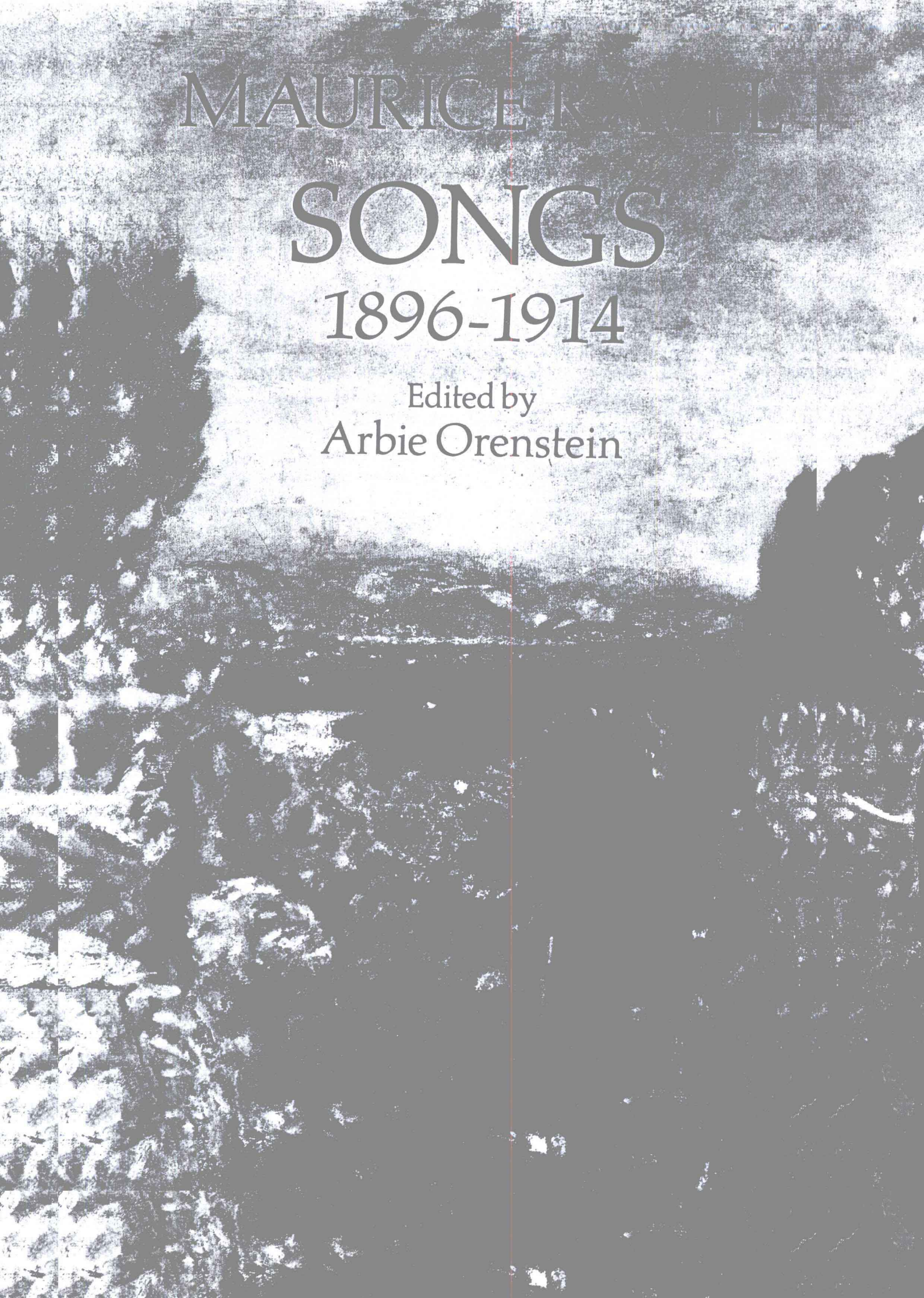




MAURICE KAVEL

SONGS

1896-1914

Edited by
Arbie Orenstein

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DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC., NEW YORK

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This Dover edition, first published in 1990,
is a new collection of thirteen works, originally published as follows:

Sainte, Durand & C^{ie}, 1907.

Épigrammes de Clément Marot, E. Demets, 1900.

Manteau de fleurs, J. Hamelle, 1906.

Shéhérazade, G. Astruc, 1904.

Cinq Mélodies populaires grecques, Durand & C^{ie}, 1906.

Noël des jouets, Bellon Ponscarne, n.d.

Histoires naturelles, Durand & C^{ie}, 1907.

Vocalise-Étude en forme de Habanera, Alphonse Leduc, 1909.

Les Grands Vents venus d'outremer, Durand & C^{ie}, 1907.

Sur l'herbe, Durand & C^{ie}, 1907.

Chants populaires, P. Jurgenson, 1911.

Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé, Durand & C^{ie}, 1914.

Deux Mélodies hébraïques, Durand & C^{ie}, 1915.

We are grateful to the Music Library of Queens College
for the loan of some of the scores for reproduction.

Manufactured in the United States of America
Dover Publications, Inc.
31 East 2nd Street
Mineola, N.Y. 11501

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ravel, Maurice, 1875–1937.

[Songs. Selections]

Songs, 1896–1914.

French and English words; French words with English
translations also printed as texts.

I. Songs with piano. I. Orenstein, Arbie. II. Title.

M1620.R2507 1990 90-750799

ISBN 0-486-26354-1

A ce vi-va-ge d'os-ten - soir Que l'ô-leu-ne har-pe par l'An-ge for-mée à-vec son vol du

son Pour la dé-li-ca-te pha-lan - ge Du

doigt que dans le vieux son - tal Ri le vieux li - ne et le ba-lan - ce

sur le plu-mage in-hu-men - tal

Mu - si - ci - en - ne du si - lence

Maurice

Sainte, final page of the holograph, signed by Ravel and dated December 1896. (The key signature is four flats.)

Preface



This collection of songs by Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) contains most of his music in this genre written up to 1914.¹ Only a few songs were completed in the postwar years: *Ronsard à son âme* (1924), the *Chansons madécasses* (1925–26), *Rêves* (1927), and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* (1932–33). Thus, Ravel's contribution to the *mélodie* was small in quantity but distinguished in quality. The first editions of the songs, mostly published by Durand, were carefully done, and only two minor corrections have been made.

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¹The following songs, which do not appear in this volume, were edited by the present writer and published separately by Salabert in 1975: *Ballade de la reine morte d'aimer* (c. 1893, poem by Roland de Marès), *Un Grand Sommeil noir* (1895, poem by Paul Verlaine), *Chanson du rouet* (1898, poem by Leconte de Lisle), *Si morne!* (1898, poem by Émile Verhaeren), *Tripatos* (1909, a Greek folk song), and the *Chanson écossaise* (1910, poem by Robert Burns).

