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Debussy's Arabesque and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912)

GURMINDER KAUR BHOGAL

Abstract

Just as arabesque carries a range of visual and literary associations, this ornament assumes a diverse presence in music scholarship, where it characterizes a wide repertoire and assortment of techniques. Despite its conceptual breadth, this essay shows that arabesque upheld a specific musical identity for Debussy and Ravel. This is reflected in their simulation of art nouveau's intricate and fluid designs through melodic gestures that emphasize irregular rhythms and dissonant metres. Also in keeping with art nouveau is the tendency of these composers to privilege musical arabesque's structural appearance and expressive capacity. These observations are explored with reference to Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, a ballet that critics admired for its arabesque qualities. An analysis of four dances will reveal how the distinct rhythmic and metric profiles of arabesque melodies portray characters and their narratives. In challenging preconceptions of ornament as marginal and meaningless, this essay shows how arabesque became endowed with structural and expressive significance at the *début du siècle*.

Introduction

As arabesque traversed different epochs, cultures, media, and genres, it left behind a trail of meanings and associations that revealed something of its ancient, exotic past. From its origins in the Middle East, arabesque made its way into the West during the Renaissance, where European artists were captivated by its elaborate, curvilinear motifs.[1] Wary of this ornament's Eastern roots, Europeans initially restricted arabesque to the periphery; in the media of architecture and painting, for instance, the fantastic hybrid of intertwining leaves, tendrils, and fused animal/human forms decorated marginal borders and frames.[2] As this decorative style became popular (and more visible in Rococo art), it was appropriated by other media. In Enlightenment and nineteenth-century literature, arabesque denoted a genre – as in Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) – as well as those techniques that reflected the translation of visual arabesque into writing; digressive prose, self-reflexive irony, and disrupted narratives were understood as emulating the intricate, looping curves of meandering arabesque.[3] In nineteenth-century music visual arabesque was transformed into a musical genre – as in Schumann's *Arabeske*, Op. 18 (1838) – while its

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1 Ottomeyer, 'Arabesque', 244. Ottomeyer claims that 'arabesque' is itself a European term that arose during the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries to describe traditions of Islamic art.

2 See Riccardi-Cubitt, 'Grotesque', 699.

3 Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760–7) and Denis Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (1771–8) count among the earliest examples of literary arabesque; see Menninghaus, 'Hummingbirds, Shells, Picture-Frames', 27–46. Current scholarship on literary arabesque focuses on the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Friedrich Schlegel, and Stéphane

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reincarnation as art nouveau established correlations with musical techniques – as in Debussy's *Deux arabesques* (1888–91).

Just as arabesque interacts with different media, traditions, and their respective techniques, it assumes an equally polyvalent personality in musical discourse. The *New Grove* dictionary entry 'Arabesque' informs us that 'the term has been implied in, if not applied to, three musical devices: (1) the contrapuntal decoration of a basic theme [. . .]; (2) an elaboration by *gruppetti*, scale figures and so on [. . .]; (3) a rapidly changing series of harmonies that decorate, without furthering, a point in the progress of a composition'.[4] This definition goes on to relate each 'musical device' to a specific genre and composition: J. S. Bach's Cantata No. 147, *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben*, in the first instance, Schubert's Andante in A, D604 in the second, and the nocturnes of Field and Chopin in the last. Arabesque, according to *Grove*, is a recognizable characteristic of diverse composers as well as distinct genres.

While current and historical accounts of melody, ornament, and harmony often invoke arabesque with respect to the above-mentioned composers, the composer with whom the concept is most frequently associated is Debussy. At the turn of the century Debussy wrote two articles that extolled the structural beauty and expressive richness of arabesque.[5] Since these writings (and perhaps because of them) Debussy scholars have continued to draw on arabesque to describe diverse aspects of his compositional style. For example, Françoise Gervais claims that Debussy conceived of this ornament as a pure entity that 'constitutes a melodic line [. . .] [where] all the "points" that form this sustained line [. . .] "turn into themselves" [. . .] without interruption'.[6] Gervais imports the fundamental characteristics of Islamic art (non-referential design) and visual arabesque (curvilinear motifs) to define Debussy's arabesque as a collection of abstract, supple melodies.

More recent applications of arabesque expand and diversify Gervais's broad definition. Arthur Wenk introduces a category of arabesque that focuses on harmony rather than melody.[7] Jann Pasler interprets Debussy's emphasis on 'line' as concerning melody and its relationship to aspects of counterpoint, texture, and voice-leading.[8] Caroline Potter understands the title of Debussy's *Deux arabesques* 'as indicative of a flowing and decorative type of piano writing [. . .] the ornaments which pervade the second *Arabesque* demonstrate the essentially decorative associations of the term, and the undulating, legato melodic lines of the first piece illustrate the curved shape of the traditional arabesque'.[9] The 'decorative impulse'

Mallarmé. Informative studies include Thompson, 'Romantic Arabesque, Contemporary Theory, and Postmodernism'; Muzelle, 'Friedrich Schlegel et l'arabesque picturale'; and Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy and Desire*. Schlegel's 'Arabeske' participated in a broad philosophical debate that included Goethe, Kant, and Hegel as key participants; see Goethe, 'Von Arabesken'; Kant, *Critique of Judgment*; and Hegel, *Aesthetics*.

4 Brown and Hamilton, 'Arabesque'.

5 'Musique: Vendredi Saint', in *Revue blanche*, 1 May 1901; and 'L'Orientation musicale', in *Musica*, October 1902.

6 Gervais, 'La Notion d'arabesque', 10.

7 Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 188–9.

8 Pasler, 'Timbre, Voice-Leading, Musical Arabesque'.

9 Potter, 'Debussy and Nature', 144. She also characterizes certain melodic figurations as conveying 'arabesque-type patterns' (145–6), 'arabesque technique' (146), and 'arabesque shape' (146).

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remains central to Boyd Pomeroy's study of 'Debussy's thematic arabesques'.[10] Wenk's ideas are revived in Pomeroy's belief that 'in Debussy's own music [. . .] ornamental conception finds its most characteristic form in harmonic inactivity, without the dimension of chord progression to distract from the "curve" and "contour" of the melodic arabesque'.[11] With Mark DeVoto's remarks on Debussy's 'ornamental style, full of trills, graces and *gruppetti*', we witness how each of *Grove*'s 'musical devices' sustain currency in the most up-to-date formulations of Debussy's arabesque.[12]

This brief overview demonstrates a multi-faceted interpretation of arabesque that invokes a variety of musical elements from melody and harmony to ornament and texture. While this diversity reflects the wide-ranging comprehension of musicologists as they grapple with Debussy's vague writings, it also reveals the conceptual difficulties involved in translating visual phenomena into specific musical techniques. Given the range of musical contexts that arabesque finds itself in, is it possible for such a broad, multifarious concept to yield sensitive and valuable analytic insights? Does arabesque merit serious musical consideration as an idea or technique that enriches our understanding of stylistic and aesthetic issues? Or is it better to do away with this generic, all-encompassing concept?

It is with the awareness of arabesque's significance for *fin-de-siècle/début-du-siècle* Parisian culture that I shall demonstrate its potential richness as a hermeneutic tool. Through a re-examination of Debussy's writings and melodic style in this essay, I intend to remodel notions of musical arabesque. My investigation will expose disjuncture between Debussy's writings, his compositional technique, and contemporary reception of the two, a disjuncture that stems from the absence of rhythm and metre in Debussy's – and, consequently, current scholarship's – statements on musical arabesque. By showing how irregular rhythm and dissonant metre are intrinsic to Debussy's conception, I propose an alternative theoretical model, one that pulls into the same orbit Ravel's treatment of melody in his ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*. Even as we explore instances of conceptual and aesthetic overlap between Debussy and Ravel, I seek, on another level, to deconstruct preconceptions of arabesque as 'decoration', an 'attractive' musical gesture that remains structurally insignificant and dramaturgically impotent. Instead, the ensuing discussion reveals how art nouveau's 'whiplash curve' boasted a structural presence and symbolic capacity that renewed and celebrated its links to an ancient, distant tradition.

Debussy's Metaphors of Musical Arabesque

In addition to his articles for *Revue blanche* and *Musica* Debussy sprinkled the term 'arabesque' into several letters.[13] The gist of Debussy's remarks is relatively well known: the

10 Pomeroy, 'Debussy's Tonality', 159.
11 Pomeroy, 'Debussy's Tonality', 158.
12 DeVoto, 'The Debussy Sound', 191.
13 Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger documents Debussy's persistent use of 'arabesque' between 1890 and 1913, noting the appearance of arabesque in the composer's description of his Faun melody to Mallarmé, his discussion of sixteenth-century vocal polyphony with André Poniatowski, and his remarks on the music of Palestrina and Lassus to Eugène

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sixteenth-century contrapuntalists Palestrina, Vittoria, and Lassus were understood as making use of the 'divine "arabesque"'. Debussy explained that 'the Primitives [. . .] found the basis of it in Gregorian chant, whose delicate tracery they supported with twining counterpoints'.[14] Despite their sensitive application it was not the 'Primitives' but J. S. Bach who realized the full potential of arabesque. In Bach's music, Debussy claimed, 'the age of the "wonderful arabesque"' was epitomized in the 'free play of sonorities whose curves, parallel or contrary, prepared the unimaginable blooming that decorates [. . .] his innumerable notebooks with an imperishable beauty'.[15] Debussy regarded the 'principle of ornament' as intrinsic to Bach's Concerto in G but also as 'the basis of all kinds of art'.[16] He was careful to state that 'ornament' in this context 'has nothing to do with the textbook meaning ascribed to it'.[17]

Debussy does not contextualize his use of the term 'arabesque'. Nonetheless, his language evokes aspects of post-Renaissance arabesque that resurfaced during the Rococo revivals of mid-nineteenth-century Paris.[18] In this spirit, parallels between visual arabesque – fluidity, fantasy, ornament, curve – and musical techniques – counterpoint, improvisation, melody, harmony – imply natural correspondences between art and music in his writings. As a result, the preponderance of metaphors in Debussy scholarship ascribes a degree of legitimacy to such concepts as 'melodic line' and 'harmonic curve', which emerge as the necessary outcome of Debussy's willingness to mix media.

Although these concepts have proved inestimable in capturing the listener's experience of Debussy's music, the facile way in which they have crept into our language has mitigated the need to address Debussy's suggestion of such metaphors. Moreover, our tendency to recognize and propagate these metaphors without critical reflection has characterized a passive mode of concretization that fails to engage deeply with Debussy's musical translation of visual arabesque. By empathizing with the range of musical phenomena that academic interpretations relate arabesque to, I believe we have also run the risk of trivializing Debussy's conception. In other words, by putting our blind faith in Debussy's written word and its

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Vasnier; see Eigeldinger, 'Debussy et l'idée d'arabesque musicale', 7–9. For the composer's remarks on arabesque see also Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*.

