Table 6.5 shows the scene’s principal musical ideas, which alternate and overlap: the ‘nocturne’ with its open-fifth string chords and ‘natural’ sounds; the waltzing figures shared by most of the animals; and the grumbling (croaking?) quaver seconds of the Frogs.

¹⁹ A purely balletic 1986 staging of the opera by Czech-born choreographer Jiří Kylián made this mirroring explicit: the set featured a multipurpose bell-shaped lattice that served first as the Squirrel’s cage/prison and later as the Child’s. (Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 75.)

²⁰ Colette’s directions imply this, although they do not make it explicit.

Table 6.5 Organisation of Garden Scene

Characters	Musical material (Group A)		Musical material (Group B)		Musical material (Group C)	
	[Cats]	Semitone + fifth motif				
Garden (nocturne)	Open fifth chords; parallel motion; slide-whistle (birdsong)	Semitone + fifth motif				
	Animal noises					
Trees	Open fifth chords; parallel motion; slide-whistle	Semitone + fifth motif				
	Open fifth chords; tritone movement					
Dragonfly	Valse lente, $\text{♩} = 132$ Semitone + fifth motif; piano arpeggios					
Nightingale	Birdsong	Valse lente, $\text{♩} = 132$ Semitone + fifth motif; piano arpeggios				
Dragonfly/nightingale/animal noises	Open fifth chords; nightingale's song; animal noises	Valse lente, $\text{♩} = 132$ Semitone + fifth motif; piano arpeggios				
		Faster waltz ($\text{♩} = 208$); semitone + fifth motif (fragmentary)				
Bat	Prelude: Orchestral reprise of Dragonfly's semitone + fifth motif, $\text{♩} = 208$					
Frog's waltz	Dance (valse), $\text{♩} = 208$; semitone + fifth motif					
	'Grumbling' seconds and rising fourths					
Frog and squirrel ('Save yourself!')		'Grumbling' seconds and rising fourths				
Squirrel	Valse lente, $\text{♩} = 100$ Semitone + fifth motif; piano arpeggios					
Child's reflection	Chromatic figures in bassoons and cor anglais recall slide whistle	Fragment of cats' duet (semitone + fifth)				

A direct example of this new integration of characters and melodic material occurs at Figure 110: the animal noises of the scene's opening, together with the song of the nightingale (anticipated at Figure 100 by flute and slide whistle and now sung in reality), are superimposed on the dragonfly's waltz. Where the superimposition of the music of Cup and Teapot had suggested the enclosed world view of the Child and the early 'inanimate' *sortilèges*, this passage reflects both the unity of the natural world and the Child's growing awareness of it. A similar moment of sympathetic reprise comes just before the Squirrel's aria, when the celli repeat the parallel fifths that opened the garden scene, at pitch and with the same tempo marking (*Andante*, ♩ = 60). The waltz of the Squirrel shares the piano arpeggios and the *Valse lente* indication of that of the Dragonfly (but *un poco più lento*: the ♩ = 132 of the Dragonfly becomes here ♩ = 100), a large-scale mirroring that ensures the structural coherence of the scene.

In contrast to the diverse and unrelated music of the inanimate *sortilèges* from the opera's first half, the garden scene shows a striking congruence of melodic material. The motif of a rising semitone + perfect fifth recurs consistently throughout the scene. It first appears in the duet of the two Cats (the scene that leads the Child into the Garden; Ex. 6.6a). The same motif (enharmonically re-spelt) is taken up in the waltz of the Dragonfly, when it becomes antecedent to a consequent that gently recalls Maman's falling fourth (Ex. 6.6b). The Bat then makes subtle reference to this consequent (Ex. 6.6c), before the flute takes up the Dragonfly's theme in a passage that moves seamlessly into the dance of the Frogs (Exx. 6.6d and 6.6e), in which the semitone + fifth motif is constantly reiterated. The same motive appears at the beginning of the Squirrel's waltz (Ex. 6.6f), shared between orchestra (antecedent) and Squirrel (consequent) while at the end of the Squirrel's waltz, the reappearance of the two cats prompts the reprise of a fragment from their duet: the semitone + fifth motif, succeeded by a fragment of the opening nocturne (Ex. 6.6g).

Example 6.6 Uses of the semitone + fifth motive

a. First introduced by the Cat, Fig. 97

LE CHAT *p*

Môr - nâ - ou nâ - ou, Moâ - ou.

b. Becomes antecedent to falling fourth consequent in the Dragonfly's waltz, Fig. 107

LA LIBELLULE

Où es - tu? Je te cher - che

c. Consequent appears in Bat's waltz (with octave transposition), Fig. 113+4

LA CHAUVÉ-SOURIS L'ENFANT

Tu sais? Je sais!

d. Prelude to Frogs' waltz, Fig. 118

(three bars) (three bars)

e. Antecedent becomes main melodic gesture in Frog's waltz, Fig. 122+5

f. Antecedent and consequent open the Squirrel's waltz, Fig. 131+9

L'ÉCUREUIL

mes beaux yeux? Le ciel li-bre,

Antecedent

Consequent

f

espressivo

g. Cat's semitone + fifth is followed by 'nocturne' glissandi, Fig. 134+5

p

espressivo

More than anything Ravel ever wrote, the music of the Garden Scene returns to the mood and spirit of *Ma mère l'Oye*. The opening of the scene, with its sustained string chords and haunting birdcalls, directly recalls the 'Prélude' that Ravel added to his orchestrated ballet score of *Ma mère l'Oye* (Exx. 6.7a and 6.7b). The reduction and revoicing of the underlying harmonies in Example 6.7c shows more clearly how precise is the correspondence of musical material.

Example 6.7

a. 'Prélude', *Ma mère l'Oye* (ballet), bars 43-44

pp

Sov.

b. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Fig. 100

c. (left) *Ma mère l'Oye*, bars 43-44; (right) *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Fig. 101 (reduction)

The conclusion of ‘La Belle et la bête’, with its slow chords, chromatically descending melody in the upper registers of the piano and its atmosphere of enchanted stillness, is also echoed in the string chords and slide-whistle of the Garden scene. More explicitly, the characteristic consequent of Example 6.6 is reminiscent of bars 17-20 of ‘La Belle et la Bête’, the falling fourth stretched here to a fifth, as Example 6.8 demonstrates.

Example 6.8

a. L’Enfant et les sortilèges, the Dragonfly, Fig. 107

Musical notation for Example 6.8a, showing a vocal line in 3/4 time. The melody consists of a chromatically descending line: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter), B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G3 (quarter). The lyrics are 'Où es - tu? Je te cher - che'.

b. ‘Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête’, bars 17-23

Musical notation for Example 6.8b, showing a piano accompaniment line. The melody consists of a sweeping phrase: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter), B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G3 (quarter).

The squirrel’s sweeping phrases similarly echo the Beauty’s part of ‘La Belle et la Bête’ (compare bars 35-39 of the latter, Example 5.18). The ‘knocking’ quaver seconds of the ‘Valse des rainettes’, meanwhile, hark back to the grumblings of the Beast, and the Beast’s own ancestor, Belzébuth, the ‘chien sombre’ of *Noël des jouets* (Ex. 6.9).

Example 6.9

a. Noël des jouets, bars 25-26

Musical notation for Example 6.9a, showing piano accompaniment for Noël des jouets in 6/8 time. The piece is in D major. The right hand features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and sixteenth notes. The left hand features a bass line with a chromatically descending line: G3 (quarter), F#3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C3 (quarter), B2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), G2 (quarter). Dynamics include *pp* and *p*. The piece ends with a fermata over the final G2.

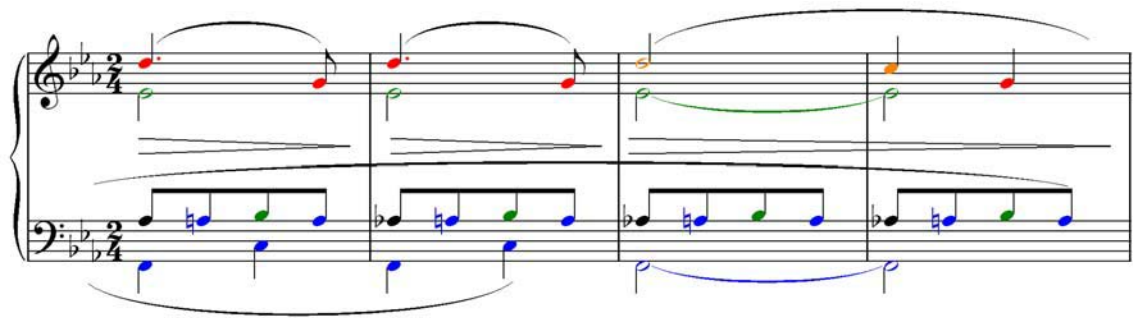
b. 'Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête', bars 49-58

c. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Fig. 127+6

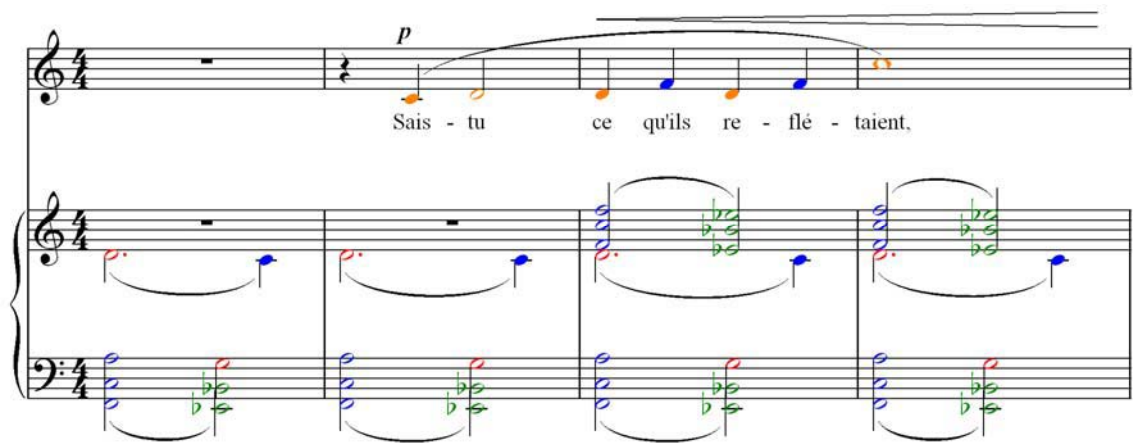
The farthest-reaching allusion to *Ma mère l'Oye* in the Garden scene of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* can be found just before the Squirrel's little aria. His line 'Sais-tu ce qu'ils reflétaient, mes beaux yeux?' ['Do you know what they reflected, my beautiful eyes?'] curiously recalls the conclusion of 'Petit Poucet'. If the resemblance is not immediately obvious, the identity of musical sense across the two passages can be seen by tracing the transposition of notes across the texture, as shown in corresponding colours in Example 6.10. Both passages, too, concern children lost and lonely in an outside world that has become threatening and unfamiliar.

Example 6.10

a. 'Petit Poucet', bars 68-71



b. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Fig. 131+5



Finally, the threefold reiteration of the cadence that signals the return of Maman recalls the conclusion of 'Le jardin féérique' with its soaring strings and harp glissandi as well as its tolling fourths. The Garden of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* seems thus to become another 'Jardin féérique', magical, joyous and transcendent.

While *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and *Ma mère l'Oye* share the basic narratives and scenarios of fairytale, in their conception, perspective and breadth they occupy largely separate spheres. Even so, the opera of the *Années folles* and the piano duet suite and ballet from the last years of the Belle Époque are united by their musical and dramatic portraits of animals (Beasts), birds, trees and gardens. This congruent imagery of the natural world indicates an underlying continuity of literary, dramatic and musical idiom across Ravel's musical fairytales. In particular, it hints at the significance and symbolism with which Ravel invested the traditional Woods of the fairytale, a concept explored in Chapter Seven.

6.5 Orchestration

Ravel's orchestration is a revealing indicator of the Child's state of mind and the world around him. Throughout the opera, the wind and brass are used principally for the 'inanimate' objects and for the expression of emotions such as boredom and rage, while the strings convey remorse and tenderness and portray the natural world.²¹ The winds dominate the first half of the work: they create bitonal havoc with the percussion section to depict the Child's 'frenzy of perversity'; Ravel chooses a bassoon and contrabassoon to herald the first appearance of the *sortilèges*; plaintive clarinets, oboes, bassoons and flutes accompany the shepherds' and shepherdesses' pastorale; the Princess is accompanied by that fragile flute; the winds and brass rudely punctuate the phrases of Mr Arithmetic. The strings, by contrast, are used for the yowls of the Cats, in haunting harmonics to accompany the waltz of the Dragonfly and to create the washes of colour that flood the second half of the opera.

The first entry of the string section in the opera comes at Figure 4. As Maman sings 'Do you regret your laziness?' two violins, a viola and a cello play a re-voiced 'Maman cadence' (the falling fourth becomes a sixth; see Example 4.10). The entry thus establishes a highly significant connection, for the strings are immediately associated with regret or remorse. Fragmentary interjections of the opening oboe theme heard over these string chords confirm the Child's sullen rebelliousness. The Child's rude gesture and Maman's punishment are accompanied by winds and pizzicato strings before, returning to reaffirm their affiliation with reflection and sorrow, the strings accompany Maman's exit on the words, 'Songez, songez surtout au chagrin de Maman!' ['Think most of all of Maman's sorrow'] (Ex. 6.11).

²¹ Ravel's orchestral scores are typically coloured by wind soloists and sections. Scott Goddard discusses this characteristic relative to *Daphnis et Chloé* and Michael Russ regarding *Le tombeau de Couperin* and the two piano concerti. Russ also notes the connections between 'mechanical' atmospheres and wind-dominated orchestration in Ravel's music, citing in particular the 'Feria' of the *Rapsodie espagnole* (Scott Goddard, 'Maurice Ravel: Some notes on his orchestral method', *Music and Letters* 6:4 (1925), p. 299, and Michael Russ, 'Ravel and the orchestra', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, pp. 124, 127, 130.)

Example 6.11 Orchestration reinforces words and emotions, Fig. 5+4

MAMAN

ff

p espressivo

6

Et son - gez à vo - tre faute! Et son - gez à vos de - voires! Son - gez, son - gez sur -

Clarinet, bassoons

Horns, bassoons

Strings

ff

p espressivo

tout au cha - grin de Ma - man!

Clarinet, bassoons

Ravel uses only winds, percussion and pizzicato strings in the first three appearances of the *sortilèges* (the Armchair and Bergère, the Clock and the Cup and Teapot). Interestingly, he twice adds a solo cello, *arco*, for fleeting moments. Sliding down through the interval of a second as the Armchair sings, ‘No more cushions for his sleep’ (Ex. 6.12a), the cello suggests the vanishing (even deflating?) cushions that are the first visible consequences of the Child’s destructive actions. The central, more nostalgic section of the Clock’s aria is introduced by the line ‘I, I who sounded the sweet hours’ (Ex. 6.12b); the shadowing of his line by the cello here reminds us that this is the first real instance of regret in the opera.

Example 6.12 Solo cello reinforces the consequences of the Child's actions

a. 'No more cushions for his sleep!', Fig. 18

Plus de coussins pour son sommeil, Plus de sièges pour

1 cello, *arco*

mf espressivo

port.

b. 'I, I who sounded the sweet hours', Fig. 23+4

L'HORLOGE

p dolce

Moi, moi qui son - nais de douces heures

1 cello, *arco*

p espress.

We do not hear the string section *arco* until the entrance of the Fire, and even here it retains its primarily accompanimental role, leaving the melodic and timbral colouration to the winds. Interestingly, this scene appears just after the Child's own first expression of regret, as he laments the loss of his beautiful Chinese cup. Does this admission, this tentative step towards repentance, win him the grace of the string section?

In the central (C) passage of the Princess's scene, the outer sections (labelled as Ca; see Table 6.3) are linked by their accompanying figurations, their legato clarinet arpeggios contrasting with the *portato* arpeggios of the flutes during the dialogue. While these woodwind arpeggios continue to dominate the texture, as both Child and Princess become more impassioned the strings take hold; at the climactic phrase (the

Real harps and impossible ones thus disappear and reappear, in flights and returns that place the listeners outside a wall while nonetheless conveying what is hidden within, as something barred to the ear.²²

The Child reclaims the ‘real’ harp and the first violins with his declaration of love. Yet he too remains outside the wall: he has not yet matured to the stage where he can surmount it.

In the Garden scene, the string section comes to the fore. They play sustained open fifths beneath the noises of the animals in the opening nocturne, but even here harmonics in violins and violas give the sound a thin, unearthly character: it is not until the threefold iteration of the ‘Maman cadence’ at Fig. 149+3 that we hear them in all their glory.²³ However, throughout the second half, the string-tinted orchestration (*portando* accompaniment to the trees, soaring violins in the frogs’ waltz, the tender progression that leads to the Squirrel’s aria, the rich chords of the reiterated ‘Maman cadence’) illuminates the natural environment and reflects the Child’s changing attitudes to and interaction with his world.

In addition to this large-scale orchestral painting, there are brief moments of illumination, emphasised by the strings. When the Bat makes plain to the Child that the death of his mate has left the children motherless and the Child murmurs ‘Sans mère!’, the strings, hitherto *pizzicato*, stop plucking to bow for a single bar. On the final page of the score, the oboes take up their perambulating theme from the work’s opening – but now they are doubled by two violins. This reconciliation of winds and strings is perhaps the best indication of the Child’s newfound maturity.

6.6 Pentatonicism

While the semitone + fifth rising motif serves to unify the melodic material of the garden scene, two other important motifs recur across the opera in more direct connection with the Child’s gradual development: the falling fourth and associated cadence that together represent the figure of Maman, and pentatonic lines spanning a descending octave. Ravel’s repeated use of pentatonicism becomes here both a

²² Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001), pp. 234, 238. Abbate fails to note that the woodwinds continue playing their ‘stolen’ arpeggios at this point, an orchestral colouring that foreshadows the first movement of the *Concerto en sol*.

²³ Although the passage is scored for full orchestra, the ear is drawn to the long-awaited *divisi* strings.

measuring stick and a device to ensure continuity.²⁴ Each time we hear a descending pentatonic scale, the Child has reached another moment of realisation or development.

The first scene establishes the importance of the scale: the Child's directness and simplicity of expression are reinforced by his pentatonic melodies (the petulant F \sharp at Figure 2+6 serves to facilitate the shift from the G-A-B-D-E group to D-E-F \sharp -A-B; see Example 6.1). The final line of his monologue ('J'ai envie de mettre Maman en penitence') spans a descending pentatonic octave (Ex. 6.14; the F \sharp needed to complete the line can be found in the oboe part).

Example 6.14 Descending pentatonic statement, Fig. 2+9

Oboes

L'ENFANT

mon - de! J'ai en-vie de met - tre Ma-man en pé - ni - ten - ce.

The Child's 'O ma belle Tasse chinoise', the point at which he begins to feel repentance, is also set across a descending pentatonic octave (see Example 6.3 above). The same gesture is applied to a similar moment of realisation: after the Dragonfly's ever-more-persistent demands for the Child to render his missing mate reach a climax the Child sings, 'I cannot! I cannot!' (Ex. 6.15).

Example 6.15 Descending pentatonic statement, Fig. 111+3

L'ENFANT

f

Je ne peux pas! je ne peux pas!___

The only two sortilèges to employ these pentatonic figurations are the Princess and the Squirrel – the two characters whose scenes have the most profound dramatic and

²⁴ Apart from the scene of the Cup and Teapot, Ravel's use of pentatonism is here divested of the traditional associations with *chinoiserie*. The open, straightforward character of the scale and its frequent employment in children's songs and nursery rhymes (typified in Kodály method) suggests instead a natural applicability for evocations of childhood.

emotional impact. The first line sung by the Princess is set to a descending pentatonic scale. This scale is repeated almost exactly by the Child at the climatic point of the scene, as demonstrated in Example 6.16. This moment is the Child's first really lyrical expression, quite different from the conversational tone of the opening and foreshadowing the lyricism of his aria. There is even a correspondence of note values, and the modulation back to E \flat makes the connection even clearer: the Princess's impact on the Child is direct and profound.

Example 6.16 Descending pentatonic statements in the Princess's scene

a. Princess's first line, Fig. 62+8

LA PRINCESSE

Oui, _____ c'est El - le, ta Prin - ces - se en - chan - té - e

b. Child's climactic phrase, Fig. 68

L'ENFANT

Ton Che - va - lier? Le Prince au Ci - mier cou - leur d'au - ro - re?

This particular pentatonic arrangement also recurs in the early moments of the Garden scene, as the Child opens his arms and sings, 'Ah, what joy to find you again, Garden!' (Ex. 6.17). Here, his descending phrase begins in whole-tones, but shifts to pentatony: the words 'quelle joie de te retrouver, Jardin!' are set to D, C, B \flat , G and F. The lessons of the Princess have evidently gone deep.

Example 6.17 Descending pentatonic statement (Fig. 102+3)

L'ENFANT, ouvrant les bras

Ah! _____ quel - le joie de te re - trou - ver, Jar - din! _____

Whole-tone
mf
Pentatonic

The final significant pentatonic gesture comes at the conclusion of the Squirrel's poignant aria, a lament for his lost freedom that sweeps away the Child's last excuses and defences. The Squirrel's final phrase, '...tout miroitant de larmes!' ['...shining with tears'] traces a descending pentatonic line. Unlike Examples 6.3 and 6.14-16, this line spans not an octave but a minor seventh. As the Squirrel concludes, the harmonies trace a cycle of fifths towards the tonic of A \flat major (Ex. 6.18). The Child's response is a remarkable indicator of his growth. The resolution of the squirrel's aria and of the whole scene is suspended as he sings 'Ils s'aiment... ils sont heureux... ils m'oublient'. This almost parenthetical passage – the Child is singing only to himself – is not itself pentatonic. As he finishes, however, the harmony finally arrives at the tonic A \flat , and the Child sings 'Ils s'aiment... Ils m'oublient... Je suis seul...' ['They love each other... They forget me... I'm alone'] on that missing E \flat . The note sounds clearly as a resolution of the Squirrel's descending scale.

Example 6.18 Descending pentatonic statement; the Child completes the Squirrel's phrase (Fig. 133+7)

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for L'ÉCUREUIL and the bottom staff is for L'ENFANT. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The Squirrel's line (top staff) is a descending pentatonic scale: G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The Child's line (bottom staff) continues the scale: B3, A3, G3, F3, E3. The lyrics are: 'Tout mi-roi-tants de larmes! Ils s'ai-ment. Ils sont heur-eux. Ils m'oublient... Ils s'aiment... Ils m'oublient... Je suis seul... Ma-man!'.