Introduction



Maurice Ravel's legacy consists of some sixty compositions written between the early 1890s and the 1930s. Slightly more than half of these works are instrumental: fifteen pieces and suites for the piano, eight chamber works, six orchestral works, several ballets, and two piano concerti. The vocal music consists of eighteen songs and song cycles with accompaniment for piano, chamber ensemble, or orchestra; several settings of folk melodies; one work for unaccompanied mixed chorus; and two operas. It would be misleading to divide this music into periods of apprenticeship and maturity, for Ravel's earliest compositions were on the whole remarkably characteristic. The "Habanera" and the *Menuet antique* were written by a twenty-year-old student, and with the completion of *Jeux d'eau* at the age of twenty-six the composer's style was firmly set. These early works indicate many of the trends he would pursue: a predilection for dance rhythms, the music of Spain, archaic pastiche, and contemporary impressionistic techniques. Thus, from the outset, Ravel's approach to composition might be called metamorphic—that is, in each new undertaking he would cover fresh ground, placing his personal stamp upon widely differing techniques and idioms. This is particularly evident in the vocal music. From the preciousness of Clément Marot to the complex symbolism of Stéphane Mallarmé, from Renaissance Alexandrines to modern poems in prose, Ravel rarely repeated himself. Most often, he turned to free verse (*vers libres*) and prose poems. He believed that setting a text implied creating a new work of art and that the musician thereby became an equal partner with the author. Thus, a text could be modified, as long as its general sense and poetic beauty were in no way jeopardized. The spiritual sources of Ravel's vocal art range from the composers of

the French Renaissance chanson to the work of Massenet, Mussorgsky, Chabrier, Satie, Fauré, and Debussy. The peripheral influence of Wagner and Schoenberg may also be observed. Unlike the more adventurous instrumental style, the vocal writing employs traditional tessitura with practically no attempt at virtuosity. Depending on the song, one may observe a lyrical vocal line that extends over a limited range (*Sainte*), quasi-parlando writing (*Histoires naturelles*), or some instrumental angularity (*Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*). The accompaniment will occasionally establish a uniform atmosphere, deriving from the general mood of the poem (*Épigrammes de Clément Marot*), while at other times the text may be interpreted quite literally (*Histoires naturelles*). Ineluctably attracted to exoticism, Ravel willingly harmonized folk melodies from many nations. He preferred having the melodies sung in their original language, and performed, if possible, with orchestral accompaniment. An interpreter would thus have to cope with some ten languages.

A complete accounting of the elements in Ravel's art would run a gamut from Gregorian chant to Gershwin, passing through the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras. He managed to keep his personal touch in a style that varied from the classical simplicity of *Ma Mère l'Oye* to the transcendental romantic virtuosity of *Gaspard de la nuit*, from the luxuriant, caressing sonority of *Daphnis et Chloé* to the austere violence of the *Chansons madécasses*, and from Renaissance pastiche to adaptations of jazz. His achievement is not eclectic, nor can it be summed up in one all-encompassing label. It is thoroughly French in orientation, and is solidly based upon traditional practice. In the last analysis, like any other significant artist, Ravel fashioned his own laws and created his own universe.

Notes on the Music¹



SAINTE (Saint; poem by Stéphane Mallarmé; composed 1896; dedicated to Madame Edmond Bonniot, née Mallarmé; first performance: Hélène Luquiens and Ravel, June 8, 1907, Paris)

In December 1865, Mallarmé (1842–1898) wrote to the poet Théodore Aubanel, describing *Sainte* as a “short melodic poem.” The poem’s original title was “Sainte Cécile jouant sur l’aile d’un chérubin” (“Saint Cecilia Playing on the Wing of a Cherub”), and Ravel’s setting captures the contemplative mood by means of a quasi-liturgical vocal line accompanied by slow-moving chords. The many unresolved chords of the seventh and ninth point to the pathbreaking influence of Ravel’s colleague and mentor Erik Satie. (Ravel modified three words in Mallarmé’s poem: “. . . De la viole étincelant/Jadis selon flûte ou mandore; . . . Jadis selon vèpre ou complie.”)

ÉPIGRAMMES DE CLÉMENT MAROT (Epigrams by Clément Marot)

- I. D’Anne qui me jecta de la neige (On Anne throwing snow at me).
- II. D’Anne jouant de l’espinnette (On Anne playing the spinet).
(I. 1899; II. 1896; dedicated to M. Hardy-Thé; first performance: M. Hardy-Thé and Ravel, January 27, 1900, Paris)

The art of Clément Marot (1496–1544) has qualities that appeal to most Frenchmen: delicate charm, polish, clarity, and wit. Ravel was particularly attracted to the orthographical curiosities of Renaissance French. The poet’s original titles, “D’Anne qui luy jecta de la neige” and “D’Anne,” appear to have been modified by the composer. The songs exhibit gentle refinement and preciousness, coupled with a deliberately archaic use of parallel fifths and octaves.

MANTEAU DE FLEURS (Mantle of Flowers; poem by Paul Grivollet; 1903).

Paul Grivollet (the stage name of Paul Barthélémy Jeulin, 1863–1936) performed secondary roles at the Comédie Française and also wrote plays and collections of poetry. His poems have remained obscure with good reason, and “Manteau de fleurs” proved to be a rare lapse in Ravel’s fastidious selection of texts for musical adaptation. Grivollet sent his poems to the leading French composers of the day, and managed to convince twenty-two of them to set his work. The result was an undistinguished collection of songs entitled *Les Frissons*. With its numerous measured thirty-second notes, the piano accompaniment often suggests orchestral sonorities. Ravel’s orchestration of the accompaniment (still unpublished) is somewhat better, but, like Debussy in *Dans le jardin*, he was unable to overcome Grivollet’s banal poetry. Ravel later returned to the motif of flowers in his ballet libretto *Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs*, based on the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*.

SHÉHÉRAZADE (Scheherazade)

- I. Asie (Asia); dedicated to Mademoiselle Jeane [*sic*] Hatto.
- II. La Flûte enchantée (The Magic Flute); dedicated to Madame René de Saint-Marceaux.
- III. L’Indifférent (The Unresponsive One); dedicated to Madame Sigismond Bardac.
(Poems by Tristan Klingsor; 1903; first performance: Jane Hatto, Alfred Cortot conducting, May 17, 1904, Paris)

In his poems Tristan Klingsor (the pseudonym of Arthur Justin Léon Leclère, 1874–1966, French poet, painter, art critic, and composer) strove for clarity, balance, and, above all, communication with the reader:

My poems are like sketches. . . . A poem should be that already; a point of departure for a song, or a melody. . . . Perhaps that is why I have had the good fortune to please musicians. You see, I attempted not to be merely a rhymist, I attempted to be a rhythmist. Rhythm, in poetry, music, and in painting, is the artist’s foremost resource.¹

¹I wish to thank Columbia University Press for permission to quote from my book *Ravel: Man and Musician* (1975).