14 'Les primitifs, Palestrina, Vittoria, Orlando di Lasso, etc [. . .], se servirent de cette divine "arabesque". Ils en trouvèrent le principe dans le chant grégorien et en étayèrent les frêles entrelacs par de résistants contre-points' ('Musique: Vendredi Saint', 67; trans. from Debussy, *Debussy on Music*, 27).

15 'Le vieux Bach, qui contient toute la musique, se moquait, croyez-le bien, des formules harmoniques. Il leur préfèrait le jeu libre des sonorités, dont les courbes, parallèles ou contrariées, préparaient l'épanouissement inespéré qui orne d'impérissable beauté le moindre de ses innombrables cahiers. C'était l'époque où fleurissait "l'adorable arabesque"' (Debussy, 'L'Orientation musicale'; repr. in *Monsieur Croche*, 65; my translation).

16 'Pourtant, ce concerto est une chose admirable parmi tant d'autres déjà inscrites dans les cahiers du grand Bach; on y retrouve presque intacte cette "arabesque musicale" ou plutôt ce principe de "l'ornement" qui est la base de tous modes d'art' ('Musique: Vendredi Saint', 67; my translation). Debussy's comment responds to a performance by Ysaÿe. Given that Bach did not write a Concerto in G for violin, we may assume (following Wenk and Stefan Jarocinski) that Debussy is referring to Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 in G major; see Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 181.

17 'Le mot "ornement" n'a rien à voir ici avec la signification qu'on lui donne dans les grammaires musicales' ('Musique: Vendredi Saint', 67; my translation).

18 Debora Silverman explores this revival in her book *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*.

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connotations, we have failed to notice and overcome the wide gulf that separates his verbal effusion from his musical explication.

In my attempt to redefine notions of musical arabesque through a close reading of Ravel's ballet, I adopt a circumspect approach. This considers it necessary to investigate what 'line' or 'curve' signify with respect to melody, and to question what ornament refers to in melody if, as Debussy warns, it has nothing to do with dictionary definitions. In exploring the survival of visual terminology in discussions about Debussy's arabesque, I shall now consider how metaphors have come to embody and inform our perception of arabesque. My intention is to justify our recourse to the visual domain by demonstrating that visual concepts upheld *specific* musical identities for Debussy and Ravel, as demonstrated, primarily, in their treatment of melody, rhythm, and metre.[19]

Conceptual Blending: from Line to Melody

Recent developments in cognitive theory have formulated an approach towards linguistic metaphor that treats it not as the ornament of language, but as an essential component for understanding aspects of cultural consciousness. In *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis* Lawrence Zbikowski shows how we use metaphor in a systematic fashion to map different domains on to each other.[20] For example, when we use the phrase 'I'm feeling *up*' to express happiness, or 'I'm feeling *down*' to express sadness, our observation of 'happy' body language – expansive gestures, bouncy steps, animated actions – and 'sad' body language – sluggish gestures, inhibited movements, downward-sloping head – correlate with an up–down orientation in physical space.[21] The correlation between domains of emotions and orientation in physical space fosters networks, provoking evocative metaphors that further increase our understanding by connecting a familiar domain with an unfamiliar one. The effectiveness of a metaphor is proportionate to the number of correlations that obtain between the domains brought into proximity; the larger the number of correlations, the less cognitive work we have to do to understand the metaphor.

Since associations of arabesque with melody are most frequent in writings by Debussy and writings on Debussy's music, I shall consider the conceptual metaphor 'melody is line' . This metaphor maps the register, succession, pattern, duration, metre, and rhythm of a melody on to a figure drawn in two-dimensional space. Register correlates with orientation, that is, the 'up and down' movement of the figure, which is itself a metaphor for up–down orientation in physical space; the succession of pitches maps on to the continuity of the figure; patterned ascending and descending motifs map on to the undulating curves of the figure; duration

19 I remain aware of the provocative questions that Reinhold Brinkmann posed during the 1980s and remain somewhat relevant today: 'What, in the realm of music, are those sensitive, perfectly drawn asymmetric lines of apparently endless movement? What, in the technique of composition, corresponds to this visual phenomenon? Is it the melodies of irregular, ametrical structure, without *caesura*-stressing cadences? Is it the related contrapuntal parts? [. . .] What could be called thoroughly ornamental in the musical field? [. . .] trills, *appoggiaturas*, virtuosic playful *fiorituras*?' ('On the Problem of Establishing "Jugendstil" ', 24).

20 On this topic see also Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* and 'Theorizing Musical Meaning'.

21 Zbikowski, *Conceptualizing Music*, 65.

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maps on to the linear extent of the figure, which can also be understood as the overall trajectory that the eye must trace as it follows the figure; metric instability maps on to the irregular, fluid quality of the figure; and short rhythmic values map on to intricate, ornamental gestures within the figure (or of the figure itself). These mappings are elucidated in the Conceptual Integration Network (CIN) of Example 1, a model designed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner for studying conceptual blends, and appropriated into music scholarship by Zbikowski.

Example 1 captures the metaphorical transfer of concepts between music and the visual arts. This CIN consists of four mental spaces interconnected by arrows. Centrally located input spaces – the Music Space and Arabesque Space – are connected by a double-headed unbroken arrow to suggest direct correlations: line with melody, orientation with register, etc.[22] As suggested by the dashed arrows, this mapping is guided by the Generic Space, which represents the core cross-space mapping and projects structure to the fourth space, the 'blended space', to create the concept of Arabesque Melody. From this CIN we may imagine how musical elements blend with aspects of visual arabesque to create concepts of 'melodic line', 'melodic curve', 'supple melody', and 'decorative melody' as they emerge in the new structure of Arabesque Melody. This dynamic network makes another vital contribution: the sense of play generated by correlations between spatial and temporal stimuli fuels the imagination and motivates us to perpetuate metaphors through a range of expressive activity.

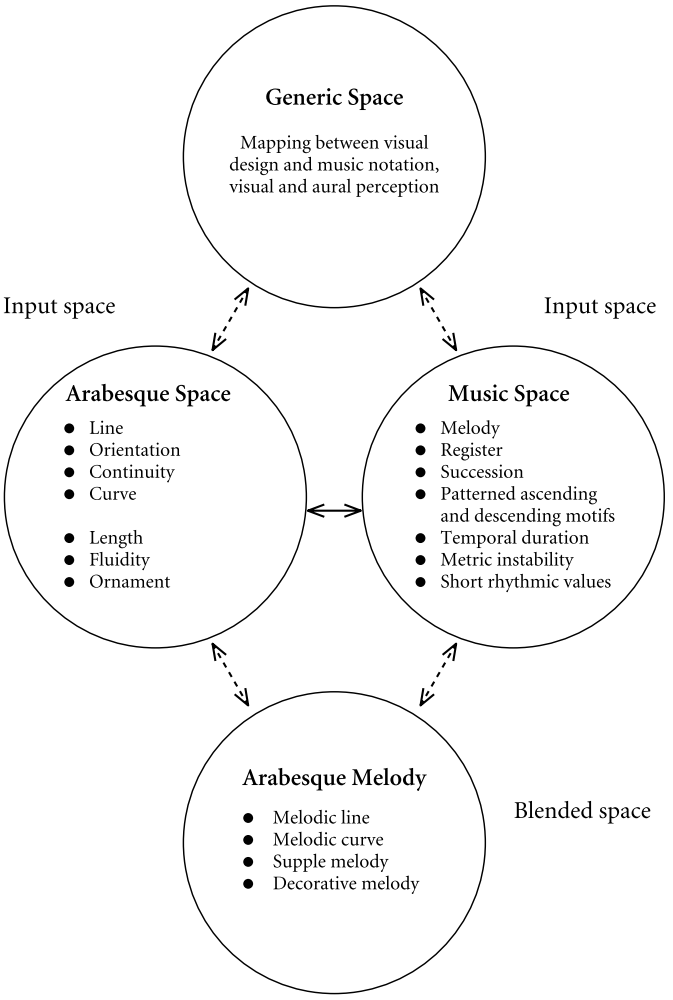
Turning now to music, I shall consider how these concepts become manifest. In preparation for an exploration of arabesque melody in *Daphnis*, I shall begin with the Faun's melody at the opening of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1892–4), whose arabesques, Debussy confessed, were dictated by the flute of Mallarmé's Faun (see Example 2).[23] The four bars of this melody encapsulate the central traits of visual arabesque. At first glance we notice repetition between bb. 1–2 that is offset by the consequent of bb. 3–4.[24] Focusing on the content of this repetition, we hear how periodic registral descent and ascent between the tritone $c♯^2$–g^1 traces the aural equivalent (and visual representation) of a 'curve'. The succession of registral ascent by descent in the consequent phrase also evokes a series of shorter curves that are subsumed by a single legato phrase; the motion $c♯^2$–$d♯^2$ is balanced by $g♯^2$–e^2, and $g♯^1$–b^1 by $c♯^2$–$a♯^1$. Within the undulating pattern of the antecedent,

22 Zbikowski explains that the arrows are double-headed because 'under certain circumstances, structure may also be projected from the blended space back into the input spaces, and from the input spaces back into the generic space' (*Conceptualizing Music*, 80).

23 See Eigeldinger, 'Debussy et l'idée d'arabesque musicale', 7. In subsequent paragraphs Eigeldinger summarizes Mallarmé's references to arabesque.

24 Repetition is a defining quality of arabesque that goes back to its origins in Islamic art. Here, abstract, intricate motifs that were repeated across a surface mesmerized the viewer to portray the 'infinite and timeless reality of Allah'; see Mason, 'Structural Congruities in the Arab Genealogical Form', 27. In art nouveau, repeating arabesque motifs were also used to saturate the tableau. See, for instance, Pierre Bonnard's *Women in the Garden* (1891), Maurice Denis's, *Ladder in Foliage*, or *Poetic Arabesques for the Decoration of a Ceiling* (1892), or Henri Matisse's *La Desserte rouge* (1909). Despite arabesque's assimilation into Western art traditions during the Renaissance, we must note that archaeological advancements of the nineteenth century fuelled the Romantic frenzy for the exotic and facilitated a return (imaginary and real) to arabesque's roots in the ancient Middle East. Important for the purposes of this essay is the range of characteristics the Romantics ascribed to ancient arabesque, such as Eastern, primitive, irrational, fantastic, and mysterious.

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Example 1 After Zbikowski's CIN model: a CIN showing the conceptual blend for arabesque melody.



