The Intimate Connection Between Music and Poetry
in Claude Debussy's Compositions

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Purpose of Thesis

This discussion on Debussy's poetic techniques is limited to two compositions: symphonic poem based on Stéphane Mallarmé's "Afternoon of a Faun" entitled Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun and an Art Song trilogy based on Pierre Louÿs's "Chansons de Bilitis" entitled Chansons de Bilitis. Along with a discussion of Debussy's background and musical styles, both sections include an explanation of the poets' artistic philosophies and styles. Finally, there is an exploration of the ways in which Debussy musically reproduces the poetic effects of the poets Mallarmé and Louÿs in a further attempt to understand the intimate relationship between Music and Poetry.
Claude Debussy is one of the most prominent and innovative musicians in recent musical history. He gave a new meaning to French music by developing a style music critics have since deemed “Impressionism,” which Kramer defines as placing “impressions of visual stimuli” into music (223). Although Debussy is known for many different contributions to the evolution of music, one of his greatest accomplishments is his creation of a perfect balance between the rhythm of poetry and the rhythm of music. Perhaps his most successful balance is found in his orchestration of the French poet Mallarmé’s “L’Apre’s-midi d’un Faune,” or “Afternoon of a Faun,” in the year 1892. Debussy titled his musical rendition of the poem *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*.

Like many of his other pieces, *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* is based on the lyrics of a French poet. This particular poem is by Stéphane Mallarmé, but Debussy also drew from other poets of his day for subject material and inspiration—Baudelaire, Verlaine, Banville, and Louys are just a few. Debussy either met many of these transitional poets or became introduced to their works while he was studying at the Académie des Beaux-Arts of the Institut de France, where he received his formal musical training.

Because the European public recognized his genius early on, Debussy was well-received in artistic circles. For example, in response to Debussy’s String Quartet of 1893, Paul Dukas “hailed Debussy as ‘one of the most gifted and original artists of the young generation of musicians’ and praised him as a ‘lyricist in the full sense of the term’” (Thompson 111), and while at the Conservatorie Debussy received many awards for outstanding musical compositions (Austin 5). Not surprisingly, his genius is still recognized today by many critics and music lovers, as Thompson indicates: “Debussy’s writing strikes us today as one of the major miracles of musical history” (112). Understandably, the first performance of *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*
magnified Debussy's already promising reputation as a gifted composer. The renowned conductor Gustave Doret conducted this first performance and later explained the audience's reaction to Debussy's music: "Suddenly I feel behind my back a completely captivated public! The triumph is complete, so much so that in spite of the rule forbidding encores I did not hesitate to break the rule. The orchestra, delighted, joyfully repeated the work" (Austin 140). This conductor's willingness to "break the rules" for the sake of a brilliantly constructed composition illustrates just a portion of the enthusiasm Debussy's work inspired.

Because Debussy was greatly disheartened with the music of his contemporaries, he struggled to create compositions that were innovative and nontraditional. His early desire for musical innovation caused his philosophy on the true essence of music to conflict with the ideas of many of the leading musicians and critics of his time. For instance, Debussy thought of music as an expression of a feeling or "nuance," while his instructors and the leading contemporary composers saw music in more defined terms. Due to this differing of musical opinion, Debussy became frustrated with the musical training he was receiving at the Conservatorie. Author Arthur Wenk illustrates, "As far back as Debussy's early years at the Conservatorie in the 1870s he was discontented with music as it was then being taught" (1). Debussy's blatant criticism of the leading musicians in France may have contributed to his future involvement with the writers of his day. He believed that though the musicians failed in their description of reality, the writers excelled, and in them he found his philosophical equals. Wenk states that Debussy found "his fellow musicians and uninspiring lot" (2) and "preferred the company of literary men to that of musicians" (1). Therefore, he migrated away from his musical friends. Machlis suggests that Debussy received more
inspiration from the writers he surrounded himself with than from his fellow musicians. He states, "it was the writers, not the musicians, who exerted the strongest influence on Debussy (454). Since Debussy desired to present his version of reality through his works, it is only natural that he turned to his literary friends and equals for philosophical conversation (1). The influence that literature had on Debussy's life may explain the poetic quality found in his works.

Not only was Debussy's music influenced by literature, but his life in general was also greatly influenced by various writings. Debussy's last entry in his notebook illustrates his love of words. The following quotation is from d'Orléans's poem "Rondeau": "There is no more pleasant pastime/Than to toy with one's thoughts" (Cobb xvii). From this quotation by the artist himself we can see that Debussy obviously enjoyed the satisfaction that the sounds and meanings of words had to offer. Further illustrating his love for literature are his personal letters, which are filled with references to lines of poetry. Some of these quotations are as short as one or two words, such as found in one of Debussy's many letters to friend Robert Godet. In one letter Debussy feels frustrated and drained not only with writing but with life in general. In order to encapsulate this depression, he refers to Laforgue's phrase, "Grinding in the workshops of Nothingness" taken from his poem "Complainte des voix sous le figier boudhique" (Cobb 235). Debussy quotes a longer text, also by Laforgue, in another letter to Godet in which he is again depressed:

*The dead*

*Are discreet,*

*They repose*

*In much cold* (243)

Debussy pens this letter just eight months before his death of cancer. In this
example, literature serves a personal need of Debussy's by expressing his anxiety at his soon-approaching death. However, Debussy also uses literature to express his more optimistic days. In a letter to Jacques Durand he writes that he does not "see things as dressed in black" as does Durand (225). He takes this line from one of his favorite poets Charles d'Orleans in his poem "Pour ce que Plaisnace est morte." It is not surprising that Debussy places such great significance upon the written word itself, for as Wenk states, "veneration of the word is an essential element of the French culture" (6).

