

The Language of Enchantment:

Childhood and Fairytale in the Music of Maurice Ravel

Emily Alison Kilpatrick

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Cet ouvrage fut conçu au jardin de

Claude Moreau

conservatrice du Musée Maurice Ravel à Montfort l'Amaury

Je le lui dédie en reconnaissance de sa sagesse, sa chaleur et son enthousiasme généreux

avec mes hommages affectueux

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List of Musical Sources

Musical examples have reproduced from the following sources:

- FS** *A book of French songs*. Selected by G.M. Stéphan. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1939.
- M** Massenet, Jules. *Manon*. Paris: Heugel, H&C^{ie} 7067, 1895.
- N** Musorgsky, Modest. *The Nursery [Detskaya]*. *Complete Works* vol. 12, ed. Paul Lamm. New York: Kalmus, 1930-1933.
- EP** Ravel, Maurice. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. Piano-vocal score. Paris: Durand, D&F 10699, 1925 (repr. 1932).
- EO** Ravel, Maurice. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. Miniature full score. Paris: Durand, D&F 13019, 1925 (repr. 1966).
- MD** Ravel, Maurice. *Ma mère l'Oye*. Piano duet. Paris: Durand, D&F 7746, 1910 (repr. 2003).
- MS** Ravel, Maurice. *Ma mère l'Oye*. Solo piano. Transcribed Jacques Charlot. Paris: Durand, D&F 7930, 1910.
- MB** Ravel, Maurice. *Ma mère l'Oye*. Ballet score (piano reduction). Transcribed Jacques Charlot. Paris: Durand, D&F 8395, 1912 (repr. 1963).
- TC** Ravel, Maurice. *Trois chansons pour chœur mixte sans accompagnement*. Paris: Durand, D&F 9431, 1916 (repr. 1999).
- RS** Ravel, Maurice. *Songs, 1896-1914*. Arbie Orenstein, ed. New York: Dover, 1990 [No plate numbers; reprinted from Durand engravings].

Most examples from *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* are drawn from **EP**, but in some cases additional information has been added from **EO**. This is indicated as **EP***. Similarly, most examples from *Ma mère l'Oye* have been reproduced from **MS**, but when additional information has been drawn from **MD** or the layout has been altered for reasons of clarity, this is indicated as **MS***.

All musical examples have been typeset by the author using Sibelius software.

Additional abbreviations:

- F-Pn musique** Music department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
Bm-O Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

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Abstract

No human condition is invested with more diverse and complex perceptions, ideals and emotions than childhood. Although it has long been accorded a particular significance in the context of his life and work, Maurice Ravel's conception of childhood, together with the musical language through which it found expression, has never been the subject of a detailed, extended study. This thesis, therefore, explores the roles and realisations of childhood in Ravel's music, arguing that they were inextricably linked with the language, traditions and idioms of the literary fairytale – an hypothesis Ravel himself supported when he wrote that his intention in his fairytale-based *Ma mère l'Oye* was to evoke 'the poetry of childhood'. Through a study of these intertwined themes, the thesis develops new analytical and interpretative approaches to three major works: the piano duet suite *Ma mère l'Oye* (1910), the *Trois chansons* for mixed choir (1914-1915), and the opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (1919-1925). These works span a fifteen-year period that saw a decisive evolution in Ravel's compositional style, and was crucially impacted by the great cataclysm of the First World War.

Ravel deliberately aligned his music with the traditions of the fairytale through the creation and expressive manipulation of musical and dramatic structure, language, gesture and perspective. One may trace the voice and presence of the storyteller in *Ma mère l'Oye*, a work dedicated to two children for whom Ravel was a favourite companion and teller of fairytales. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* presents a detailed portrait of its eponymous Child, set within a fairytale in which traditional elements combine with a complexity of dramatic, musical and psychological construction that invokes the *zeitgeist* of the 1920s. The shadows of real events intrude more disturbingly upon the *Trois chansons*, whose distorted fairytale narratives represent a direct and personal response to the War. In its balance of musical interpretation and explication, supported by a clearly defined historical and philosophical context, the study yields new insights into a central facet of Ravel's musical identity.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

Signed:

Date:

Acknowledgements

This project was inspired by a period of residence in Montfort l'Amaury, France, in the summer of 2004. Thanks are due to Annick de Béistigui, Vice-President of the Conseil d'Administration de la Fondation Maurice Ravel, who facilitated my stay. I will always be grateful for the generosity of Arnaud and the late Henriette de Vitry, who welcomed me into their home and family for the duration of my stay (and on subsequent visits). The kindness of many other residents helped to make 'la petite australienne' an honorary *Montfortoise*; I thank in particular the Brault and de Normandie families and Marie-Huguette Hadrot, who shared much local history with me. Claude Moreau, curator of the Musée Maurice Ravel, was and remains a constant and enthusiastic source of information and insight on all things Ravelian, and to her this work is gratefully and affectionately dedicated.

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Roy Howat's extensive knowledge and wide-ranging experience as performer, editor and scholar have immeasurably enriched my own understanding of this fascinating period of musical history. More personally, it is thanks to Roy that the writing of this thesis has been – surprising as it may sound – the happiest time of my life.

Note on the text

All translations are my own unless otherwise acknowledged. For reasons of space, most French language sources are quoted in translation only. Original versions have been included only when the use of language itself is of particular importance.

While some primary sources (letters, articles, interviews, memoirs) have been excerpted from published translations, some passages have been retranslated for reasons of clarity and emphasis. Hence references may be found to both French and English editions of works such as Arbie Orenstein's *Maurice Ravel: Lettres, écrits, entretiens* (published in English as *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, articles, interviews*).