Example 2 Opening melody from Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, bb. 1–4.

a chromatic descent and mostly whole-tone ascent is carried by juxtaposed duple and triplet semiquavers, the shortest durational values, which emerge in this melody as ornamental gestures that 'fill in' the registral gap between $c\sharp^2$ and g^1.[25] In the way that the melody

25 The technique of 'filling in' also has a correlate in Islamic arabesque. Mason explains that by 'filling in spaces' arabesque avoids 'the strong contrast between ornamented and empty expanses' to suggest a 'decomposition of matter' in the emphasis upon decoration rather than structure; see 'Structural Congruities in the Arab Genealogical

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'winds down' and 'rolls up' through these semiquavers, Debussy suggests a correlate to the 'enroulements de dessins mélodiques' that he admired in sixteenth-century polyphony.[26]

Juxtaposed duple and triplet semiquavers characterize ornament as rhythmically unstable while contributing in two other ways to the fluid and supple character of this melody. First, the metric placement of semiquavers on the second and third beats of 9/8 tends to expand our perception of musical time. Decoration of the tritone by short values suggests that the entire gesture is longer than a less ornate presentation of the same interval; since the ear has to follow a larger number of pitches, the listener may perceive either a longer unit of time, or a unit that is *stretched* in order to accommodate all the different pitches.[27]

Secondly, Debussy enhances the fluid quality of this monophonic melody by articulating neither the quaver nor the dotted-quaver pulses. Instead, this melody blurs the articulation of the notated 9/8 metre through agogic emphasis on the first tied dotted crotchet. The tie prevents an accent on the second dotted crotchet so that a clear projection of this pulse and a grouping in 9/8 is evaded. Quite literally, we perceive this ornate melody as evoking a sense of 'timelessness' as Debussy strives to capture, in a single gesture, the primordial mysticism of Mallarmé's poem.

As arabesque finds its way from the canvas, through the poem, to the music, we see how this ornament's decorative and supple qualities inspired Debussy's characterization through rhythmic intricacy and metric instability. While arabesque flits from medium to medium, it appears that Debussy's temporal conceptualization was not unique; it reciprocated, rather, the synaesthetic inclinations of writers and artists themselves.[28] Their creative intentions, however, remained diametrically opposed, as the painter André Lhote suggests in his analogy between musical performance and Gauguin-inspired landscape painting. Here, arabesque – 'the secret thread' – provides rhythmic definition for the entire tableau:

Form', 29. In his historical investigation of ornament the architectural theorist Alois Riegl also distinguished between ornament that *frames* and ornament that *fills*. Riegl understood the sense of play between frame and fill as representing the continual negotiation between figure/ground and concave/convex elements; see Schafter, *The Order of Ornament*, 52–4.

26 Debussy uses this phrase in a letter to Eugène Vasnier on 24 November 1885; see Eigeldinger, 'Debussy et l'idée d'arabesque musicale', 9.

27 The concept of a 'stretched' line is borrowed from Kandinsky, who, in evaluating the curvilinear designs of Jugendstil, stated: 'Length is a durational concept [. . .] the time required to follow a straight line is different from the time required to follow a curved line even if the lengths are the same, and the more animated the curved line is, the more it stretches itself out in time'; see Frisch, 'Music and Jugendstil', 145. Jonathan Kramer makes a similar claim with reference to proportional analysis, stating that maximally filled time intervals are perceived as longer than moderately filled intervals of the same clock duration; see 'The Perception of Musical Time', in *The Time of Music*, 322–74. Alternatively, Stephen Handel presents cognitive evidence to suggest that in such a context the listener actually hears the phrase in time, although it might take longer to process the increased number of pitches and rhythms; see *Listening: an Introduction to the Perception of Auditory Events*.

28 Théophile Gautier spoke of a 'mathématiques rythmées' associated with 'les formes ornementales', while Charles Baudelaire associated arabesque with 'rhythm and motion' (see Kremen, 'Baudelaire's Spiritual Arabesque', 57–62); the artist-critic Paul Signac wrote of the 'rhythmical lines' of arabesque (see Benjamin, 'The Decorative Landscape', 301); the Fauvist André Derain described arabesque as 'the superposition of rhythm' (see *Le Dessin fauve, 1900–1908*, 61); in his 1894 lecture *La Musique et les lettres* Mallarmé described the fluid musicality of literature and art as 'la totale arabesque' (see McCombie, *Mallarmé and Debussy*, 99); and Gustave Moreau contemplated, 'one cannot imagine what may be awakened in the mind [. . .] by a beautiful arabesque, a fine expressive movement of lines' (see Benjamin, 'The Decorative Landscape', 310).

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> Like those conductors who mime a symphony with their hands [. . .] the painter, responsive to the hidden rhythm of a landscape, dances with it, brush and pencil in hand, and registers such movements which voluptuously interflow. At such moments he must no longer think about what he knows of this landscape [. . .] but have eyes only for the secret thread that binds them together.
>
> Having worked out the balanced movements, the curves and arabesques, the leaps and explosions of form suddenly unified by this rhythm [. . .] you will then have the irrational and living framework of the landscape which will be unfolded like a human form stretched out, and the outcrops, the flowing hair, will take their place as if by magic as the artist gives the required twist of expressive distortion.[29]

Lhote revives arabesque's Islamic past, where abstract, detailed designs saturated the surface to create organic unity while inducing spiritual euphoria. Like Kandinsky, moreover, he experiences the curvilinear motif as a dynamic unfolding that serves, in several respects, as a metaphor for the temporal dimension. The link between arabesque and dance recalls to our minds a position in ballet as well as the contemporaneous Serpentine Dance of Loïe Fuller at the Folies-Bergère in Paris.[30] Under the artist's paintbrush, Lhote suggests, arabesque offered art a means to approximate a quality that it could not literally possess: movement.

This situation is reversed in the domain of music. Although Debussy and, as we shall see, Ravel evaluated visual arabesque in terms of its metric and rhythmic potential, they used this sinuous design as a means to *arrest* musical time. Of course, since music is by definition temporal, it is somewhat paradoxical to speak of 'stasis'. But this is precisely the effect that Debussy achieves at the opening of his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, where the absence of a periodic pulse allows profuse rhythmic details to 'expand' the metric moment and suspend musical time. Stasis is also manifest in the threefold repetition of the Faun's melody, which recasts the linear as the circular, an observation that James Hepokoski perceives as 'an eloquent musical analogue to the prevailing Decadent and Symbolist ideal of interior, rather than exterior, growth'.[31] Static metric contexts that recycle melodic material captured the underlying paradox of Symbolist (and Impressionist) thought in one more way: the *instant suspendu* offered an opportunity to view the suspended sound object from the perspective of changing harmony and shifting timbres.[32] Consequently, as the Faun's melody undergoes subtle transformations of harmony and orchestration, Debussy generates movement within the boundaries of the transfixed moment.[33]

29 Lhote, *Traité du paysage* (1939), quoted in Benjamin, 'The Decorative Landscape', 310.

30 Loïe Fuller premiered her Serpentine Dance in Paris in 1892. She 'performed' arabesque through fluid, improvisatory movements that were heard against music by Ravel, Skryabin, and Florent Schmitt. Her embodiment of sensuous curves seems to have strengthened the association between arabesque and the feminine as seen in the sexualized portrayals of *femmes fatales* by the *fin de siècle*.

31 Hepokoski, 'Formulaic Openings in Debussy', 56. Frisch describes the 'sense of goallessness' and 'gentle, nonteleological activity' inherent in such passages as being characteristic of Jugendstil (or art nouveau) music; see 'Music and Jugendstil', 154–5.

32 The recurrent trope of *l'instant suspendu* (or *l'instant en instance*) in French aesthetics is given an interesting treatment by Vladimir Jankélévitch in *Debussy et le mystère*, and by Michel Fleury in *L'Impressionnisme et la musique*.

33 We should note that Eduard Hanslick's well-known reference to arabesque anticipates visual aesthetics of the *fin de siècle*. Hanslick esteems 'an arabesque not dead and static, but coming into being in continuous self-formation before

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Ornament and Expression in Arabesque Melodies

In many ways the Faun's melody is archetypal arabesque. It enacts all the properties of visual arabesque while privileging, through structural prominence, the melody's status as ornament. By treating ornament as structure, Debussy initiates a conceptual inversion that invests formal and expressive meaning in a gesture conventionally deemed superficial and semantically empty. Consequently, as blurred boundaries facilitate Debussy's manipulation of centre and frame, they also present an opportunity to extract ornament from the margins and bring it – complete with attendant references to topics of the exotic, ancient, erotic, feminine, nature, fantasy – into the core of our aesthetic experience.[34] In the case of the Faun, his erotic desires are sublimated into a sensuous melody whose mesmerizing repetition, intricate chromatic/whole-tone motion, and metric weakness converge in Debussy's evocation of a chronologically remote and culturally distant other.

In case this observation seems self-evident, we should recall that it was ancient rhetoricians who fuelled Western philosophy's dubious outlook on ornament. The reasons for their suspicions were plentiful: ornament's sensuous luxury was considered distracting, irrational, immoral, seductive, and, in the same negative vein, feminine.[35] Furthermore, because its abstract designs left no room for concrete representation, ornament was conceived of as a *meaningless* appendage to more substantial, 'serious' art.[36] Even as ornament's status changed from its denigration as visual 'eye candy' by Goethe to its celebration as absolute 'free beauty' by Kant (and, later, Hanslick), it was only during the *fin de siècle* that its physical appearance and symbolic potential were united. At this moment, artists entranced by arabesque's undulating curves embraced this ornament's material form as well as its accumulated associations. In this respect, it is possible that by adapting arabesque Debussy sought to capitalize its latent expressive capacity.

My hypothesis unsettles enduring views on musical arabesque, beginning with Gervais's claim that Debussy's 'line' exists '*beyond any plastic or affective representation*'.[37] While Gervais propagates a notion of absolute arabesque that finds its roots in German aesthetics,

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our eyes'. However, his perception of 'a collection of small details' that convey a sublime, autonomous beauty typifies early Romantic conceptions of arabesque. Compare, for example, Kant's discussion of arabesque, parerga, and 'free beauty' in the *Third Critique* with its echo in Hanslick's notion of thematic beauty. See Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 29–32.

34 The above-mentioned works by Goethe, Kant, and Hegel provide insight into how ornament became associated with these topics in Western philosophy. For a recent treatment of this issue see Bhogal, 'Histories of Arabesque', in 'Arabesque and Metric Dissonance', 34–114.

35 As Ernst Gombrich observes, 'Socrates [. . .] constantly urged his disciples to be on their guard against the attractions of fine speech precisely because he was aware of their powers of seduction. The tricks and ornaments of sophistic oratory could easily deflect the hearer from the argument in hand' (*The Sense of Order*, 18–19). Naomi Schor, in *Reading in Detail*, documents the overtly gendered treatment of ornament in Western thought.

36 This point is made most clearly by Goethe in his 1789 essay 'Von Arabesken', where he states that ornament 'serves the better art at the frame, it does not exclude, it does not displace, but only more generally makes possible the possession of a good artwork' (193, my translation). 'Fröhlichkeit, Leichtsinn, Lust zum Schmuckscheinen die Arabesken erfunden und verbreitet zu haben [. . .] besonders wenn sie, wie hier, der bessern Kunst gleichsam zum Rahmen dienen, sie nicht ausschliessen, sie nicht verdrängen, sondern sie nur noch allgemeiner, den Besitz guter Kunstwerke möglicher machen'.