Although Debussy is a strong advocate of the French language, he is by no means the only artist who felt such strong devotion.

Debussy describes the strong link he saw between music and poetry on many different occasions. In one article he states that "Music and poetry are the only two arts that move in space" (Cobb xii). To Debussy, both poetry and music are inseparable necessities in life. He considers the perfect world one in which both art forms bond together in a "Natural union" (xiii). In his music Debussy sought to truly capture the meaning of the poet's text, not just "merely complement the mood of a text, or illustrate certain of its words" (Wenk 6). Therefore, it is not surprising that Debussy chose to bring these two abstractions of music and poetry together in so many of his works. He did not, however, think that all composers should set poetry to music; only those who could fully understand the poet's intentions should attempt it: "Musicians who do not understand poetry should not set it to music. They can only spoil it" (Cobb xiv). Although Debussy may appear overly self-congratulatory in this remark, I do not think he intended it to be taken in that manner. Rather, he realized that combining the two art forms carries a large responsibility and should not be attempted by those who are not ready to accept it.
Debussy not only called upon other French poets for lyrics, but he also tried his own hand at writing poetry. His first and only published attempt was in 1892 when he composed "Proses Lyriques." He chose free verse for his poetry claiming that it "puts fewer restriction on the composer" (Wenk 195). As a composer, he was concerned with the "musicality" of poetry and its potential for translation into musical compositions. Writing his own poetry was one way Debussy brought the two art forms closer together in his own mind. As Wenk states, "In the 'Proses Lyriques' we find a direct expression of Debussy's relation to poetry" (Wenk 198). Though "Proses Lyriques" was successful, it is Debussy's only published attempt at using his own lyrics for a musical composition.

One of Debussy's most-loved poets was the Frenchman Stéphane Mallarmé, who also saw a strong link between music and poetry. Consequently, music had a strong influence on the style he developed. As Kramer states, "Mallarmé sought to duplicate in literature the effects of music" (234). Further illustrating Mallarmé's view of music and poetry is the essay he wrote titled the "Crisis in Poetry," which represents Music and Poetry as fundamental in the thinking process. He writes: "Music and Literature constitute the moving facet of that single, true phenomenon which I have called Idea" (Austin 115). He continues by comparing the elusiveness of the written word with a symphony--its "swirls and uneasy hesitation," "withdrawal to the shades," and "sudden bursting, leaping, and multiple ecstasy of Brilliance" (Austin 114). Perhaps Mallarmé's combination is most clearly seen when he states that "Music and Verse combined to form Poetry" (Austin 119). This final connection is a major component in understanding Mallarmé's philosophy on poetry. In his mind, poetry could not have been created without music.
The term “Symbolist,” referring to Mallarmé and stylistically similar poets, was similar to the label “Impressionist” placed on Debussy. According to Machlis, the Symbolists “strove for direct poetical experience unspoiled by intellectual elements” (454). Naturally, they also produced “new” types of poetry. Because he sought to “refresh the languid current of French literary style by the use of odd, exotic, and archaic words,” Mallarmé is considered the “Father” of the Symbolist movement in France (Thompson 311). Similar to the many other artistic movements in France, poets struggled to create art that was “revitalized” and broke away from the typical, stale art that had crept into France through years of obedience to tradition. Mallarmé’s poetry is elusive and obscure in mood. He does not write with the intention of slapping his readers in the face with a blunt moral or social statement; rather, he subtly conveys his ideas. As Kramer states, “The heart of the poem is in a definition of sublimation. Mallarmé attempts to trace the process in which desire first vanishes into the dream and is then transformed into music” (235). As can be seen, both plot and action take an inferior position to mood in Mallarmé’s poetry. Quite possibly, it is this image-based concept of art that originally drew Debussy to Mallarmé’s poetry.

Since Mallarmé considered music as vital to living a full life, it is not surprising that he strove to include musicality in his poetry, particularly in his poem “Afternoon of a Faun” (Translation located in Appendix). Mallarmé states that he was “trying to make a sort of running pianistic commentary upon the fully preserved and dignified alexandrine . . . a sort of musical accompaniment which the poet composes himself” (Austin 111). Mallarmé’s connection with music was so great that he included musical terminology in his explanations of his piece. Originally, Mallarmé had no intention of allowing any composer(s) to set his poem to music. He envisioned it as being
a monologue read by an actor, which would inherently give the poem a certain amount of "stage character" (Thompson 310). After hearing Debussy's piece, however, Mallarmé changed his mind: he loved Debussy's adaptation because he thought it explored the musical and literal aspects of the poem. Upon his first hearing of the piece, played by Debussy on the piano, Mallarmé replied: "I had not expected anything like that. The music brings forth the emotion of the poem and gives it a background of warmer color" (Thompson 114). Even though Mallarmé had not originally envisioned his poem as being set to music, Debussy produced such an outstanding work of art that Mallarmé decided to adapt his plans.

Debussy is not the only artist who saw avenues for artistic expression in Mallarmé's poem. Two other famous artists also expressed the poem in different art forms. The first of these adaptations, a series of illustrations by the painter Manet, appeared with Mallarmé's publication of "The Afternoon of a Faun" (Thompson 311). The second artistic expression was by a famous and extremely talented dancer of the day, Nijinsky. In 1895 Nijinsky choreographed an interpretation of the poem to Debussy's music (Thompson 312). His dancing was well-received upon its first performance, but he did not receive recognition similar to Debussy's.