His words prove show that he has reached a nadir of loneliness and remorse, impelling him to call for his mother 'in spite of himself'. Yet by completing and resolving the Squirrel's scale the Child has also reached another important milestone: he has entirely repented of his earlier behaviour.

6.7 'Maman!'

Although Maman never fully appears on stage, her presence is musically and dramatically recalled throughout the opera in ways that offer us another perspective from which to view the development of the Child. In her first emphatic invocation in the opening scene, the word 'Maman' is set to an ascending fourth (see Example 6.14). Ravel subtly emphasises the Child's feelings of sulky rebellion here by inverting the

falling fourth that will come to symbolise Maman and her loving tenderness. This falling fourth and its associated cadence are the opera's only real *leitmotifs*. First heard with Maman's entry, clear and repeated statements of the cadence characterise her conversation with the Child (see Example 4.10). Moving in the first instance from the tonic of G by whole-tones to E \flat , the Maman cadence returns after her punishment, its falling fourths stretched to tritones (Example 6.11 above) before it is finally restated in its original form and pitch to conclude the scene, a gesture that reinforces its enclosed ternary structure.²⁵

In addition to the open statements of Maman's name and her cadence in the first, climactic and last scenes of the opera, motives based around the interval of the falling fourth occur on numerous occasions. The first part of the Child's tantrum concludes with three iterations of the word *méchant*, each set to a falling fourth – a gesture that, by recalling the 'Maman' motif, here implies his rebellion directly (Ex. 6.19).

Example 6.19 Child's falling fourth implies rebellion, Fig. 8+2

L'ENFANT

Je suis très mé - chant! Mé - chant, mé - chant, mé - chant!

Mr Arithmetic chants 'zanne, zanne, zanne' and 'toffe, toffe, toffe' to repeated fourths, and most of the Clock's phrases end with the falling fourth. The female Cat's miaous make frequent use of the same interval, and even the accompaniment to the Fire's aria swings relentlessly across perfect fourths (dominant-tonic).

Example 6.6b above demonstrates the importance of the falling fourth as consequent to the characteristic semitone + fifth antecedent of the Garden scene. Even when not stated openly, the descending fourth is often used to characterise key phrases. Many of the Princess's phrases span descending fourths, while both the Bat ('Le nid plein, les petits...') and the Squirrel ('la prison') make use of descending third + second motifs (Ex. 6.20).

²⁵ For further discussion of the 'Maman cadence', see Peter Kaminsky, 'Of children, princesses, dreams and isomorphisms: text-music transformation in Ravel's vocal works', *Music Analysis* 19:1 (2000), pp. 39-42.

Example 6.20 Other phrases spanning descending fourths

a. The Bat, Fig. 114+5

Le nid plein... Les pe - tits... sans leur mè - re.

b. The Squirrel, Fig. 129+3

La pri-son. Heu, heu. La pri-son. Le

This figure also suggests a further connection to *Ma mère l'Oye*: it is reminiscent of the characteristic intervallic pattern of 'Le jardin féérique', as Chapter Five demonstrated (see Example 5.14).

In the animals' final unaccompanied fugal chorus, the word 'l'Enfant' is heard many times set to falling fourths (Ex. 6.21), a subtle gesture that reinforces the meaning of the text – 'he is good, the Child, he is wise...': the Child has attained the tenderness and wisdom of Maman and is reconciled with both her and with his world.

Example 6.21 Setting of 'L'Enfant' to falling fourth implies reconciliation and maturity, Fig. 153+3 (falling fourths indicated in brackets)

LES BÊTES

S sa - ge, Il est bon, L'En fant, il est sa - ge.

A Il est bon, l'En fant, il est sa - ge.

T Il est bon, l'En - fant, il est sa - ge, Il est sa - ge.

Because the falling fourth is such a characteristic motif, it becomes a particularly effective expressive device when stretched into the tritone. In keeping with its traditional symbolism of angst or unease, the tritone reappears at moments of particular

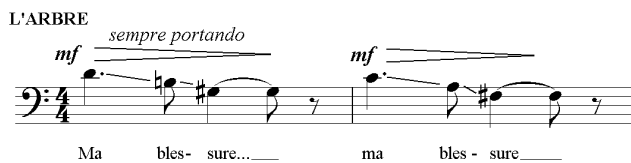
instability or ‘wrongness’. Its first appearance is, significantly, as a direct distortion of the ‘Maman cadence’, as Maman laments ‘Et pensez à votre faute...’ (Ex. 6.22a) The groans of the ‘bleeding’ Trees also make use of prominent descending tritones (Ex. 6.22b), while at the end of the Fire’s aria, the second iteration of the Child’s ‘J’ai peur’ is set a tritone below the first, a gesture that emphasises his fear and uncertainty (Ex. 6.22c).

Example 6.22 Distortion of falling fourth into tritone

a. ‘Think most of all of Maman’s sorrow’ (accompaniment), Fig. 5+7



b. The tree laments his wound, Fig. 103+1



c. ‘I’m scared’, Fig. 49+3



The use of the falling fourth at key moments emphasises the Child’s gradual development and his final reconciliation with his mother. Set to the words ‘méchant, méchant, méchant’ it encapsulates his rebellion and rage, while in the final scene its adoption by the animals for the word ‘l’Enfant’ and by the Child in the final ‘Maman cadence’ symbolises his newfound maturity. The distortion of this motif into the tritone gives particular emphasis to situations of tension and distress. It could also be argued that the more subtle iterations of the falling fourth motif suggest the hidden presence or figure of Maman presiding over the entire opera, a point that will be explored in Chapter Eight.

6.8 Conclusion

It should not surprise us that the unifying force of a ‘*fantaisie lyrique*’ entitled *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* is indeed *L’Enfant* himself. Yet because the Child does spend much of the work as an onlooker, it is easy to overlook just how important a role he plays, and how that role shapes the entire opera. *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* gains its essential coherence through the musical and dramatic characterisation of the Child. This works on a small scale – melodic gestures like the falling fourth, the tritone and the pentatonic scale that recur at crucial moments – as well as through broader questions of form, as we have seen from the contrasted structures employed across the two halves of the opera.²⁶ The Child’s musical purpose is at times obvious: his reflections between scenes in the first half serve to punctuate as well as link the narrative from each *sortilège* to the next. The lyricism of ‘*Toi, le cœur de la rose*’ reveals a subtler musical intent: it at once carries the scene of the Princess to its conclusion and proves that the Child has learned to express himself in a completely different manner from his naturalistic opening monologue. As the Child’s growth is shown through the development and integration of form, so too it emerges from Ravel’s orchestration, as the wind-dominated opening gives way to the warm string sounds of the garden scene. The reconciliation of the opposing timbres is encapsulated in the final bars of the opera.

Not frozen in time like so many operatic children, the Child has a past and a future; he was once a baby and will one day be an adult. Ravel’s musical translation of this growing up seems to demonstrate an awareness of childhood as an essentially transitive process. Unlike Schumann or Alain-Fournier, who lament the passing of childhood and take recourse in nostalgia, in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* the process of growing up is celebrated. There are sorrows along the way; the episode of the Princess teaches the Child and reminds the audience that as one grows up certain things disappear forever. Nevertheless, the opera’s conclusion is uplifting: we leave the theatre not lamenting our own lost childhoods, but content and grateful that the Child has attained the next stage of his.

²⁶ Pascal Saint-André presents a complementary perspective, writing that the opera’s forms progress from the chaos of the Child’s rage, little by little towards the clear outlines of popular dances (minuet, foxtrot, waltz), ‘then finally to the most formal and elaborate form – the fugue’. (Saint-André, ‘Argument: *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*’, p. 31.)

Is the story of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* a fairytale complete in itself, or the story of a child who finds himself in a fairytale? Both, perhaps. The Child reacts to the appearance of the *sortilèges* with shock: he never expected his armchair to sing or his clock to walk. He never questions their existence, however, and nor does he challenge the magical atmosphere by denying the right of inanimate objects to move and dance and sing. He may have accidentally found himself in a fairytale but once there he does not fight the story but unquestioningly becomes part of it. The Child is simultaneously placed within the fairytale and outside it; although he sets the *sortilèges* in motion by his own acts, it is not until the episode of the Princess that he really begins to interact with them, and not until the scene in the Garden that he is fully integrated into the story.

What happens to the Child is no dream-sequence but a fantastic reality: he touches and speaks to the *sortilèges* and they respond to him. Carolyn Abbate writes of the last pages of the opera:

The animals, the trees, the teapot, the wallpaper, the book: none of these things could speak, dance or sing. They had *seemed* to, but their animation and voices are now understood as an illusion engendered by a gaze that had broken into a secret world but had then fallen away.²⁷

This is surely a misconception. Abbate imposes here an adult's perspective on the opera, as do Christine Prost (see Chapter Five) and Steven Huebner, who writes that listeners 'never seem invited to relinquish a position of superiority towards [the Child]'.²⁸ Ravel and Colette circumvent these intellectually-driven analyses by asserting and maintaining the vision of the Child. The chairs, clocks and cups don't *seem* to come to life – in the opera they really do. They do for the Child, who is still of an age to believe such things possible, and they do for us, because we watch the opera through his eyes. As in all fairytales, belief makes the incredible reality. The importance of this perspective cannot be overemphasised. In discussing this opera about a child, about childhood, sometimes we have to put analysis to one side and simply look differently.

To conclude, let us return to Paul Bechert's description of the 'big, small world' of this *Enfant* and his *sortilèges*. Opera as a medium often deals with the very large:

²⁷ Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, p. 230. Like Abbate and many other commentators and critics, Schillmöller assumes that the opera's magical events all take place within the dreams of the Child (*Maurice Ravels Schlüsselwerk*, p. 108), but no dramaturgical or source evidence supports this interpretation.

²⁸ Huebner, 'Ravel's Child', p. 72.

nations, rulers, great heroes and villains. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* has little to do with these. Nevertheless, it does draw on the grand themes of opera: struggle, betrayal and tragedy; repentance, forgiveness and love. This broad sweep of emotions and events is concentrated and expressed through its very small central human figure. The Child's world is simultaneously enclosed – physically, in the nursery setting of the opening; metaphorically in his inability to relate to and understand it – and yet infinite, represented by the garden and in the possibilities of the imagination. The Child is small in proportion to the things around him but great in power and potential. So by the end of the opera, he has grown out of his 'big, small' world and into one that is expansive enough to contain him.

Chapter Seven

The Perilous Realm: Retelling Ravel's wartime fairytales

Il y a là, derrière la porte,
dans cette chambre noire,
mon dernier trésor de lumière:
la voix, les rires de Bel-Gazou.¹

Colette

7.1 Introduction

In 1917 Colette recorded a conversation with her four-year-old daughter (christened Colette, but known as 'Bel-Gazou'). First published in *L'Excelsior*, the story was later incorporated into *La Chambre éclairée* (1921):

'Bel-Gazou, in your bathing suit here in the woods, you look like a goldfish at the bottom of some green water. Bel-Gazou, you also look like Little Red Riding Hood, you know, the Little Red Riding Hood who was taking a pot of butter and a pastry to her grandmother?'

'A pastry! What kind of pastry?'

'Oh, ah, a *millefeuille*...'

The hard little hand leaves mine and slaps a bare thigh.

'A *millefeuille* pastry! And didn't anyone tell the mayor?'

'The mayor? Why?'

Bel-Gazou points towards the brown roof tiles of a village visible through the branches.

'The mayor down there! Because pastry is forbidden, on account of the war!'

'But...'

'And the mayor, he'd have gone to Red Riding Hood and he'd have said: "Monsieur, I am requisi... requisitioning your pastry! It's not allowed to use flour to make pastry during the war! And you must pay a thousand sous fine! For that's the way it is!"'

'But see here, Bel-Gazou, the Red Riding Hood story is very old. At that time there was no war!'

'No war? Oh! Why was there no war?'

The charming nose lowers, then tilts up, the little hand catches mine again, but Bel-Gazou's slowed footsteps and a bound, two hesitant bounds of a young goat, bespeak doubt and helplessness before a mystery: 'No war?' It's true, she cannot imagine... In August 1914, she was twelve months old...²

¹ 'There, behind the door, in that dark room, is my last precious light: the voice, the laughter of Bel-Gazou'. Colette, 'La Chambre éclairée', *La Chambre éclairée*, *Œuvres* vol. II, p. 887.

² Colette, *La Chambre éclairée*, trans. Helen Beauclerk, in *Colette: Earthly Paradise: An autobiography drawn from her lifetime writings*, ed. Robert Phelps (London: Penguin 1974), p. 231.

Although Colette's daughter never experienced the traumas of the First World War at first hand, its repercussions threatened her childhood. In this passage, Bel-Gazou tries to make the fairytale conform to the prohibitive logic of a turbulent reality; the one will not be stretched upon the fabric of the other and she is left confused and 'helpless'. As Marcel Marnat wrote of Ravel's 'Ronde', no matter how little one has been exposed to the horrors of war, remaining 'innocent' is never entirely possible.³

Jean Marnold, reviewing the première of Ravel's *Trois chansons pour chœur* in the *Mercure de France*, immediately noted their connection with the 'vieilles chansons françaises' of the sixteenth century.⁴ René Dumesnil expressed a similar view when he wrote:

[I]f the harmonies maliciously season ['Nicolette'] according to the taste of a very refined twentieth century musician, it is to better demonstrate, by recalling the present and associating it with the past, the continuity of a traditional culture.⁵

The assertion of a steadfast and vital culture was of particular importance for a set of songs composed in the winter of 1914-1915 and premièreed as the battle of Passchendaele raged. No work composed during the First World War can be examined without regard to its traumas and tragedies. This chapter contends that the context and content of the *Trois chansons* make them the most explicit of Ravel's 'wartime' works, as direct and personal a response as Claude Debussy's *En blanc et noir*. Like Colette, Ravel was distressed by the impact of the war upon those too young to understand it; like Colette, he expressed his distress through the imagery of the fairytale.

The musical and dramatic construction of the *Trois chansons* is underpinned by the conflicting demands of fantasy and reality, where real events intrude disturbingly upon fairytale narratives. The songs' content, structure and imagery, their manipulation of fairytale idioms and their uncharacteristically black humour all reflect powerfully on Ravel's wartime experiences and emotions. This chapter explores the processes whereby Ravel manipulated his fairytales and suggests a material explanation for their underlying bitterness. In doing so, it directly addresses the central concern of this thesis, the significance of childhood and fairytale in Ravel's life and work.

³ Marnat, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 433.

⁴ Jean Marnold, 'Musique' [Concert reviews], *Mercure de France*, 122:460 (16 August 1917), p. 701.

⁵ Dumesnil, 'Maurice Ravel poète', pp. 126-7.

7.2 ‘The sound of a going’⁶

As the inexorable cataclysm of July 1914 unfolded, Maurice Ravel was summering in Saint-Jean-de-Luz.⁷ His letters make no mention of the gathering storm clouds; he was alternately enjoying the ‘beautiful sky, the heat and the flies of my native region’⁸ and finishing his Piano Trio in a burst of compositional intensity. The declaration of war came as a stunning blow. To Cipa Godebski he wrote:

Since the day before yesterday, this tocsin, these weeping women and most of all the horrible enthusiasm of the young people and all the friends who must have departed and of whom I have had no news. I cannot go on. The nightmare of every minute is too terrible...⁹

From distant Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Ravel watched the ‘Miracle of the Marne’ and the ensuing ‘Race for the sea’, as Allied and German armies attempted to out-flank each other, moving westwards across northern France and southern Belgium towards the vital Channel ports. While Ravel helped to care for wounded soldiers, he was (and clearly felt himself to be) far from the vivid realities of war that were dominating Paris: the troop-trains departing, the wounded soldiers and refugees filling the streets, the posters and newspapers, the tension and terror as the city itself came under threat. Perhaps the clearest evidence of his sense of separation from the fast-moving events of the war was demonstrated through his letters in his repeated roll-calls of friends, enlisted and civilian:

⁶ *King James Bible*, 2 Samuel 5:24.

⁷ A seaside town in the Basque region, adjoining Ravel’s birthplace Ciboure.

⁸ Letter to Lucien Garban, 30 June 1914, in Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, p. 149.

⁹ Marnat, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 405. Colette, in *Les Heures longues*, described the sounding of the tocsins of war in St-Malo, a passage whose sentiments echo Ravel’s:

How can I ever forget that hour? Four o’clock on a beautiful summer day at the seaside, the sky misted over, the golden-yellow ramparts of the old town facing the sea, which near the shore was green but on the horizon was blue – the children in red bathing suits leaving the beach for their teatime snack, and climbing the choked streets... And in the centre of town, the uproar bursts forth all at once: tocsins, drum, the shouts of the crowd, the crying of children... There is a press of people around the town drummer, who reads aloud the edict: no one listens to him because they know what he is announcing. Women leave the groups at a run, stopping short as if struck, then running again with a look on their faces that seems to say they have gone beyond some invisible boundary and have plunged into another world. A few of the women burst into tears, then as suddenly stop weeping and stand, open-mouthed, to reflect. Some young lads grow pale and stare straight ahead like sleepwalkers. The car in which we are riding stops, wedged into the crowd, and the crowd congeals against the wheels. Some people climb up on it, the better to see and hear, then get down without even having noticed us, as if they had climbed a wall or a tree – in a few days, who will know whether this car is yours or mine? The details of that hour hurt me and are necessary, like the details of a dream that I would like both to leave and avidly to pursue.

(Colette, *Les Heures longues*, trans. Helen Beauclerk, in *Colette: Earthly Paradise*, pp. 242-3.)

[to Madame Alfredo Casella, 21 September]

I know that the Abbé Petit is guarding the fort of Antibes, that Sordes is at Verdun, which has been quiet until recently, but now... that Schmitt is frustrated at Toul, yawning at aeroplanes that pass too high, that Delage is furious to find himself at Bordeaux, in the midst of Mme de Noailles, Le Bargy, Maurice Rostand and a heap of *Tout-Parisiens* of the same type...¹⁰

[to Roland-Manuel, 26 September]

Go and see Pierre Haour [...] you will be able to obtain the address of our poor Sordes [...] You didn't tell me about your brother. Where is he? Write soon.¹¹

[to Manuel de Falla, 15 December]

Here is the news about our friends: Delage enlisted [...]and] is now being sent on a mission [...] Schmitt is with the 41st Territorial Army [...] My brother enlisted in the ambulance corps...¹²

Ravel's major preoccupation during late summer and autumn was his repeated and unsuccessful attempts to join up: his age (39), his small stature and physical frailty all counted against him. Meeting refusal after refusal from the military, he quickly became frustrated and depressed. His letters are filled with his continuing attempts to obtain papers and pass medical examinations, his conflicting sense of duty to family, work and country and the agony of his rejections.¹³

Although Ravel would echo popular sentiment when he wrote in September 1914 of 'this glorious fight', and although his sense of personal and patriotic duty compelled him to enlist, he was never blinded by nationalistic fervour. 'Long life to the Internationale and to Peace', he wrote in August – 'that's why I'm signing up'.¹⁴

Back in Paris by the end of 1914, Ravel began work on what would become the second of the *Trois chansons pour chœur mixte sans accompagnement*, 'Trois beaux oiseaux de Paradis'. He completed the first and third songs, 'Nicolette' and 'Ronde', in February 1915, shortly before he was finally accepted into the army (as a driver). The dedications of the *Trois chansons* reflect Ravel's personal preoccupations at the time of their composition: each is dedicated to someone whom Ravel hoped would expedite his enlistment. 'Nicolette' is dedicated to Tristan Klingsor, one of Ravel's closest friends, the poet of the *Shéhérazade* songs and himself the composer of a set of songs entitled

¹⁰ 'Soixante-deux lettres de Maurice Ravel à Hélène et Alfredo Casella', ed. Jean Roy, *Cahiers Maurice Ravel* 1 (1985), p. 70.

¹¹ In Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, p. 154.

¹² In Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, pp. 157-8.

¹³ See Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, pp. 151-8.

¹⁴ In Orenstein (ed.), *Maurice Ravel: Lettres, écrits, entretiens*, p. 142.

Chansons de ma mère l'Oye. More materially, Klingsor had connections with senior military officials; Marcel Marnat and Étienne Rousseau-Plotto suggest that he had been using these contacts in order to get Ravel the mobilisation he so ardently desired.¹⁵ ‘Ronde’ was dedicated to Sophie Clemenceau, the wife of Paul and sister-in-law of Georges Clemenceau.¹⁶ Mme Clemenceau, Austrian by birth, ran a musical salon on Sunday afternoons¹⁷, which had attracted the likes of Richard Strauss, Hugo van Hofmannsthal, Gustav Mahler and Albert Einstein, as well as numerous French musicians and composers.¹⁸ It was almost certainly at one of these weekly gatherings of musicians and artists, engineers, inventors and politicians where Ravel first encountered the mathematician and statesman Paul Painlevé, the dedicatee of ‘Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis’. By the end of 1915 Painlevé was serving in Aristide Briand’s cabinet as Minister for Public Instruction. He would become War Minister in 1917 before briefly assuming the premiership.¹⁹ Ravel hoped to persuade Painlevé, an aeronautics specialist and aviation enthusiast, to expedite and approve his application to join the airforce.²⁰ The dedication to the Clemenceau family almost certainly reflects a similar request for high-level intercession.

Little information is extant regarding the première of the *Trois chansons*. The songs exist in two different versions, one for unaccompanied mixed choir and the other for solo voice and piano accompaniment. It seems likely that Ravel completed both versions at the same time. Arbie Orenstein and Marcel Marnat give the date of the choral première as 11 October 1917, at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, with the

¹⁵ Marnat, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 410; Rousseau-Plotto, *Ravel: Portraits basques*, p. 125.

¹⁶ Ravel regularly spent Christmas Eve with the Clemenceau family, whom he may have known through his father: like Pierre-Joseph Ravel, Paul Clemenceau was an engineer, the author of a monograph entitled *Les machines dynamo-électriques* (1889) and, from the early 1900s, director of the (company) Société Centrale de Dynamite. (Michael S. Smith, ‘Putting France in the Chandlerian Framework: France's 100 Largest Industrial Firms in 1913’ *The Business History Review* 72:1 (Spring 1998), pp. 75-6.)

¹⁷ Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel et nous*, p. 48.

¹⁸ Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, p. 178n2 and (regarding the friendship between Mahler and the Clemenceau family) ‘Fonds Guillaume de Lallemand du Marais’, Médiathèque musicale Mahler, Paris (8 February 2007), http://www.bgm.org/ressources/pdf/fonds_lallemand.pdf (accessed 4 January 2008).

¹⁹ According to the journal of Magdeleine Decori, Painlevé and Sophie Clemenceau were engaged in an affair by at least the latter part of 1915. Decori noted with some surprise that Aristide Briand was unaware of this liaison (Sophie’s nationality being by then a matter of some political delicacy), implying that others in their circle did know (Michèle Plott, ‘The Rules of the Game: Respectability, Sexuality, and the *Femme Mondaine* in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris’, *French Historical Studies* 25:3 (2002), p. 550). If Ravel was in the know, the dedications – which could have been attached to the songs at any time between their composition and their publication in 1916 – may reflect another touch of his ironic humour.