In discussing the *fin de siècle* in France, Tristan Klingsor observed that "the Orient was in the air, through Bakst, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Doctor Mardrus, who translated the *Thousand and One Nights*." In 1903, Klingsor compiled a collection of one hundred poems entitled *Shéhérazade*. The title was taken from Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral suite, and the collection centers about the Orient and its kaleidoscopic lure. Born just one year apart, Ravel and Klingsor had spent many evenings together discussing music and poetry with colleagues, and at the composer's request the poet declaimed "Asie," "La Flûte enchantée," and "L'Indifférent" for him. Thereupon, Ravel went into his customary isolation when composing, reappearing to request some minor changes in the text of "Asie," to which the poet agreed.² Ravel was attracted not only to the oriental lure of Klingsor's collection, but also to its subtle free verse and its vivid pictorial imagery. The text is set syllabically, often in a quasi-recursive fashion, underpinned by orchestral motifs. This apparently accounts for the composer's acknowledgment of Debussy's "spiritual influence" on the song cycle; the vocal line in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, however, is generally closer to recitative.

In adapting Klingsor's poems, Ravel was primarily concerned with transforming the rhythmic subtleties of free verse into melody, a direction he would pursue in the *Histoires naturelles* and in his first opera, *L'Heure espagnole*. *Shéhérazade* gradually decreases in intensity, from the rich voluptuousness of "Asie" through the gentle lyricism of "La Flûte enchantée" to the languid sensuousness of "L'Indifférent." Subtitled "Three poems for voice and orchestra," this haunting triptych was Ravel's second artistic encounter with oriental fantasy, the first being his Overture to *Shéhérazade* (1898, first published by Salabert in 1975). If the songs are performed with piano, the pianist must try to capture the variegated colors of the orchestral

¹L. J. Pronger, *La Poésie de Tristan Klingsor* (Paris: M. J. Minard, 1965), p. 65.
²Ravel was upset that his interpreter, soprano Jane Hatto, would have to sing about a pipe ("Like Sinbad placing my old Arabic pipe between my lips from time to time"), and he suggested that the pipe be replaced by a cup ("Like Sinbad raising my old Arabic cup to my lips from time to time").

CINQ MÉLODIES POPULAIRES GRECQUES (Five

- I. Chanson de la mariée (Bride's Song).
 - II. La-bas, vers l'église (Yonder by the Church).
 - III. Quel Galant m'est comparable (What Gallant Can Be Compared with Me?).
 - IV. Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques (Song of the Girls Collecting Mastic).
 - V. Tout gai! (Be Gay!).
- (Melodies and texts collected by Pericles Matsa and Hubert Pernot; 1904-6; first performance of the complete cycle: Marguerite Babatjan, at a lecture-recital presented by M. D. Calvocoressi in Paris during the 1935-6 season.)

The genesis of the *Cinq Mélodies populaires grecques* may be traced to a lecture that the French musicologist

Pierre Aubry planned to give on the songs of oppressed peoples (Greeks and Armenians). He asked the critic Michel D. Calvocoressi to select some Greek songs for illustrative purposes, and after making his choice, Calvocoressi taught them phonetically to the singer Louise Thomasset, who agreed to perform them on short notice but wished to have piano accompaniments for the melodies. The critic thereupon turned to Ravel, who wrote only two (nos. 3 and 4) were later incorporated into the *Cinq Mélodies populaires grecques*; the others remained unpublished, as Ravel found their accompaniments "too brief." As a result, three other melodies were later set, and since Ravel admired Marguerite Babatjan's interpretations of them, he subsequently set a sixth Greek melody for her, *Triptolè*. Ravel's accompaniments blend perfectly with their respective melodies, skillfully capturing the various folk expressions of love, faith, and joy.

NOËL DES JOUETS (The Toys' Christmas; poem by Maurice Ravel; 1905; dedicated to Madame Jean Cruppi; first performance: Jane Bathori and Ravel, March 24, 1906, Paris; Jane Bathori, Ravel conducting, April 26, 1906, Paris)

This song reveals Ravel's modest ability as a poet, and the depiction of a Christmas manger, with toy animals, flocks, and angels, affirms his fascination with the pristine world of childhood. The clarity and tenderness of the poem are not unrelated to some of Jules Renard's *Histoires naturelles*, and passages in the piano recall the second movement of Ravel's Sonatine (1903-5). He observed that the music is "clear and plain, like the mechanical toys of the poem, and the parallel seconds and concluding fanfare in the accompaniment will reappear with increased effect in *Ma Mère l'Oye*."

HISTOIRES NATURELLES (Natural Histories)

- I. Le Paon (The Peacock); dedicated to Madame Jane Bathori.
 - II. Le Grillon (The Cricket); dedicated to Madeleine Picard.
 - III. Le Cygne (The Swan); dedicated to Madame Alfred Edwards, née Godebska.
 - IV. Le Martin-Pêcheur (The Kingfisher); dedicated to Emile Engel.
 - V. La Pintade (The Guinea Fowl); dedicated to Roger Ducasse.
- (Poems by Jules Renard; 1906; first performance: Jane Bathori and Ravel, January 12, 1907, Paris.)

In September 1895, shortly before the publication of the *Histoires naturelles*, Jules Renard (1864-1910) wrote in his journal: "Histoires naturelles—Buffon! described animals in order to give pleasure to men. As for me, I would wish to be pleasing to the animals themselves. If they were able to read my miniature *Histoires naturelles*, I should wish that it would make them smile." The subtlety of Renard's technique has been perceptively analyzed as follows:

Intimately bound with the overall sentence structure is the skillful interlocking of linguistic levels. Rhetoric and colloquialism are juxtaposed; the polished literary phrase is preceded or followed by a matter-of-fact aside. This variation enables Renard to change his point of view, moving into and out of the mind of his subject at will (and in this respect at least he is indebted to La Fontaine). In this way he is able to achieve changes of tempo and subtle effects of irony.²

Two important spiritual ancestors of Ravel's song cycle were Chabrier's charming and humorous animal songs and Mussorgsky's incomplete opera *The Marriage*. In setting Gogol's play, Mussorgsky observed that he was "crossing the Rubicon. This is living prose in music . . . this is reverence toward the language of humanity, this is a reproduction of simple human speech."³ Mussorgsky's goal was adopted by Ravel, who observed that in the *Histoires naturelles* "the diction must lead the music." Jane Bathori recalled that in the *Histoires naturelles* Ravel

had completely broken with what is customarily called "melody." The voice was subservient to the prosody, which embraced the text to such an extent that the mute *e*'s were no longer heard. This procedure, which Ravel also used in *L'Heure espagnole*, disconcerted quite a few singers, but made them acquire a more supple and more animated diction.⁴

In order to approximate the tone of conversation, the meter is frequently changed, and the melody often moves within a limited range. In this regard, the critic Émile Vuillermoz made the following personal observation:

When Ravel made one of those razor-edged remarks of which he alone possessed the secret, he used to make a characteristic gesture: he put his right hand quickly behind his back, described a sort of ironical pirouette, cast down his mischievously sparkling eyes and let his voice suddenly drop a fourth or a fifth. In the *Histoires naturelles* and *L'Heure espagnole* one finds this characteristic intonation in all sorts of places. It is Ravel's own voice, his pronunciation, his well-known mannerisms that have produced this *quasi parlando* melody.⁵

Above all, the *Histoires naturelles* reaffirm the marked sensitivity of author and composer in depicting the magical world of animal life.