37 Gervais, 'La Notion d'arabesque', 6 (my italics). More recently, McCombie prolongs ideas of absolute arabesque in her observation that 'the vogue for thinking about music in terms of its line rather than as representation of feeling, [was] reflected in Debussy's admiration for the ''courbes'' in Bach' (*Mallarmé and Debussy*, 101–2).

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her perception of arabesque melodies in Debussy's music opens up a window of opportunity for my mode of investigation. For in pointing to Debussy's pluralistic interpretation of 'line' – melodies independent of the accompanying harmony, solo melodies, melodies that use triplets of varied rhythmic durations, and those that are restricted to small intervals – Gervais indicates diverse instances of arabesque melody without speculating on Debussy's need to differentiate between them, a requirement that might fulfil precise expressive conditions on Debussy's part.[38] This last point becomes even more compelling when placed in the context of Debussy's *Revue blanche* article. In his Islamic-tinged perception of arabesque curve – 'the parallel movement of several lines whose meeting, whether fortuitous or contrived, solicits emotion' – Debussy goes on to explain how this 'ornamental conception' gives rise to images, a correlation between ornament and signification that has made little impact in Debussy scholarship to date.[39]

Turning back to the CIN in Example 1 above, I now propose modifications that will allow us to entertain the possibility of multiple arabesques and their potential for narrative expression in *Daphnis*. In Example 1 we saw how distinct mappings between Arabesque Space and Music Space created the conceptual blend Arabesque Melody. Since Gervais's analyses suggest that Debussy distinguishes between arabesque melodies in two ways – first, in the types of metric instability that characterize each melody; and second, in each melody's varied assimilation of rhythmic values – we must alter this CIN if we are to grasp the range of metric and rhythmic complexity that defines Debussy's arabesques.

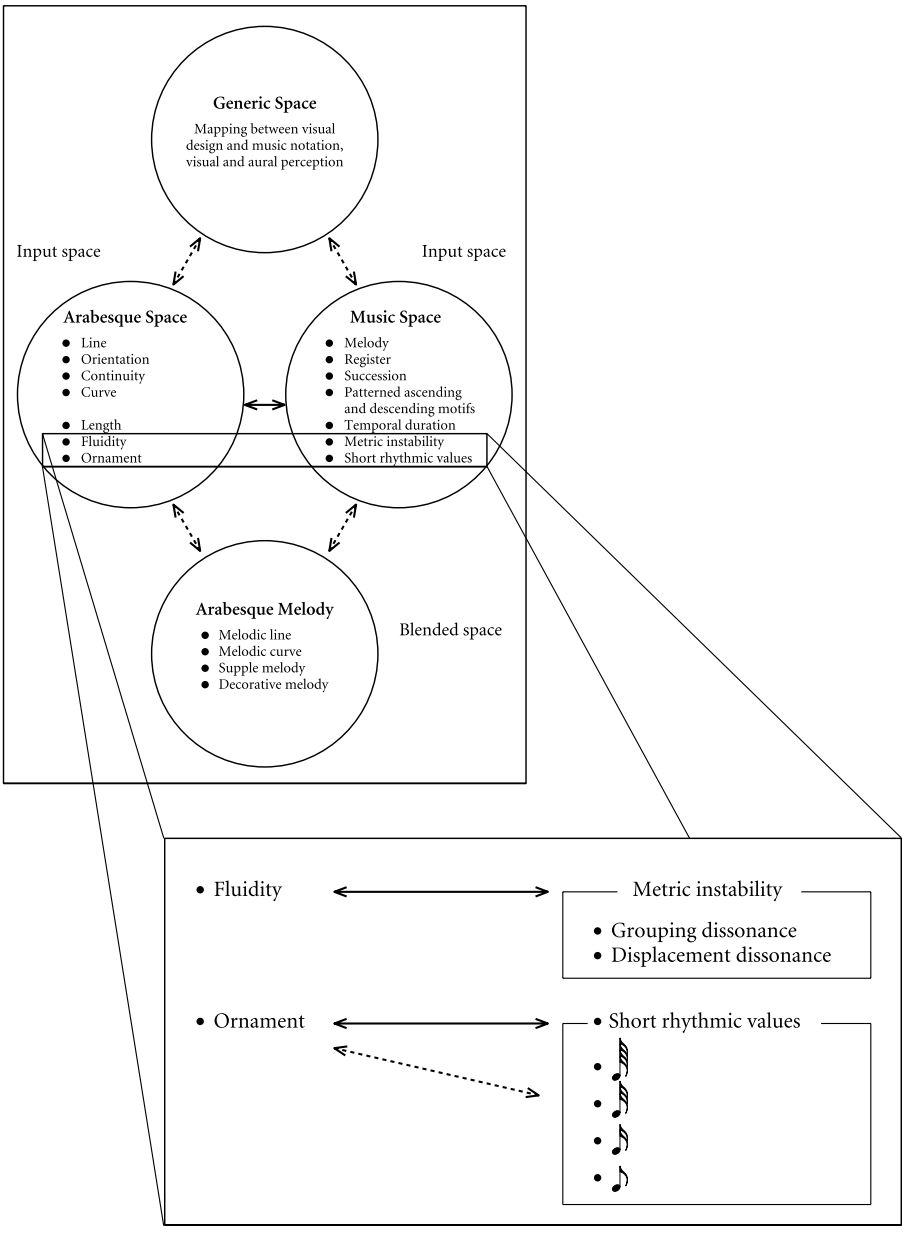
Example 3 presents an extended CIN that focuses on mappings concerning metre and rhythm. In this example I expand the input 'metric instability' by listing two types of metric dissonance that characterize musical arabesque. After Harald Krebs, I label these 'displacement dissonance' and 'grouping dissonance'.[40] The input 'short rhythmic values' is also expanded. It now lists a range of durational values that evoke 'ornament' in a melody. These refinements make it possible to envisage the numerous metric identities of arabesque melody that lie dormant in this CIN; the unbroken arrow corresponds to the variety of displacement and grouping dissonances that evoke fluidity, while the dotted arrow indicates the possible assortment of rhythmic values, from quavers to hemidemisemiquavers, that denote ornament. Despite the number of options available in this framework, certain requirements must be fulfilled if a melody is to qualify as 'arabesque'. For instance, it is crucial that each melody

38 To this list we may add at least two other types of arabesque: the quintuplet demisemiquaver motif, observed by Claudia Zenck-Maurer in *Versuch über die wahre Art*, 135; and the *arabesque descendante*, observed by Jankélévitch in *Debussy et le mystère*, 89.

39 'Dans la musique de Bach, ce n'est pas le caractère de la mélodie qui émeut, c'est sa courbe; plus souvent même, c'est le mouvement parallèle de plusieurs lignes dont la rencontre, soit fortuite, soit unanime, sollicite l'émotion. A cette conception ornementale, la musique aquiert la sûreté d'un mécanisme à impressionner le public et qui fait surgir les images' (Debussy, 'Musique: Vendredi Saint', 67–8; my translation).

40 A grouping dissonance arises when two or more pulse levels of non-integral cardinalities are *combined*. For example, the label G3/2 denotes the existence of a grouping dissonance between conflicting 3-layers and 2-layers. A displacement dissonance arises when two or more pulse levels of the same cardinality are *non-aligned* to create syncopation. For example, the label D4 + 1 (1 = crotchet) identifies a displacement dissonance where the initiation of a 4-layer is *delayed* by a crotchet pulse; D4 – 1 indicates that the 4-layer is *anticipated* by a crotchet pulse. Harald Krebs differentiates further between dissonance created through *superposition* (direct dissonance) and dissonance resulting from *juxtaposition* (indirect dissonance); see Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces*.

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Example 3 An extended CIN that 'zooms in' on the mappings concerning metre and rhythm.

is characterized by both grouping and displacement dissonance. In turn, these dissonances should work in conjunction with values that emphasize at least one, if not more, of the specified durations. Equally essential is that each of the remaining mappings issuing from line, orientation, continuity, curve, and length should meet their musical counterparts.

In what follows I offer a tailor-made CIN for each melody and its accompaniment. In each instance I extract just the mappings for fluidity and ornament, since the remaining mappings

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stay constant from one melody to another. While these extended CINs demonstrate that metric dissonance and short values are fundamental to the evocation of arabesque, they will also show how a specific configuration of dissonances and durational values reflect each melody's unique role in the drama.

From Debussy to Ravel

The leap that I am about to make may seem disquieting. There is the risk, after all, that my methodology forces Debussy's compositional style and aesthetics into an uncomfortably intimate relationship with that of his younger compatriot. This alignment might be seen to refute or, worse still, disregard the efforts of critics and scholars to disentangle these composers and their unique contributions since the early days of the Debussy–Ravel fracas.[41] What I intend to demonstrate, however, is the genuine stylistic overlap between Ravel's melodic style in *Daphnis* and Debussy's conception of arabesque. This legitimate resemblance should not detract from the differences that distinguish one composer from the other; nor should it pass without comment simply because Ravel, to my knowledge, never spoke of his music as arabesque. Rather, the absence of this concept in Ravel scholarship encourages more than deters a study of emerging parallels in the two composers' formulation of arabesque melodies as gestures of structural significance and symbolic value. The study of arabesque in *Daphnis* will help us understand points of intersection between the two composers' techniques and aesthetics, and, in relation to a specific narrative, it will allow us to explore how the distinct rhythmic profiles and metric attributes of melodies serve as markers of dramatic expression.

The close intertwining of arabesque with *Daphnis* was also suggested by contemporary critics. In the first reviews, critics described Ravel's score using language that invoked arabesque and its association with art nouveau. This discourse pointed to the ballet's formal plasticity, metric weakness, and complex network of melodic lines. Elements discussed in these critiques – line, plasticity, digression, suppleness, and flexibility – created specific correlations between aspects of melody, form, and rhythm in *Daphnis*, and general associations with aspects of visual arabesque. Although the importance of these reviews lies primarily in their description of Ravel's innovative contribution to the genre of ballet, the critics' use of aesthetic concepts from art nouveau provides an additional incentive to explore arabesque in *Daphnis*.

The common appropriation of art nouveau terminology by critics was put to several different ends. In his positive evaluation Jean Marnold, a prominent music critic, drew attention to the 'physionomie de plasticité tout extérieure' of certain thematic ideas, particularly Daphnis's theme.[42] On a similar note, Robert Brussel, another music critic, echoed Marnold's admiration for the suppleness ('plasticité') and clarity of Ravel's music. In his

41 Arbie Orenstein draws attention to some of the tensions surrounding issues of imitation and influence between Debussy and Ravel; see *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 31–3.

42 Marnold, 'Musique: *Daphnis et Chloé* de M. Maurice Ravel' (1917). Marnold's review is in response to a performance of the two orchestral suites from *Daphnis* heard at a Société Musicale Indépendante concert.