Mallarmé's "Afternoon of a Faun" is based upon the dream of a half-faun/half-human concerning Reality, namely the existence of beautiful nymphs in the forest surrounding him. At the beginning of the poem the faun is certain he sees the nymphs. He is so sure of their existence that he runs into a nearby thicket to look for them, and later he thinks he feels their kisses on his chest. However, after some playful excursions the faun realizes that the nymphs do not exist and that he was only dreaming. The poem ends with the faun resigning to join his transitory nymphs the only way he can, in sleep.
The work ends as it began, with a feeling of drowsiness and dreaming.

Because it has no direct story line the composer can follow, it would be impossible for an artist to recreate such an elusive poem as Mallarmé's "Faun" in another medium. However, as mentioned earlier, Debussy does remarkably well in his version of the poem. It is said that he followed the poem line by line when he wrote the music for this piece. He followed the original so closely, in fact, that his symphonic poem has exactly the same number of measure bars as the poem does lines (Wenk 152). However, Debussy's version is not a direct interpretation of the poem—he wanted only an image of the faun's experiences. He preserved the mood and feeling of the work without limiting himself to a specific form. Debussy made no attempt to claim that his composition was a direct expression of Mallarmé's work. He described the piece as a "general impression of the poem"—the "scene marvelously described in the text" (Thompson 113). Both Mallarmé's and Debussy's works have one common denominator—they create an elusive quality in their works through various poetic and musical techniques.

The first way Mallarmé creates an elusive mood is by inverting word order. For instance, his poem begins, "Those nymphs, I want to make them permanent" (line 1) instead of "I want to make those nymphs permanent." He continues by saying, "So clear/ Their light flesh-pink, it hovers in the atmosphere/ Oppressed by stuffy sleeps" (lines 2-3) instead of "Their light is clear and flesh-pink, hovering on the atmosphere and oppressed by stuffy sleeps." By inverting the word order, Mallarmé eliminates any preconceptions the reader may have. The reader is unable to anticipate what the poem will say regarding their behavior.

Debussy's first means of creating musical ambiguity is his weakening of the tonic-dominant relationship, which is extremely important in establishing
the key of any piece. By removing the I-V chord progression. Debussy also removes the feeling of a strong key or tonal center. The final result is that the piece sounds ambiguous, and therefore Debussy is able to catch the listener off-guard.

The second technique Mallarmé uses in creating a dream-like feeling is his writing with nuances instead of absolutes. Wenk states, "Mallarmé substitutes nuance for clear ideas of well-outlined emotions" (169). Mallarmé does this by "designating only a part or an aspect of the object instead of the whole of it" (Wenk 168). Many times he alludes to the feelings and surroundings of the faun but does not state the faun's reactions. For example, while playing the flute, the faun thinks of the music as "The only Breeze . . . invisible, serene, and calculated breath/ Of inspiration, as it is drawn back to heaven" (lines 22-23). Through this line Mallarmé creates a metaphor between the faun's music and Inspiration. As another example, the faun refers to his flute as "two pipes" or a "double reed" instead of referring to the instrument as his flute. Mallarmé also delves into the human psyche in his poem. Hidden sexuality, for instance, offers an opportunity for Mallarmé to exercise ambiguity in another direction. He indicates, without directly stating, that the faun has a strong sexual motive for following the nymphs. For example, after losing the embraced nymphs, he comforts himself, saying, "You know, my libido, that every pomegranate/ When it grows ripe and red must burst and buzz with bees" (lines 97-98). Five lines later he refers to the eruption of the volcano Etna and also to the goddess of love, Venus, which reminds the reader of sexual passion and climax. Mallarmé poses a picture of the sexual faun in the reader's mind through his use of graphic imagery. Without this technique, the poem would have a certain dry quality, void of the passion the faun experiences.
Not only does Debussy weaken the tonic-dominant relationship in order to create ambiguity, but he also reduces the dynamics of the piece. The orchestra maintains the low dynamic of "pp" throughout most of the piece. In order to create an even stronger emotion at the end of the work Debussy indicates that only a "ppp" should be reached. This reduction in dynamics creates a dream-like quality in the piece; it lulls the listener to Debussy's land of images. Similar to Mallarmé's poem, the reduced dynamics only suggest reality and paint an indefinite picture for the listener. The work's loudest marking of a "ff" is only achieved at the climax of the poem when the faun disentangles the embracing nymphs and runs with them into a nearby thicket. At this point the faun's sedated dream-state is over, and he begins action. In order to portray this new development effectively, Debussy raises the dynamics of this section.

Debussy also establishes an elusive tone through his instrumentation. He selects instruments that produce a mellow and relaxed tone, such as the flute, clarinet, muted French horn, antique cymbals, bassoon, violin, viola, cello, bass, and harp. The sensation he creates is one of eeriness and suspense, especially through the use of the harp. The harp's main contribution to the piece is the "glissando," a rapid strumming of all the strings beginning with the lower ones and ascending until every string has been stroked. Gliding over all the strings adds "dreaminess" to the listeners' perceptions—it also escapes the tonality mentioned earlier in the I-V relationship. Though the harp has been utilized by many musicians, Debussy's use of this instrument is one of the most effective. Austin recognizes his genius when he states: "The opening chord of the Faun is doubtless the one most famous and influential example of the glissando, and one of the best-remembered sounds of the piece" (86). In its relationship to the poem, the glissando fittingly answers
the question. "Was it a dream I loved?" (line 5). Debussy’s answer to Mallarmé’s question is at last a nebulous one, for neither he nor the reader can distinguish the difference between dream and reality in the faun’s afternoon. The opening passage of this piece also merits discussion in contributing to the elusive quality of the work. Debussy carefully utilizes the lower register of the flute, which produces a sleepy and sensual tone, throughout the whole piece. In fact, he uses the flute’s opening theme as the motivic basis for the rest of the work. This haunting, chromatic melody reappears numerous times, sometimes leaving the flute and shining in the clarinet and the oboe. Because of this recurring motive, Wenk states that the work is a “series of digressions upon the opening line” (163). It is clear that all of the themes within the piece are derived from the flute solo at the beginning. Since the piece is not segmented into standard movements, the recurring motive provides unity for the work.