Renard's seventy sketches of animal life were illustrated by Félix Vallotton (1896), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1899), and Pierre Bonnard (1904). Moreover, Lucien Guitry and other leading actors of the day declaimed the poems in public. Although viewed with suspicion and hostility in 1907, Ravel's interpretation of the *Histoires naturelles* has been vindicated by time, and the cycle now appears to be an important and original contribution to French song.

¹Renard's title is indebted to the noted eighteenth-century French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, whose monumental *Histoire naturelle* was published in forty-four volumes between 1749 and 1804.

²Basil Deane, "Renard, Ravel, and the 'Histoires naturelles,'" *Australian Journal of French Studies* 1 (1964), p. 179.

³J. Leyda and S. Bertensson, *The Mussorgsky Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1947), p. 112.

⁴*Revue musicale*, December 1938, pp. 179–80.

⁵Vuillermoz et al., *Maurice Ravel par quelques-uns de ses familiers*, p. 60.

VOCALISE-ÉTUDE EN FORME DE HABANERA (Vocalise-Etude in the Style of a Habanera; 1907)

This piece was commissioned by A. L. Hettich, a professor of voice at the Conservatoire, to introduce the students to contemporary vocal études. Many composers responded to Hettich's request, among them Gabriel Fauré, Arthur Honegger, Jacques Ibert, and Albert Roussel. Ravel's vocalization, which is underpinned by the habanera rhythm, gives the performer ample opportunity for display within a limited range of virtuosity. The composition later achieved considerable popularity in a violin transcription entitled *Pièce en forme de Habanera*, and thus for once the tables were turned on the master adapter of the art of others.

LES GRANDS VENTS VENUS D'OUTREMER (The Great Winds Coming from Beyond the Sea; poem by Henri de Régnier; 1907; dedicated to Jacques Durand; first performance: Hélène Luquiens and Ravel, June 8, 1907, Paris)

Ravel turned to the writings of Henri de Régnier (1864–1936) on three occasions. In addition to his setting of this symbolist poem, a quotation from the collection *La Cité des eaux* appears in the score of *Jeux d'eau*, and a phrase from the novel *Les Rencontres de Monsieur de Bréot* is found in the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. "Les Grands Vents venus d'outremer" first appeared in a collection entitled *Tel qu'en songe* (1892). The pathos and violence of the poem are reasonably well matched by a turbulent, highly chromatic, and somewhat overcharged accompaniment, which is frequently quite independent of the vocal line. Ravel's setting is somewhat atypical, and the song occupies a relatively isolated position in the composer's catalogue.

SUR L'HERBE (On the Grass; poem by Paul Verlaine; 1907; first performance: Jane Bathori and Ravel, December 12, 1907, Paris)

In an unpublished letter to the critic Georges Jean-Aubry written on September 4, 1907, Ravel commented on *Sur l'herbe*: "In this piece, as in the *Histoires naturelles*, the impression must be given that one is almost not singing. A bit of preciousness is found there which is indicated moreover by the text and the music." The abbé's charming and incoherent comments, which include two allusions to music, are underscored by a graceful accompaniment, which evokes an eighteenth-century dance. The autograph of *Sur l'herbe* suggests that Ravel contemplated setting a series of poems from *Fêtes galantes*, but as it turned out the song proved to be his final adaptation of Verlaine's poetry.

CHANTS POPULAIRES (Folk Songs)

- I. Chanson espagnole (Spanish song).
- II. Chanson française (French song; gathered by Léon Branchet and Johannès Plantadis, this song was published in Paris by the Schola Cantorum in 1904).
- III. Chanson italienne (Italian song).
- IV. Chanson hébraïque (Hebraic song; gathered by Joel Engel in Vilna, Russia, in 1909).

In 1910, at the invitation of the Russian soprano Marie Clémentine d'Alheim (1869–1970), Ravel participated in an international competition sponsored by the Maison du Lied in Moscow. The organization was founded with a threefold purpose in mind: first, to stimulate public interest in folk melodies; second, to increase the repertory of artistically harmonized folk melodies by inviting composers to enter biannual competitions; finally, to encourage young singers by giving them the opportunity to perform folk songs before the public in small recital halls. The competition entailed setting seven folk melodies (Spanish, Russian, Finnish, French, Scottish, Italian, and Hebrew). Ravel won first prize in four of the categories, and the other prizes were won by Alexander Olenine¹ (Russian song) and Alexandre Georges² (Flemish and Scottish songs).

Ravel's accompaniments are indicative of his broad empathies. The guitarlike accompaniment of the Spanish song effectively captures its bitter irony, while the French song is elegant and charming. The Italian song, dealing with the pangs of unrequited love, is the shortest and perhaps least successful of the group. The Hebrew song, a dialogue between father and son, is in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Aramaic; a dancelike section (the father's questions) alternates with recitative (the son's replies) in a simple, tasteful manner.

¹Marie Clémentine d'Alheim's brother, he was a student of Balakirev (1850–1938). Ravel's Flemish and Russian songs have not been recovered. His Scottish song was reconstructed by this writer on the basis of a sketch (Salabert, 1975). Based on a wistful love poem by Robert Burns ("The Banks of Doon," 1791), it is an important addition to the collection.