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observation of 'small details to which [the music] is frequently diverted', Brussel alluded to parallels between intricate, meandering arabesque and digressive aspects of the music.[43]

Later reception reinforces the ballet's arabesque qualities, with special attention given to the textural prominence of musical line. Roland-Manuel, the French musicologist, emphasized 'the triumph of clear lines, of simple and strong design' where 'the taste for pure tones gives way to the whims of the line and to the necessity of repetition'.[44] André Mirambel also heard 'a combination of varied lines that express[ed] sentiments of the idyllic pastorale'.[45] His observation of Ravel's treatment of line as blurring the distinction between song and accompaniment alluded to the fluid boundaries between structure and ornament. Mirambel implied the predominance of this sensation in contexts of 'three, four or even five musical lines, which may be parallel or intertwining or appear only in order to disappear rapidly'.[46]

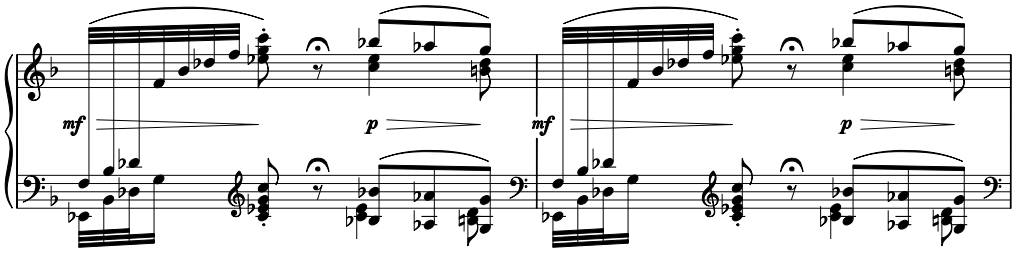
Critics who responded less positively to *Daphnis* focused their attention on its alleged rhythmic weakness, by which they meant metric irregularity. Pierre Lalo complained that *Daphnis* 'missed the most important quality of ballet music: rhythm'.[47] Gaston Carraud joined Lalo in lamenting that Ravel's use of rhythm was of 'une faiblesse extrême', which caused difficulties for the dancers.[48] Lalo and Carraud's emphasis on metric instability reflected the absence of a four-square metre, which had long been considered essential to ballet. By thwarting the listener's (and dancer's) expectations of a regular metre, Lalo and Carraud condemned metric irregularity and its evocation of flux and suppleness – ironically, the very qualities that art nouveau celebrated and revered.

Extensions of Arabesque Melody in *Daphnis*

Each occurrence of arabesque melody is closely interwoven with Ravel's portrayal of the ancient Greek pastoral romance by Longus. The mysterious opening melody (evocative of Pan and suitably played by a solo flute) sets the tone for the ballet (Fig. 1).[49] It is closely followed by the melody associated with Daphnis (Fig. 1^{+6}) before leading into the *Danse religieuse*, a ritual offering to the three Nymphs where Daphnis first notices Chloé. Since his rival, Dorcon, also vies for Chloé's affection, a dance contest is proposed, with a kiss from Chloé being the victor's prize. Daphnis's virtuosic dance, marked by sweeping flourishes (Fig. 43), wins the competition, and following Chloé's beguiling kiss, he falls into a deep reverie. A convoluted, undulating melody (Fig. 55) signals the entrance of the seductive Lyceion, who drops her veils in an attempt to lure Daphnis. Lyceion departs, her adulterous desires left unfulfilled, and soon after pirates invade and abduct Chloé. Daphnis curses the deities for not protecting her. He collapses in despair, while an intricate melody marks the animation of the three Nymphs (Fig. 74), who invoke Pan to save Chloé. At the pirates' camp,

43 Brussel, *Le Figaro*, 9 June 1912.
44 Roland-Manuel, *A la gloire de Ravel*, 92–4.
45 Mirambel, 'L'Inspiration grecque', 116.
46 Mirambel, 'L'Inspiration grecque', 118.
47 Lalo, 'La Musique' (1912).
48 Carraud, *La Liberté*, 11 June 1912.
49 Rehearsal numbers refer to the Dover score of *Daphnis and Chloé* (New York, 1989).

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Example 4 Daphnis's flourishes from his *Danse légère*, Fig. 43^{+3-4}.

meanwhile, a descending melody marks Chloé's anguish as she is forced to dance for Bryaxis (Fig. 133^{+5}). Suddenly the atmosphere changes, Pan saves Chloé, and the lovers are reunited in the following Sunrise scene. Daphnis and Chloé embrace and pay homage by miming the story of Pan and Syrinx, as evoked by an elaborate flute melody (Fig. 176^{+3}).[50]

While it is not possible to examine each of the seven arabesques enumerated above, I shall focus on four to demonstrate how arabesque melodies characterize protagonists and their dramatic situations. Each melody's rhythmic identity is of importance since it stimulates further refinements that generate two categories of melodies: (1) 'arabesques of action', denoted by rhythmic intricacy and associated with 'active' characters who advance the drama; and (2) 'arabesques of feeling', denoted by rhythmic simplicity and associated with 'passive' characters who suspend narrative development because they are denied agency. I now consider how Ravel manipulates this dichotomy, beginning first with a dance competition.

Daphnis's *Danse légère et gracieuse*

Example 4 shows the sweeping flourishes that suspend the metric pulse (as reinforced by fermatas) and characterize Daphnis's performance as virtuosic.[51] These florid gestures suggest Daphnis's desire to flaunt his body as it lingers in the air during his gymnastic leaps.[52] Daphnis sublimates his desire for Chloé into these ornaments, although their abrupt occurrence suggests his inability to control his feelings. The association of ornament with metric dissonance only heightens our perception of Daphnis's emotional instability during his performance. Example 5 summarizes the rhythmic and metric features of Daphnis's dance, which I shall now explore.

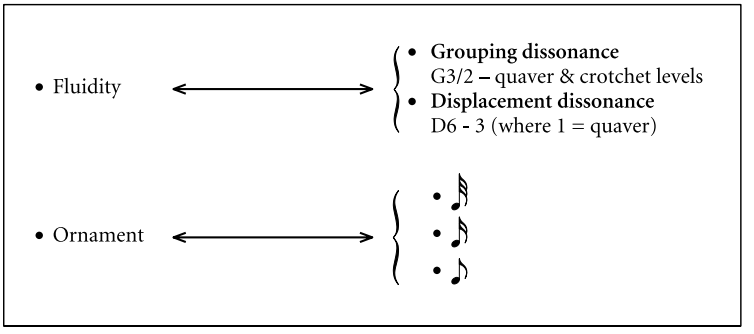
At the opening of his dance (Fig. 43) a direct dissonance (G3/2) between quaver and dotted-quaver pulses suggests a first unstable attempt to articulate 6/8 metre (see Example 6). This gesture is destabilized further through the parallel emphasis on c^2, which articulates a

50 The original story is considerably more complicated. My synopsis recounts crucial aspects of the novel as they occur in the collaborative *Ballets russes* setting between Ravel, Mikhail Fokine, and Léon Bakst.

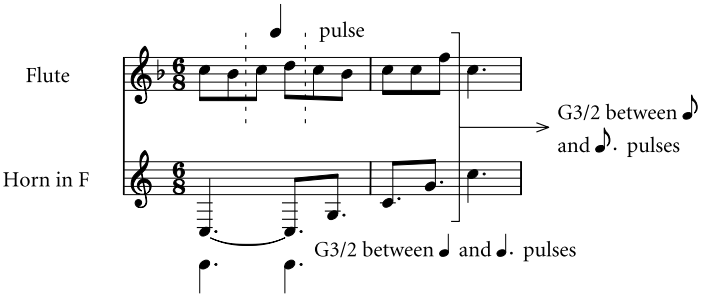
51 Danielle Cohen-Levinas describes these flourishes as focusing metric stress on the first beat of the bar. Instead of finding their resolution in the second part of the bar, she claims these flourishes remain suspended '"en l'air"'; see 'Daphnis et Chloé ou la danse du simulacre', 93.

52 Michel Calvocoressi explains that this musical gesture was inspired by Nijinsky's famous sideways leap, which was characterized by 'a run and a long pause'; see Mawer, 'Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance', 143.

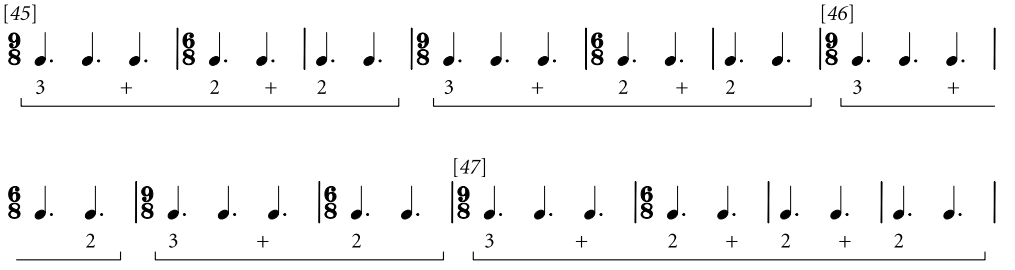
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Example 5 A CIN that shows the rhythmic and metric features of Daphnis's dance.



Example 6 Grouping dissonance in Daphnis's dance, Fig. 43^{+1-2}.

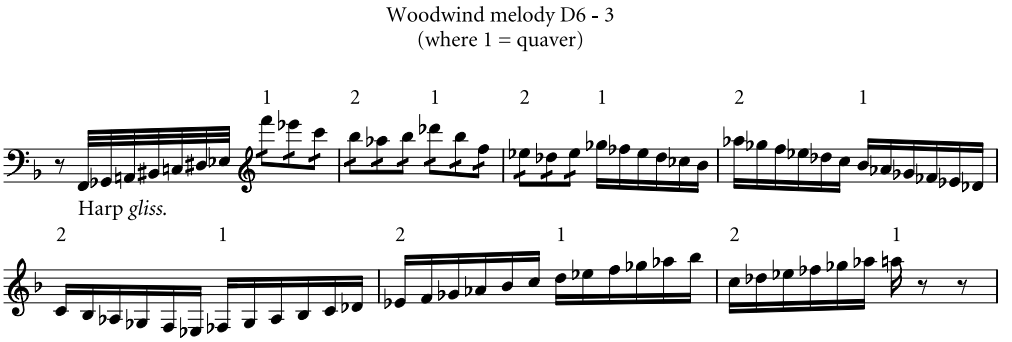


Example 7 Metric fluctuation between triple and duple metres, Figs 45–47^{+4}.

crotchet pulse that conflicts with the dotted-crotchet pulse of 6/8 (G3/2). Daphnis's vigorous flourishes intensify these grouping dissonances in Fig. 43^{+3-4} and later follow another unsuccessful attempt to establish 6/8 at Fig. 44. Using a different metric technique, the *plus animé* (Fig. 45) draws on metric fluctuation to portray Daphnis's emotional performance. In this passage shifts between duple and triple metres characterize his supple dance. Example 7 shows how an irregular pattern of metric fluctuation (3 + 2 + 2) is suddenly contracted (3 + 2) and extended (3 + 2 + 2 + 2) before metric activity ceases altogether at Fig. 47^{+5}.