Debussy also establishes the mood of his piece through the use of the tritone, chromaticism, whole-tone scale, and atypical rhythms. Prior to Debussy, it was not unusual for composers to write using these musical elements occasionally; however, Debussy develops them to a much greater extent than did the earlier composers. He uses them specifically to establish a mood of ambiguity in the piece. The first technique, the tritone, is an interval of an augmented fourth/diminished fifth. Its sound, which is identical to the English siren, creates a hollow feeling when played in any context. Debussy capitalizes on the mood produced by the tritone for his piece to illustrate the faun’s confused emotions. The faun’s theme is built upon the tritone, which is first heard in the opening notes of the flute line. Similar to Debussy’s weakening of the I-V relationship, the presence of the tritone further confuses the listener as to the tonality of the piece (Wenk 164).
Debussy includes the tritone as an important element in almost every variation upon the opening flute theme.

Debussy also uses chromaticism, a series of notes that are a half-step apart. This technique is also illustrated in the opening measures of the flute line. His melody is composed of the progression B-A#-A-G#-G.

The \textit{Faun}, and many of his other works, contains a large amount of chromaticism and produces the same effects that have been mentioned earlier.

As yet another means of creating musical ambiguity, Debussy uses variations on the standard diatonic scale (any major or minor scale). For example, he often constructs passages on notes taken from the pentatonic scale—a scale that is constructed on the scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 and therefore contains no half-steps. The other major variation, the whole-tone scale, also avoids the presence of half-steps. This scale is composed of eight notes that are all a whole-step apart.
Finally, Debussy enhances his mood of ambiguity by varying the location of the strong beat in a measure, which creates complicated and atypical rhythms. Usually the strong beat of any work is found on the first beat of each measure; however, Debussy ignores bar lines and places accents on different beats throughout the measure. Debussy uses ties and slurs over bar lines as a means of avoiding the strong One beat. Misplaced accents cause the listener to concentrate more on entire phrases than on individual measures. Debussy revealed this philosophy on rhythm most clearly when he stated, "Rhythms cannot be contained within bars" (Austin 130). One look at the score of the *Faun* indicates that he was not willing to allow himself to be confined by measure bars and traditional rhythms. A passage from the beginning of the piece is reduced for illustration:

Because of such practices, many critics at the turn of the century thought that Debussy was musically inferior as a composer. In their minds, he stretched the boundaries of convetntiality too far—he broke too many rules. True to his rebellious form, Debussy ignored this criticism and continued in his musical noncomformity. He allowed his inner ear to dictate his musical ideas instead of changing his style for the sake of the critics. It is fortunate that he did not succumb to social pressures, for his pieces have inspired many other
composers to write with a similar musical style. His name is now one of the greatest in the ranks of Impressionistic artists.

Debussy seeks to musically surprise his listeners not only with his orchestral music, but also with his "Chansons," or French Art Songs. These songs comprise much of the Debussy repertoire and have a major role in the formation of his musical style. As Thompson says, "If Debussy had been almost exclusively a composer of songs . . . he still would have been one of the most distinctive and independent figures in music" (276). His Chansons are at the highest end of a singer's repertoire, requiring diverse skills in pronunciation, musical adaptation, and understanding of the text and emotions. The piece I have chosen to illustrate Debussy's mastery in the Art Song is based on a poem series by Pierre Louÿs, titled "Chansons de Bilitis." Similar to the Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, "Chansons de Bilitis" "contains the essence of Debussy's poetic insight" (Thompson 297). Once again, he combines the art forms of poetry and music to give the listener a new and deeper understanding of the poet's intent.

The poet Pierre Louÿs was a close personal friend of Debussy for a period of about ten years, during which time Louÿs wrote the poems of Bilitis. Like many other Symbolist poets of the time, he also saw a close connection between poetry and music. Not surprisingly, music shaped his writing in many ways. First of all, he rejected elaborate rhyme schemes in poetry; he preferred to unify each line of his poetry with strong rhythmic patterns, similar to the rhythm in musical compositions. He regarded rhythm as "the perfect vehicle for artistic expression" (Clive 10). The means through which he chose to accomplish his poetic style was blank verse, since through it he could manipulate rhythm most effectively (Clive 10). Similar to Debussy, he often compared "the poet's choice of the exact word to express his idea with
the composer's choice of the exact sound to express his musical conception" (Wenk 174). This comparison between the struggle for musical perfection and the struggle for literary perfection was, as mentioned earlier, also a philosophy of Mallarmé. The influence of music on Louys's life is further illustrated by his personal writings. In many of his journals he "employed the vocabulary of music to discuss literary style" (Wenk 174). To Louys, as to many other Symbolist poets, music and poetry were interdependent.