²⁰ Rousseau-Plotto, *Ravel: Portraits basques*, p. 125. On 14 December 1915 Ravel wrote to Roland-Manuel ‘...after more than a year of effort, I am going to join the Air Force...’ (Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 77.)

Ensemble Vocal Engel-Bathori directed by Louis Aubert. Michel Duchesneau has subsequently established that the programme of the Société musicale indépendante concert on 5 August 1917 (at the Salle des Agriculteurs) included the songs, presented by the Engel-Bathori choir and soloists Jane Bathori, M^{lle} Puginier, Émile Engel and M. Desprez, all directed by Louis Aubert. Acknowledging this discrepancy, Duchesneau suggests that the August performance may not, in fact, have taken place as announced.²¹ Bathori herself complicated the issue in her homage to Ravel, published in the *Revue musicale* in December 1938:

Then came the war: Ravel, this prestigious and delicate musician, was mobilised to drive heavy trucks, a circumstance that did not prevent him from writing his three songs for four voices [...] In November 1917, at the Vieux-Colombier [...] the chorus of my and Engel's students, under the direction of Louis Aubert, gave the first performance of these three songs.²²

Bathori's memory is obviously at fault here, since Ravel composed the songs before he was mobilised. As it is, Jean Marnold settles the question by reviewing the songs in the *Mercure de France* on 16 August 1917 (that is, following the SMI concert of 5 August):

[Amongst the works presented was] a *String Quartet* by M. Jean Huré, full of sincerity and frequently interesting; six delicate *Poèmes arabes* by M. Louis Aubert, and *Trois chansons* for a *capella* choir by M. Maurice Ravel, just a month after we heard M^{lle} Lucy Vuillemin sing them delightfully, arranged by the author for solo voice and piano accompaniment, at the matinée organised by 'Art and Liberty' at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées.²³ At the S.M.I. these *Trois chansons* were presented with remarkable detail by the 'Engel-Bathori Vocal Ensemble', though one could perhaps reproach them for having almost *spoken*, rather than *sung* them. These pieces, which could easily sound like a pastiche of our old *Chansons françaises* of the sixteenth century, achieved a great success.²⁴

The *Trois chansons* could perhaps seem an odd addition to the ranks of French wartime compositions. Only 'Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis' makes reference to the war: the three birds are 'snow-white', 'bluer than the sky' and 'crimson', and the refrain

²¹ Michel Duchesneau, *L'Avant-Garde Musicale à Paris de 1871 à 1939* (Liège: Mardaga, 1997), p. 310.

²² Jane Bathori, 'Souvenir', *Revue musicale* 19:187 (Special issue dedicated to Ravel, December 1938), p. 180.

²³ No records of this solo performance have been located, but it seems likely that Ravel was the pianist, given that he had by then received a temporary discharge from the army, suffering from indifferent health and stricken by the death of his mother.

²⁴ Jean Marnold, 'Musique' [Concert reviews], pp. 700-701. Stephen Zank, who gives 11 October as the date of the choral première, misread Marnold's review. He writes: 'The songs were also performed at an SMI concert in August 1917 by the Engel-Bathori duo (see Marnold 1917)' – a mistranslation of: 'À la S.M.I. ces *Trois chansons* furent remarquablement détaillés par "L'ensemble vocal Engel-Bathori"...' (Stephen Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 347.)

‘My love is at the war’ is a chilling reminder that many fairytales came to bitter endings in 1914. While the song is undoubtedly a wartime lament, were its birds not the colours of the French flag it could belong to any land and any battle, real or imagined. Despite the songs’ dedications and their heritage in the ‘vieilles chansons françaises’ of the sixteenth century, they are not particularly patriotic, nor are they militaristic or triumphalist. They are instead fairytales, presenting fantastic stories set in woods and fields far away from the blood-stained mud of the Western Front.

7.3 No ‘happily ever after’

Notwithstanding their faraway settings, Ravel’s *Trois chansons* contravene one of the most basic narrative premises of the fairytale: the happy ending. The power of the fairytale narrative is firmly embedded in our psyche, and thus when we come across a fairytale where virtue is *not* triumphant or evil goes unpunished, the effect can be deeply unsettling. As previous chapters have suggested, fairytales represent an unconscious reflection of the way we think the world should function, and so, when that perfect realm and those expected patterns are threatened, we are disconcerted on an equally fundamental level. It is therefore the context of the *Trois chansons* that gives them their disturbing distortion. Marrying for money is as ancient a practice as telling fairytales. If Nicolette were a Belle Époque *toute-Parisienne* who turned down an amorous but penniless artist in favour of an elderly, ugly factory owner, nobody would be shocked. But because Nicolette wears a mobcap, because she walks in the fields picking flowers and meets a talking wolf, she is instantly a fairytale character, a Red Riding Hood of sorts. Thus our distress when she absconds with her ugly lord is correspondingly great and our sense of fitness is appalled.

Ravel reinforces his distorted narratives in the *Trois chansons* by dropping the objective voice of the storyteller and involving himself directly, deliberately twisting the perspective of the listener and offering cynical commentary on his own tales. This is unprecedented in Ravel’s writing; his characters are usually painted with clear-eyed objectivity, their eccentricities and follies and their merits highlighted equally. We laugh at Don Inigo Gómez in *L’Heure espagnole*, but still feel a little sorry for him; the bizarre apparition of staggering, shrieking clocks and fox-trotting teapots in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* provokes no ridicule and we appreciate the beauty of the swan and the

peacock in the *Histoires naturelles* as much as the ironic revelation of their greediness and foolish pride.

In ‘Nicolette’, however, Ravel abandons this dual view and pushes his *dramatis personae* into the realm of purely sardonic caricature. Every character – wolf, page, lord and Nicolette herself – cuts a highly unrealistic figure and each is depicted with neither mercy nor sympathy. The growling wolf is less frightening than ridiculous, with the *ou* vowels in the tenor and alto that crescendo to huffy staccati (Ex. 7.1).

Example 7.1 ‘Nicolette’, bars 14-17

Ren - con - tra vieux loup grog - nant Tout hé - ris - sé, l'oeil bril - lant:

The foolish sentimentality of the beautiful but two-dimensional page is similarly mocked in bars 27-39 (Ex. 7.2). Here the irony is saccharine, conveyed through the sighing *portamenti* on the word *joli* [pretty] and the repetition of that word by the soprano, bass and tenor voices around the altos’ text; the imposture implied by the tenors’ falsetto; the ‘celestial’ harmonies of the upper voices in bars 31-34; the major chords at the beginning of the verse and at the central cadence that replace the minor and open-fifth chords of the other verses; and the lingering perfect cadence in the submediant F major at bar 35 (in stark contrast to the rapidly moving harmonies that occur at this point in the other three verses). This entirely artificial and over-drawn sweetness is decisively dispelled with the first stumbling steps of the lord.

Example 7.2 'Nicolette', bars 27-34

S
Jo - - - - - li, Jo - - - - - li,
A
Ren - con - tra pa - ge jo - li, Chaus - ses bleues et pour - point gris,
T
Jo - - - - - li, Jo - - - - - li,
B
Jo - - - - - li, Jo - - - - - li,

31
pp
Ah! Pa - - - - - ge jo - li.
pp
Ah! Pa - - - - - ge jo - li.
falsetto
'Hé là! ma Ni - co - let - te, veux - tu pas un doux a - mi?
Ah! Ah! Pa - ge jo - li.

The all-conquering lord is perhaps the sole irredeemably obnoxious Ravelian creation. He staggers drunkenly against the inflexible rhythms of the song, lurching from dissonance to dissonance in sliding semiquavers. The sustained 'Hin' sounds in the tenor and alto in bars 44-47, falling chromatically in their turn, reinforce the lord's repulsiveness: the nasal vowel is strongly suggestive of disgust (see Example 4.8).

While the talking wolf and beautiful page are characters we might expect to encounter in any *conte*, the lord seems to have staggered in quite by chance. He plainly does not belong to the story and his unexpected arrival shatters it completely. He is too gross and too earthy for a fairytale, where even the wickedest characters have a little style about them. An ogre could be smelly and 'twisted', perhaps, but not a real man. We experience this same jolt or revulsion of feeling at the end of 'Ronde' when we find

that the creatures have been frightened away: something that wasn't *meant* to happen has thrown us unexpectedly and heavily from the enchanted realm of fairyland back to an ugly reality. It is easy to imagine little Mimi Godebska protesting that her 'Rara' had 'told the story wrong'.

7.4 'Paper hens and ducks from breadcrumbs'

In his 1977 research report, F. André Favat explored some of the reasons why children are naturally attracted to fairytales.²⁵ Drawing on the work of Jean Piaget, Favat presented three key findings that have direct relevance to this study:

- Fairytales embody an *accurate representation* of the child's conception of the world
- Children are attracted by the *predictability* of fairytales, having inferred outcomes from similar patterns among the tales
- Children younger than eight years are attracted to fairytales because the tales, by their form and content, *reaffirm* children's original, simplistic conception of the world as a *stable* and *gratifying* universe.²⁶

Fairytales, Favat suggests, encapsulate the way that children younger than eight conceive the world and its workings.²⁷ Clear hierarchical structures and powerful authority figures (kings, queens, fairy godmothers) reinforce children's understanding of secure parental authority: these characters set the rules, and they reward and punish according to predictable patterns of behaviour.²⁸ Yet even children can be powerful in fairytales: Petit Poucet saves himself and his brothers through his courage and ingenuity and brings wealth and ease to his entire family.²⁹

The morality of fairytales is straightforward and can be directly extrapolated to real lives: if Red Riding Hood hadn't disobeyed her mother and left the path, she would never have met the Big Bad Wolf (and the child would never have fallen down, or been barked at by the scary dog...). The clear-cut nature of fairytale characters and language is also naturally childlike: for children too the world is painted in bold colours, in right and wrong, black and white, good and bad. Children experience emotions much as

²⁵ Favat, *Child and Tale: The Origins of Interest*.

²⁶ Favat, *Child and Tale*, inside cover.

²⁷ Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. x.

²⁸ Favat, *Child and Tale*, pp. 32-3.

²⁹ Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time*, p. 63.

fairytale characters do: love, hate, pain, fear, happiness, sharply defined and intensely felt.³⁰

Like characters in fairytales, children are naturally prepared to believe in the existence of what we call ‘magic’ as an explanation for events otherwise inexplicable, whether it be a frog becoming a prince or a seed becoming a flower or the workings of a television remote control. Part of this natural belief in magic is a belief in animism: the understanding of inanimate objects as living and conscious, and of animals as able to communicate and respond in human ways.³¹ So if one damages a chair, the chair will be hurt; if one meets a squirrel in the woods, that squirrel may well be able to hold a conversation. This is not, as Favat stresses, a consciously worked out set of principles, but simply a ‘general trend of mind’.³²

As Chapter Six outlined, Piaget’s Theory of Development postulated that pre-operational children are what Piaget termed ‘egocentric’: they ‘still live with the impression that their thoughts, aims and desires are known and shared by those around them’.³³ This understanding of the world is not dissimilar to that of the fairytale hero: the briars around the Sleeping Beauty’s castle part for the true Prince, and the glass slipper fits Cinderella’s foot. As Favat surmises, ‘The events [of fairytales], however initially adverse, consistently conjoin in myriad ways to enable [the hero] to fulfil his desires’.³⁴

Favat suggests that fairytales are not just an ‘accurate representation’ of children’s reality but that they portray the world as it should be: predictable, stable and, eventually, happy. As children grow up, they find themselves experiencing a real world that is uncertain and often distressing, a world of which they are *not* the centre and which they are largely powerless to alter or contest. Fairytales can thus become both a retreat from and a protection against the disillusionments and disappointments of growing up, as children return to them in search of ‘an ordered world more satisfying than the real one’.³⁵

³⁰ Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, pp. 72-3.

³¹ Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. 30.

³² Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. 31.

³³ Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. 37.

³⁴ Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. 37.

³⁵ Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. 65.

Fairytales, then, are magical and separate, gratifying and secure. Whilst they are credible and easily understood, they also represent an idealised world that can be held against a frequently confusing and distressing reality.

For adults, enjoyment of fairytales can satisfy vestiges of belief in magic and animism, within a ‘fictive frame and kept at a distance’.³⁶ This conscious separation helps to absolve the adult reader or storyteller from any guilt or reluctance that may otherwise be felt at participating in a ‘childish’ activity.³⁷ Fairytales can thus take on a new reality, for to be successfully told to children they must be believed in, at least temporarily. Perhaps most importantly, fairytales can represent a sort of wish-fulfilment, a search for that increasingly remote and unattainable magic and security they once provided. As Favat puts it:

Just as children seek to deny a confusing real world by entering the more ordered and familiar world of the fairytale, so do adults who, faced with ambiguities and complexities, seek a similar refuge.³⁸

In his comprehensive survey *Proof through the Night: Music and the Great War*, Glenn Watkins used similar language to describe the toy-soldier-like ‘March’ from Igor Stravinsky’s *Trois pièces faciles* for piano duet, a work completed, like the *Trois chansons*, in 1915:

From yet another perspective, the act of viewing such serious matters as life, death and war through the lens of children’s games was an evasion as much as a solution. Just as Robert Graves attempted in “The Shadow of Death” to make sense of the chaos of war by placing events ‘into a childhood framework in which he would have control of them’, so Stravinsky sought an accommodation through recourse to a child’s world of make believe.³⁹

Did Ravel use fairytales – children’s stories – to retreat to ‘a child’s world of make believe’? Fairytales and childhood did seem to provide him with relief, comfort and inspiration in times of personal unhappiness or unease. The completion and première of *Ma mère l’Oye* in 1910 represented the end of his first sustained fallow period. Following the death of his father Pierre-Joseph in October 1908, Ravel had completed

³⁶ Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. 57.

³⁷ Favat, *Child and Tale*, pp. 56-57.

³⁸ Favat, *Child and Tale*, p. 56.

³⁹ Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), p. 135, quoting Patrick J. Quinn, *The Great War and the Missing Muse: The Early Writings of Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1994), pp. 35-6.

only a setting of the Greek folksong *Tripatos* and the *Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn* (a commission from the *Revue musicale* as part of their Haydn centenary tribute). In early 1910, Jacques Durand suggested to his frustrated and depressed composer that his little 'Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant' (composed whilst babysitting the Godebski children a month before Pierre-Joseph's death) could be expanded into a suite for piano duet. The swift completion of the project suggests that its form and content quickly released Ravel's flow of inspiration once more. Perhaps Ravel found solace and reassurance within the separate, perfect, ordered and magical world of the fairytale, and perhaps the completed *Ma mère l'Oye* was a tribute equally to Ravel's father and to his own childhood, as well as to the Godebski children. Chapter Eight explores the theory that *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, composed in the years after the death of Ravel's mother (which sparked an even longer period of creative sterility), was, in its twinned themes of fairytale and childhood, similarly inspiring and comforting.

On active service near Verdun in 1916, Ravel could still find respite in children and childhood: he wrote of a restful Sunday spent

...in the most lovely countryside: a torrential stream, with high banks; waterfalls on the left and a little tunnel on the right where the tiny river is lost in a bower of leaves and white roses... All the time the hell over there goes on... I ate a meal here with some family – who have been evacuated – and made paper hens and ducks [from] breadcrumbs for the kids...⁴⁰

The recipient of this letter was Roland-Manuel, who wrote of Ravel's wartime correspondence:

Although he was usually a most negligent letter-writer, the war, separator of friends, drove him to confide to paper thoughts and feelings which he would never have spoken. The tone of his letters, light at first and deliberately mocking, gradually gave way to anguish during the course of three years, which forced the spoilt child from his beloved game, and brought him face to face with himself amidst suffering and want.⁴¹

One wonders if the *Trois chansons* had a similarly cathartic and self-revelatory effect, releasing Ravel's distress and frustration and helping him to seek comfort in the fairytale. Yet, as Roland-Manuel writes, the 'spoilt child' was 'forced from his beloved game[s]' of fantasy and ironic make-believe. While *Ma mère l'Oye* had the power to relieve and stimulate Ravel in a time of personal grief, the cataclysmic events of 1914

⁴⁰ Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 78.

⁴¹ Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 76.

seemed to require a different remedy altogether. Perhaps at no other time in human history had the refuge of a ‘more ordered and familiar world’ been necessary than during those first months of the conflict, when the appalling realities of twentieth century warfare – the trenches, the mud, the civilian casualties – were beginning to reveal themselves.

7.5 ‘Where are the children?’⁴²

During the early months of the First World War, a key focus of public attention was the so-called ‘Rape of Belgium’: the devastation of that country’s infrastructure and countryside and the atrocities allegedly committed against its civilians by invading German troops. Belgian refugees poured into Paris and London, providing first-hand accounts of the looting and pillaging of land and property and the rape, mutilation and murder of civilians.⁴³ In one well-known incident, a dentist from Chelmsford, who attended Belgian refugees, said that ‘over and over again [the refugees] have passed decapitated bodies of children lying by the roadside’.⁴⁴ The figure of the child – injured, dead, orphaned, homeless – quickly came to symbolise the plight of the Belgian people. Children were depicted in innumerable cartoons, propaganda posters, pamphlets and newspaper accounts (Plate 13 is a typical example). The American writer William Dean Howells summed up popular sentiment with his poem *The Little Children*, published in Edith Wharton’s *Le livre des sans-foyer* [*The Book of the Homeless*] in 1916:

‘Suffer little children to come unto me’
Christ said, and answering with infernal glee,
‘Take them!’ the arch-fiend scoffed, and from the tottering walls
Of their wrecked homes, and from the cattle’s stalls,
And the dogs’ kennels, and the cold
Of the waste fields, and from the hapless hold
Of their dead mothers’ arms, famished and bare,
And maimed by shot and shell,
The master-spirit of hell
Caught them up, and through the shuddering air
Of the hope-forsaken world
The little ones he hurled
Mocking that Pity in his pitiless might –
The Anti-Christ of Schrecklic[h]keit⁴⁵

⁴² Colette, *La maison de Claudine*, *Œuvres* vol. II, p. 967 (Title of Chapter 1).

⁴³ Some 200 000 fled to Paris between August and October 1914 alone. (John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German atrocities, 1914: A history of denial* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2001), p. 184.)

⁴⁴ Horne and Kramer. *German atrocities, 1914*, p. 185.

⁴⁵ In Watkins, *Proof through the Night*, p. 104.

A recurring motif in these reports was the child with hands or arms cut off by vengeful German soldiers (typified in cartoons such as Plate 14). Although many reports claiming eyewitness accounts of such mutilations were probably apocryphal, the severed hands of children became one of the defining images of 1914.⁴⁶

Plate 13 **‘L’enfant au fusil de bois’ [‘The child with the wooden gun’]**

‘You have raised a real gun, one that kills, against that childish weapon, which he would have put down to eat his tart’
French postcard, 1914, reproduced in Horne and Kramer, *German atrocities, 1914: A history of denial*, p. 208.

NOTE:

This plate is included on page 221
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

⁴⁶ Horne and Kramer. *German atrocities, 1914*, p. 204.

Plate 14 **Francisque Poulbot, ‘C’est sa main’ [‘It’s her hand’]**
Cartoon, 1915, reproduced in Horne and Kramer,
German atrocities, 1914: A history of denial, p. 210

NOTE:

This plate is included on page 222
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

Horne and Kramer summarise the importance of the image of the child in the popular imagination with accuracy and insight:

Myths reduced a complex and emotionally charged situation to an emblematic person or action. Children occupied an important place in the culture and collective imagination of the warring societies in 1914-15. Faced with the German invasion, Allied civilians and soldiers displaced their own impotence to protect family and home onto the image of the child.⁴⁷

As the hard winter of 1914-15 turned to a cheerless spring, a new crisis emerged: the German blockade of the Channel ports and the loss of agricultural land and infrastructure led to chronic food shortages in Belgium. Within weeks, two million Belgians were reported to be on soup lines.⁴⁸ Once again, the key image presented to the French (and British and American) people was that of the starving child. Many of the relief organisations that sprang up during 1915 and 1916 were dedicated to the children of Belgium. It was for a concert organised by one of these organisations (Aide affectueuse aux musiciens) that Claude Debussy composed the song *Noël des enfants*

⁴⁷ Horne and Kramer. *German atrocities, 1914*, p. 204.

⁴⁸ Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York UP, 2004), p. 107.

*qui n'ont plus de maison*⁴⁹ [*Christmas of the children who no longer have homes*] in March 1917. Debussy wrote to Paul Dukas of the song's first performance:

From a financial point of view it went very well. I was able to confirm just how much our public remains attached to these sentimental pieces! The success of the three evenings was one *Noël pour les enfants qui n'ont plus de maison* – words and music by C. Debussy... you will see that from the following: 'Mama is dead; Papa is at the war; we have no wooden shoes anymore; we would rather have bread than toys'; and to conclude: 'victory to the children of France'. It's no more cunning than that? It's just that it goes straight to the heart of the citizenry.⁵⁰

Debussy was not the only composer to tug on the public heartstrings with a little sentimentalised propaganda. Henry Février's song *Lettre de petit Pierre à Papa Noël* tells of a child awaiting the arrival of Father Christmas. He begins by asking Papa Noël to leave sweets and toys in his wooden shoe, but as the song progresses he concedes his gifts to his father, off 'fighting the Boches' near Verdun.⁵¹ Many more gruesome and graphic songs that portrayed children dying heroically *pour la patrie* were performed in Parisian cabarets.

In his memoirs, Manuel Rosenthal recalled Ravel saying that after the war ended, '...everyone remembered what had been said of the Germans, who cut off the hands of little children, killed pregnant women and did so many other terrible things'.⁵² Regardless of their factual basis, the stories of German atrocities against children dominated the public imagination in 1914-1915. If there is a distant echo of such tales in Colette's *La Chambre éclairée*, the violated childhood of these war-stricken children may perhaps have contributed more directly to the distorted fairytales of the *Trois chansons*.

Amidst this national trauma came news of great personal grief for Ravel: the deaths of Pierre and Pascal Gaudin. The Gaudin family from Saint-Jean-de-Luz were the cousins Ravel never had, his *famille basque*, as he called them. Marie Delouart Ravel was a friend of Annette Gaudin, and her aunt (Maurice Ravel's great-aunt) Engrâce (or Gracieuse) Billac was for many years the nanny of the seven Gaudin children, of whom

⁴⁹ All published editions give the song's title as *Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons*. However, in Debussy's contract with Durand (4 December 1915) and all his correspondence it is spelt as given above (cf. Debussy, *Correspondance*, pp. 1957, 2064, 2093 et al.). Pierre Boulez has observed, in the course of editorial discussion, that the singular (*maison*) makes better French syntactic sense (information from Roy Howat).