After the metre resumes with a repetition of the opening motif, Ravel reorchestrates Daphnis's flourishes to include the woodwinds (Fig. 49^{+3}). The increasing textural

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Example 8 Displacement dissonance in Daphnis's closing section, Figs 50–50^{+7}.

prominence of this figure pre-empts the rhythmic virtuosity of Daphnis's final bravura effort to impress Chloé (Fig. 50). Unable to contain himself, Daphnis launches into his dance one dotted crotchet too early; this is suggested by the flute, which bursts suddenly into rapid semiquavers on the second beat instead of the downbeat of 6/8 (Example 8). As a result, the entire coda is displaced (D6 – 3, where 1 = quaver) and eventually merges in the metric drift to 3/4 as Daphnis is invited to receive his kiss (Fig. 51).

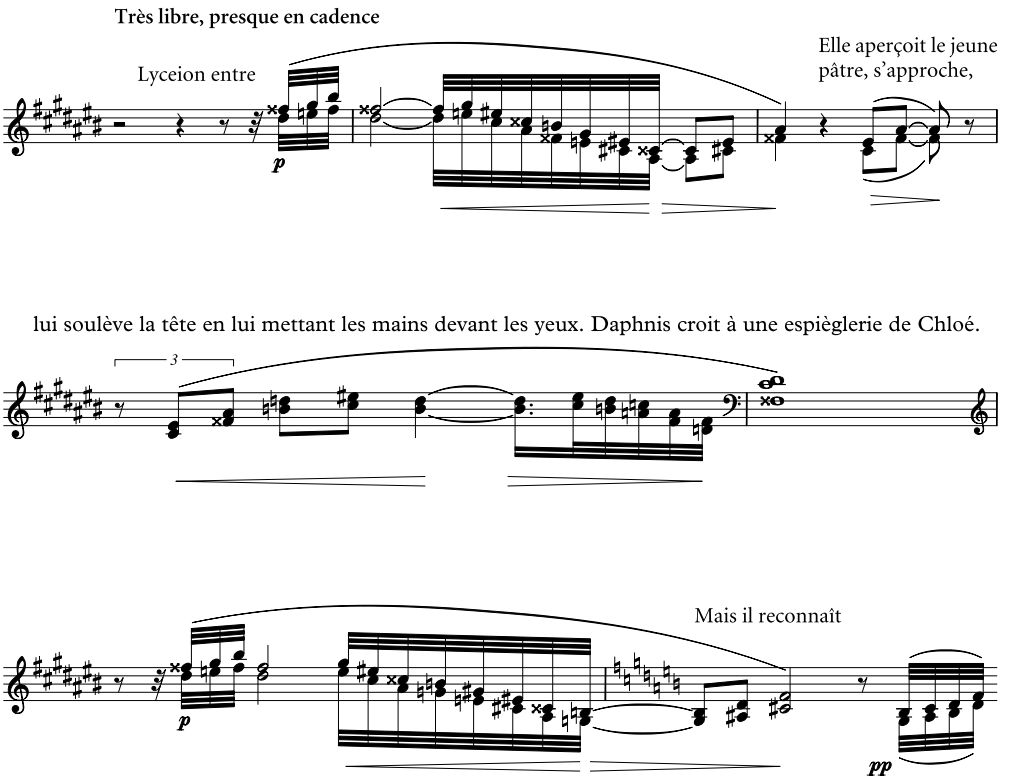
Daphnis's association with ornament and metric dissonance is linked directly to his depiction as a sensitive, effeminate character. This observation is most compelling when we compare his emotional dance with his rival's inartistic efforts. Dorcon's *Danse grotesque* represents one of the ballet's most *regular* rhythmic and metric moments (Fig. 32). And as such, this crude, duple-time dance aligns itself with the music of the other insensitive brutes of the ballet, the pirates; their music, which extends from Figs 92–130^{+11}, projects the longest stretch of a regular duple metre in the entire work. In Dorcon's dance a two-bar introduction precedes two eight-bar antecedent phrases. The regular, duple hypermeter is interrupted only once, through metric contraction at Fig. 35^{+5}. Otherwise, the percussive, periodic articulation of a crotchet pulse portrays Dorcon as an unrefined cowherd, whose unrelenting metric consonance is met with mockery and laughter.[53] In contrast, Ravel casts Daphnis's fluid dance (its disruptive flourishes, fluctuating metres, and grouping dissonances) as the epitome of refined expression.

Lyceion's 'Dance of Veils'

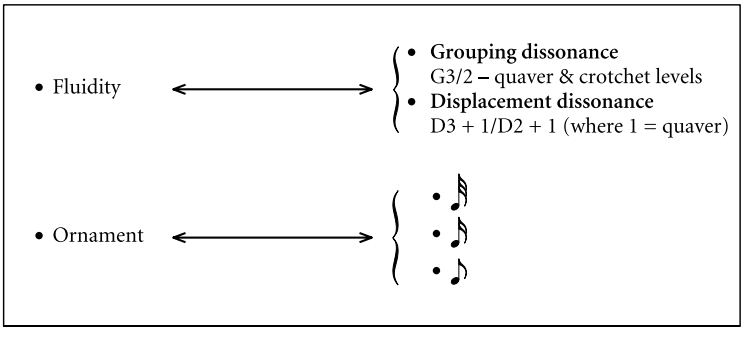
The 'Salome of Greece' (as Vladimir Jankélévitch describes her) creeps up on Daphnis as he lies face down in the grass. Having just received Chloé's kiss, Daphnis is in a state of ecstasy and mistakes Lyceion's seductive advances for Chloé's playful games. When he recognizes Lyceion, however, he tries to distance himself from her. Lyceion's arabesque melody, played by two clarinets that writhe and undulate in intricate, rhythmic gestures, signals that she will not take no for an answer (Figs 55–7). Instead, the sudden profusion of ornament in

53 See Ravel's score indication at Figs 40–1: 'Le foule imite ironiquement les gestes gauches du bouvier [. . .] qui termine sa danse au milieu d'un rire général.'

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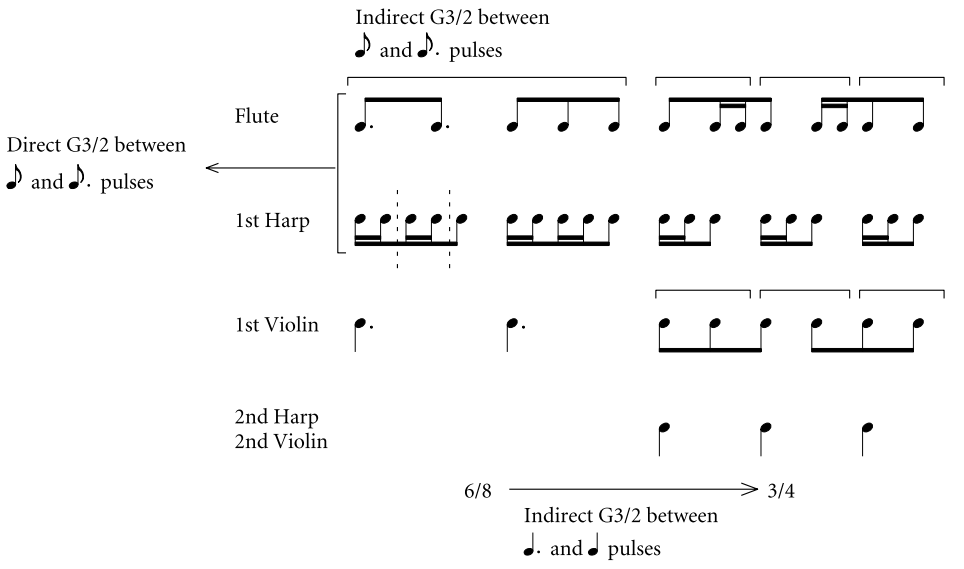
Example 9 Lyceion's arabesque melody at Figs 55–56^{+3}.



Example 10 A CIN that shows the rhythmic and metric features of Lyceion's dance.

Lyceion's 'quasi cadenza' melody sublimates her desires and (like Daphnis's decorative outbursts) breaks down metric periodicity. The irregular alternation between short and long rhythmic values, frequent ties, bursts of rhythmic activity on weak beats, and lack of downbeat emphasis come together to characterize this *femme fatale*'s capricious melody (see Example 9).

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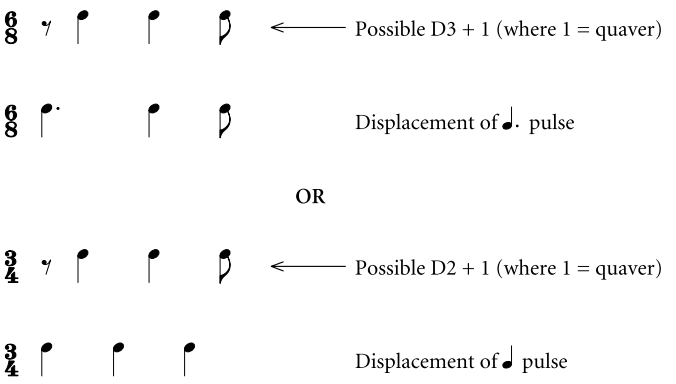
Example 11 Grouping dissonance in Lyceion's dance, Fig. 57^{+2-3}.

In Longus's romance the sexual encounter between Lyceion and Daphnis is one of consent (even though she tricks him into learning about sex through her supervision). In the ballet, however, Daphnis has no interest in becoming Lyceion's apprentice, so she strives to fulfil her needs – like Salome before her – by removing her veils one by one, at Fig. 57^{+8} and Fig. 59^{+5-6}. Following each of these moments (Fig. 57^{+10} and Fig. 60^{+2-3}), a snippet of Lyceion's arabesque motif darts through the clarinets and, as with the first occurrence of her motif, the sudden emphasis on ornament momentarily suspends metric activity. While each motif indicates a different stage of her seduction (eager anticipation at Fig. 55, frustration at Fig. 57^{+8}, failure at Fig. 59^{+5-6}), it is the unstable metric context (specifically, conflict between the notated metre of 6/8 and perceived metre of 3/4) that heightens the expressive effect of these flourishes. Example 10 summarizes the rhythmic and metric features associated with Lyceion's melody and dance.