Just as Mallarmé's "Faun" is considered paramount among his works, "Chansons de Bilitis" is viewed as Louys's best work by many critics. Buck deems this piece "the most singular bloom of Louys's genius" (233). Louys's poems are based on a supposed Greek poet named Bilitis who was born in the early sixth century B.C. in Pamphylia. According to the legend, Bilitis was well-traveled as well as well-learned. After living in Pamphylia until early womanhood, she moved to the island of Lesbos, where she became the good friend and student of Saphho, and then to Cypros, where she served as a courtesan, or religious prostitute, until her death. The inside of Bilitis's tomb was supposedly decorated with her poems. With the discovery of her works by a German archeologist, G. Heim., Louys purported to have translated the poems into French, including a preface to the poetry collection titled, "The Life of Bilitis" which gives a summary of Bilitis's life. Louys divides her poetry into three sections, corresponding to her life: "Bucolics in Pamphylia," "Elegiacs at Mytilene," and "Epigrams in the Isle of Cypros." Debussy selected the poems for his trilogy from the first section, which focuses on her life in Pamphylia. Louys's publication caused a commotion within the archeological world as well as the literary one. His publication is considered one of the "greatest hoaxes" of the nineteenth century (Clive 111). Some experts supported Louys whole-heartedly on his finding while others laughed
at him openly. One well-known archeological scholar of a French university "declared that Bilitis was not unknown to him, and that he had for a long time considered her a personal friend" (Wenk 175). Yet another authority actually published new translations of six of the "Chansons" thinking Louys had left out certain critical elements in the poetess's works. However, most critics took the poetry for what it truly was, beautifully written, but not by an ancient Greek poet. Characteristics found within the poetry show that it could not have been written hundreds of years ago in ancient Greece. As Buck points out, a "number of passages indicate modern thought," and "some of the Songs are adapted from epigrams by well-known poets in the Greek anthology" (233). Louys himself hints at the inauthenticity of the poems by the very name of the supposed archeologist who found Bilitis's tomb--G. Heim. In German, "G/Heim = Geheim = Le mysterieux" (Clive 110). Louys's intention was not to genuinely fool the authorities of the day, but rather he desired to produce an image and background for his poetry. Even though the poems held some controversial elements, such as "underlying lesbianism" and an "erotic character," they were basically well-received at their time of publication. (Clive 111). No matter what the poems' origins, Louys's poetry should be looked at as an imaginative work of art--done at the age of twenty-three--that takes the reader back to a civilization long past.

Louys enjoyed Debussy's musical version of his poetry to such a great extent that he asked Debussy to write music for twelve more poems from the Bilitis collection. Debussy did so, and Louys was once again pleased with the result (Wenk 178). This music, however, will not be considered in this discussion. I will only be focusing on Debussy's original trilogy.

"The Flute of Pan," the first poem in Debussy's trilogy, reads as follows:
The Flute of Pan

For the day of Hyacinthus, he gave me a syrinx made of carefully cut reeds, joined with white wax which is sweet as honey to my lips.

He teaches me to play, seated upon his knees; but I tremble a bit. He plays after me: so softly that I can scarcely hear him.

We have nothing to say to each other, so close are we one to the other; but our songs answer each other and, by turns, our lips join on the flute.

It is late; there is the song of the green frogs which begins with nightfall. My mother will never believe that I have stayed so long searching for my lost waistband.

One can see that the poems of Louÿs and Mallarmé are similar in many ways, specifically in their sensual imagery. Louÿs develops the feeling of sensuality in three different ways: the subject matter of the poem, the myth the poem is based on, and the form of the poem. First of all, the subject matter of the poem is sexual—it speaks of Pan, the Greek mythological god of sexual pleasures, teaching Bilitis how to play a flute, or more accurately, teaching her sexual pleasures. Bilitis says, “He teaches me to play [the flute], seated upon his knees” (line 3); the flute, or reed, is “sweet as honey to my lips” (line 2); and “our lips join on the flute” (line 6). These lines symbolically illustrate that Bilitis’s lesson goes beyond musical expression—Pan and Bilitis are relating on a sexual basis. Louÿs also includes what Bilitis’s excuse to her mother will be about why she is late. Bilitis plans on telling her mother that she spent a long time looking for her lost her waistband. Louÿs was careful in making Bilitis’s lost article her belt, for through it he symbolizes her lost virginity. The reader has no other interpretation for Bilitis’s experience with Pan except that the couple experienced a sexual relationship (Wenk 180). Next, the Greek myth the poem is based on is
sexual. According to the myth, Pan is in pursuit of a nymph named Syrinx, who does not want his attention. Diana, the goddess of the earth and hunt, changes Syrinx into a reed. Pan, then, plucks the reed she has become and makes her, or the reed, into a flute. Pan has actually won the struggle, then, since the nymph has no way of escape. He is able to play upon her. “employing the flute to transform sexual frustration into art” (Wenk 180). The Greek myth that Louys chose coincides with the undercurrent of sexuality found in the poem. Finally, Louys uses the format of the poem to allude to sexual imagery. Each line is written in a spiral; it “continually turns back upon itself” (Wenk 180). The ends of each line wrap around, often breaking up either a noun-adjective pair or a verb and its object to force the reader to maintain the flow of the words: “he gave me a syrinx made of carefully/ cut reeds,” “my lost/ waistband,” and “He plays/ after me” (lines 3-4). One function of this pattern is to provide unity in the poem. Yet the pattern also serves a deeper purpose--it symbolizes a snake's winding path and slinky body. The snake is one of the oldest symbols of sexual intimacy. Through this image, Louys expresses Pan's sexual desire visually (Wenk 180). Pan's flute is extended into a phallic symbol and a symbol of sexual desires.

Debussy maintains the erotic feeling of the poetry of his friend in his musical adaptation. One way he accomplishes this feeling is by creating unforgettable melodies--or arabesques as he terms them. Debussy is known for his beautiful melodies, and in this piece he uses them to his advantage in creating sexual imagery. He creates a melody that is snake-like and winding, similar to the format of the lyrics in Louys's poem. One of the ways he creates the winding feeling is by using a “conjunct” or adjacent style (Wenk 182). The notes in his melodies are connected, as is illustrated in the opening measures of “The Flute of Pan.”
Debussy's connected notes create both a smooth melody and a snake-like image similar to Louys's. The second technique Debussy employs is the recitative, or repeated note, style. Using this style allows Debussy to maintain the flow of the words of the poem. He is able to include all the words of a line of poetry without making the line of music sound forced or unnatural, and he is able to keep the notes in the melody adjacent.