⁵⁰ Debussy, *Correspondance*, p. 2093.

⁵¹ Watkins, *Proof through the Night*, p. 108.

⁵² Marnat (ed.), *Ravel: Souvenirs de Manuel Rosenthal*, p. 134.

five lived to adulthood. The Ravel family spent many summers at Saint-Jean-de-Luz, staying with or near the Gaudins, a tradition Ravel maintained all his life.⁵³ The Gaudin family considered Ravel ‘equal to a fifth son’, and he kept up a lifelong correspondence with the two sisters, Marie and Jeanne (whom he called Jane).⁵⁴ The familiarity, openness and warmth of these letters plainly reveal the degree of affection and sympathy in which he held the family. Given this close fraternal relationship, it is not hard to imagine the effect that Pierre and Pascal Gaudin’s deaths – killed by the same shell on their first day at the front – must have had on Ravel.⁵⁵

Pierre and Pascal Gaudin died on 12 November 1914, just a month before the composition of ‘Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis’, and three months before the completion of ‘Nicolette’ and ‘Ronde’. In 1917 Ravel would dedicate the ‘Rigaudon’ of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* to the Gaudin brothers. Might their deaths have stimulated the *Trois chansons* as well? In August 1932, ‘Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis’ was performed at the Festival Ravel held in San Sebastian. The song was performed in Basque (as ‘Zeruko iru txori polit’), and Étienne Rousseau-Plotto suggests that Ravel translated it himself.⁵⁶ ‘I am Basque; the Basques feel deeply but seldom show it, and then only to a very few’, Ravel said to his friend Jacques de Zogheb.⁵⁷ The Basque performance of ‘Trois beaux oiseaux’ was perhaps a second *tombeau* for the Gaudins, Ravel’s *famille basque*.

⁵³ Michel Delahaye (‘Lettres de Maurice Ravel à la famille Gaudin de Saint-Jean-de-Luz’, *Cahiers Maurice Ravel* 9 (2005-2006), p. 16), Pierre Narbaitz (*Maurice Ravel: un orfèvre basque* (Bayonne: L’Académie Internationale Maurice Ravel, 1975), p. 90, and Rousseau-Plotto (*Ravel: Portraits basques*, pp. 47-50) all believe that this tradition began in Ravel’s childhood (Rousseau-Plotto suggests 1885-1890) and continued through his youth. While this is difficult to prove conclusively, a letter from Ravel to Jeanne Gaudin in August 1901 certainly demonstrates considerable familiarity with the people and the region: ‘We hope to be able to go to Luz towards the end of August [...] It will be so lovely to see you all again!’ (Rousseau-Plotto, *Ravel: Portraits basques*, pp. 47-8).

⁵⁴ Jeanne [Jane] Gaudin moved to Paris upon her marriage in 1908 and often saw Ravel there. She affirmed that they would speak Basque together when they met (Delahaye (ed.), ‘Lettres de Maurice Ravel à la famille Gaudin’, p. 14).

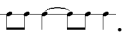
⁵⁵ In a letter to Ravel of 10 December 1914, his brother Édouard wrote, ‘On Saturday [...] I met a nurse from St-Jean-de-Luz. He told me that Pierre and Pascal Gaudin had both been killed by the same shell. Is this true, and do you have any news?’ (‘Lettres d’Édouard Ravel à Maurice Ravel’, MSS, F-Pn musique, VM-BOB 23242.)

⁵⁶ Rousseau-Plotto, *Ravel: Portraits basques*, p. 220.

⁵⁷ Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, p. 16.

7.6 'Into the Woods'

Beyond the direct distortion of their fairytale narratives and characters, the *Trois chansons* blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy in ways that directly reflect upon the circumstances of their composition. Fairytales typically stand apart from reality, remote, mysterious and yet oddly familiar. Almost every fairytale begins with some variant upon the theme of 'once upon a time', or 'long ago and far away'. These ancient phrases cross boundaries of language and culture – if the words change, the sense does not – and celebrate the continuity and impermeability of the tradition of fairytales and their telling. 'Once upon a time' carries the flavour of a ritual incantation, a circle drawn to separate the tale, the teller and the listener from the outside world. The remoteness and separation of fairytales increases their believability: we know that such things could not happen now, but can imagine that 'once upon a time' they may have really occurred. Although children may struggle to believe that a princess could sleep through the entire twentieth century, they cannot quite discount the possibility that in some distant, ancient, unknown land she may really have slept a hundred years.

Ravel typified this fairytale separation from the first bars of *Ma mère l'Oye*. The invocation of a very old courtly dance immediately establishes a faraway atmosphere that places the piece in the realm of things past. In the 'Pavane', as in the rest of the suite, the use of modal melodies similarly invokes an 'antique' style. The 'Pavane' is rhythmically characterised by the recurring motive . The crotchet tied across the half-bar effectively suspends the impetus of the third beat, creating the mysterious atmosphere that is the essence of a 'once upon a time'. The Princess of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* evokes in different but equally effective terms the distant enchantments of the fairytale. Rising out of the floor to the accompaniment of her swirling harp arpeggios, the Princess seems an ethereal creature, fragile and shadowy, never allowing the 'real' Child close enough to touch her. Carolyn Abbate also writes persuasively of the symbolism of the proscenium arch, which, like the 'once upon a time', separates the 'real world' of the auditorium from the fantasies taking place on stage.⁵⁸

The *Trois chansons* hint at the separation and antiquity of *Ma mère l'Oye* by invoking the *chanson* tradition of the Renaissance. However, this separation is no more

⁵⁸ Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, p. 230.

than a façade: the harmonies of the songs temper Renaissance purity with very Ravelian piquancy. More importantly, the veil of mystery and distance in *Ma mère l'Oye* is decisively removed in the *Trois chansons*. Where the 'Pavane' hangs suspended above its strong beats and 'Petit Poucet' wanders rhythmically uninflected through many changes of metre, 'Ronde' and 'Nicolette' are pinned to the ground by their uncompromising rhythms and heavy accents. There is, too, a distinctive earthiness in the 'Rabelaisian' assonances of 'Nicolette' that contrasts with the other-worldliness of *Ma mère l'Oye*. The lord really seems to be an elderly, ugly factory owner, no fairytale *seigneur* but a modern and very material creation. In 'Ronde' the conflict between the real and the fantastic is directly expressed through the opposition of dactylic and trochaic feet, reinforced by the juxtaposition of triplets and duplets (as discussed in Chapter Four). There is none of the mystical distance of *Ma mère l'Oye*, and harsh reality – in the form of unambiguous and unmagical trochees/duplets – finally triumphs.

This interaction of fantasy and reality is perhaps best expressed through Ravel's invocation of the Woods of fairytale. 'Do not go to the woods of Ormonde, for they are filled with sprites, ogres, demons, nymphs...' the 'old people' of 'Ronde' sing to their children. These sentiments have been expressed since time immemorial: beware the 'little people' and follow the 'horns of Elfland faintly blowing' if you dare! Central to European folklore, woods have been always places of mystery and magic. They are peopled with fairies and witches wicked and benign, sleeping princesses, gallant princes and fantastic and terrifying creatures of all descriptions. They are the quintessential location of fairytales: how many stories unfold in gingerbread houses, gloomy caves and foreboding castles beneath tall trees, in bosky glades or within thorny hedges?

For his *Ma mère l'Oye*, Ravel chose four tales to which the Woods are central: Tom Thumb and his brothers lose themselves in there, the Beauty's Beast and Laideronnette hide their ugliness from the world in secluded forest castles, and the Sleeping Beauty and her court wait in the woods for a hundred years. The prevalence of woods in fairytales, and the number of characters who must enter or traverse the woods to fulfil their destinies reveals a fascination and a mythology deeper than that of fear. Woods are terrible but entrancing, full of magic and impregnable fantasy. As Stephen Sondheim

also knew, the Woods are a borderland between reality and fairytale, a place where ordinary people have extraordinary experiences.⁵⁹

Many of the fairytales with woodland settings began as cautionary tales. Parents wanting to prevent children from wandering where they might encounter outlaws, bandits, bears and wolves told stories of ogres, giants and witches – creatures more comprehensible and more terrifying to childish imaginations. ‘Ronde’ depicts all these creatures and more, and the opening words of the ‘old people’ – ‘Do not go the woods of Ormonde!’ – recall the sentiments of these tales. ‘Ronde’, however, breaks another of the most powerful narrative conventions of the fairytale: when Red Riding Hood’s mother tells her not to stray from the path, we know that in fact she will, but when the ‘old people’ tell the children not to go into the woods at all, the children eventually obey.

The first two verses of ‘Ronde’, although sung by the ‘old people’, suggest the insouciance and impermeability of youth. The text could even be sung in reality by the young people as a parody of what their elders have told them so many times. We know the warnings must have no impact: if the creatures were still in the woods, the children would be off to find them at once. The reality of their disappearance is much more terrible than the imagination: there will be no *need* to go into the woods ever again. There is something much darker than mischievousness in the final lines of the song. A sense of cold fury and desolation belies the exuberance of the perfect cadence (Ex. 7.3). The harmonic clarity, the unambiguous quavers and the abruptly sparse texture give the words an additional and chilling emphasis that encapsulates the disillusionment of the preceding songs.

⁵⁹ In Sondheim’s 1987 musical *Into the Woods*, characters and quests from many fairytales all interact within one marvellous forest. In Sondheim’s woods, as in Ravel’s, danger, magic, enchantment and redemption are mingled; these Woods seem to represent the individual fears and desires of each character:

Into the woods to get the thing
That makes it worth the journeying
[...]
Into the woods, where nothing's clear,
Where witches, ghosts and wolves appear.
Into the woods and through the fear,
You have to take the journey

(Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Into the Woods* (original London cast recording), New York: RCA Victor, 60752-2-RC, 1990.)

Example 7.3 'Ronde', bars 79-94

Tempo 1 *cresc. sempre*

djinns, de dia-blo-teaux, d'é - frits, d'ae-gy-pans, de syl-vains, go-be-lins, kor-ri-gans, né-cro-mans, ko-bolds,
 djinns, de dia-blo-teaux, d'é - frits, d'ae-gy-pans, de syl-vains, go-be-lins, kor-ri-gans, né-cro-mans, ko-bolds,
 a - des, dry - a - des, fol - let - tes, lé - mu - res, gno - mi - des, suc - cu - bes, gor - go - nes, go - be - li - nes
 a - des, dry - a - des, fol - let - tes, lé - mu - res, gno - mi - des, suc - cu - bes, gor - go - nes, go - be - li - nes

83 *ff*

Ah! Ah!
 N'al-lez pas au bois d'Or-mon-de, N'al-lez pas au bois d'Or-mon-de, Ah!
 N'al-lez pas au bois d'Or-mon-de, N'al-lez pas au bois d'Or-mon-de, N'al-lez pas au bois d'Or-mon-de,
 N'al-lez pas au bois d'Or-mon-de, N'al-lez pas au bois d'Or-mon-de, N'al-lez pas au bois d'Or-mon-de,

89 *mp* *fp* *f*

Les ma-la-vi-sées vieil-les, Les ma-la-vi-sées vieux les ont ef-fa-rou-chés Ah!
 Les vieil-les, Les vieux les ont ef-fa-rou-chés Ah!
 Les vieil-les, Les vieux les ont ef-fa-rou-chés Ah!
 Les vieil-les, Les vieux les ont ef-fa-rou-chés Ah!

In his essay ‘On Three Ways of Writing for Children’, C.S. Lewis penetratingly observed that after one has encountered an enchanted wood in a fairytale, all woods subsequently become a little enchanted.⁶⁰ The banishment of the fantastic beings of ‘Ronde’ from their woods of Ormonde thus holds profound literary and psychological significance.

The text of the final verse of ‘Ronde’ – ‘N’irons plus au bois d’Ormonde / Hélas! plus jamais n’irons au bois...’ is made more powerful by its natural alignment with one of the most popular of French children’s songs, *Nous n’irons plus au bois* [*We shall not go to the woods again*]. *Nous n’irons plus au bois* also invokes the magic and mystery of the woods:

Nous n’irons plus au bois, les lauriers sont coupes / la Belle que voilà ira les ramasser [...] et Jeanne la bergère avec son blanc panier / allant cueillir les fraises et la fleur de l’églantier...

We shall not go to the woods again, for the laurels have been cut / the Beauty who lives there will go and gather them [...] and the shepherdess Jeanne with her white basket / goes gathering strawberries and wild roses...

Ravel’s ‘Ronde’ hints not just at the text but also gently at the tune of *Nous n’irons plus au bois*: he sets his words *n’irons plus* [or *n’allez pas*] to the mediant, subdominant (which he sharpens) and dominant, in an allusion that contemporary audiences would have been quick to recognise (Ex. 7.4).⁶¹ However, despite the similarity between the contours of the two tunes, the octave-spanning, four-bar melodic arc of *Nous n’irons plus au bois* (Ex. 7.4a) is reduced in ‘Ronde’ to pairs of two bars and spans only a fifth (Ex. 7.4b). Here once more is the sense of compression and tension that pervades the *Trois chansons*.

Although the singers of the nursery song ‘will not go to the woods again’, their fantasy is undamaged: fairytale characters still inhabit *their* forest. Ravel’s choice of text as well as his setting reinforces the links with French musical and fairytale

⁶⁰ C.S. Lewis, ‘On Three Ways of Writing for Children’, p. 65.

⁶¹ In addition to its familiar nursery associations, Claude Debussy had quoted *Nous n’irons plus au bois* in two piano pieces, ‘Jardins sous la pluie’ from the *Estampes* of 1903 and the third of the 1894 *Images*, ‘Quelques aspects de *Nous n’irons plus au bois*, parce qu’il fait un temps insupportable’ (in which he also sharpens the subdominant in bars 137-145), as well as in his song ‘L’échelonnement des haies’ and the orchestral *Image* ‘Rondes de printemps’.

traditions, but simultaneously heightens the sense of loss that we feel at the fantastic beasts of ‘Ronde’ having been frightened away.

Example 7.4

a. *Nous n’irons plus au bois*, bars 1-5

Musical notation for 'Nous n’irons plus au bois' (bars 1-5). The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features a vocal line with a melodic contour that descends stepwise from G4 to E4, then rises to F#4, G4, and finally descends to E4. The lyrics are: 'Nous n’irons plus au bois, les lauriers sont coupés.'

b. ‘Ronde’, bars 57-60

Musical notation for ‘Ronde’ (bars 57-60). The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features a vocal line with a melodic contour that descends stepwise from G4 to E4, then rises to F#4, G4, and finally descends to E4. The lyrics are: 'N’irons plus au bois d’Or-mon-de, Hé-las! Plus jamais n’irons au bois:'. The piece concludes with a 3/4 time signature change.

A more distant echo of *Nous n’irons plus au bois* also appears in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, in the lament of the Pâtres and Pastourelles for their lost lovers, their mauve grass and their green sheep: ‘Nous n’irons plus sur l’herbe mauve, pâtre nos verts moutons!’ they sing. As Example 7.5 demonstrates, the soprano phrase imitates in minor mode the stepwise descent of the folk tune’s ‘...les lauriers sont coupés’ to the tonic, while the alto line echoes the 3-2-1 movement of ‘sont coupés’ more precisely.

Example 7.5 *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, Fig. 51+6

Musical notation for 'L’Enfant et les sortilèges' (Fig. 51+6). The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features a vocal line with a melodic contour that descends stepwise from G4 to E4, then rises to F#4, G4, and finally descends to E4. The lyrics are: 'Nous n’irons plus sur l’herbe mauve, Pâtre nos verts moutons!'. The piece concludes with a 3/4 time signature change.

Ravel returns here to a sort of ‘style antico’ via the quasi-naïve pastoral atmosphere of the *Trois Chansons*. The acerbic diminished octaves created by the opposing modes are those of ‘Nicolette’ and, like ‘Nicolette’, suggest a sideways glance at the destructive ways of the world. Like the children of ‘Ronde’, the shepherds and shepherdesses ‘will not go to the woods again’, for their enchantment is at an end. It is perhaps no coincidence that this scene is followed by the episode of the Princess, who makes explicit the consequences of the Child’s actions: by destroying the book of

fairytale in which she resides, he has banished her forever into the realm of Sleep and Night.

The congruence of melodic material between the Garden scene of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and the tree-filled tales of *Ma mère l'Oye* (outlined in Chapter Six) demonstrates the continuity of Ravel's own fairytale imagery. The similarities between the fragments of birdsong in both works reflects more directly upon Ravel's love for real woods, which frequently served as a source of inspiration and necessary solitude. Much of Ravel's composing was done in the country, staying with friends in Lyons-la-forêt, Châteauneuf-en-Thymerais and Lapras par Lamastre, or, after 1921, at his own country retreat. In his later years Ravel would take his friends on long excursions into the ancient forest of Rambouillet, close to Montfort l'Amaury, showing them rare flowers and identifying all the birds they saw and heard. More frequently, he would wander alone, the exercise and the stillness helping him to resolve compositional tangles. Hélène Jourdan-Morhange described the Forest of Rambouillet as 'his kingdom', whose many glades and wandering paths were all familiar to him, and whose avian inhabitants he could imitate perfectly.⁶² Before the War, Ravel had been a frequent guest of Cipa and Ida Godebski at their country house 'La Grangette', situated in Valvins, near Fontainebleau and its famous forest. It is easy to imagine him taking Mimi and Jean on excursions into the Fontainebleau woods and telling stories as he went. Stationed near Verdun in 1916, Ravel spent some of his free hours wandering in the forest and notating birdsong, thus distancing and distracting himself from the horrors taking place around him.⁶³

In *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Ravel and Colette give voice to 'frogs, insects, toads...' as well as birds, bats, dragonflies and squirrels and even trees. The true creatures of Ravel's beloved forest thus themselves become the magical, fantastical beings that are central to fairytales, and the Garden/Wood becomes the threshold of fairyland. In *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* the characteristic physical journeying of fairytale heroes becomes the internalised journey of the Child's growing up. The Child must go outside to get to the Garden, and thus he enters an environment that, although known and beloved – 'À, quelle joie de te retrouver, Jardin!' ['Oh, what joy to find you again, Garden!'] – has become unfamiliar, mysterious and then hostile, filled with talking

⁶² Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel et nous*, pp. 29, 31.

⁶³ In Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, pp. 175-6.

animals who eventually rise up against him. The animal's climactic rising seems intended to banish the Child from the symbolic 'woods'. By binding the wounded squirrel's paw, however, the Child is able to repair the breach he has caused. While the animals bear him back towards the house in the final pages of the opera, his act of repentance has reunited him with the garden and its attendant creatures. He will be able to go to the woods again, where the children of 'Ronde' will not.

7.7 Conclusion

Concluding his discussion of the *Trois chansons*, Marcel Marnat offers this interpretation of 'Ronde':

Ravel suggests here the forthcoming shipwreck of an entire civilisation, the triumph of wicked forces deployed by the 'malavisés' against all the natural exuberance of life [...] in this unexpectedly elated 'Ronde', all the turmoil of these old imaginary paradises is subjected to the spectre of destruction; they will henceforth be disfigured by the images of war. The nostalgia of the 'boys and girls' is pitted, as in Catullus, against the choirs of the old (ideologies?) and their destructive orders.⁶⁴

Marnat's analysis sits a little uneasily within the outlook of a composer who explicitly sought to keep his art free of ideology. If Ravel's *Trois chansons* really are a response to the war, that response is much more personal than ideological. The 'old people' of 'Ronde' really *are* the *grandes personnes*, the 'big people' in a world where Ravel still felt himself a child, and the grown-ups who, as the Little Prince well knew, seek to replace the magic and wonder of childhood with the grim dreariness of the adult world.

In his 1938 homage to Ravel, Tristan Klingsor wrote of the *Trois chansons*:

And if music is also one of those faithless beauties that hide their heart, if it does not always clearly betray the secret of its author, once at least the words were clearer and less enigmatic: when the musician himself wrote the poems of his *Trois Chansons*. There we find unveiled the author's penchant for legend, for the old depths of popular tradition, for that which pleases children. There, popular sentiment and the most refined music are for once united in a delicate masterpiece.⁶⁵

The reflections of Émile Vuillermoz on *Ma mère l'Oye* and Manuel Rosenthal on *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* quoted in the Introduction to this thesis are mirrored here by Klingsor's acknowledgement of the personal import of the *Trois chansons*. In his

⁶⁴ Marnat, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 433.

⁶⁵ Klingsor, 'Maurice Ravel et le vers libre', p. 122.

fairytale, Ravel does not 'hide his heart'; Klingsor (the dedicatee of 'Nicolette') argues that they are his most 'truthful' works.⁶⁶

Favat's theory that fairytales accurately mirror the child's image of the world seems intriguingly inverted in Ravel's adult conceptions of childhood and fairytale. The characteristics of fairytales explored in this and previous chapters are all qualities with which Ravel endowed his view of childhood as well. He perceived childhood as children perceive fairytales: at once real and imagined, magic and remote, ordered and straightforward, beautiful and lyrical, satisfying and secure.

In his article 'Debussy, Ravel and Alain-Fournier', Christopher Palmer suggested that Ravel's recourse to fairytales and childhood was both 'an evasion' and a denial of Favat's 'confusing real world':

Ravel took definite steps to prevent any sully of his childlike vision of the world; he was only too painfully aware of its illusory quality and so went out of his way to avoid coming to grips with reality in any shape or form, at least in so far as his art was concerned. Hence the complete exclusion of any human elements from his scores and their replacement by stylised representation...⁶⁷

Palmer here overlooks the key point that 'stylised representation' may mask, but does not necessarily exclude, 'human elements'. Like the puppets in Paul Gallico's *Love of Seven Dolls* who reveal the emotions of their troubled puppeteer, the characters and scenarios, the dedications and the context of the *Trois chansons* speak for their creator in words that he, *basque pudique*, denied himself.

It was perhaps natural for Ravel to turn to fairytales in the *Trois chansons*, when the outbreak of war had rapidly transformed the world into a terrifying and ugly place. In the winter of 1914-15 Ravel was suffering concern for serving friends; he was troubled by the deception and evasion necessary to conceal his attempts at joining up from his beloved and ailing mother; he felt a sense of personal failure from his rejection by the army; and he was already grieving for the loss of Pierre and Pascal Gaudin. These events, to which the tragedy of the children of Belgium provided an inescapably present and gruesome background, must have dispelled any sense of childhood as safe haven. Just as the image of the mutilated child came to symbolise the impotence and trauma of a people at war, Ravel's distorted fairytales are symptomatic of profound personal

⁶⁶ Klingsor, 'Maurice Ravel et le vers libre', p. 122.