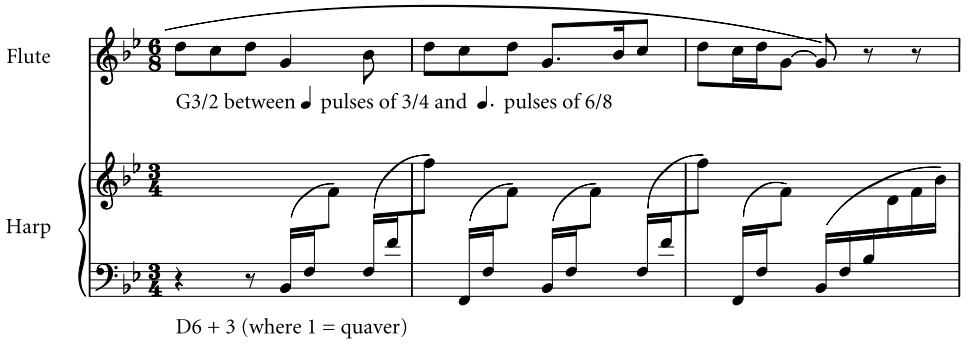
In Example 11 we see the three pulse levels that establish 6/8 metre in Lyceion's dance: dotted crotchets in the violins, semiquavers in the harp, and quavers in the flute melody. These pulses are brought into conflict on two levels: on a quaver level we hear direct dissonance between the dotted-quaver pulse of the flute melody and quaver pulse of the harp semiquavers, and indirect dissonance between the dotted quavers and quavers of the flute melody; on a crotchet level, a dotted-crotchet pulse is juxtaposed against a crotchet pulse to create indirect dissonance. Together, these conflicts project a 'double hemiola' contained within a four-bar hypermeter – grouped into two bars of 6/8 followed by two in 3/4 – that collapses as Lyceion drops her first veil.[54]

54 The term 'double hemiola', referring to simultaneous G3/2 dissonances at two distinct levels of the metric hierarchy, is from Cohn, 'Hypermetric Conflicts', 13.

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Example 12 Displacement dissonance at Fig. 58^{+2}.



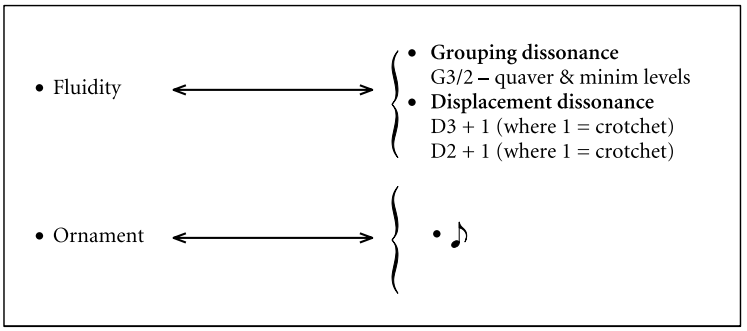
Example 13 Displacement and grouping dissonance at Fig. $58^{+2–4}$.

When Lyceion resumes her dance, indignant at Daphnis's attempts to cover her shoulders with the veil, she becomes increasingly daring.[55] Her movements are now more fluid (as implied by the markings *très libre* and *plus langoureuse*) and as a result the metre is more dissonant. In a context of *tempo rubato*, the indirect dissonance between quavers now becomes a *direct* dissonance (Fig. $58^{+1–2,\ +5–6}$). Equally destabilizing is the displacement dissonance of the cellos and basses, which functions dually in 6/8 and 3/4 throughout this passage (D3 + 1 (where 1 = quaver) in 6/8, and D2 + 1 (where 1 = quaver) in 3/4, Example 12). The harps intensify this metric instability by projecting both displacement and grouping dissonance, as shown in Example 13. Recurring conflicts between 6/8 and 3/4 come to a head at Fig. 59, where incessant motivic repetition articulates 3/4 before Lyceion drops another veil (Fig. $59^{+5–6}$). This time Daphnis collects her veil in a clear 3/4 grouping that marks Lyceion's failure and implies his allegiance to Chloé (her melody, heard first at Fig. 29, is also in 3/4).

Ravel's sublimation of desire – Daphnis's for Chloé and Lyceion's for Daphnis – is not the innocuous transformation that he suggests. For in these two 'arabesques of action', elaborate

55 At Fig. $57^{+9–10}$ Ravel's score indicates: 'Daphnis le ramasse et le lui repose sur les épaules. Ironique, elle reprend sa danse.'

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Example 14 A CIN that shows the rhythmic and metric features of Chloé's dance.

motifs that inhabit the centre (rather than the periphery) of our aural experience are suffused with meaning and intent. As a privileged component of the musical texture, ornament centralizes latent expression while exerting a degree of control over musical processes such as metre. In Lyceion's dance, for instance, the sudden appearance of short rhythmic values obscures a clear metric articulation in order to focus our attention on ornament and its evocation of her role as temptress. Ravel's association of rhythmic complexity with *femme fatale* becomes even clearer when we place Lyceion's glamorous motif and Chloé's simple melody side by side.

Chloé's *Danse suppliante*

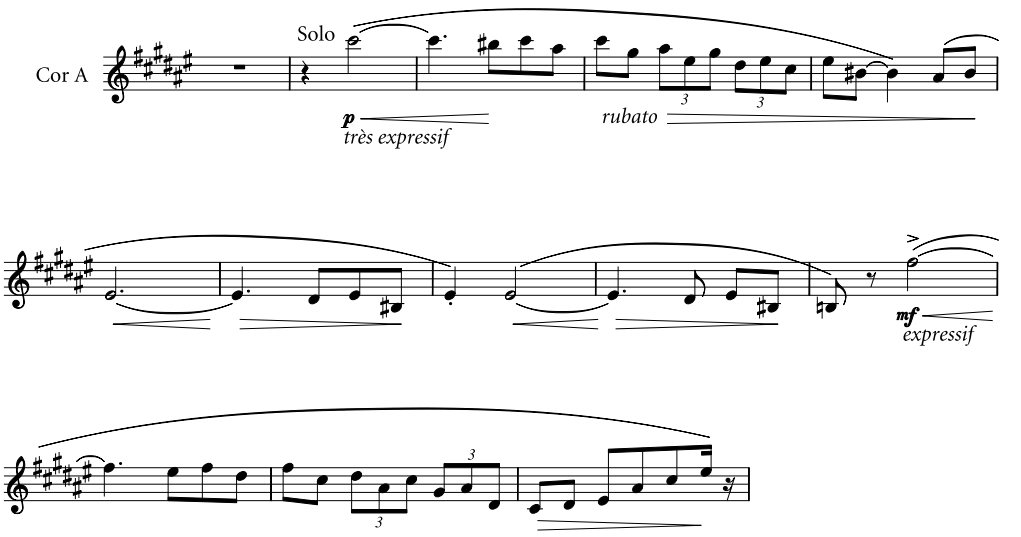
Ravel's stylized treatment of ornament opposes the immoral *femme fatale* with the chaste *femme timide*. Brilliant, enticing displays that tempt the ear are associated with the dangerously alluring Lyceion. In contrast, an unadorned, fluid melody that bares its basic outlines is associated with the young and naive Chloé. To achieve their goals both women require the assistance of a man – Lyceion of Daphnis and Chloé of Bryaxis – although they solicit this in different ways: Lyceion tries her charms and Chloé tries to escape.

Chloé is forced to dance for her captors. Her plain, descending melody reflects her torment while denoting, through rhythmic simplicity, her lack of agency (Fig. 133^{+5}).[56] Unlike Lyceion, Chloé acts under command; she does not control, nor does she relish her performance. Rather, the rhythmic ostinato that accompanies her wilting melody reminds us that she is trapped and powerless to escape. By removing excess ornament from Chloé's melody, Ravel creates an 'arabesque of feeling' that suspends narrative development to focus on her plea. The rhythmic and metric characteristics of Chloé's music are shown in Example 14.

Example 15 shows how Chloé's melody privileges suppleness over virtuosity: her melody alternates between descending and ascending motivic patterns; rhythmic fluidity is suggested in the ease of transition between duple and triple quavers (indirect dissonance, G3/2); tied notes and delayed agogic emphasis eliminate metric stress of the first beat (displacement dissonance, D3 + 2 (where 1 = crotchet) and D3 + 1 (where 1 = crotchet), respectively); and

56 Jankélévitch reminds us that the 'chute aérienne' of the *arabesque descendante* serves as a topos for sensations of 'wilting, senescence, and decline'; see *Debussy et le mystère*, 89–91.

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Example 15 Chloé's melody at Figs 133^{+4}–134^{+4}.

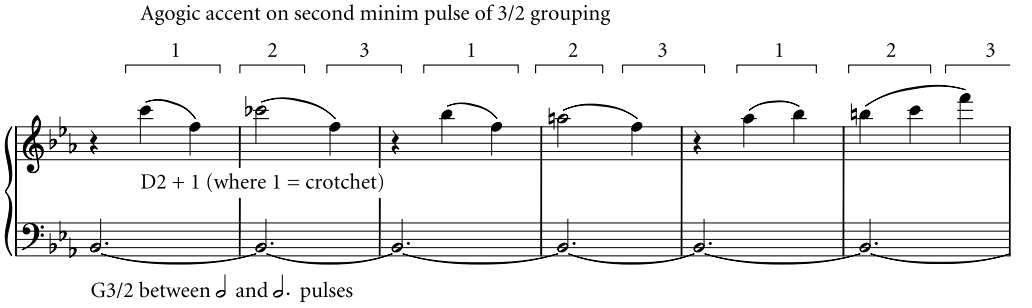
long melodies are placed in an irregular metric context that oscillates between two tempi, *au mouvement* and *ralenti*. Most of all, it is this fluctuation that renders Chloé's melody fluid: the first tempo lends a sense of urgency to the triplet quavers, while the second tempo lends a sense of expansion to the following quavers (Fig. $133^{+7–8}$). An evenly spaced periodic pulse is never established, and we are left hovering somewhere between Chloé's tumbling melody and her sighing accompaniment.

We have seen how Ravel uses unstable metric contexts to intensify a character's emotional state. Although Chloé's episode is no exception to this, his leitmotivic treatment of metric dissonance provides an additional commentary on her ordeal. Examples 16a and 16b demonstrate how Ravel extracts the metric irregularities of Chloé's melody at Fig. 29 and transforms them in the accompaniment to her dance at Fig. 133. Example 16a shows the metric instabilities of Chloé's melody: grouping dissonance (G3/2) and displacement dissonance (D2 + 1 (where 1 = crotchet)), which project an uneven articulation of 3/2 metre by aligning the second beat with the downbeat. Like Daphnis, Chloé's sensitive character is depicted through metric instability. It is thus significant that these instabilities resurface at a moment of dramatic tension, and that their transformation, as heightened by tumbling melodies and fluctuating tempi, highlights her distress.

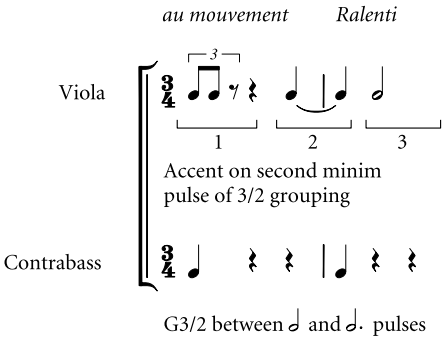
In Example 16b we see that the G3/2 of Fig. 29 is echoed at Fig. 133 by the dotted-minim pulse of the bass pizzicato and cor anglais melody, and the minim pulse of the remaining strings. We also see a recurrence of the displaced agogic emphasis in 3/2: the suspended second minim pulse, along with the tempo indication *au mouvement* and accompanying crescendo, creates a sense of forward momentum towards the agogically accented second bar. As in Fig. 29, then, an uneven grouping of 3/2 metre is heard where downbeat emphasis is shifted to the second minim pulse. Even as we adapt to the periodicity of this irregular metric pattern, it is experienced as a form of *regular irregularity* that is constantly destabilized

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a. Metric dissonance in Chloé's melody at Fig. 29$^{+4–9}$.



b. Chloé's metric dissonance of Fig. 29 permeates the accompaniment at Fig. 133.