Third, Debussy uses a sustained note or chord with a melodic line floating above it for his smooth melodies, similar to what the Medieval musicians used, called the “cantus firmus.” His floating melodic line is hauntingly beautiful, adding eroticism to the mood of the piece (Wenk 184).

Finally, Debussy uses ornamentation in his melodies, including trills and
Louÿs also creates a feeling of anticipation in his poem “The Flute of Pan.” He never directly relates the action of the poem, yet the reader understands what is happening by Louÿs withholding details from the reader and allowing the reader’s imagination to be free. For example, he never directly states that Bilitis is experiencing sexual intercourse for the first time, yet the reader feels intuitively that this must be the case. Louÿs hints at what has happened. He uses images such as, “our lips join on the flute” and “He teaches me to play.” By leaving a great deal up to the imagination of the reader, Louÿs develops a feeling of anticipation in the poem.

Debussy also musically accomplishes a feeling of anticipation through his use of retrogression. He often repeats a note or phrase before going on to the next musical idea. He purposely avoids musical “direct expression” for the same reason that Louÿs chooses not to state things directly--both artists desire a mood of ambiguity (Wenk 189).

Debussy also uses the dynamics of this piece to portray a mood of sensuality. The piece begins and ends with “pp.” with the loudest marking of the composition being “p.” By keeping the volume of the piece low, he allows the listener to use his/her imagination. Debussy also indicates the mood of the piece. In the beginning the style is marked, “Lent et sans rigueur de

triplets, to add sensuality.
rythme” which means “Slowly and without rigorous rhythm” in English. Throughout the piece he prints such comments as. “doux et soutenu.” (calm and sustained) “pressez un peu.” (pressing forward slightly) and “tres lointain” (very far away). These remarks serve the same function as the dynamic markings—the creation of a specific mood.

“La Chevelure.” or “The Hair.” is the second poem in Debussy’s sequence. It is printed below:

The Hair

He said to me: “Last night I dreamed. I had your hair about my neck. I had your locks like a black collar around my neck and over my breast.

“I caressed them, and they were mine; and we were joined thus forever, by the same locks, mouth upon mouth, as two laurels often have but one root.

“And, little by little, it seemed to me that our limbs were mingled, that I became you or that you entered into me like my dream.”

When he had finished, he placed his hands gently on my shoulders, and he looked at me with so tender a regard that I lowered my eyes, trembling.

One of the first things the reader notices in this poem is its inner structuring. Louÿs forms the poem in such a way that the reader witnesses the lovers’ increasing levels of intimacy. Gradually, Bilitis and Pan become more united and intertwined, both physically and spiritually. Their intimacy begins with a dream Pan has of Bilitis’s hair covering his chest—“I had your locks/ like a black collar around my neck and over/ my breast” (lines 2-4); by
the next stanza the couple becomes united on a deeper realm—they "spring from the same root" and are "metaphorically united" (Wenk 189). With the third stanza they are at last physically united—"I became you or you entered into me like my dream"—until at last he awakens. The final stage in their unity is a visual image of Pan standing with his hands on Bilitis's shoulders. At last they have become one in every way, appearing as "two trees growing from the same root" in their bond (Wenk 190). Louys uses a tree as a symbolic representation of the couple. Their unified bodies are the trunk, while their outstretched limbs represent branches. They are two separate people, yet their love unites them.

Like Louys, Debussy provides symbolic cohesion in his piece. He does so initially by expanding Louys's symbol of the tree. Debussy constructs his piece in two sections, both of which stem from the climactic material found in the middle of the piece (mm. 9-12). Debussy builds tension in the climactic section by using ascending and descending scale passages. Beginning in measure nine, the vocal line descends from a C to a low D, then it turns around and ascends to a soaring high E on the word "mouth."

The bass of the accompaniment is written opposite of the vocal line; its scale passage ascends from measures nine to eleven and then descends through measure twelve until reaching its low point, also on the word "mouth."
It is no coincidence that the vocal line and accompaniment meet. They do so on the most significant words in the text, such as "mine," "hair," and "mouth." From this basis, or trunk, the remaining portion of the piece is created, allegorically forming the branches and expanding outward.

Chromaticism is the other means Debussy uses to create unity. The opening measure of the piece is chromatic, perhaps foreshadowing the forthcoming entwinement of Bilitis's hair and Pan's neck.

Chromaticism is found again, denser this time, in measure eighteen. Here, the couple is as closely intertwined as humanly possible. They have been bonded metaphorically. In a response to Louys's imagery, Debussy uses chromaticism—it provides a means for notes to be as close to each other as possible. His close notes become a symbol of the intimacy found in Louys's lovers. Both the notes and the lovers approach near-unity simultaneously.

The third and final poem of the sequence is "Le Tombeau des naiades."
The Tomb of the Naiads

I was walking along the frost-covered wood: my hair flowered with little icicles in front of my mouth, and my sandals were heavy with clumps of muddy snow.

He said to me: “What are you looking for?”—I am following the track of the satyr. His little cloven hoofprints alternate like holes in a white cloak. He said to me: “The satyrs are dead.”

“‘The satyrs and the nymphs as well. In thirty years there has not been such a terrible winter. The hoofprint which you see is that of a billy-goat. But let’s stop here, at their tomb.”

And with the blade of his hoe he broke the ice of the spring where the naiads used to laugh. He took great frozen pieces, and lifting them up toward the pale sky, he peered through them.