TROIS POÈMES DE STEPHANE MALLARMÉ (Three Poems by Stéphane Mallarmé)
 I. Soupîr (Sigh), dedicated to Igor Stravinsky.
 II. Placet futile (Futile Petition), dedicated to Florent Schmitt.
 III. Surgi de la croupe et du bond (Rising from the Croupe and the Leap), dedicated to Erik Satie.
 (1913;¹ first performance: Jane Bathori, with a chamber ensemble² conducted by Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, January 14, 1914, Paris)

During the opening seasons of the Ballets Russes, in which *The Firebird*, *Le Fœtus*, and *Daphnis et Chloé* were presented, Ravel and Stravinsky occasionally attended rehearsals of each other's music. Their cordial relationship was to become even closer when they jointly accepted a commission from Serge Diaghilev to reorchestrate and adapt part of Mussorgsky's incomplete opera *Khovantchina*. The composers worked on the assignment in Clarens, Switzerland, during March and April, 1913. In the course of their collaboration, Stravinsky showed his colleague the manuscript of his most recent ballet, *Le Sacre du printemps*. Ravel was extremely enthusiastic, and predicted in a letter to his friend Lucien Garban that the creation of *Le Sacre du printemps* would be an event as

important as the premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Another score that Ravel discovered at Clarens was Stravinsky's *Poèmes de la lyrique japonaise*, and he expressed considerable interest in the music, as well as its setting for solo voice accompanied by a chamber ensemble. Stravinsky explained that his instrumentation was derived from the score of *Pierrot Lunaire*, which Schoenberg had recently shown him in Berlin. Though unacquainted with Schoenberg's work, Ravel was anxious to exploit its coloristic possibilities, and he soon completed "Soupîr," the first of his Mallarmé poems. While Ravel was occupied with his settings of Mallarmé's poetry, Claude Debussy was composing his final homage to the poet, entitled *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (for voice and piano), and both collections were published by Durand about the same time. It was curious that both composers would independently set three poems by Mallarmé; when two of their three selections turned out to be identical, it was, as Debussy noted with dismay, a "phenomenon of autosuggestion worthy of communication to the Academy of Medicine." Ravel completed his songs before Debussy, and asked Dr. Edmond Bonniot, Mallarmé's son-in-law, for permission to utilize the poet's texts. The men were on friendly terms and the required authorization was granted immediately. A short time later, when Dr. Bonniot was approached by Jacques Durand with a similar request, he agreed to the publication of Debussy's "Éventail," but refused "Soupîr" and "Placet futile," whose rights had just been granted to Ravel. Debussy's songs were published only after Ravel begged Dr. Bonniot to grant Durand the required authorization, a gesture typical of his probity and good will.

The poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé poses considerable intellectual challenge. Ravel once commented on the poets' "unbounded visions, yet precise in design, enclosed in a mystery of sombre abstractions—an art where all the elements are so intimately bound up together that one cannot analyze, but only sense its effect." On another occasion, he explained: "I wished to transpose Mallarmé's poetry, especially that preciously so full of meaning and so characteristic of him, 'Surgi de la croupe et du bond' is the strangest, if not the most hermetic of his sonnets." In a letter to his colleague and biographer Roland-Manuel, written on October 7, 1913, Ravel discussed his setting of "Placet futile":

. . . Just as your letter arrived I was finishing my 3 poems. Indeed, *Placet futile* was completed, but I retouched it. I fully realize the great audacity of having attempted to interpret this sonnet in music. It was necessary that the melodic contour, the modulations, and the rhythms be as precious, as properly contoured as the sentiment and the images of the text. Nevertheless, it was necessary to maintain the elegant deportment of the poem. Above all, it was necessary to maintain the profound and exquisite tenderness which suffuses all of this. Now that it's done, I'm a bit nervous about it.

Ravel's concern to maintain the "profound and exquisite tenderness" of the sonnet is of considerable interest, particularly in view of the fact that he was often maligned as a cerebral contriver of effects—as was Stéphane Mallarmé. The poet described "Soupîr" as "an autumnal reverie," and on another occasion he observed that "Placet futile" was an

croupe et du bond," a difficult evocation of an empty vase, has been interpreted by a noted Mallarmé scholar as follows:

The poet is alone and looking down at the empty vase as if he were a sylph painted on the ceiling. . . . No water is in the vase. It seems to be dying because of its emptiness. . . . The waiting of the vase for water is comparable to the waiting of the poet throughout the darkness of the night. A rose, placed in the opening of the vase, would have fulfilled the vase in its reason for being, as a poem or some act of creation would have justified the poet's vigil.³

Ravel's setting of the poem manages to match its verbal wizardry, primarily by exploiting a harmonic scheme that is not tonally oriented. The songs thus progress from traditional tonality ("Soupir") to a suggestion of atonality within a tonal framework ("Placet futile") to genuine atonality ("Surgi de la croupe et du bond"). Ravel never returned to the atonality of his concluding song, and it is a work of extraordinary interest. The Mallarmé poems occupy a rather isolated position in the composer's catalogue, and although relatively unknown, they constitute a superb achievement. As in the *Shéhérazade* cycle, the piano accompanist in the Mallarmé poems must attempt to capture the resplendent colors of the chamber ensemble.

¹There are two complete autographs of the Mallarmé songs, one for voice and piano, the other for voice and instruments. The latter autograph (and the Durand edition) indicates the following: "Soupir," Clarens, April 2, 1913; "Placet futile," Paris, May, 1913; "Surgi de la croupe et du bond," St. Jean de Luz, August, 1913.

²The chamber ensemble consists of a piccolo, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, string quartet, and piano.

³Wallace Fowlie, *Mallarmé* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 51.

DEUX MÉLODIES HÉBRAÏQUES (Two Hebraic Songs)

- I. Kaddisch (Kaddish).
- II. L'Énigme éternelle (The Eternal Enigma; text and melody first published by the Society for Jewish Folk Music, Russia, 1911).
(1914;¹ dedicated to Madame Alvina-Alvi; first performance: Alvina-Alvi and Ravel, June 3, 1914, Paris)

The Hebraic melodies form an interesting contrast, with the rhapsodic cantorial melismas of the "Kaddisch" offset by the folklike simplicity of "L'Énigme éternelle." Although the latter text, in Yiddish, is of no particular import, the Aramaic text of the "Kaddisch" is one of the masterpieces of the Jewish liturgy. Abraham Idelsohn criticized Ravel's setting of "L'Énigme éternelle" as "ultra-modern . . . without regard for its scale and the nature of the mode."² This observation was made in 1929, and today, of course, the accompaniment no longer appears "ultra-modern." It should be pointed out that in all of his folk harmonizations, Ravel's sole concern was to write a tasteful accompaniment, and thus any restriction imposed upon his choice of harmony would have been totally unacceptable. The French texts of the Hebraic melodies were arranged by the composer, after he had been supplied with a literal translation. These songs form a natural pendant to the "Chanson hébraïque," and they marked Ravel's final adaptation of folk melodies.

¹There is also Ravel's orchestral transcription (1919); first performance: Madeleine Grey, Rhené-Baton conducting the Padeloup Orchestra, April 17, 1920.

²Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), p. 486. See also p. 490, example 5, for a "correct" harmonization of another version of the melody.