⁶⁷ Palmer, 'Debussy, Ravel and Alain-Fournier', pp. 270-271.

distress. In 1915, Ravel could no longer sustain the fairytale world that he had created for the affluent and contented Godebski children in 1910. Nevertheless, unlike Robert Graves or Stravinsky, Ravel's flight into fairytale is no escapist act. Ravel, brought 'face to face with himself' by the horrors of war, expressed in the *Trois chansons* his anguish and impotent grief.

In his essay 'The Ethics of Elfland', G.K. Chesterton wrote of the 'brittleness' of the fairytale, describing the prevalent imagery of glass and mirrors, brightness and 'thin glitter'. There is a fragility to the fairytale, Chesterton suggested, that accorded with his own 'sentiment towards the whole world':

I felt and feel that life itself is as bright as the diamond, but as brittle as the window-pane; and when the heavens were compared to the terrible crystal I can remember a shudder. I was afraid that God would drop the cosmos with a crash. Remember, however, that to be breakable is not the same as to be perishable. Strike a glass, and it will not endure an instant; simply do not strike it, and it will endure a thousand years.⁶⁸

The tragedy of Ravel's *Trois chansons* is also that of Bel-Gazou and her Red Riding Hood. The *millefeuille* is forbidden; the woods of Ormonde have been stripped of their magical creatures; belief and innocence are lost. Chesterton's glass was struck and it did not endure. It seems that the gates of Fairyland were barred to those seeking refuge from the realities of war. Which realm had become perilous now?

⁶⁸ Chesterton, 'The Ethics of Elfland', pp. 85-86.

Chapter Eight

Representations and interpretations of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*

Les grandes personnes ne comprennent
jamais rien toutes seules, et c'est fatigant, pour les enfants,
de toujours et toujours leur donner des explications.¹

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

8.1 Introduction

Ravel's music presents us with an ironic dichotomy. Its polished and ostensibly innocent surface sometimes seems to confound analysis, yet its intense sophistication constantly challenges us to wonder just how Ravel managed to cover his tracks so well. In addition to the purely musical answers to this question, many writers have extended their search to Ravel's personal life. His close family ties (in particular his devotion to his mother), the absence of documented intimate relationships, his reticence and disinclination to display emotion amongst all but his closest friends, even his diminutive stature have all fuelled the speculation of biographers. If the present study cannot avoid considering Ravel as a human being, this has been done in the preceding chapters with a constant eye to musical factors and documentation relevant to the present thesis. This chapter aims complementarily to clear away the mists of sometimes ill-supported speculation and extraneous interpretation that have come to surround the opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*.

Twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship has seen the study of fairytales approached from every conceivable angle: historical, linguistic, anthropological, structuralist and post-structuralist, feminist and post-feminist. Similarly, the place or symbolism of children and childhood in human culture and society has formed the basis of studies by psychoanalysts and psychologists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and researchers in all the creative arts. An opera that evolved across the turbulent

¹ 'Grownups never understand anything by themselves, and it's tiring for children to be forever and ever having to explain everything'. Antoine de St-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince* (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 10.

decade 1915-1925, created by two artists whose divergent lives and charismatic personalities have been subjected to innumerable critiques and analyses, and whose story unites these twin themes of childhood and fairytale, presents a particularly fruitful field of interpretative speculation. Mathias Schillmöller has described *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* as 'simultaneously problematic and astonishing', shielding itself against deconstruction through its kaleidoscopic, 'almost unordered' music.² Attempts to decode the work 'often just muddy the waters', Schillmöller suggests.³ Yet, as previous chapters have shown, a clear order and formal design do indeed bind the opera together, and its conceptual basis has been realised with equal consistency and focus.

The present chapter builds on the conclusions of Chapters Six and Seven in exploring the opera's representations of childhood and fairytale, both those inherent in the score and libretto and those woven into it in subsequent productions and scholarly appraisals. The chapter traces musicological perspectives, directorial constructions, psychological and psychoanalytic analyses and socio-political appraisals from the première up to the present day, juxtaposing these perspectives with the opera's original conception as a 'divertissement', its literary heritage in the fairytale tradition, Colette's stipulations for its staging, and the relevant writings of both its creators. In building up a partial survey of the work's performance history, it also offers a practical foundation upon which directors and designers can build.

8.2 Cultural engagement: from Marx to Matisse

In February 1981, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* was staged at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in a production created by John Dexter and David Hockney and conducted by Manuel Rosenthal.⁴ *L'Enfant* was the last work in a triple bill: Erik Satie's ballet *Parade* was the evening's curtain-raiser, followed by Poulenc's opéra-bouffe *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. The three works were bound together by their connections to the First World War.⁵ As Dexter reflected:

² Schillmöller, *Maurice Ravels Schlüsselwerk*, p. 16.

³ Schillmöller, *Maurice Ravels Schlüsselwerk*, p. 16.

⁴ The production was reprised at Covent Garden in 1983 and 1987, conducted on both occasions by David Atherton.

⁵ Although composed between 1940 and 1944 and first performed in 1947, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* was based on Guillaume Apollinaire's play of the same name, which, like *Parade*, premiered in Paris in 1917.

The original idea sprang out of the 14-18 war. My father died in 1965 of wounds received in that war. Nobody can explain why it went on so long. Nobody said 'Stop'. Nobody ever says 'Stop'.⁶

Dexter focused his underlying narrative through compelling imagery of children as the observers, victims, perpetrators and healers of violence. The sets for both *Tirésias* and *Parade* were dominated by barbed wire and spectre-like figures in gas masks; these elements were carried more subtly into *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. Wartime themes were also emphasised in the reshaped narrative of *Parade*, which centred on a 'wonderstruck' child watching circus performers playing to troops in the trenches. In the words of John Russell, the child 'lives through the dream of the grown-ups, just as in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* he will live through a dream of his own'.⁷ At the conclusion of *Parade*, the protagonist Harlequin led this 'archetypal innocent child' from the barbed wire and gas marks of war into a happier world.⁸ The Harlequin reappeared at the end of *L'Enfant*, this time leading the Child into what *New York Times* critic Donal Henahan described as 'a new world of kindness and sensitivity'.⁹ As the last work on the programme, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* surmised, encapsulated and resolved the themes of *Parade* and *Tirésias*. The Child's binding of the Squirrel's paw thus took on a significance that reached back to the earlier works: it was he who was finally able 'to say "Stop"'. The implication was plain: as Dexter said, 'children can redeem the world'.¹⁰

Dexter and Hockney also linked their three works to one another and to the time and place of their creation through Matisse-inspired décor and the emphasis of their shared music hall elements. They were thus able to draw out their overarching themes from a clearly defined historical framework. While *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* retains the timelessness of the fairytale, in its clearly defined nursery setting and in the musical and dramatic characterisation of its twentieth-century Child, the opera is closely bound to its era. In their various commentaries on the opera, Marcel Marnat, Pascal Saint-André and Michel Faure have all focused upon the opera's social context, placing the work

⁶ John Russell, 'David Hockney's designs for Met Opera's *Parade*', *The New York Times*, 20 February 1981, from Factiva Online, <http://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx> (accessed 3 August 2007).

⁷ Russell, 'David Hockney's designs for Met Opera's *Parade*'.

⁸ Anna Kisselgoff, 'Ballet: *Parade*'s dances made into curtain-raiser', *The New York Times*, 22 February 1981, from Factiva Online, <http://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx> (accessed 3 August 2007).

⁹ Donal Henahan, 'Met Opera's *Parade*, Captivating Triple Bill', *The New York Times*, 22 February 1981, from Factiva Online, <http://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx> (accessed 3 August 2007).

¹⁰ Russell, 'David Hockney's designs for Met Opera's *Parade*'.

firmly within the political landscape of the interwar years. According to these scholars, the strong presence of the Marxist Left in France at this time finds a dramatic equivalence in the revolt of the animals (the injured, subjugated populace) against the Child-tyrant. Saint-André writes of the ‘libertarian discourse’ of the Squirrel¹¹, who, according to Marnat, ‘attempts to give [the domestic animals] a sense of class-consciousness’¹² and acts as a match set to the fuel of their anger. If Marnat writes of the ‘Cartel des gauches’ (referring to the Socialist-Radical alliance that followed the 1924 elections¹³) and the ‘classes soumises’¹⁴ (and it should be noted that he puts these terms in inverted commas), Michel Faure openly discusses the bourgeoisie and proletariat¹⁵, while Pascal Saint-André invokes the deeply emotive ideal of ‘une ère libre et fraternelle’.¹⁶ Saint-André also argues that the hints of *La Valse* in the Dance of the Frogs act as a symbol of revolution.¹⁷

The libretto of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* was essentially conceived in 1916, before the Russian Revolution (1917), before the foundation of the French Communist Party (1920) and before the strikes, popular agitation and political and economic instability of the 1920s and 1930s (centred around the far-Left Popular Front movement). If the great rallying call of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* has been a galvanising force since 1789, the ‘Cartel des gauches’ was a creation of the 1920s. Although Ravel was always quick to draw firm distinctions between his art, his private life and his political or social affiliations, he was plainly a man of the left, a Dreyfusard who read *La Liberté*, associated with leftist politicians and, in 1916, firmly distanced himself from the right-wing National League for the Defence of French Music. Nevertheless, his declared and Colette’s effective political non-engagement suggests that the socio-political

¹¹ Saint-André, ‘Argument: *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*’, p. 30.

¹² Marcel Marnat, *Maurice Ravel*, p. 561.

¹³ Charles Sowerwine, *France since 1870: Culture, Politics and Society* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 134.

¹⁴ Marnat, *Maurice Ravel*, pp. 561, 565.

¹⁵ Faure, *Musique et société du Second Empire aux années vingt*, p. 85. Faure concludes his unashamedly Marxist analysis with the contention that the opera is a limited ‘bourgeois’ work: ‘when all is weighed, the moral of *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* is as conservative as that of [Debussy’s] *L'Enfant prodigue*.’ Comparing the opera with Maeterlinck’s *L'Oiseau bleu*, Faure asserts that ‘the revolutionary ambition and cosmic adventure of Tytyl become a tantrum thrown within the confines of a provincial house and its walled garden’ (p. 157). However, Faure overlooks one of the opera’s key dramatic premises: as we have seen in previous chapters, Ravel and Colette continually juxtapose the small with the very large. The Garden (which, though walled, represents the expansive fairytale woods), the repetition of the key word *libre*, and Paul Bechert’s astute recognition of the Child’s ‘big, small world’ all demonstrate the constant interplay of themes of enclosure and liberation. Later discussion returns to this.

¹⁶ Saint-André, ‘Argument: *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*’, p. 27.

¹⁷ Saint-André, ‘Argument: *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*’, p. 30.

conceptions of Marnat, Saint-André and Faure were not necessarily those of the opera's creators.

Saint-André's description of the 'revolutionary' implications of the fragmentary reference to *La Valse* seems thus to conflate several ideas and dates. The terrifying confusion of the final bars of *La Valse* may well have born of the devastation and insanity of the First World War (even though the work was first conceived as early as 1906). Yet that conflict was spawned not by revolutionary ideals but by blind nationalism and diplomatic disasters. If Ravel's self-quotation in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* is a presentiment of catastrophe, then it is not that of an ideological crisis, but of a more fundamental abandonment of morality in paroxysms of vengeful rage.

The animals' revolt is of essential structural importance to the opera's dramatic and musical construction: rather than acting as a culmination of an ever-growing unrest, it is a necessary reaction to the Child's destructive actions. The passages are two sides of the same coin, mirroring each other in their placement as well as their events: the Child's rage forms the last part of the first scene, the animals' the first part of the last scene. Ravel and Colette, with their eyes and ears for structure, must have been well aware of this reciprocity of characters and events – an essential fairytale narrative device, as earlier chapters have established. The Squirrel's aria has a similar dramatic function. Its reiteration of the key word *libre* compels the Child to the realisation that he is trapped by his own actions – no unaccountable tyrant after all. As the Squirrel sings, the animals assemble in the Garden, which becomes, in Colette's words, 'a paradise of animal tenderness and joy'. It is not the Squirrel's 'libertarian discourse' but the Child's anguished 'Maman!' that lights the flame of their anger. Following the chaotic disintegration at Figure 139, the gradual reconstruction of texture and motif into a fugal chorus could be seen to suggest a post-revolutionary reappraisal and renewal. Yet fugue, the most ordered, formalised, restrained and intellectual of musical régimes, seems to bear little resemblance to the characteristic turbulence and repression of a post-revolutionary order. And once again allegory stumbles when viewed against the dramatic action. The Child-tyrant may literally be overthrown – he falls to the ground – but the opera's conclusion is far from Orwellian: he is redeemed (reinstated?) by his act of tenderness and the animals sing a loving Monteverdian chorus in his praise.

In his 1989 Geneva production of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Oscar Araiz extended the revolutionary implications noted by Marnat, Faure and Saint-André, conceiving the opera as a metaphorical representation of the entire progress of humanity. Araiz described his conception thus:

I have chosen to focus on the symbolic aspect, for this work that interweaves multiple, interconnected themes (Nature, Science, Culture, History) has great symbolic weight: this child is not a child, it is an adult with the head of a child. It is also the image of contemporary man, advancing towards his destruction with tranquil recklessness, accumulating objects destined to kill him or make him vanish, who allows his universe to be devoured by pollution. [...] The image of the child becomes therefore the metaphor for a particular form of madness, in this case a persecution mania, which renders every object and action menacing.¹⁸

Araiz perhaps unsurprisingly labelled his creation a *pièce noire*. Such metaphors seem to sit uneasily when juxtaposed with historical circumstance and literary convention, let alone the personality and compositional philosophy of a composer who thought of neither himself nor his works with grandiosity.

A clearer reading of the opera's cultural perspective can be developed through a return to the traditions of the literary fairytale. The narrative cores of the classic fairytales have remained essentially unchanged for centuries – for example, Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant' has equivalents in the *Pentamerone* ('Sun, Moon and Talia'), *The Arabian Nights* ('The Ninth Captain's Tale') and in the tales of the Brothers Grimm ('Little Briar-Rose'). Nevertheless, all fairytales are also connected inextricably to the time and place of their telling: their characters, the locales and the terminology must be flexible in order to remain relevant and appealing to audiences of different eras, nationalities and social classes. Across the centuries, tellers of fairytales have inflected their tales with touches of topical satire, specifically intended to highlight social and moral foibles of their societies. The 'classic' French fairytales of Perrault and d'Aulnoy were born of aristocratic discourse, salon games and cultured conversation. Perrault's tales are filled with little jabs at the follies and vanities of his era: his 'Petit Poucet' concludes sardonically:

The King paid [Tom Thumb] very well to carry his orders to the army [using the seven league boots he had stolen from the ogre]; and endless maidens gave him anything he wanted in order to have news of their fiancés, and that made his biggest profit. He

¹⁸ Oscar Araiz, '*L'Enfant et les sortilèges*', in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Theatre programme (Grand Théâtre de Genève, 1989), p. 6 (also partially cited by Steven Huebner, 'Ravel's Child', p. 71).

found that some ladies gave him letters for their husbands, but they paid so badly and it added up to so little that he didn't even bother adding those tallies to his accounts.¹⁹

In keeping with fairytale tradition, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* gestures towards its era in the precision and humour of its details. Seen in this context, its flashes of satire make perfect sense. 'Since we don't understand, it will always sound Chinese', sings the Cup, mocking the French fascination with the Orient (a taste not always matched with discrimination), just as Mme D'Aulnoy's Pagodes and Pagodines played on the much earlier passion for 'Chinese in the style of Boucher'. This setting helps to clarify, for example, the analysis of Michel Faure, who considers that the character of the Teapot (who resembles the African-American boxers of popular theatre and music hall) reinforces contemporary racist stereotypes. Physically imposing and threatening violence, Faure sees the black Teapot as the 'barbarian' of bourgeois perception, rebelling against [white] social conformities through his *portando*, the jazz-based harmonies and the 'provocative' percussion section (which includes a cheese-grater).²⁰

In this loaded analysis, however, Faure overlooks a crucial piece of documentary evidence. The famous interchange of letters between Ravel and Colette on the subject of this duet, in which Colette calls for 'a great gust from the music hall' to 'stir up the dust of the Opéra'²¹, is the key to the interpretation of this eccentric scene. Neither composer nor librettist unquestioningly transfers 'lower class' musical traditions into 'high art', nor do they complacently patronise the minstrels of the popular music halls, as Faure suggests ('treat them as "jolly fellows": we will tame them').²² The ridiculous appearance of the two characters, their soldier's slang and contemporary references²³, combined with the American-style foxtrot and bitonal passages, served as a challenge to the reactionary patrons of the 'Académie nationale de la musique'.²⁴ In the rarefied world of opera, the scene – bizarre as it may seem – is in fact an abrasive intrusion of

¹⁹ Charles Perrault, *Contes de Ma mère l'Oye*, p. 197.

²⁰ Faure, *Musique et société du Second Empire aux années vingt*, p. 85.

²¹ Orenstein, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges: correspondance inédite de Ravel et Colette', pp. 210-11.

²² Faure, *Musique et société du Second Empire aux années vingt*, p. 85.

²³ Sessue Hayakawa was a Japanese silent film actor, for example. For detailed discussion, see Gregory Harwood. 'Musical and literary satire in Maurice Ravel's *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*', *Opera Journal* 29:1 (1996), pp. 2-16.

²⁴ Ravel deliberately used the official name for Charles Garnier's Opéra in his letter to Colette to emphasise the irony of the situation ('I confess that the idea of having a ragtime sung by two Negroes at the Académie Nationale de la Musique fills me with delight'). The duet of the two cats was also created in a deliberately provocative spirit. During the first Paris season in 1926 the audience whistled and miaowed back at the actors – which worried Ravel not in the least: acting on a suggestion of Roland-Manuel's he went along to the Opéra-Comique and miaowed as loudly as anybody (Orenstein, *Ravel, man and musician*, p. 270).

something like reality. It is as if a loud and colourful cabaret had opened its doors in the centre of one of the elegant terraces of the *seizième*.

Wartime and post-war themes of conflict, innocence, wisdom and renewal are unquestionably woven through *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. Like the *Trois chansons*, the opera was a work born of the First World War, even though it grew to its completed form amidst the troubled and chaotic relief of the post-war years. Beyond its socio-political implications, the allegorical significance of the fairytale with its themes of reparation and forgiveness is profound. Colette's compelling image of a peaceful Norman house (created, it should not be forgotten, in 1916) is matched by Ravel's post-war music that can comprehend the consequences of devastation and the necessity for reparation and understanding, for the rebuilding of the world by and for the children.

The effectiveness of the 1981 Metropolitan Opera production of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* lay in its unification of fairytale imagery (bright colours, mystery and magic) with tangible connections to the wartime and post-war culture of its creation (barbed wire and gas masks; Matisse and music hall), realised with eloquence and elegance, passion and restraint. Dexter's acknowledgement of the very personal origin of the triple bill (from his father's wartime experiences) seemed to ensure that the production would speak with intimacy and immediacy to its audiences. By contrast, Araiz's lofty language suggests that his production was a less accessible one, deprived of the connection with a time and place that is essential for the success of a good fairytale.

8.3 'My mother's house'

For his 1975 Milan production of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (reprised at the Opéra Garnier in 1979), Jorge Lavelli conceived a metaphorical representation that was as potent as that of Oscar Araiz, if rather more compact in its span. Lavelli, with designer Max Bignens, limited his symbolism to the passage from childhood to adulthood. He wrote that he conceived the opera as a rite of initiation into an understanding of the passing of time and of loss. He focused on the Child's own first encounters with nostalgia, expanding the significance of the Princess's scene to the work as a whole: 'the projection of a memory of childhood, with all the nostalgia of a moment lost

forever'.²⁵ Lavelli's conception of the opera, together with his choice of Stravinsky's *Œdipus Rex* as its accompanying work, is perhaps an unconscious (as it were) realisation of a particularly pervasive and significant strand of interpretation and analysis of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. A post-war opera centred on one individual Child and the conflict and resolution between child and mother offers obvious scope for psychoanalytical speculation; when combined with the singular private lives of its two creators (the one famously liberated, the other equally famously restrained), the temptation of psychological and psychoanalytical representation seems irresistible.

Crucial to an understanding of the representations of childhood in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* is the much-discussed figure of Maman. While she is absent from the stage for most of the opera – and her face never appears at all – her character focuses the narrative and her presence is subtly but pervasively recalled as the story unfolds. Earlier chapters have demonstrated the significance of the falling fourth and cadence associated with Maman in the opera's musical construction. To this one might add the dramatic symbolism of characters such as the Princess, in whom Jacques Dupont sees a mother-figure: as Dupont suggests, the mother is the 'première bien-aimée' [first beloved] of her child. Claimed by Sleep and Night, the Princess finally sinks into the ground, leaving the Child 'alone and desolate'; her disappearance implies the finality of death.²⁶ A moment of crucial dramatic mirroring occurs when the Child realises that his killing of the Bat has left the baby bats without *their* mother, a revelation described by Pascal Saint-André as 'the culmination of the expression of tragedy'.²⁷ While *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* is unique in the repertoire for its focus on the child, it is nevertheless remarkable that its final word is 'Maman'.

It is perhaps natural to attempt to extend studies of these key psychological elements in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* to the personal lives of the work's creators. Ravel and Colette were both devoted to their mothers, acknowledged their profound influence on their creative lives and were devastated by their deaths. As Colette wrote in her preface to the 1953 joint reissue of *My mother's house* (the English title of *La maison de Claudine*) and *Sido*:

²⁵ Jorge Lavelli, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges', in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, Theatre programme (Opéra Garnier, Paris, May 1979).

²⁶ Jacques Dupont, 'Visages de l'enfance, sortilèges de Colette', *L'Avant-Scène Opéra* 127 (1990), p. 24.

²⁷ Saint-André, 'Argument: L'Enfant et les sortilèges', p 50.

I always remained in touch with the personage who, little by little, has dominated all the rest of my work: the personage of my mother.²⁸

Adèle-Eugénie-Sidonie Landoy Colette, known as ‘Sido’, died in 1912, months before the birth of Colette’s only daughter and four years before the creation of the libretto of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*. Marie Delouart Ravel died in January 1917, two years before Ravel began work on the opera’s score. A fortnight after her death, Ravel wrote to Mme Fernand Dreyfus:

Spiritually, it’s dreadful...it was such a short while ago that I wrote to her, and would receive her frail letters, which saddened me... and yet, they gave me such joy. I was still happy then, despite the inner anguish... I didn’t know it would happen so quickly. And now, this horrible despair, the same recurring thoughts...²⁹

After attending Marie Ravel’s funeral, Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux recorded in her diary that Ravel and his brother Édouard were ‘in despair, they adored their mother. We almost had to carry them; they could barely stand’.³⁰ Following Marie’s death and his own early discharge from the army (due to ill health), Ravel experienced a sustained period of inactivity and creative frustration. Composition never came easily to him, but after 1917 it would be slower and harder than ever before. His next two works (*Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *La Valse*) were both realisations of projects begun years earlier. His first true post-war composition was the *Sonate pour violon and violoncelle* (1920-1922) – three to five years after the death of his mother – which was followed by *Tzigane* (1924), and then, at last, the completed *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*. The realisation of *L’Enfant*, slow and painful though it proved, perhaps had a similarly cathartic effect to that which *Ma mère l’Oye* had provided in 1910.