Fittingly, Louys places this poem last in the section of Bilitis’s life at Pamphylia. As discussed earlier, after leaving Pamphylia Bilitis first travels to the island of Lesbos and then proceeds to Cypros, where she discovers that life holds many hardships. Not only is she separated from her family, but she must also become a religious prostitute in order to support herself. Leaving Pamphylia is not only a physical journey; it is also an emotional one. When she leaves Pamphylia, she also permanently leaves the innocence of her youth. This poem may symbolize Bilitis’s journey through life. In it, Louys parallels Bilitis’s own search for her former self with her physical search for the sprightly naiads. The death of the innocent, young Bilitis who believed in the mystical world of fairies could very well be symbolized by the death of the naiads she seeks. All that is left of Bilitis’s former innocence is what she retains in her memory—yet it is only a simple remnant of what she used to be. She must realize that her search for her past is futile, for she indicates in her
poem that she was walking down the wrong path. She follows a goat’s hoofprints in the snow, not the prints of the satyrs. Pan says, “The hoofprint which you see is that of a billy-goat” (line 8). Just as it is unknown how long Bilitis searched erroneously in the snow for the satyrs, thinking she had found the correct path, it is also unclear to the reader for what length of time she had been misled in trying to find the path back to her innocence. No matter how long it had been, though, Louys clearly indicates that her innocence is gone forever. The false tracks she follows in her mind lead her only to her own frozen tombs.

Louys appropriately chooses Winter for the setting of his closing poem, for through it he creates a metaphor between the naiads’ icy grave and Bilitis’s loss of innocence. He uses many “cold” images—such as “frost-covered wood,” “hair flowered with little icicles,” and “holes in a white cloak”—to create a chilling mental picture of the frigidity and barreness of the satyrs’ present surroundings. Louys chooses freezing as the means of death for the naiads with a specific purpose in mind. As opposed to any other form of death—i.e., burning, dehydration, starvation, etc.—in freezing, the dead organism still maintains its life-like appearance. Therefore, the naiads would look as they did while living, except that they would be without their “souls.” The only missing element would be their inner being, their “soul.” Similarly, Bilitis looks basically the same physically as she did when she held her young beliefs. However, she too is missing something within herself. Death resulted from the naiads’ loss of their inner being. Bilitis’s condition may then be as severe as is theirs.

A chilled feeling is also developed in the poem through Louys’s use of irony. Perhaps the most noticeable ironic tool is his usage of the garden hoe. Instead of using this garden tool in the spring for planting, Pan uses it in the
winter to crush the ice of the tomb. The hoe, which is typically used for aiding in the garden's life, is used in this poem to signify Life's death. The reader gets the impression that the happy world one takes so much for granted has vanished into the idealized past. Bilitis is left to face her bleak future with no more spring time and no more naiads of laughter. A hoe of production is replaced with the hoe of destruction. Louys also uses irony to contrast the many meanings of the word "spring" within the line, "... he broke the ice of the spring where/ the naiads used to laugh" (lines 10-11). In French, the word "spring" has two different meanings: the literal growing season and "origin," in reference to running water. Louys's double usage of the word "spring" reinforces his image that Spring, the season, has been replaced by Winter. The once-babbling water ceases its flow and becomes frozen. The spring's death also marks the end of the laughing, happy times that both Bilitis and the naiads used to enjoy in life.

Similar to Louys's sequence, Debussy places this poem representing death at the end of his musical trilogy. Fitting to the tone of the poem, he uses many techniques to create a mood of despair and isolation: he utilizes the Lydian mode, dissonances, rhythm, and phrasing. First of all, Debussy composes much of this piece on the Lydian mode, as opposed to the typical major or minor key. Modes were constructed by the ancient Greeks and used until the 1600s (there was no concept of "major" or "minor"). Therefore, the names for the eight modes, including Lydian, come to us from the Greeks. Many composers since the Middle Ages have called upon the various modes as a means of creating "new" feelings and "different" sounds. Debussy is one of the many composers who frequently used the different modes. It is fitting he does so in this piece, for the Lydian mode provides another symbol of Ancient Greece, the civilization of Bilitis. Debussy uses this mode when Bilitis states
why she is roaming the forest—"I am looking for the tracks of the satyr" (line 4)—in order to portray the despair of Bilitis's search.

Out of the different modes, the Lydian one in particular contains one identifiable trait—the "presence of the tritone between the tonic and the subdominant" (Slonimsky 272). The tritone, as mentioned earlier, has an eerie and hollow sound and can not be ignored or overlooked by the listener when heard in a piece of music. By weakening the I-V relationship, its presence signals to the listener that the situation at hand is confused or unclear. The Lydian mode has another appealing characteristic to Debussy. As Lloyd explains in his Encyclopedia of Music, each mode, according to its sound, was associated with a certain mood. The Dorian mode, or what we term Major today, sounds strong and was considered masculine. The Lydian, on the other hand, sounded weak to the Greeks and was considered feminine. This weak sound may explain why Debussy chose to place the Lydian mode at the point that Bilitis realizes she has lost her innocent past forever. His use of this mode is very effective in portraying the mood of the piece.

Debussy also uses rhythm as a means of expressing the somber mood in "The Tomb of the Naiads." The accompaniment is laced with rapid sixteenth notes which portray the memory of the playing naiads.
Another rhythmic element Debussy uses is a slow march in the bass of the accompaniment. The piano's steady chords remind the listener of Bilitis's walk into the forest, following the goat's footsteps (Wenk 194).

Since she has unknowingly embarked on a vain search for her innocence, Debussy portrays her journey to the tomb with a despairing march.