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Texts and Translations



SAINTE (Stéphane Mallarmé)

A la fenêtre recélant
Le santal vieux qui se dédore
De la viole étincelant
Jadis selon flûte ou mandore

Est la sainte pâle étalant
Le livre vieux qui se déplie
Du Magnificat ruisselant
Jadis selon vêpre ou complie

A ce vitrage d'ostensoir
Que frôle une harpe par l'Ange
Formée avec son vol du soir
Pour la délicate phalange

Du doigt que sans le vieux santal
Ni le vieux livre elle balance
Sur le plumage instrumental,
Musicienne du silence.

SAINT

At the window that harbors
The old flaking-gilt sandalwood
Of the viol that sparkled
In the past to flute or mandore

Is the pale female saint who displays
The old unfolding volume
Of the Magnificat that flowed
In the past for vespers or compline

At this monstrance-glass
Brushed by a harp that the Angel
Forms in his evening flight
For the delicate tip

Of the finger that, without the old sandalwood
Or the old book, she balances
On the instrumental plumage:
Musician of silence.

ÉPIGRAMMES DE CLÉMENT MAROT

D'Anne qui me jecta de la neige

Anne par jeu me jecta de la neige
Que je cuidoyis froide certainement:
Mais c'estoit feu, l'expérience en ay-je
Car embrasé je fuz soudainement
Puisque le feu loge secrettement
Dedans la neige, où trouveray-je place
Pour n'ardre point? Anne, ta seule grâce
Estaindre peut le feu que je sens bien
Non point par eau, par neige, ne par glace,
Mais par sentir ung feu pareil au mien.

D'Anne jouant de l'espinette

Lorsque je voy en ordre la brunette
Jeune, en bon point, de la ligne des Dieux,
Et que sa voix, ses doigts et l'espinette
Meinent ung bruyet doux et melodieux,
J'ay du plaisir, et d'oreilles et d'yeulx

EPIGRAMS BY CLÉMENT MAROT

On Anne Throwing Snow at Me

Anne playfully threw snow at me
That I thought would surely be cold,
But it was fire—I felt it—
For I was suddenly set aflame.
Since fire lodges secretly
Within snow, where can I turn
To avoid burning? Anne, only your mercy
Can quench the fire I feel so keenly:
Not with water, with snow, nor with ice,
But by feeling a fire similar to mine.

On Anne Playing the Spinnet

When I see the tidy dark-haired girl,
Young, plump, a descendant of the gods,
And when her voice, her fingers and the spinet
Produce a sweet and melodious sound,
I have more pleasure through my ears and eyes

Plus que les saintz en leur gloire immortelle
Et autant qu'eulx je devien glorieux
Dès que je pense estre ung peu ayme d'elle.

Than the saints in their immortal glory,
And I become as glorious as they are
The moment I think myself a little beloved by her.

MANTEAU DE FLEURS (Paul Grivollet)

Toutes les fleurs de mon jardin sont roses,
Le rose sied à sa beauté.
Les primevères sont les premières écloses,
Puis viennent les tulipes et les jacinthes roses,
Les jolis œillets, les si belles roses,
Toute la variété des fleurs si roses
Du printemps et de l'été!
Le rose sied à sa beauté!
Toutes mes pivoines sont roses,
Roses aussi sont mes glaïeuls,
Roses mes géraniums; seuls,
Dans tout ce rose un peu troublant,
Les lys ont le droit d'être blancs.
Et quand elle passe au milieu des fleurs
Emperlées de rosée en pleurs,
Dans le parfum grisant des roses,
Et sous la caresse des choses
Toute grâce, amour, pureté!
Les fleurs lui font un manteau rose
Dont elle pare sa beauté.

MANTLE OF FLOWERS

All the flowers in my garden are pink;
Pink is becoming to her beauty.
The primroses are the first to bloom,
Then come the pink tulips and hyacinths,
The pretty carnations, the roses that are so beautiful,
The full variety of flowers so pink
Of spring and summer!
Pink is becoming to her beauty!
All my peonies are pink,
Pink too are my gladioli,
Pink my geraniums; alone
In all this somewhat disturbing pink,
The lilies have the right to be white.
And when she walks amid the flowers
That are pearled with weeping dew,
In the heady fragrance of the roses
And beneath the caress of nature,
The embodiment of grace, love, purity!
The flowers form a pink mantle for her
With which she adorns her beauty.

SHÉHÉRAZADE (Tristan Klingsor)

I. Asie

Asie, Asie, Asie.
Vieux pays merveilleux des contes de nourrice
Où dort la fantaisie comme une impératrice
En sa forêt tout emplie de mystère.
Asie,
Je voudrais m'en aller avec la goëlette
Qui se berce ce soir dans le port
Mystérieuse et solitaire
Et qui déploie enfin ses voiles violettes
Comme un immense oiseau de nuit dans le ciel d'or.
Je voudrais m'en aller vers des îles de fleurs
En écoutant chanter la mer perverse
Sur un vieux rythme ensorceleur.
Je voudrais voir Damas et les villes de Perse
Avec les minarets légers dans l'air.
Je voudrais voir de beaux turbans de soie
Sur des visages noirs aux dents claires;
Je voudrais voir des yeux sombres d'amour
Et des prunelles brillantes de joie
En des peaux jaunes comme des oranges;
Je voudrais voir des vêtements de velours
Et des habits à longues franges.
Je voudrais voir des calumets entre des bouches

SCHEHERAZADE

I. Asia

Asia, Asia, Asia.
Ancient wonderland of nursery tales,
Where imagination sleeps like an empress
In her forest all filled with mystery.
Asia,
I would like to depart on the schooner
That is rocking this evening in the harbor,
Mysterious and solitary,
And that finally unfurls its violet sails
Like a huge night bird in the golden sky.
I would like to depart for isles of flowers
While listening to the song of the perverse sea
With its ancient bewitching rhythm.
I would like to see Damascus and the cities of Persia
With their light minarets in the air.
I would like to see beautiful silk turbans
On black faces with gleaming teeth;
I would like to see eyes dark with love
And their pupils shining with joy
Set in skins yeilow as oranges;
I would like to see velvet clothing
And garments with long fringes.
I would like to see calumets in mouths

Tout entourées de barbe blanche;
 Je voudrais voir d'après marchands aux regards louches,
 Et des cadis, et des vizirs
 Qui du seul mouvement de leur doigt qui se penche
 Accordent vie ou mort au gré de leur désir.
 Je voudrais voir la Perse, et l'Inde, et puis la Chine,
 Les mandarins ventrus sous les ombrelles,
 Et les princesses aux mains fines,
 Et les lettrés qui se querellent
 Sur la poésie et sur la beauté;
 Je voudrais m'attarder au palais enchanté
 Et comme un voyageur étranger
 Contempler à loisir des paysages peints
 Sur des étoffes en des cadres de sapin
 Avec un personnage au milieu d'un verger;
 Je voudrais voir des assassins souriant
 Du bourreau qui coupe un cou d'innocent
 Avec son grand sabre courbé d'Orient.
 Je voudrais voir des pauvres et des reines;
 Je voudrais voir des roses et du sang;
 Je voudrais voir mourir d'amour ou bien de haine.
 Et puis m'en revenir plus tard
 Narrer mon aventure aux curieux de rêves
 En élevant comme Sindbad ma vieille tasse arabe
 De temps en temps jusqu'à mes lèvres
 Pour interrompre le conte avec art . . .