Given the strength of Ravel’s attachment to his mother, some musical commentators have sought to impose the figure of a desolate Ravel upon the character of the Child. As Marie’s death forced Ravel to abandon the fantasies of childhood, so the Child, rejected

²⁸ Colette, ‘Preface’ to *My Mother’s House and Sido*, trans. Una Vincenza Troubridge and Enid McLeod, p. 19.

²⁹ Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader* (New York: Columbia UP, 1990), p. 180. Marie Delouart Ravel’s death may have been hastened by the famously severe winter of 1917, in which critical coal shortages prompted a seriously ill Debussy to write his piano piece *Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon* as payment for his coal merchant.

³⁰ Chimènes (ed.), *Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux : Journal 1894-1927*, p. 926. Meg – who seemingly had little personal sympathy with Ravel, misunderstanding his music and deploring his *gauchiste* tendencies – added to this entry the caustic comment, ‘Spectacle lamentable peu réconfortant par ce temps où l’héroïsme se dépense comme la respiration’. [‘A lamentable spectacle, of little comfort in these times when heroism is being spent like breath’.]

by his phalanx of enchanted creatures, is left calling desperately for his mother. Added impetus for this point of view could be sought in the perceived parallels between the Child's initial furious rejection of his mother and Ravel's occasionally complex relationship with his. (Maurice and Édouard Ravel both lived with their parents well into adulthood and Marie, devoted to her sons, was probably over-protective and occasionally stifling.) This argument, however, denies the importance of Colette as librettist. If Ravel modified and even created particular passages of text, the characters and the broad storyline were not of his making. Furthermore, beyond any personal issues from either author (and as argued above), the Child's rage is absolutely necessary to the opera's dramatic construction and its fairytale storyline. One must after all have conflict and resolution; without the Child's initial rebellion, his reconciliation with Maman and with his world would have no impact whatsoever.

Rather than through direct characterisation or relation, a more revealing connection can be perceived through the subtle influence of Sido Colette and Marie Ravel on the tone of the opera. The libretto of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* has much in common with Colette's more reflective autobiographical works of the 1920s. The novels *La maison de Claudine* (1922), *La naissance du jour* (1928) and *Sido* (1929) semi-mythologise her Burgundian childhood with a particular focus on the figure of Sido. Comparison of excerpts from *La maison de Claudine* with the Garden scene of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* reveals a remarkable correspondence of imagery, language and sensation:

The scene is before me as I write, the garden with its sun-warmed walls, the last of the black cherries hanging on the tree, the sky webbed with long pink clouds. I can feel again beneath my fingers the vigorous resentment of the caterpillar, the wet, leathery hydrangea leaves, and my mother's little work-worn hand.³¹

In the failing light I remain leaning against my mother's knees. Wide awake, I close my useless eyes. The linen frock under my cheek smells of household soap, of the wax that is used to polish the iron, and of violets. If I move my face a little away from the fragrant gardening frock, my head plunges into a flood of scents that flows over us like an unbroken wave: the white tobacco plant opens to the night its slender scented tubes and its starlike petals. A ray of light strikes the walnut tree and wakens it; it rustles, stirred to its lowest branches by a slim shaft of moonshine, and the breeze overlays the scent of the white tobacco with the bitter, cool smell of the little worm-eaten walnuts that fall on the grass.³²

As he speaks, the garden is gradually filled with leaping squirrels. Their play, their caresses, as they are suspended in the air, do not disturb those of the frogs below. A pair

³¹ Colette, *My Mother's House*, p. 64.

³² Colette, *My Mother's House*, pp. 56-7.

of intertwined dragonflies drift apart and settle side-by-side. A group of Oleander hawk-moths imitate them. Other groups come together, then separate. The garden, throbbing with wings, glowing with squirrels, is a paradise of tenderness and animal joy.³³

Here are three depictions of the evening falling in a real and an imagined garden. Colette's familiarity with and sympathy for the 'vigorous resentment' of the caterpillar and the wakening trees are directly reminiscent of the emotions and actions she bestows upon the creatures in the Garden scene. If the first of these passages is defined by images and sensations, the second by scents and the third by movement, all three are viewed through the eyes of the child and the same spirit of peace and tenderness infuses them.

From a musical perspective, a similar connection between *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and other of Ravel's works can be traced via the falling fourth that represents 'Maman' and is recalled across the opera. One must, however, be wary of reading too much into these iterations. As Deborah Mawer writes, '[Ravel's] signature interval, objectified across his repertory, is the perfect fourth, often used in descent or with the two pitches in parallel'.³⁴ Chapter Four demonstrated the importance of motives based around a fourth in *Ma mère l'Oye*; other characteristic examples include the opening of the *Sonatine*, bars 12-15 of 'La vallée des cloches' and bars 46-49 and 55-59 of 'Noctuelles' (*Miroirs*). The falling fourth is, however, also a natural interval of spoken French; it is particularly suited to the word 'Maman'. Émile Vuillermoz recalled that many of Ravel's own spoken phrases ended with the falling fourth³⁵, a characteristic inflection that occurs repeatedly in *L'Heure espagnole* and *Histoires naturelles*. While the falling fourths that characterise the arias of the Clock and Mr Arithmetic might be argued as invoking the presence of Maman, it thus seems more likely that they mirror the natural inflections demanded by the text. The falling fourths of the Child's 'méchant, méchant, méchant!' do, by contrast, seem deliberately chosen to reflect his rebellion against Maman's influence, since such mocking children's phrases more often imply a minor third. Whatever their psychological implications, the iterations of the falling fourth play an important role in promoting thematic unity, as Chapter Six demonstrated. Ravel, *toujours conscient*, would have been very aware of this.

³³ Colette, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, in *Œuvres complètes* vol. III, p. 166.

³⁴ Deborah Mawer, 'Musical objects and machines', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, p. 48

³⁵ Vuillermoz, 'L'Œuvre de Maurice Ravel', p. 60.

The most straightforward psychological approach to *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* may be to view the work simply as a homage or *tombeau*. Sido, who gave her daughter her love and sympathetic understanding of nature, and Marie, without whom Ravel 'could never have composed *Ma mère l'Oye*'³⁶, are almost certainly memorialised in an opera that celebrates fantasy and fairytale, a childlike ability to perceive the magic inherent in the natural world, and maternal, filial and pantheistic tenderness and love. Perhaps, therefore, Ravel deliberately applied the word 'Maman' to his characteristic interval as a retrospective tribute.³⁷

8.4 'Highly interesting psychological material'³⁸

The first commentator to seize upon the psychological and psychoanalytical implications of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* was the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, who presented an analysis of the opera to the British Psycho-Analytical Society just four years after its première (her paper was then published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*). Knowing little or nothing of either Ravel or Colette, nor of their relationships with their own mothers, Klein did not attempt to project the symbolism of the opera onto its creators, but dealt with the work as an independent entity. Her paper, titled 'Infantile anxiety-situations reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse', demonstrates the increasingly reciprocal relationship between psychoanalysis and the creative arts of the time, as analysts began to realise the investigative possibilities inherent in works of art. Subsequent scholars, including Christine Milner, Richard Langham Smith, Julie Kristeva and Steven Huebner have drawn upon or developed Klein's theories in their own analyses of the opera.³⁹

While these later studies have considerable scholarly value, none of them note the degree of disconnection between Klein's paper and the opera itself. On her own

³⁶ Jean Françaix, *De la musique et des musiciens*, p. 164.

³⁷ More poignantly, the libretto seems to reflect not just Colette's grief at Sido's death, but something of her own, still-unfamiliar motherhood. The relationship between Colette and her daughter was always rather fraught; the younger Colette spent much of her childhood in the care of nurses and governesses and in later life tended to remain resentfully in the shadow of her illustrious mother. Perhaps as she wrote the libretto of what she originally intended to be a *Divertissement pour ma fille*, Colette was beginning to realise that she could not be for her daughter the mother that Sido had been for her. Was she then attempting to recreate the figure of her wise, present and devoted mother in herself?

³⁸ Melanie Klein, 'Infantile anxiety-situations reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929), p. 436.

³⁹ Christine Milner, 'Le corps de Sido', *Revue littéraire mensuelle* 631 (1981), pp. 71-84; Richard Langham Smith, 'Ravel's operatic spectacles'; Julie Kristeva, *Le génie féminin: la vie, la folie, les mots*, vol. 3, 'Colette' (Paris: Fayard, 2002); Steven Huebner, 'Ravel's Child'.

admission, Klein based her analysis upon a review by Eduard Jakob of the 1929 Viennese production (sung in German), published in the *Berliner Tageblatt*. As Ole Olsen observes, she did not attend a performance and thus heard not a note of Ravel's music nor a word of Colette's libretto.⁴⁰ As an analysis of the contents of the *review*, Klein's conclusions can be defended. As an analysis of the opera itself, however, her arguments are rendered highly questionable if not untenable by corruptions and mistranslations of the libretto, together with her unfamiliarity with the work's details and subtleties.

The opera's journey through three languages and four countries (French into an Austrian production sung in German, to a Berlin review and thence to a paper written in English and given in London) deprived it of many linguistic subtleties, an element crucial in any text by Colette, of all writers. Typical of the significance that Klein's analysis accords to dubious translations is the line 'J'ai envie de manger tous les gateaux' ['I want to eat all the cakes'], which becomes in her paper 'I'd like *best of all* to eat up *all* the cake *in the world*'.⁴¹ In an important shift of psychological and literary emphasis, a desire that is both achievable and just one of several expressed wants ('I want to go for a walk, I want to eat all the cakes, I want to pull the cat's tail...') becomes both an impossible fantasy and the culmination of all desires. The Child's chief wish is *not* oral gratification, as Klein suggests ('eating up all the cake in the world'). His final 'J'ai envie de mettre Maman en pénitence' ['I want to put Maman in the corner'] demonstrates the shift of his desires from the general ('I want to roar at everyone') to the specific: it is *Maman* against whom his anger is really directed, and he wishes for adult power sufficient to punish her.

An equally important shift of linguistic emphasis may be observed in Klein's analysis of the opera's final scene. Klein (or the reviewer) noted that the animals sing of the 'good and well-behaved' child.⁴² The line in fact reads 'Il est bon, l'Enfant, il est sage'. While *sage*, when applied to a child, does mean 'well-behaved', it also means 'wise'. This line directly recalls Maman's first words, 'Bébé a été sage?' The central

⁴⁰ Ole Andkjær Olsen, 'Depression and Reparation as Themes in Melanie Klein's Analysis of the Painter Ruth Weber', *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 27 (2004), p. 34. Klein herself was then living in London (having emigrated in 1926 to work with Ernest Jones). She wrote that 'my account of [the opera's] content is taken almost word for word from a review by Eduard Jakob in the *Berliner Tageblatt*'. (Klein, 'Infantile anxiety-situations', p. 436.)

⁴¹ Klein, 'Infantile anxiety-situations', p. 440.

⁴² Klein, 'Infantile anxiety-situations', p. 437.

point of the opera is that the Child has achieved knowledge and understanding of the world around him, not that he has finally emerged from his temper-tantrum into conformity with the adult expectations of ‘good behaviour’. The reappearance of the word *sage* in the final chorus is a deliberate literary and dramatic device: in crucially exploiting the double meaning, the word demonstrates the Child’s newfound maturity.

Klein interprets the Child’s spilling of ink on the table and overturning the kettle in the fire as ‘representing the weapons which very little children have at their disposal: namely, the device of soiling with excrement’.⁴³ In this context, the line she attributes to the Fauteuil and Bergère, ‘Away with the *dirty* little creature’, gains added emphasis: for a child that has soiled itself, the humiliation and shame of being ‘dirty’ is severe. In fact, the line sung by the duo is much simpler: they ‘ne voudront plus de l’Enfant’ [‘want no more of the Child’]. In any case, a child of ‘six or seven’ has grown beyond ‘soiling with excrement’: this is the action of a toddler.

Crucially, in Klein’s paper the opera is given the title *The Magic Word*. This is a translation of the German *Das Zauberwort*, under which name the Viennese production was staged, and refers of course to ‘Maman’. While the significance of the presence and image of Maman is undeniable, this translated title casts the entire work in a dramatically different light from *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* [*The Child and the enchantments*], and provides infinitely greater scope for psychoanalytical speculation. Klein writes, for example, ‘As he cares for the wounded squirrel, [the Child] whispers, “Mama”’.⁴⁴ This seems a significant juxtaposition of events: the Child is acknowledging the centrality of Maman in his act of reparation and love and consciously associating himself with her and with all that is maternal, forgiving and gentle. But it is inaccurate: in fact the Child is impelled to call for his mother when, observing the tenderness of the two cats on the wall, he finally acknowledges and understands his own loneliness and longing for love. Klein adds of the final chorus that ‘as the animals leave the stage, some of them cannot refrain from themselves calling out “Mama”’.⁴⁵ This is another mistaken emphasis, since the animals call for Maman only to summon her; the final iteration of that word is left to the Child alone.

⁴³ Klein, ‘Infantile anxiety-situations’, p. 437.

⁴⁴ Klein, ‘Infantile anxiety-situations’, p. 440.

⁴⁵ Klein, ‘Infantile anxiety-situations’, p. 437.

Perhaps the least substantiated of Klein's hypotheses is her assertion that the figure of the Child's father (never mentioned in the opera) is continuously present through multiple phallic symbols. The Child's destructive frenzy is an attack 'on the mother's body and the father's penis in it'.⁴⁶ She sees the caged squirrel and the pendulum torn from the clock as 'plain symbols of the penis in the mother's body'⁴⁷, the torn pastoral wall-hanging as representing 'the act of coitus with the mother'⁴⁸, and writes that:

...the little old number-man who comes out of the book-cover is the father (represented by his penis), now in the character of judge, and about to call the child, who faints with anxiety, to his reckoning for the damage he has done and the theft he has committed in the mother's body.⁴⁹

Since the crucial scene of the fairytale Princess was seemingly omitted from the review (and thus Klein's paper), we have to infer for ourselves the implications of the Child's desperate cry for his sword with which to defend the Princess.

Klein's conclusions are fatally undermined by her scant knowledge of the opera, by the omission of crucial scenes and characters – the Princess and the Cats not the least of these – and by her failure to appreciate the extent and significance of the Child's process of transformation and reparation. In the words of Carol Mavor:

...one questions her thorough emphasis on the Child's destructive acts and her lack of attention in regard to the boy's feminine (maternal) acts.⁵⁰

Klein barely refers to the second half of the opera, as the Child finds shame, sorrow, repentance and finally love within the garden and amongst the animals; her emphasis is almost entirely on the Child's rage and the perambulations of the inanimate *sortilèges*. Joseph Schwartz observed that Klein's extreme language and darkly tormented view of the Child is characteristic of her work as a whole:

Klein's account of infancy is a maelstrom of threats and deprivation, of destruction, of fears of retaliation, of an ever-present malevolence, of terrible anxiety, of terror [...] a tale of gothic horror.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Klein, 'Infantile anxiety-situations', p. 437.

⁴⁷ Klein, 'Infantile anxiety-situations', p. 437.

⁴⁸ Klein, 'Infantile anxiety-situations', p. 437.

⁴⁹ Klein, 'Infantile anxiety-situations', p. 439.

⁵⁰ Carol Mavor, 'Introduction: The Unmaking of Childhood', in *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*, Marilyn Brown, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 35.

⁵¹ Joseph Schwartz, *Cassandra's Daughter: A History of Psychoanalysis in Europe and America* (London: Allen Lane, 1999), p. 197. In a revealing anecdote, Schwarz writes that Klein interpreted her young son's anxiety about going to school and his fantasies about constructing ladders and ropes to get to

Klein's paper has long been considered a seminal work, with her conclusions on sadism as a response to a situation of distress or danger, and the image of the 'good' or 'bad' parent regarded as notably innovative and important. While these conclusions certainly have some value for psychoanalysts, it is surprising that Klein's many inaccuracies and exaggerations have not been noted in the existing musicological surveys of the opera.

Given that a reappraisal of the opera's psychological or psychoanalytical connotations seems therefore to be due, a more solid foundation for research can be found in French literature and critical writing of the 1920s. The debate on the merits of psychoanalysis was one of the touchstones of Parisian intellectual life in the post-war period. The new science had a controversial infancy in France, as demonstrated by the fact that the Société Psychanalytique de Paris was not formed until 1926 (by contrast, the London Psychoanalytic Society was founded in 1913 and the American Psychoanalytic Association in 1911). Yet, as Sherry Turkle writes:

Freud believed that too easy an acceptance meant that psychoanalysis was being denatured, and he also believed the converse: resistance to psychoanalysis suggested that it was being taken seriously.⁵²

In France, then, the new science was taken very seriously indeed. Perhaps because of its initial rejection by the medical profession, French psychoanalysis quickly became the province of writers and artists. Its early championship by André Gide and the Surrealists established an immediate connection with literature and philosophy⁵³, a link that was maintained after the Second World War through the work of Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), with its focus on linguistics and the poetic.⁵⁴ Amongst the many articles in literary and intellectual journals of the 1920s dealing with psychoanalysis, extensive pieces by Albert Thibaudet and Louis Cazamian on psychoanalysis and literary criticism offer an excellent summation of contemporary opinion.⁵⁵ Each assumes a

school without going on the roads as a playing out of fixations about procreation and birth. The child was in fact being tormented by his schoolmates for his Jewishness. (p. 209.) This story offers a telling insight into Klein's characteristic exaggeration and complication of situations and events, a tendency that perhaps made her overlook practical childhood experience.

⁵² Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 5.

⁵³ Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 99.

⁵⁴ Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, pp. 54-5, 242-46.

⁵⁵ Albert Thibaudet, 'Réflexions sur la littérature: Psychanalyse et critique', *Nouvelle revue française* 91 (April 1921), pp. 467-81, and Louis Cazamian, 'La psychanalyse et la critique littéraire', *Revue de littérature comparée* 4 (1924), pp. 449-75.

considerable degree of familiarity on the part of their audiences with the concepts and the terminology of psychoanalysis, demonstrating the widespread currency of both. Each firmly locates Freudian theory in philosophy and in literature, as demonstrated by Thibaudet, who notes the failure of the publishing house Alcan to include Freud alongside their editions of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bergson.⁵⁶ Both refer to the impact of psychoanalysis on contemporary creative arts: as Cazamian observes, ‘The novel and the theatre of today [...] are full of the latent or manifest presence of Freudianism’.⁵⁷

At a conceptual level, it can be argued that *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* typifies a crucial shift in twentieth century theatre, one undoubtedly prompted or stimulated by psychoanalytic theory and its associated literary and artistic impact. On the operatic stage, this was demonstrated by the increasing focus on the self and the accompanying interiorisation of motive and impulse. As George Martin put it, ‘In the nineteenth century the hero battled forces outside himself; in the twentieth he battles those within’.⁵⁸ Martin cites Benjamin Britten’s Peter Grimes as the century’s quintessential operatic protagonist, for he is both hero and villain, struggling with his inner conflicts and finally driven by them to suicide.⁵⁹ In some respects Grimes is not unlike Berg’s Wozzeck, who murders his Marie and then drowns himself, unable to reconcile his love with his jealousy and an overpowering sense of vulnerability and helplessness. *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* is a work of very different scope and intent, but its protagonist too is both villain and hero, destroyer and creator, and it is his journey from one state to another that the opera documents.

The libretto of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* predates the first widespread publications of Freud and Jung in French translation (Freud’s works were appearing in French in the years immediately following the First World War, Jung’s by the mid-1920s⁶⁰), but in its conception and treatment of its subject the opera once again proves its strong connections with the spirit of the age. Central to psychoanalytic theory is what Caroline Steedman describes as ‘the idea that the core of an individual’s psychic identity was his

⁵⁶ Albert Thibaudet, ‘Réflexions sur la littérature’, p. 467.

⁵⁷ Louis Cazamian, ‘La psychanalyse et la critique littéraire’, p. 450.

⁵⁸ George Martin, *A Companion to Twentieth Century Opera* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1980), p. 10.

⁵⁹ Martin, *A Companion to Twentieth Century Opera*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Jean-Pierre Mordier, *Les Débuts de la psychanalyse en France, 1895-1926* (Paris: Maspero, 1981), p. 141.

or her own lost past, or childhood'.⁶¹ The importance of the role that childhood plays in the formation of the adult being is one of the key underlying motives of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. Similarly, that the protagonist of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* is a child; that he is given no other name *but* the Child; that he is endowed with such depths of feeling and the capacity to understand, respond and develop – all these characteristics can be seen partly as a reflection on the impact of psychoanalysis on the arts.

If one remains within the Austro-German school of psychoanalysis, the opera's fairytale setting would seem to lend itself more easily to a Jungian rather than a Freudian approach. According to Jung, the cross-cultural commonalities in fairytales prove that they are a vital conduit for the expression of the collective unconscious – that which is 'shared in a mystical way by all humankind, [containing] the deeper, universal and primal aspects of the personality'.⁶² The characters and narrative structure of fairytales mirror the archetypes Jung identified within the human psyche; *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, which is deliberately placed in the fairytale tradition, can also be seen as expressive of some of these archetypes. The powerful, nurturing Maman has something of Jung's archetypal Great Mother, while the Child's reconciliation with his world links him to Jung's symbolic Child, who functions as a symbol of renewal and rebirth. Jung offers two more key functions of the child-motif or archetype which have direct relevance to the Child of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. The first of these emerges from his statement that:

'Child' means something evolving towards independence. This it cannot do without detaching itself from its origins: abandonment is therefore a necessary condition, not just a concomitant symptom.⁶³

Here, perhaps, is the Child of the first half of the opera, violently detaching himself from his familiar surroundings, then – through the Princess – moving more consciously towards independence through an understanding of loss. Secondly, Jung's archetypal Child is also the 'one who makes whole', a 'uniting symbol' and a 'bringer of healing'.⁶⁴ If Ravel and Colette's Child is at first more destroyer than healer, another Jungian archetype offers an explanation. The Child's rage can be seen as a

⁶¹ Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, p. 4.

⁶² Burness E. Moore and Bernard D. Fine, *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts* (New Haven: American Psychoanalytic Association and Yale UP, 1990), p. 17.

⁶³ Carl Jung and Carl Kerényi. *Introduction to a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 121.