Not only has Debussy had a widespread influence over music of the early 1900s, but he has also affected the musicians of our own time. Through his writings, composers became more concerned with musical feeling, expanded rhythms, and well-chosen instrumentation as opposed to strict learning of music theory. Along with his friends and fellow artists in literature, Debussy created a style of music that finally combines Poetry and Music in a way that compliments both Art forms. Much should be attributed to Claude Debussy, who has been hailed as "one of the most important French
composers of the early Twentieth Century" (Machlis 460).
Appendix

Translation to “The Afternoon of a Faun.” by Stéphane Mallarmé

These nymphs, I want to perpetuate.
So clear.
Their light incarnadine, that it lilts the air
Drowsy with tufted slumbers.

Did I love a dream?
My doubt, accumulation of old night, ends
In many a subtle bough, which, [having] remained the true
Woods themselves proves, alas, that all I offered myself
For triumph was the ideal fault of roses.
Let us reflect . . .

or what if the women you expound
Represent a wish of your fabulous senses!
Faun, the illusion escapes from the blue
And cold eyes, like a tear-welling spring, of the chaster [nymph]:
But, the other [nymph], all sighs, do you say she contrasts
Like a hot breeze of the (hot) day in your fleece?
But no! through the motionless and weary fainting
Suffocating with heat the fresh morning, if it struggles.
Murmurs no [sound of] water but that which my flute pours
Into the grove sprinkled with chords: and the only wind
[Coming] Out of the two pipes prompt to exhale itself before
It disperses the sound in an arid rain
Is, on the horizon unstirred by so much as a wrinkle,
The visible and serene artificial breath
Of inspiration, which regains heaven.

O Sicilian banks of a calm marsh
That my vanity plunders like the [recurrent] suns.
Tacit, under the flowers of sparks, TELL
“That I was cutting here the hollow reeds tamed
By talent: when, on the glaucous gold of distant
Greeneries dedicating their vine to wellsprings,
Undulates an animal whiteness in repose:
And that at the slow prelude with which the pipes are born
The flight of swans, no! of naiads flees
Or plunges. . . .”

Inert, all burns in the tawny hour
Without showing by what art together ran off [the nymphs]
Too much hymen desired by [me] the one who seeks the lar
Then I'll awaken to the first fervor.
Straight and alone, under an ancient flood of light
Lily! and one of you all in point of candor.

Other than the sweet nothing [the kiss] rumored by their lips
The kiss, which quietly assures of the perfidious ones,
My breast, virgin of proof, attests a bite,
Mysterious, due to some august tooth;
But enough! such a mystery chose for its confident
The vast and twin reed on which one plays under the azure:
Which, turning to itself [the reed-flute] the trouble of the cheek,
Dreams, in a long solo, that we were beguiling
The surrounding beauty [of nature] by false confusions
Between itself and our credulous song;
And [dreams] to make, as high as love modulates.
Vanish from the ordinary dream of a back
Or a pure flank followed by my closed looks,
A sonorous, vain and monotonous line.

Try then, instrument of flights, O wicked
Syrinx, to reflower at the lakes where you await me!
I, proud of my rumor, am going to speak at length
Of goddesses: and by idolatrous portrayals,
Life still more girdles from their shadow.
Thus, when I have sucked from grapes the brightness,
To banish a regret by my ruse put aside.
Laughing, I raise to the summer sky the empty cluster
And, blowing in its luminous skins, avid
For drunkeness till evening I look through them.

O nymphs, let us reinflate some diverse MEMORIES.
"My eye, piercing the reeds, darted at each immortal
Neck, which drowns in the water is burning
With a cry of rage to the forest roof;
And the splendid bath of hair disappears
In the brightnesses and the shivers, o jewels!
I run up: when, at my feet, are clasped (bruised
From the langour tasted of this evil of being two)
Sleeping women amid their mere random arms;
I ravish them without disentangling them, and flee
To this clump, hated by the frivolous shadow,
Of roses yielding up all perfume to the sun, where may our
Sporting be like the consumed day."
I adore you, wrath of virgins. O ferocious delight
Of the sacred naked burden which slides
To flee my lip on fire drinking in, as a lightning thrust.
Quivers! the secret terror of the flesh:
From the feet of the inhuman to the heart of the timid one
Who is abandoned at once by an innocence, humid
With mad tears or less sad vapors.
“My crime, is to have, gay at vanquishing these treacherous fears,
Divided the dishevelled tuft
Of kisses that the gods kept so well mingled:
For hardly was I about to hide an ardent laugh
Under the happy folds on one (keeping
By a simple finger, so her featherlike candor
Might be colored by the emotion of her sister which is beginning to catch
fire.
The little one, naive and not blushing):
When from my arms, undone by vague deaths. This prey forever ungrateful
frees itself
Without a pity for the sob with which I still was drunk.”

So much the worse! towards happiness others will pull me along
By their tresses knotted to the horns of my forehead:
You know. my passion. that. purple and already ripe.
Each pomegranate bursts and murmurs with bees;
And our blood. smitten with whoever will take it.
Flows for all the eternal swarm of desire.
At the hour when this wood with gold and ashes is tinted
A festival is excited in the extinguished foliage:
Etna! It is amid you visited by Venus
On your lava placing her candid heels,
When a sad slumber thunders of the flame exhausts itself.
I hold the queen!
   O sure punishment (to come) . . .
No. but the soul
Empty of words and this weighted body
Succumbs late to the proud silence of noon:
Without any more ado we must sleep in forgetfulness of the blasphemy.
Lying in the thirsty sand and as I love
To open my mouth to the wine-making star (the sun)!
Couple. adieu: I’ll see the shadow you became (Wenk 307).
WORKS CITED