II. *La Flûte enchantée*

L'ombre est douce et mon maître dort
 Coiffé d'un bonnet conique de soie
 Et son long nez jaune en sa barbe blanche.
 Mais moi, je suis éveillée encor
 Et j'écoute au dehors
 Une chanson de flûte où s'épanche
 Tour à tour la tristesse ou la joie.
 Un air tour à tour langoureux ou frivole
 Que mon amoureux chéri joue,
 Et quand je m'approche de la croisée
 Il me semble que chaque note s'envole
 De la flûte vers ma joue
 Comme un mystérieux baiser.

III. *L'Indifférent*

Tes yeux sont doux comme ceux d'une fille,
 Jeune étranger,
 Et la courbe fine
 De ton beau visage de duvet ombragé
 Est plus séduisante encor de ligne.
 Ta lèvre chante sur le pas de ma porte
 Une langue inconnue et charmante
 Comme une musique fausse.
 Entre!
 Et que mon vin te réconforte . . .
 Mais non, tu passes
 Et de mon seuil je te vois t'éloigner
 Me faisant un dernier geste avec grâce
 Et la hanche légèrement ployée
 Par ta démarche féminine et lasse . . .

Completely encircled with white beards;
 I would like to see ruthless merchants with shifty eyes,
 And cadis and viziers
 Who merely by moving their bent finger
 Grant life or death according to their whim.
 I would like to see Persia, and India, and then China.
 The paunchy mandarins beneath parasols,
 And the princesses with delicate hands,
 And the scholars arguing
 About poetry and beauty;
 I would like to linger in an enchanted palace
 And, like a foreign traveler,
 Contemplate at leisure landscapes painted
 On fabrics in pine frames
 With a figure in the middle of an orchard;
 I would like to see assassins smiling
 As they watch the executioner cut through an innocent
 man's neck
 With his big Oriental scimitar.
 I would like to see paupers and queens;
 I would like to see roses and blood;
 I would like to see people dying of love or else of hatred.
 And then return later on
 To relate my adventure to connoisseurs of dreams,
 Like Sinbad raising my old Arabic cup
 To my lips from time to time
 To interrupt my tale artfully . . .

II. *The Magic Flute*

The shade is pleasant and my master is asleep,
 Wearing a conical silken cap,
 His long yellow nose buried in his white beard.
 But I, I am still awake
 And I listen
 To a flute song outside expressing
 Sadness and joy in turn.
 A melody languid and frivolous in turn
 Which my dearly beloved plays,
 And when I approach the casement
 I feel as if each note flies away
 From the flute to my cheek
 Like a mysterious kiss.

III. *The Unresponsive One*

Your eyes are gentle like a girl's,
 Young stranger,
 And the delicate curve
 Of your beautiful face shadowed with down
 Has a line that is even more seductive.
 Your lips sing on my doorstep
 An unknown, charming language
 Like music off-pitch.
 Come in!
 And let my wine refresh you . . .
 But no, you walk by
 And from my threshold I see you move away
 Addressing a final graceful gesture to me,
 Your hips slightly bent
 By your feminine, languid gait . . .

CINQ MÉLODIES POPULAIRES GRECQUES
(translated from the Greek by Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi)

I. Chanson de la mariée

Réveille-toi, réveille-toi, perdrix mignonne, ouvre au matin tes ailes. Trois grains de beauté, mon cœur en est brûlé! Vois le ruban d'or que je t'apporte, pour le nouer autour de tes cheveux. Si tu veux, ma belle, viens nous marier! Dans nos deux familles, tous sont alliés!

II. Là-bas, vers l'église

Là-bas, vers l'église, vers l'église Ayio Sidéro, l'église, ô Vierge sainte, l'église Ayio Costannidino, se sont réunis, rassemblés en nombre infini, du monde, ô Vierge sainte, du monde tous les plus braves!

III. Quel Galant m'est comparable

Quel galant m'est comparable, d'entre ceux qu'on voit passer? Dis, dame Vassiliki? Vois, pendus à ma ceinture, pistolets et sabre aigu . . . Et c'est toi que j'aime!

IV. Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques

O joie de mon âme, joie de mon cœur, trésor qui m'est si cher; joie de l'âme et du cœur, toi que j'aime ardemment, tu es plus beau qu'un ange. O lorsque tu paraîs, ange si doux devant nos yeux, comme un bel ange blond, sous le clair soleil, Hélas! tous nos pauvres cœurs soupirent!

V. Tout gai!

Tout gai! gai, Ha, tout gai! Belle jambe, tireli, qui danse; Belle jambe, la vaisselle danse, Tra la la la la . . .

NOËL DES JOUETS (Maurice Ravel)

Le troupeau verni des moutons
Roule en tumulte vers la crèche
Les lapins tambours, brefs et rêches,
Couvrent leurs aigres mirlitons.
Vierge Marie, en crinoline.
Ses yeux d'émail sans cesse ouverts,
En attendant Bonhomme hiver.
Veille Jésus qui se dodine
Car, près de là, sous un sapin,
Furtif, emmitoufflé dans l'ombre
Du bois, Belzébuth, le chien sombre,
Guette l'Enfant de sucre peint.
Mais les beaux anges incassables
Suspendus par des fils d'archal
Du haut de l'arbuste hiémal
Assurent la paix des étables.
Et leur vol de clinquant vermeil
Qui cliquette en bruits symétriques
S'accorde au bétail mécanique
Dont la voix grêle bêle:
"Noël! Noël! Noël!"

FIVE GREEK FOLK SONGS

I. Bride's Song

Awake, awake, dainty partridge. Open your wings to the morning. Three beauty spots set my heart on fire! See the ribbon, the golden ribbon I bring you to tie around your hair. If you wish, lovely one, let us be married! In our two families everyone is related!

II. Yonder by the Church

Yonder by the church, by the church Ayio Sidero, the church—O Blessed Virgin—the church Ayio Constannidino, there are gathered, there are assembled in infinite numbers, the world's—O Blessed Virgin—all the world's best people!

III. What Gallant Can Be Compared with Me

What gallant can be compared with me of all those one sees passing by? Tell me, lady Vassiliki? See the pistol and sharp sword attached to my belt . . . And it's you that I love!