⁶⁴ Jung and Kerényi, *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, p. 115.

manifestation of his Shadow, the ‘dark side’ of the human personality, in Jungian terms; ‘all those uncivilised desires and motions that are incompatible with social standards and our ideal personality...’⁶⁵

The animals in the Garden, communicating more directly and more passionately than the inanimate *sortilèges*, are, like Jung’s archetypal Animal, closely in touch with their own true natures. By helping the Child to recognise his Shadow, they also help him to discover his own self, thereby reconciling the conflicting parts of his personality. The distinguished French psychoanalyst Henriette de Vitry has remarked (in conversation) that French psychoanalysis characteristically seeks to treat the whole person rather than the specific illness or symptom. Mme de Vitry suggested that this holistic, reconciliatory approach is typical of the French psyche; it also points here towards a connection between Jungian thought and a very Gallic creation.

A further intriguing Jungian connection is also suggested by the characters of the Princess and the Fire, who seem to express different elements of the Anima (the feminine elements of the male psyche). The Princess appears as a young woman, but with an aura of experience; she is wise but mysteriously so; she appears from and disappears into the earth: all these qualities are typical of the Anima.⁶⁶ The dangerously flickering Fire typifies a darker, more perilous and threatening projection of the Anima, intensified by the scene’s progress from light into shadow. Ravel’s stipulation that Fire and Princess ‘must’ be played by the same singer seems to heighten this dichotomous representation of the Anima. Jung himself admitted late in life that his theories had mostly been arrived at intuitively before he argued out their logic in detail, often only to show their viability in professional terms. In his casting specifications, Ravel – who had almost certainly not heard of Jung’s concept of the Anima/Animus – appears similarly to have intuited an archetype that Jung explored independently.

Jung’s writings on fairytale also lead us once more to the suggestion that a return to the principles and traditions of fairytales may help directors and designers to clarify some of the opera’s symbolism. The narrative of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* operates on two levels: the Child’s experiences within his own fairytale – he knows and loves

⁶⁵ Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (London: Penguin, 1953), p. 50.

⁶⁶ Sue Walrond-Skinner, *A Dictionary of Psychotherapy* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 54.

fairytale, as the episode of the Princess demonstrates – and the idioms of the fairytale that are applied across the opera as a whole. Amongst the productions that sought to integrate the Child’s vision with the fantastic narrative was the 1950 Opéra-Comique staging, conducted by André Cluytens, directed by Louis Musy and designed by Michel Terrasse. A portfolio of set and costume designs for this production is held in the Bibliothèque-musée de l’Opéra. The Child himself, with pink and black jacket, blue pants and golden hair, seems almost genderless and timeless, a fairytale protagonist of any era and reminiscent of Antoine de St-Exupéry’s Little Prince. Terrasse’s designs suggest the vividness and intensity of a child’s imagination: a bright and harmonious blend of pinks, purples, oranges and shades of blue-green fills his drawings. The predominance of secondary colours seems to help remove the setting from reality; it becomes more fantastic, even dreamlike. While the *sortilèges* themselves are human-sized, Terrasse’s backdrops serve to create Colette’s stipulated Brobdingnagian effect: the Cup, for example, is placed in front of large red drapes that trace the outline of a pagoda.⁶⁷ The drapes themselves are drawn against a black background, creating glowering silhouettes that both trigger and depict the Child’s fear and confusion.

On a practical level, the creative use of lighting offers a subtle but effective vehicle for the expression or exploration of the Child’s inner world, together with the realisation of the fantastic creatures and events. In the 1981 Metropolitan Opera production, David Hockney (for whom *L’Enfant* was a first venture into operatic design) saw lighting as a key tool in bringing the *sortilèges* to life:

From the start, influenced primarily by Matisse, Mr. Hockney conceived of the Ravel as a play of color, and convinced Mr. Dexter and Gil Wechsler, the Met's lighting director, to use colored lights on painted sets of the same color. ‘When you put a blue light on blue paint, it comes alive, as something physical’, Mr. Hockney said. ‘At home in London I built a model of my Ravel set, and a friend worked out a computerized lighting scheme that I could punch up there. I must have listened to the Ravel 300 times, playing with my lighting, and then I wrote long letters to Gil Wechsler about my ideas’.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The *sortilèges*, rather than appearing realistic, seemed to represent the spirit of their creatures; the use of body-length leotards plainly revealed the human figure. Each character had additional draperies or items of human clothing: the Squirrel, for example, wears a russet-red tailcoat with green lining, while the Fire is shrouded in red and orange veils. Terrasse also accentuates the distinction between the non-speaking Cats and the rest of the *sortilèges*: they are the only characters to wear ‘realistic’ furry headpieces (although the female Cat carries a handbag and the male Cat wears a collar and tie).

⁶⁸ Russell, ‘David Hockney’s designs for Met Opera’s *Parade*’.

Like Terrasse, Hockney's designs were vividly and fantastically colourful. However, Hockney placed more emphasis on primary colours, perhaps associating them more closely with the clarity and simplicity of childhood. Peter Goodman described the Garden scene as 'an awesome, throbbing red and blue magical forest which evoked perfectly a mysterious animal and vegetable world'⁶⁹; Paul Griffiths, reviewing the 1987 revival in *The Times*, described the sets as 'a perfect landscape of sophisticated infantilism'.⁷⁰ In a theatre whose size made the intimacy of *L'Enfant* difficult to convey, Hockney's designs managed to accentuate the Child's smallness and fear with a set in which the wallpapered wings became the walls of his nursery, leaning menacingly inwards towards the centre of the stage.

The 1929 Viennese production, designed by Eugène Steinhof and directed by Wallerstein, also made much of lighting effects and changes. Maman was represented by a great shadow cast against the wall of the Child's room (a clever and relatively straightforward way of dealing with that particular problem of scale and one that Dexter and Hockney also employed); after the Child's rage a sudden change of lighting gave deep, strange shadows to the familiar objects, which themselves did not alter. The production's Garden scene was also defined by light – no longer the clear and changeable lights of the nursery, but constant, soft and shimmering, reflecting the harmony of the creatures and the scene's unified musical construction:

In all, a few very simple lines to capture the trembling waves of colour, much atmosphere and little reality, a translucent landscape, as if it were engraved upon an iridescent glass, a mirage captured by a child's imagination!⁷¹

Writing in *L'Art vivant*, Steinhof described the emergence of the Princess thus:

The scene fades; all that remains is light; gauzes fall from all sides, creating chiaroscuro effects from within which the trapdoor rises for the title page of a great book of fairytales to pass through: a blue sky, a fine sun, across which, on a banner flying from the summit of the mountain, is proclaimed 'the miraculous history of the princess Blancheflore'. Lying within a cave in the heart of this mountain, the princess herself, white against a background whose transparency imitates the sparkling of a rock-face of amethysts...⁷²

⁶⁹ Peter Goodman, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges', Review published in *Newsday* (February 1981), *Metropolitan Opera Archives Online*, <http://66.187.153.86/archives/frame.htm> (accessed 3 August 2007).

⁷⁰ Paul Griffiths, 'Review of double bill at Covent Garden', *The Times*, 5 May 1987, from Factiva Online, <http://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx> (accessed 3 August 2007).

⁷¹ Eugène Steinhof, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges à l'Opéra de Vienne', *L'Art vivant*, 1 May 1929, reprinted in *L'Avant-Scène Opéra* 127 (1990), p. 71.

⁷² Steinhof, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges à l'Opéra de Vienne', p. 71.

The contrast between this scene and the succeeding Arithmetic episode was abrupt: ‘all one can see in the inky darkness are phosphorescent sixes, zeroes, threes...’ wrote Steinhof.⁷³ This use of lighting also seems to demonstrate the black-and-white conception of the world shared by children and fairytales.

Jorge Lavelli and his designer Max Bignens created a chiaroscuro effect on a much broader scale in their pairing of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* with Stravinsky’s *Œdipus Rex*. Each work was presented almost in monochrome, the pale costumes and sets for *L’Enfant* flooded with translucent white light, while *Œdipus Rex* was darkened to the point of obscurity. While Jean Cotte, reviewing the production, admired the contrast between the ‘nuit blanche’ of *L’Enfant* and the ‘soleil noir’ of *Œdipus Rex*⁷⁴, Jacques Rivoyré noted in his review that

[The Child’s] terrors, his nightmare, made reality through the animals’ revolt [...] loses all its terrifying effect in the grand atmosphere, muffled by the luminous white-and-beige monochrome of the décor.⁷⁵

Here, perhaps, is an overstatement of archetypes, or an attempt to make the psychological implications of the two operas a little too explicit. If, according to Jung, the fairytale archetypes – clearly present in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* – are part of our collective unconscious, recognisable and familiar to us all, then they may in fact speak more clearly to the viewer when not forced to exaggeratedly enunciate every syllable.

In the designs of Eugène Steinhof, Michel Terrasse and David Hockney, the primary goal seems to have been to grant the audience the same perspective as the Child, through both his physical eyes and through his imaginative perception of the world – hence the looming walls, the bright colours, the intense contrasts of light and shade. By contrast, productions like those of Lavelli and Araiz presented the work as (in Lavelli’s words), ‘a fable created by adults, for adults’.⁷⁶ Hence Lavelli created his *sortilèges* as very human figures (Plate 15):

⁷³ Steinhof, ‘*L’Enfant et les sortilèges* à l’Opéra de Vienne’, p. 71.

⁷⁴ Jean Cotte, ‘Paris comblé par Lavelli’, *France-Soir*, 15 May 1979, in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges: Dossier d’œuvre*.

⁷⁵ Jacques Rivoyré, ‘Si vous allez à Paris: Curieux assemblage à l’Opéra’, *La Suisse*, 27 May 1979, in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges: Dossier d’œuvre*.

⁷⁶ Jorge Lavelli, ‘*L’Enfant et les sortilèges*’.

The frog gives the impression of a sympathetic cinema gangster, the squirrel that of a housekeeper with her feather duster, the nightingale, on her pedestal, that of a prima donna.⁷⁷

Plate 15 **Max Bignens, costume designs for *L'Enfant et les sortilèges***
Theatre programme (Opéra Garnier, Paris, May 1979)
Reproduced courtesy Bm-O
(left to right: the Nightingale, the Owl, the Frog)

NOTE:
This plate is included on page 258
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

These abstracted *sortilèges* are undoubtedly clever; on stage they were probably both effective and amusing. Yet they do demand a mature viewer, who will understand, as a child (or *the* Child) would not, the irony of the coloratura-singing nightingale being dressed as a diva. Did Lavelli submerge the luminous simplicity of the Child's vision beneath a wave of adult sophistication and symbolism? While the Child certainly learns the meaning of loss in his growing up, the opera is *not* nostalgic, as Lavelli claims: it is about a 'real' child, to whom real – if inexplicable – events occur. Perhaps Ravel and Colette always remembered what it felt like to be a child; perhaps Lavelli and Araiz, in their grandly monochrome, intensely symbolic constructions had forgotten. After all, what child of 'six or seven' suffers from 'persecution mania', as Araiz suggests?

⁷⁷ Jorge Lavelli, '*L'Enfant et les sortilèges*'.

8.5 ‘The aesthetic of imposture’⁷⁸

More than twenty years after he approached Colette with a commission for a ‘fairy-ballet’, Jacques Rouché finally directed *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* at the Opéra Garnier. In an article published in *Le jour* just before the season opened (May 1939), Rouché discussed the difficulties implicit in Colette’s staging directions:

The principal character is a child; it is therefore appropriate to create the set and the furniture to a proportional scale. ‘The Child, six or seven years old, is seated before an exercise begun in a crisis of laziness’. At this stage, everything seems simple, but let us continue to read the libretto: ‘Enter Maman, or rather as much as can be seen of her, with the very low ceiling and the entire scale of all the furnishings and all the objects in exaggerated dimensions in order to make more striking the smallness of the Child; that is to say, a skirt, the bottom part of an apron, a steel chain from which hangs a pair of scissors, and a hand’. All this is delicious, simple. Madame Colette’s descriptions are wonderfully vivid and you can easily imagine the illustrations that could be created from it. But, when considering the *mise en scène* [staging], if you affix a scale to your pencil, you will notice that to realise this description necessitates a set about 1.8m high, and that even with this restricted stage the audience in the first rows will still see something more than the skirt and the scissors. Consider, on the other hand, a proportional enlargement: the Child 1 metre tall is represented by an artiste 1.6 metres tall. A table can submit to this augmentation, even a cat, if need be, but the body of a dragonfly enlarged by these proportions will still only be 3cm long, and no singer’s body could be reduced like that! It is therefore necessary to renounce an absolute scale.⁷⁹

In his review of the 1939 Garnier production, Émile Vuillermoz also highlighted the literal impossibility of realising the staging directions implicit in the libretto:

The task imposed on the designer and the costumer designer is outside human capabilities. To realise a lyric drama in which the characters are armchairs, tables, a kettle, a tea service, the cinders in the hearth, cats, squirrels, frogs, dragonflies and a naughty little boy *en travesti*; to make the furniture, the animals and the people painted on the walls sing, walk and dance, to give a body and a face to imponderables – this is obviously an unachievable ‘order’.⁸⁰

L’Enfant et les sortilèges presents an unusually complicated and prescriptive prospect for its designers and directors, since Colette’s descriptions of setting and scale are far more complex and specific than those provided by most opera librettists. Yet

⁷⁸ From Roland-Manuel, ‘Maurice Ravel et l’esthétique de l’imposture’, *La Revue musicale* 6:6 (Special issue dedicated to Ravel, April 1925).

⁷⁹ Jacques Rouché, ‘*L’Enfant et les sortilèges*’, typewritten manuscript, later published in *Le jour* (16 May 1939), in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges: Dossier d’œuvre*. Rouché and his designer Paul Colin developed a concept whereby, ‘after the disappearance of an item of furniture, a character whose costume indicates the spirit of that item appears; they are treated like the allegorical costumes painted in the age of Louis XV...’ (Rouché, ‘*L’Enfant et les sortilèges*’.)

⁸⁰ Émile Vuillermoz, ‘*L’Enfant et les sortilèges*’, *L’Excelsior*, May 19th, 1939, in *L’Enfant et les sortilèges: Dossier d’œuvre*.

since literal realisation is impossible, the opera is also a liberating work to stage, its fairytale themes and the *sortilèges* themselves admitting myriad interpretations and representations, as evidenced by the widely divergent production concepts discussed above. How, then, did the opera's first performances realise both the complexities of its staging, and its twinned themes of childhood and fairytale?

The opera's 1925 première was designed by Visconti and choreographed by a young George Balanchine for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets russes de Monte Carlo. In this production, dancers doubled the singers for most rôles.⁸¹ This concept seems to have been carried into the 1926 production, although the choreography in this case was by Louise Virard.⁸² Little information regarding staging and décor is available for both the première and the 1926 Opéra-Comique production; an absence of original documentation is compounded in this case by the critics' failure to discuss the directorial and decorative aspects of the performances.⁸³ Black and white pictures of Visconti's décor models for the Monte Carlo première do survive, however, and offer an interesting perspective on the production concept. The wood panelling and square-paned windows of the interior set (Plate 16) serve to represent the *maison normande* described by Colette. The furniture that surrounds the figure of the Child is large but not gargantuan, reflecting the Child's vision while remaining believable to the audience. The prominent upended book of fairytales is a tangible link to the opera's fairytale heritage, whilst simultaneously recalling the books-and-words motif in the first

⁸¹ For example, the singing Dragonfly was represented by a group of four dancing Dragonflies. (Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 72.)

⁸² An Opéra-Comique memo from this production offers a fragment of information about the relationship between singers and dancers. Placed within the flyleaves of a piano-vocal score from the Opéra-Comique archive (now at the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, catalogue reference A380c), the note reads, 'During pages 90-97 [that is, from the animals' cries of *Unissons-nous* until the appearance of Maman] the action continues on the main stage [le grand décor] and the dancers mime the words'. This suggests that during these eight pages at least there was a direct gestural connection between singers and dancers, although the action was being communicated on two distinct planes and the singers and dancers may not have been physically interacting. The Bm-O holds two marked-up piano-vocal scores of the opera (A830c and F1775). Almost certainly used by vocal coaches in rehearsal, both scores contain fragments of two different sets of staging indications, which appear in numerous hands and refer to at least two separate productions, the 1926 Parisian première and the 1950 reprise (F1775 bears the date *30 novembre 1925* in its inside cover; the production's rehearsal period commenced on 25 November 1925, according to the theatre's *registres*). Reusing and re-marking scores across several decades was a common practice at the Opéra-Comique; the Bm-O contains a score (F1574) of *Pelléas et Mélisande* that contains autograph markings from Debussy, along with markings from subsequent productions up until 1962.

⁸³ The most detailed descriptions of the première come not from its directorial staff or singers but from its dancers. Alicia Markova, who danced the Cinderella and the little Squirrel, recalled that '[Balanchine] had me pirouetting like mad out of the fireplace. I used to turn like a top, which George adored'. (Quoted in Francis Mason (ed.), *I remember Balanchine: Recollections of the Ballet Master by Those Who Knew Him* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 90-1).

production of *Ma mère l'Oye*. The constricting effect of the diagonal lines of the wood panelling and the shadowed stage right is relieved by the glimpses of the tree and the garden through the windows. This sense of expansion is carried into the Garden scene (Plate 17), where a tantalising vista can be seen beyond the Garden itself (the details of this landscape are unclear in the available reproductions). In each of the two sets, the central placement of these glimpses of a broader world serves to focus the scene and draw in the viewer. More importantly, this juxtaposition of images also suggests the libretto's key themes of enclosure and liberation and the ever-expanding possibilities of the imagination.

Plate 16 **Visconti, set design for *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (Interior scenes)**
In Paul Druilhe, *Les grandes créations de l'Opéra de Monte-Carlo:*
L'Enfant et les sortilèges de Maurice Ravel (Monaco, 1985)
Reproduced courtesy Bm-O

NOTE:

This plate is included on page 261
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

L'Enfant et les Sortilèges. Premier tableau :
«La pièce basse d'une maison normande».



(Archives S.B.M.)

Plate 17

Visconti, set design for *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (Garden scene)

In Paul Druilhe, *Les grandes créations de l'Opéra de Monte-Carlo*

Reproduced courtesy Bm-O

NOTE:

This plate is included on page 262 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

L'Enfant et les Sortilèges. Deuxième tableau :
Le jardin «éclairé par la pleine lune et la lueur rose du couchant».

(Archives S.B.M.)

It has been suggested by various writers that *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* could only be realised as its authors conceived by means of film and animation. Émile Vuillermoz called it 'Walt Disneyish' as early as 1939⁸⁴, while the programme notes for the 1979 Opéra production suggest that 'only a cartoon would be able to give the illusion of the secret life of these beings, because of the sort of fantasy that is their natural realm, that celebrates the distortions of reality...'⁸⁵ Another reviewer of the 1939 Opéra production pointed out the technical 'impossibilities' in the opera's musical construction: André George, writing in *Nouvelles littéraires*, noted that it was hard to take Mlle Jacqueline Courtin for 'a child of six or seven years' – 'but it would be harder still to give a child – even a child aged twelve or fourteen – a rôle bristling with such vocal and dramatic

⁸⁴ Émile Vuillermoz, 'L'Œuvre de Maurice Ravel', p. 74.

⁸⁵ Jorge Lavelli, '*L'Enfant et les sortilèges*'.

perils...'⁸⁶ Ravel would have been fully aware of this dilemma, and thus almost certainly did not intend that the rôle of the Child be played by an actual child.⁸⁷ Similarly, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* was by no means Colette's first venture into the theatrical world: she was an experienced actress, playwright and music hall artist. The 'impossibilities' of the libretto are therefore by no means the result of theatrical naïvety. Rather, it is clear that Colette never intended the proportions to be precise or the scene to be in any way 'realistic'. If we are entering the realm of fantasy, why shouldn't the relative proportions of the characters be freely altered, so the dragonfly, the Chinese cup and Maman can all be played by the same, human-sized singer (as Ravel suggests in the score) – even if they wear outsized costumes?

This brings us to a seemingly contradictory assertion. The story itself is enclosed in a web of magic and fairytale, a concept reinforced in Colette's libretto and stage directions as well as in Ravel's music. Since the opera's première, audiences and reviewers have commented that performances give a sense of being transported into this fantastic world. Yet the opera's creators intended it to be presented by real people moving on a real stage. Ravel genuinely enjoyed these complex interactions of fantasy and reality: he loved the appearance of life created in non-living objects – hence his affection for his mechanical toys and caged nightingale. This premise is central to the concept of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* as well as to its staging. Supposedly inanimate chairs and clocks dance and sing before the Child's astonished eyes; that the Child is really an adult and that there are real people manipulating the movements and sounds of these *sortilèges* offers the audience an additional complexity of perspective. In a letter to Colette describing the opera's 1926 Brussels production, Ravel wrote '...if you love strong emotions, try to get there. You will see the Dragonflies, the Moths, the Bats suspended by strings – something that cannot be done without danger in our own national theatre!'⁸⁸ Significantly, Ravel does not write, 'you will see the creatures *flying*', but 'you will see them *suspended by strings*'. The chains and levers – the mechanisms by which the 'semblance of being' was created – appealed to his

⁸⁶ André George, 'Ravel', *Nouvelles littéraires*, 27 May 1939, in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges: Dossier d'œuvre*.

⁸⁷ Some subsequent performances have managed to pull this off – in George Balanchine's 1946 production, for example, the work was entirely danced and the singers were placed in the orchestra pit or in the wings; the only on-stage singer was the Child, played by a young Joseph Connelly (Mawer, *The ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 73).

⁸⁸ In Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel et nous*, p. 125.

imagination just as much as the final effect. Perhaps, then, Ravel really wanted us to see feet sticking out beneath the Cup and a human face in the *cadran* of the Clock.

8.6 Conclusion

The precision and care with which Colette constructed the dialogue of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, she gave equally to the words that no audience will hear. The very beauty of the stage directions, together with the practical impossibilities of realising them all, suggests that Colette, as an author, intended the work not just to be sung and heard but to be *read*. She thought of the opera in part as an abstract thing, complete in itself and with an existence outside the physical reality given to it by conductors, designers, singers and dancers. In this there is another sympathetic affinity between Colette and Ravel, who also considered the music itself of far greater significance than any given performance of it (although he famously took issue with performers who distorted his intentions). Both Ravel and Colette had a care for every element of their work, even those that an audience will never directly perceive (though may feel the effects of). The poetic epigraphs Ravel added to *Jeux d'eau*, to the *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and to *Ma mère l'Oye*, like the texts that underlie *Gaspard de la nuit*, are of the same spirit as Colette's stage directions: the words themselves may not be communicated to the audiences, but their spirit should infuse the performance.