IV. Song of the Girls Collecting Mastic

O joy of my soul, joy of my heart, treasure so dear to me; joy of my soul and heart, whom I love ardently, you are handsomer than an angel. Oh, when you appear, angel so sweet, before our eyes, like a handsome blond angel, in the bright sunshine, alas! all our poor hearts sigh.

V. Be Gay!

Be gay! gay, ha, be gay! Beautiful legs, tra la, dancing, beautiful legs, the dishes are dancing too, tra la la la la . . .

THE TOYS' CHRISTMAS

The varnished flock of sheep
Rolls tumultuously toward the manger.
The drumming rabbits, curt and harsh,
Cover their shrill mirlitons.
The Virgin Mary, in crinoline,
Her enamel eyes unceasingly open,
Waiting for Father Christmas,
Watches over Jesus as she rocks him.
For nearby, under a fir tree,
Stealthy, wrapped in the shadow
Of the woods, Beelzebub, the sinister dog,
Lies in wait for the Child of tinted sugar.
But the beautiful, unbreakable angels,
Hanging by brass wires
From the top of the Christmas tree,
Guarantee the peace of the stables.
And their wings of vermilion tinsel,
Clicking in symmetrical sounds,
Harmonize with the mechanical livestock
Whose thin voices bleat:
"Noel! Noel! Noel!"

I. Le Paon

Il va sûrement se marier aujourd'hui. Ce devait être pour hier. En habit de gala, il était prêt. Il n'attendait que sa fiancée. Elle n'est pas venue. Elle ne peut tarder. Glorieux, il se promène avec une allure de prince indien et porte sur lui les riches présents d'usage. L'amour avive l'éclat de ses couleurs et son aigrette tremble comme une lyre. La fiancée n'arrive pas. Il monte au haut du toit et regarde du côté du soleil. Il jette son cri diabolique: Léon! Léon! C'est ainsi qu'il appelle sa fiancée. Il ne voit rien venir et personne ne répond. Les volailles habituées ne lèvent même point la tête. Elles sont lasses de l'admirer. Il redescend dans la cour, si sûr d'être beau qu'il est incapable de rancune. Son mariage sera pour demain. Et, ne sachant que faire du reste de la journée, il se dirige vers le perron. Il gravit les marches, comme des marches de temple, d'un pas officiel. Il relève sa robe à queue toute lourde des yeux qui n'ont pu se détacher d'elle. Il répète encore une fois la cérémonie.

II. Le Grillon

C'est l'heure où, las d'errer, l'insecte nègre revient de promenade et répare avec soin le désordre de son domaine. D'abord il ratisse ses étroites allées de sable. Il fait du bran de scie qu'il écarte au seuil de sa retraite. Il lime la racine de cette grande herbe propre à le harceler. Il se repose. Puis il remonte sa minuscule montre. A-t-il fini? est-elle cassée? Il se repose encore un peu. Il rentre chez lui et ferme sa porte. Longtemps il tourne sa clef dans la serrure délicate. Et il écoute: Point d'alarme dehors. Mais il ne se trouve pas en sûreté. Et comme par une chaînette dont la poulie grince, il descend jusqu'au fond de la terre. On n'entend plus rien. Dans la campagne muette, les peupliers se dressent comme des doigts en l'air et désignent la lune.

III. Le Cygne

Il glisse sur le bassin, comme un traîneau blanc, de nuage en nuage. Car il n'a faim que des nuages floconneux qu'il voit naître, bouger, et se perdre dans l'eau. C'est l'un d'eux qu'il désire. Il le vise du bec, et il plonge tout à coup son col vêtu de neige. Puis, tel un bras de femme sort d'une manche, il le retire. Il n'a rien. Il regarde: les nuages effarouchés ont disparu. Il ne reste qu'un instant désabusé, car les nuages tardent peu à revenir, et, là-bas, où meurent les ondulations de l'eau, en voici un qui se reforme. Doucement, sur son léger coussin de plumes, le cygne rame et s'approche. . . . Il s'épuise à pêcher de vains reflets, et peut-être qu'il mourra, victime de cette illusion, avant d'attraper un seul morceau de nuage. Mais qu'est-ce que je dis? Chaque fois qu'il plonge, il fouille du bec la vase nourrissante et ramène un ver. Il engraisse comme une oie.

I. The Peacock

He will surely get married today. It was to have been yesterday. He was in full dress and ready. He was only waiting for his bride. She didn't come. She won't be long now. In his conceit, he struts about with the air of an Indian prince and wears the customary rich presents. Love heightens the brightness of his colors and his aigrette trembles like a lyre. His bride doesn't show up. He ascends to the roof and looks toward the sun. He utters his diabolical cry: "Léon! Léon!" That's what he calls his bride. He sees nothing coming and no one answers. The chickens, who are used to it, don't even raise their heads. They are tired of admiring him. He comes down to the yard again, so sure of being handsome that he is incapable of bearing a grudge. His wedding will take place tomorrow. And, not knowing what to do with the rest of the day, he heads for the stairway to the house. He climbs the steps, as if they were temple steps, with an official gait. He lifts his robe, with its train that is so weighed down with eyes that were unable to tear themselves away from it. He repeats the ceremony once again.

II. The Cricket

It is the hour when, tired of straying, the black insect returns from his outing and carefully puts his property back in shape. First he rakes his narrow lanes of sand. He makes sawdust, which he scatters onto the threshold of his shelter. He files down the root of that tall blade of grass that might annoy him. He rests. Then he winds up his tiny watch. Has he finished? Is it broken? He rests once again. He goes back into his house and closes the door. For a long while he turns the key in the delicate lock. And he listens: No noise outside. But he is still not safe. And, as if on a tiny chain with a squeaking pulley, he lowers himself to the heart of the earth. Nothing more is heard. In the silent countryside, the poplars rise straight up in the air like fingers and point to the moon.

III. The Swan

He glides on the pond, like a white sleigh, from cloud to cloud. For his hunger is only for the fleecy clouds that he sees forming, moving and being lost in the water. It is one of them that he desires. He aims at it with his beak, and suddenly immerses his snow-clad neck. Then, just as a woman's arm emerges from a sleeve, he pulls it back. He has caught nothing. He looks: The startled clouds have disappeared. He remains disillusioned for only a moment, for the clouds return before very long, and, over there, where the ripples on the water are dying away, one cloud is already forming. Softly, on his light feather cushion, the swan paddles and approaches. . . . He exhausts himself fishing for empty reflections, and perhaps he will die, a victim to that illusion, before catching a single piece of cloud. But what am I talking about? Every time he dives, he burrows in the nourishing mud with his beak and comes back with a worm. He's fattening up like a goose.