The libretto of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* specifies with unusual precision and eloquence the perspective and the atmosphere its creators intended. The question therefore arises of how much value contemporary directors and designers should place on the author's intentions regarding the staging of their operas. While this issue is necessarily fluid, in a work like *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, written in the early twentieth century by two artists who were both familiar with the theatre and capable of expressing themselves with directness and clarity, ignoring their stated wishes places a production at serious risk of distortion or misconception (it is an oddity of current theatrical practice that such licence is routinely tolerated in staging but not in musical performance). Colette's directions go far beyond the physical staging of the opera: they seem intended to convey to designers, directors and conductors something of how it should be conceived. Beauty, tenderness, fantasy, magic and humour are the qualities Colette demands, and that Ravel's music accentuates.

One of the great strengths of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* is that its straightforward narrative can support many different interpretations, and many simultaneous layers of interpretation. So, for example, while children can appreciate the ridiculousness of the lumbering chairs and perhaps the absurdity of the tinkling *luthéal* accompaniment, adults will recognise Ravel's gentle parody of an eighteenth century minuet. Similarly, while children will respond to the waltz rhythms and the realistic animal noises of the garden scene, adults will recognise the more complex elements, such as the reappearance of the key words *libre* and *méchant*, the integrated construction, the effect of reiterated or developing melodic motives and the extent of the Child's psychological development. The delight of children in the audiences of the 1998 Opéra Garnier production⁸⁹ seems to have been in no way impaired by the adult knowledge necessary to understand its gestures to the opera's wartime conception: the trees were garbed in *poilus* (the greatcoats worn by French soldiers (including Ravel) at the front in winter) and the Squirrel's eyes were made less human by the addition of aviator's goggles.⁹⁰

Is *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, then, really a work written, as Lavelli suggests, 'by adults, for adults'? If it was conceived for the opera house – a traditionally adult domain – and not the school hall, Colette's working title specifying a divertissement 'for my daughter' surely confirms her own intentions. And this opera, created by two adults who never lost touch with their childhoods, can appeal to the very young too.⁹¹ When presented with colourful simplicity and not obscured by mists of symbolism, *L'Enfant* is exactly the sort of opera that will appeal to children. The principal character is a child, and his oversized surroundings will seem logical to watching children. They will understand the fairytale story and delight in a magic that is by turns frightening, beautiful and ridiculous: the Chairs, the Clock, the Cup and Teapot, the Frog and the Cats really are funny and appeal directly to children's acute sense of the absurd. Meanwhile, the wild beauty of the Fire, the stylised elegance of the Shepherds and Shepherdesses and the faerie fragility of the golden-haired Princess are creations akin to

⁸⁹ Particularly noted by critics Eric Dahan (*Libération*) and Olivier Olgan (*La Tribune*). (Dahan, 'A Paris, l'opéra de Zemlinsky est couplé à l'Enfant et les sortilèges de Ravel', *Libération*, 7 November 1998, from Factiva Online, <http://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx> (accessed 3 August 2007); and Olgan, 'Le Nain et *L'Enfant*: la cruauté fustigée', *La Tribune*, 13 November 1998, from Factiva Online, <http://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx> (accessed 3 August 2007).

⁹⁰ François Lafon, 'L'Infante et l'Enfant', *Le Monde de la Musique*, December 1998, in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*: Dossier d'œuvre.

⁹¹ The opera was once staged in Ravel's own home in Montfort l'Amaury, presented by an entire cast of children. (Yves Milon et al., *Maurice Ravel à Montfort l'Amaury* (Paris: ASA, 1996.), pp. 98-9.)

those of a fairytale-nourished childish imagination. Ravel's vivid instrumental colours, singable melodies and clear rhythmic impulses create a music that is both intensely descriptive and immediately accessible (one can imagine children yowling along with the cats, just as Ravel himself did at the Opéra-Comique). The physical movement in this opera-ballet is also a point of affinity with children, who naturally express themselves with their bodies.⁹² So too do they use their voices, experimenting with sound and song; moreover, if song is, as Marie-Pierre Lassus suggests, 'synonymous with enchantment'⁹³, in this atmosphere of the fairytale and the fantastic an operatic performance can make an often inaccessible medium perfectly apt.

While the naughty Child and his punishment and repentance have a direct resonance for watching children, adults will be able to assess for themselves whether the opera is fairytale or fable, nostalgic or realistic, just as they will search for and discover parodic elements, echoes of interwar society, contemporary resonances and psychoanalytic symbolism. The objective Ravel lets his characters tell their stories for themselves – and thus we may think and make of them what we choose. The important point here is that audiences will find their own meanings easily enough, so long as they are not being battered about the head with somebody else's concept. By over-emphasising the symbolic or psychological aspects of the opera, productions may miss or obscure the musical, dramatic and conceptual sophistication that underlies the work. 'Complexe, mais pas compliqué' was one of Ravel's teaching mottos; perhaps the opera's underlying complexity will speak for itself all the better for not being cluttered with 'complications'. It was originally conceived as a *divertissement*, after all.

⁹² Deborah Mawer also makes this point (*The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 75).

⁹³ Lassus, 'Ravel L'Enchanteur', p. 40.

Conclusion

Dans toute ma vie, j'ai connu deux hommes
dont je puis dire à peu près sûrement qu'ils n'ont jamais menti:
c'est Maurice Ravel et c'est Béla Bartók.¹

Manuel Rosenthal

For Maurice Ravel the concept of childhood was not an abstract entity, as the general and rather vague descriptions drifting through his biographies often imply. Instead, childhood was an inspiration and a language that found very real expression in his music. Like Edgar Allan Poe, whose essay *The Philosophy of Composition* he particularly admired², Ravel could separate the process from the result, objectively shaping form and expression to obtain his desired effect, and putting together his *enfantines* with the precision of an engineer. Structures, textures, colours, idioms, the creation, selection and setting of texts, melodic material, harmonic relationships: in all of these, the fundamental elements of musical composition, we may trace Ravel's imagery of childhood.

Ravel was one of a long line of creative artists who looked to childhood as a direct, and directly acknowledged, source of inspiration. The first strand of investigation in this thesis dealt with the placement of Ravel's *enfantines* within this musical, artistic and historical tradition. In Ravel's lifetime, musical depictions of childhood were typically judged against Schumann's *Kinderscenen* and Musorgsky's *The Nursery*, the former held as representative of an idealised, nostalgic image, and the latter of a clear-eyed and 'realistic' portrayal. *Ma mère l'Oye*, the *Trois chansons* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* each gesture on some level towards this dual tradition. The expressive naturalism of *The Nursery* may be clearly sensed in the opening of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, for example, while *Ma mère l'Oye* shares its enclosed forms and concentrated emotional content with *Kinderscenen*; Ravel's choice of the piano duet as his medium also ensured that his suite would be seen as the direct descendant of *Jeux d'enfants* and *Dolly*. The musical

¹ 'In all my life I have known two men of whom I can say with almost complete certainty that they never lied: they were Maurice Ravel and Béla Bartók.' In Marnat (ed.), *Ravel: Souvenirs de Manuel Rosenthal*, p. 128.

² Orenstein, *Ravel, man and musician*, p. 128.

enfantines of the nineteenth century typically sought to evoke childhood through a clarity and simplicity of expression (a quality that also typifies the poetry of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, amongst others). Ravel's affirmation of the importance of *dépouillement* as a means of evoking the 'poetry of childhood' explicitly placed *Ma mère l'Oye* within this aesthetic tradition and established a point of reference for his own later excursions into the realm of childhood.

In their outlook, subject matter and musical construction, *Ma mère l'Oye*, the *Trois chansons* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* nevertheless found an imagery of childhood that was new and unique to Ravel. Perceptions of childhood derive equally from individual experience and the received culture and values of a time and place. Ravel's *enfantines* are at once the creations of historical circumstance, reflecting upon the changing cultures of the European childhood, and a profoundly personal expression. Ravel was very much a composer and a man of his time, well-read and intensely cultured, eclectic in his tastes, fascinated by technological innovation, and as much at home in the café society of the *Belle Époque* as in the music halls of the *Années folles*. His creative persona was formed through his lifelong engagement with art, literature and popular culture, as much as through the music he heard, studied, emulated and critiqued.

The documentary value of Ravel's *enfantines* is, in many ways, as much historical as musical. With 'Der Dichter spricht', Schumann placed himself within *Kinderscenen* as a nostalgic observer. Ravel, by contrast, may be sensed as an active participant in *Ma mère l'Oye*, as he was an active participant in the lives of the children for whom he wrote the work. This liberal and imaginative intimacy, like the vivid detailing of the Child of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, plainly reflects the child-centred, fairytale-loving society of the Third Republic.

The conception of the *Trois chansons* similarly owes much to local, personal and broader historical circumstance. The shadow of war is implicit in the dedications of the songs and explicit in the words of 'Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis'. Ravel's distorted fairytales also capture something of the public distress at the tales of German atrocities committed against the children of Belgium: the conception of childhood as a state to be treasured, indulged and celebrated had reached its apex in the first decade of the twentieth century, so its alleged desecration had a profound impact upon the European psyche. Although he would later experience more sustained depression, the intensity of

the collective and individual anxiety, uncertainty and grief of 1914-15 made it probably the most emotionally turbulent period of Ravel's life. The interaction of historical context and personal experience discussed in Chapter Seven provides new insights into the *Trois chansons*, a work that has hitherto received little scholarly attention. The conclusions of this study thus offer a basis for further discussion of Ravel's experiences in and creative responses to the First World War.

Of all the works discussed across this thesis, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* engages most directly with the culture of its creation, in the dramatic and psychological richness of its central character, the precision with which his surroundings are detailed, and the juxtaposition of his 'modern' music with the 'out-of-time' *sortilèges*. The musical, dramatic and psychological layering in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* has been explored, synthesised and clarified in the course of this thesis. There remains, however, more research to be done: although it is beyond the scope of the present research, a detailed study of the opera's first production would further illuminate some of the conclusions drawn here.

For Ravel, unlike Robert Schumann or Victor Hugo, childhood was no metaphor for an essential goodness or purity of spirit, nor was it a lost ideal or abandoned Eden. Instead, it remained present and unsentimental, something to be experienced and, as Roland-Manuel acknowledged, communicated. The three works discussed in this thesis are shaped around compelling dramatic and musical narratives. Their sense of active engagement with childhood, experience depicted in the present tense, is a defining characteristic of Ravel's *enfantines*. Implicit throughout *Ma mère l'Oye*, this quality finds its clearest realisation in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* – a work in which we also encounter the most complex and realistic portrait of a single child on the operatic stage. This developing, changing individual reflects not only a twentieth-century understanding of childhood but also Ravel's own sense of childhood as at once present and transitive. Unlike the child of Victor Hugo's memory and Robert Schumann's image of his Clara, this Child is not stuck in shimmering stasis: real time passes and he grows up over the course of the opera.

While this thesis has addressed musical representations of childhood from Schumann and Musorgsky to Ravel and his compatriots – and in this it broadens the scope of the existing literature – it is plain that, as Georges Starobinski observed in 2002, a

dedicated and extended study in this field is still to be undertaken.³ In its exploration of the dialogues between art, literature, music and social history, this thesis has established principles of interdisciplinary synthesis and comparison that may form a framework for future research endeavours.

The second main focus of discussion dealt with the musical and conceptual interplay of fairytales and childhood across the three principal works in this study. The flexibility of these concepts was hinted at in the Introduction, which defined the key words of the title of this thesis in seemingly contradictory terms: it stated that ‘fairy tale’, was ‘a real thing’, while ‘childhood’ was a set of ideas or constructions, without physical existence. Yet for the purposes of this study these definitions have held true. The clarity of expression in Ravel’s *enfantines* derives from his consistent juxtaposition of childhood with the literary fairytale. Beyond their rich historical and artistic tradition and abundant repertory of magic and fantasy, fairytales offered Ravel powerful narratives and clearly-defined structures; a firm framework within which he was able to evoke a more mutable imagery.

In *Ma mère l’Oye* an over-arching fairytale narrative, made clear in Ravel’s arrangement of scenes, and subtly inferred through motivic and formal connections, serves to unite the five independent movements. The oddly-assorted characters and musical idioms of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* are given a similar coherence through the invocation of a broad fairytale storyline, but more directly and profoundly through the changing attitudes of the central Child. In the *Trois chansons*, outwardly traditional fairytale idioms and images – Nicolette in her mob-cap, the Big Bad Wolf, the three message-bearing birds of Paradise – are cast in strangely twisted forms. In each of the works, Ravel asserted the importance of words and narrative: the epigraphs to *Ma mère l’Oye* (and the imagery of books and words used in the ballet version), the dexterous juggling of poetic rhythm and onomatopoeia in the *Trois chansons* and the ‘magic words’ of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*.

This thesis demonstrated that, beyond the adoption and depiction of fantastic storylines, in each of the three key works Ravel consciously applied the structural idioms of the fairytale. In their different ways, *Ma mère l’Oye*, the *Trois chansons* and *L’Enfant et les sortilèges* are characterised by tripartite forms, patterns of repetition and

³ Starobinski, ‘Brahms et la nostalgie de l’enfance’, p. 141.

contrast, the juxtaposition and combination of disparate elements and the mirroring of critical words and events. In the *Trois chansons*, as in *Noël des jouets*, the traditions and idioms of the fairytale inspired in Ravel a highly original approach to the creation, manipulation and setting of text. The detailed exploration of Ravel's own poetry undertaken in the course of this research has led to a new understanding of the creation of the libretto and score of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. This reading of the collaboration between Ravel and Colette relies less on the fragmentary and semi-fictionalised historical record than on the evidence of the work itself. Chapter Four also paves the way for a more extensive study of Ravel as a writer, poet and manipulator of literary forms – a subject that, given his circle of acquaintance and the literary quality of both his published writings and his correspondence, merits further investigation. What did Ravel read and how did he draw on literary sources and idioms in his letters and critiques? How did he choose texts to set, and what qualities did he emphasise in his settings? And does the rest of his output reflect the integration of literary idioms and musical construction seen in the three main works discussed in this thesis? The diversity of literary influence and interaction underpinning these three works (explored in part in Chapter Three) suggests that this field would be a complex, fascinating and rewarding one for future research.

The final facet of this enquiry dealt with the intrinsically subjective issues of meaning and interpretation. What significance did childhood and fairytale have for Ravel? Ultimately, our answer must be a limited and speculative one. We may draw our conclusions only from the evidence of the music itself, supplemented by the recollections and tributes of those who were closest to this most unassuming and emotionally *pudique* of composers.

Despite the precise and objective manner of their construction, the reflections of Ravel's contemporaries suggest that *Ma mère l'Oye* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* at least bore a particularly personal import. They are perhaps his most freely expressive works; as Henri Prunières observed in his review of the première of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*:

The duet of the Child and the Princess is a moment of intense lyricism, justified by the situation, and will confound those who do not wish to admit that Ravel, under his mocking appearance, conceals a nature that trembles with the deepest sensibility.⁴

The emotional intensity of *Ma mère l'Oye* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (which is made the more potent by its denial in 'Nicolette' and 'Ronde') is given clarity and focus because the works are deliberately set apart. There are no Woods of Ormonde, the Child of *L'Enfant* is no self-portrait and the 'Jardin féérique' is an enchanted, unreal garden, not little Mimi's own backyard with fairies hiding at the bottom. The subject matter of *Ma mère l'Oye* is not that of *Kinderscenen*, *Jeux d'enfants* or *Dolly*: there are no nurseries, no real children (save Petit Poucet), and no explicit meditations upon childhood itself. Outwardly, the suite's narratives and imagery are those of the fairytales upon which it is based. It declares itself an *enfantine* in subtitle only. In *Ma mère l'Oye* in particular, Ravel approached the subject of childhood not directly but 'by reflection, by some other things'.

It could be tempting to read this as a self-protective device on Ravel's part: afraid to declare deeply held sentiments openly, he retreated behind the prism of the fairytale. Yet this, as this thesis has consistently demonstrated, is not the case: the fairytale *was* Ravel's image of childhood. The two concepts were inextricably connected, interwoven on every level. What childhood represented for Ravel mirrored what fairytales represent for children: a state or a place distant but accessible through imagination and active engagement; something safe, secure, predictable and gratifying; something full of magical and beautiful experiences; and something intrinsically straightforward and honest in expression. The prism of the fairytale, for Ravel, refracted subjects that could have become facile, trite or sentimental (childhood remembered, childhood experienced, childhood lost) into compelling musical and dramatic narratives.

From this concluding discussion we may draw out four different ways of evoking, experiencing, describing and imagining childhood. These four perspectives serve to focus analysis of the broader genre of artistic representations of childhood, and they resonate throughout Ravel's music. Each of them is essentially dichotomous; it is typical of the fluid symbolism of childhood that both sides of these nominal opposites are, in their different contexts, equally apt and expressive.

⁴ Henry Prunières, 'L'Enfant et les sortilèges au Théâtre de Monte Carlo', *La Revue musicale* 6:6 (Special issue dedicated to Ravel, April 1925), p. 107.

The first of these dichotomies is the juxtaposition of the very small and the very large – an opposition that means much to children, who may feel themselves small, and desire to be ‘big’ or ‘grown-up’. In the dramatic and musical realisation of *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, Ravel and Colette made much of these interactions. Colette surrounded the Child with oversized furniture ‘to emphasise [his] smallness’ and Ravel brought the lumbering *sortilèges* to life with the colourful variety of his orchestration. The first production’s sets drew the eyes of its audience through the doors and gates of the enclosed nursery and garden into wider worlds, a design concept that mirrored both Ravel’s gradual expansion of musical forms and the increasing richness of his orchestration, from the bare oboe fourths of the opening to the lush string textures of the Garden scene.

Musical *enfantines* are typically cast in a miniaturist tradition – enclosed forms, chamber settings, *dépouillé* construction – but their emotional content is by no means slight. Since the time of Jean Paul Richter and Charles Baudelaire, children have been seen as representative of the essential self, undamaged by the disillusionments of adulthood. This is a vast and far-reaching conception, which underpins much nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, finding musical expression in works such as *Kinderscenen*. While this ‘search for the self’ was engaging the attention of Proust and Freud, in practical terms the children of Ravel’s lifetime engendered the most outwardly material of cultures, the ‘cargo of externals’ described by W. Wright Roberts in 1928 and echoing in works such as Debussy’s *La Boîte à joujoux*. Here, then, is the second dichotomy: the inner being, held within the outer trappings of the middle-class childhood.

Childhood is at once the period in which we live most in the realm of the creative imagination, and the age at which our physical experience of the real world is most intense. These oppositions and interactions of fantasy and reality – the third dichotomy of childhood – have shaped much of the preceding discussion. Chapters One and Two focused their discussion around musical realisations of childhoods real and imagined. On a different level, Musorgsky captured the comings and goings between vivid sensory experience and entrancing imagination in *The Nursery*: the child is by turns carried away by the Nurse’s fantastic stories, fascinated by the unfortunate beetle and brought back to a painful present by a fall from the rocking horse. Bizet and Fauré too

engaged directly with the physicality of childhood, just as the Child of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* relates to his environment – itself at once real and fantastic – in tangible ways. In the *Trois chansons* we find the ever-adaptable fairytale, commenting satirically on the time and place of its re-creation. In *Ma mère l'Oye*, meanwhile, Ravel depicted the fairytale told and heard and lived: the Beast is both a fantastic being and Ravel himself, down on his hands and knees and growling at Mimi Godebski's ankles.

Finally, across the seventy years of Ravel's Third Republic, children and childhood were invested with the symbolism of both times past and things to come. Victor Hugo and Robert Schumann, creative artists of Ravel's grandfather's generation, had depicted childhood with nostalgia, just as in Ravel's own time the narrator of *À la recherche du temps perdu* and Alain-Fournier's *Meaulnes* tried to recapture a past concentrated in idealised childhood experience. Yet children are also an eternal symbol of renewal, and the France of Ravel's lifetime was consciously renewing itself. This era saw the development of revolutionary new technologies, enthusiastic modernity in the visual arts, the fantastical, forward-looking Expositions Universelles and the birth of the futuristic novel. In 1900 Ellen Key declared that the twentieth century would be 'The Century of the Child'⁵: the future was a fascinating prospect, and children symbolised its promise. Perhaps in response, the protagonist of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, a true Child of his time, inspired some of the most consciously 'modernist' music Ravel ever conceived. In 'Nicolette' and 'Ronde', by contrast, we find musical idioms from the time of Janequin; if the songs are not in essence nostalgic one may sense in their twisted fairytales a lament for the loss of childhood innocence.

In all of the works discussed in this thesis (including those by Schumann, Musorgsky, Bizet, Fauré and Debussy as well as Ravel), we may find combinations of these dichotomous perspectives: the big and the small, the real and the imagined, the internal and the external, the past and the future. Yet only in Ravel's music – and most of all in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* – do we find them all, both sides of every coin. We experience the story of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* through the eyes of the 'real' Child who finds himself unexpectedly within a fairytale. The opera is communicated through a physical medium – dance and acting – as well as through music, the least tangible form of artistic expression. The opera also tells of a passage from the past to the future:

⁵ Ellen Key, *Barnets århundrade* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1900), published in English as *The Century of the Child* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1909).

like Jung's archetypal Child, the protagonist of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* is 'evolving towards independence', but the process is not without pain. His one aria concerns itself with a lost ideal, and its nostalgic sentiments are foreshadowed by the laments of the Clock and the Shepherds and Shepherdesses. The inner world of the Child is revealed with striking realism and emotional sophistication, while his material surroundings are depicted in a wealth of musical and dramatic detail. The opera's central focus could be described as the harmonisation of the cultures of the internal and the external, just as the engagement of the growing Child with his oversized surroundings emphasises the conflict between and final resolution of his 'big, small world'.

Ravel's *enfantines* are all, in their different ways, shaped by these infinitely malleable oppositions and resolutions of perception and imagery. The concept of childhood seems to have held a natural resonance for a composer who delighted in seeing things from unexpected perspectives, or from several perspectives at once. As Adam Godnik writes, '[children] compel us to see the world as an unusual place again'.⁶ Free from adult 'baggage', children do not project or 'interpret': they just look, experience and communicate. By 'just looking', they help us to look differently. Like the house in Montfort l'Amaury, the concept of childhood compelled Ravel – as it compels us – to 'look differently', to fit into small spaces and strange angles, to juggle proportions and points of view, to infuse intricate mechanisms with the semblance of being, to see distinctive and varied beauties as at once unique and independent, and part of a well-formed and vibrant whole. In the memory, the idea and the experience of childhood, Ravel found a perennial freshness of inspiration and vision. Assuming a clear and colourful reality through the prism of the fairytale, childhood thus became Maurice Ravel's own 'language of enchantment'.

⁶ Adam Gopnik, *Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York* (London: Quercus, 2007), p. 14.



Plate 18 Ravel's work desk, Montfort l'Amaury
Photograph taken by the author, July 2007