Example 16 Metric irregularities in Chloé's melody and later transformation in the accompaniment to her dance.

by Chloé's fluid arabesques.[57] Much like Chloé, this metric formulation borders on the brink of collapse.

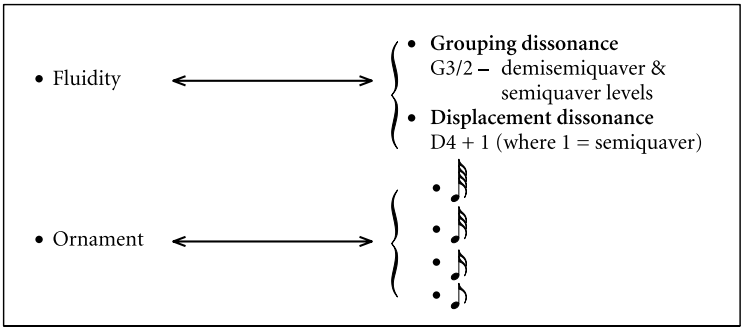
'Pan's' *Air mélancolique*

The juxtaposition of Lyceion's extrovert flourishes against Chloé's introspective melodies clarifies Ravel's dual conception of arabesque. My final example reinforces this dichotomy, even though Chloé is a key participant in this episode. In this 'arabesque of action' Chloé appears not as herself but as Syrinx, Pan's sexually harassed victim (Fig. 172). As a subservient female, 'Syrinx' dances to the tune of someone's pipe. In this instance it is Daphnis who, in the role of Pan, channels his sexual longing for Chloé into a long and convoluted flute melody (Fig. 176^{+3}).

This scene is remarkable for its narrative layering, which blurs the overlapping motives of love and desire through the use of leitmotif. For example, the intervallic leaps in 'Pan's'

57 Justin London, in 'Some Examples of Complex Metres', shows that listeners can entrain to metres where the beat level of the metric hierarchy consists of a non-isochronous pattern. Here, it is possible that the regular repetition of irregular patterns on higher metric levels (as in Chloé's dance) also allows the listener to adapt to and expect the continuation of these relationships.

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Example 17 A CIN that shows the rhythmic and metric features of 'Pan's' *air mélancolique*.

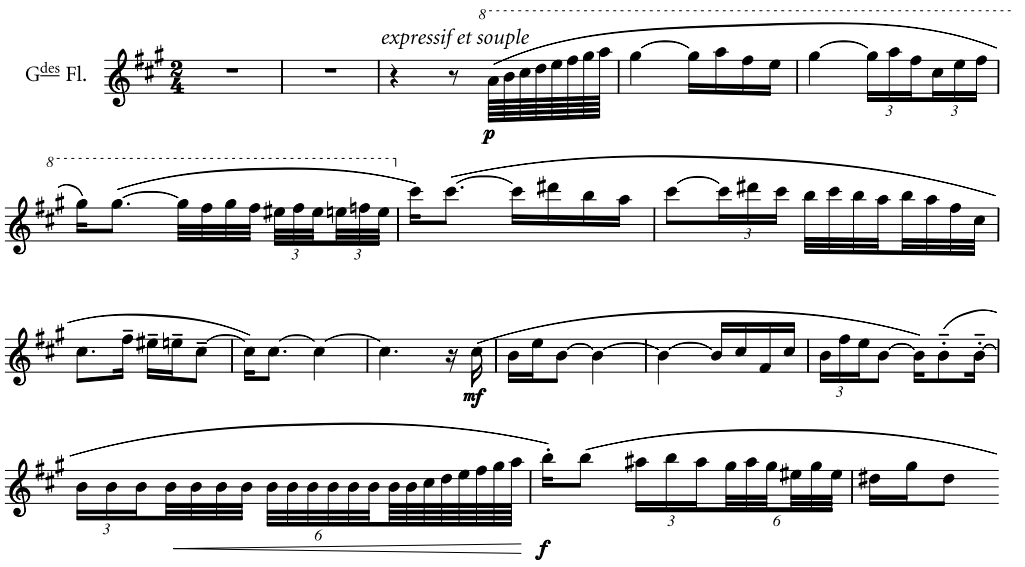
declaration of love (Fig. 173) contain a residue of Daphnis's flourishes, especially given their tendency to dissipate the metre. This association becomes more insistent at Fig. 174^{+2}, where 'Syrinx's' attempts to distance herself from 'Pan' (conveyed tellingly by a drooping melody on the oboe) are met by an ascending flourish complete with a fermata. This gesture returns us to Daphnis's *Danse légère* and aligns his uncontrollable longing for Chloé with 'Pan's' for 'Syrinx'.[58] In the following bars Ravel replaces the reference to Daphnis's dance with a leitmotif that relates Chloé to her dramatic antithesis; at Fig. 174^{+4}, as 'Syrinx' dives into the rose bushes, two oboes recall the playful intricacy of Lyceion's motifs. Perhaps 'Syrinx' is enjoying the chase after all.

A rhythmic ostinato forms a static accompaniment for the flurry of short values that pervade 'Pan's' plaintive melody. As the mappings in Example 17 imply, 'Pan's' *air mélancolique* shares much with Debussy's Faun. Ravel sublimates 'Pan's' erotic desires into an excessively ornate melody where abrupt shifts between ornament and sustained pitches mirror his emotional instability (see Example 18). The sudden appearance of short values suggests 'Pan's' irrepressible lust, while increasingly intricate motifs on the second beat (from semiquavers, triplet semiquavers, duple demisemiquavers, to triplet demisemiquavers) 'expand' the metre to evoke Pan's timeless divinity. Indirect dissonance (between duple and triplet demisemiquavers and semiquavers), displacement dissonance (D4 + 1, where 1 = semiquaver), and frequent ties across the bar line converge in Ravel's supple evocation of 'Pan's' ardent longing.

Although ties become more prominent in the second phrase (Fig. 177), rising instability may be attributed to Ravel's increasing emphasis on ornament; the first beat now undergoes rhythmic 'expansion', which accumulates in the sudden profusion of semiquavers, demisemiquavers, and hemidemisemiquavers at Fig. 177^{+5} (see Example 18). This brilliant flourish eventually recedes into a return of the opening melody at Fig. 178. But just as we anticipate melodic closure, 'Pan' is unable to hold back; a sudden influx of trills and flourishes in the flute halts metric periodicity at Fig. 179 before he proceeds headlong into the rapid semiquavers of the *vif* (Fig. 180).

58 At Fig. 174^{+2} the score indicates: 'Le dieu devient plus pressant.'

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Example 18 'Pan's' *air mélancolique*, Figs 176–77^{+7}.

This swift change of pace recalls the coda from Daphnis's *Danse légère*, where semiquaver scales evoked his uncontrollable longing for Chloé; once again, leitmotifs betray the illusion of Daphnis and Chloé's 'performance'. Here, duple semiquavers are juxtaposed against septuplet semiquavers, whose frenzy accumulates towards Fig. 184, where a sudden relaxation of the tempo evokes 'Syrinx's' first signs of distress (or perhaps, Chloé's fatigue). Gradually, 'Syrinx' regains her strength at Fig. 185 (marked *animez un peu*) and the triplet quavers become more animated to form semiquavers and finally septuplet semiquavers as 'Pan' becomes more agitated in his craving for her. Finally, at Fig. 187, 'Pan's' forceful desire breaks the representational frame as metric collapse indicates Chloé falling into the arms of Daphnis.[59]

Conclusion

In each instance of arabesque melody that I have explored, distinct rhythmic profiles and metric attributes come together to depict characters, their underlying motives and emotional states. By correlating rhythmic virtuosity with 'arabesques of action', and rhythmic simplicity with 'arabesques of feeling', Ravel translates into music long-held aesthetic values, drawing on decorative complexity to represent characters driven by feelings of desire and sexual longing, and ornamental simplicity to denote Chloé's virtuous naivety. Ravel's conception parallels contemporaneous expressions of arabesque in the visual arts – exemplified principally by the work of *Les Nabis* and *Les Fauves* – but also suggests a link to this ornament's previous incarnation in eighteenth-century painting.[60] While pastoral

59 At Fig. 187 the score indicates: 'Chloé tombe dans les bras de Daphnis.'

60 As Ravel confessed in his autobiographical sketch, 'my intention in writing it [*Daphnis*] was to compose a vast

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landscapes by Fragonard, Boucher, or Watteau might have acquired a sonic presence in Ravel's score, we have seen that they are not the only visual stimuli to have shaped Ravel's music-dramatic evocation. Through the eyes of the West, Ravel continued to regard the ancient arabesque as a means to evoke the unmediated expression of feeling and sensuality in characters that remain close to nature. In his hands arabesque was able to signify, once again, a realm of exotic and erotic fantasy.

Despite these observations, it is significant that ever since the ballet's inception Ravel's ornamental approach has continued to pose interpretative challenges for his listeners and critics. One explanation for why the role of ornament has been downplayed in *Daphnis* might be the ballet's long gestation; the work's completion date of 1912 indicates that it lagged behind the heyday of art nouveau. This may be a surprising reminder, given the extent to which this decorative movement shaped the most modern aspects of the ballet, and also given the folkloristic conception of ornament in subsequent *Ballets russes* programmes, one of which featured Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* (1913).[61] Alternatively, perhaps the absence of ornament in *Daphnis* reception may be attributed to our own methodological biases towards musical *structure*, which have meant that ornament is instinctively discounted from analytical and hermeneutic processes. Our actions reflect a long tradition of cultural grooming that regards peripheral ornament, and its association with marginalized themes, as a supplement to something more significant. It is only when ornament breaks free from the margins to 'invade the text', as Rae Gordon explains, that we are confronted by feelings, ideas, and objects deliberately censured from the civilized domain.[62] However we may choose to rationalize the deficiency of ornament in discussions on *Daphnis*, it is clear that Ravel's visually inspired conception attracted the ballet's first critics as much as it attracts us. Yet we have made little progress towards defining a vocabulary and sensitive mode of analysis for engaging with these visual-acoustic phenomena. My essay takes a step in this direction, offering the abundance of detail as a new perspective from which to approach a ballet that often makes its way into the concert hall but rarely into musical discourse.

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musical fresco, less concerned with archaism than with fidelity to the Greece of my dreams which is similar, rather willingly, to that imagined and depicted by French artists at the end of the eighteenth century'; see Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader*, 31. See also Orenstein, ed., *Maurice Ravel: Lettres, écrits, entretiens*, 45–6. It is possible that Ravel may have had landscape paintings such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Return of the Drove* (c. 1765) or Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg's *Pastoral Landscape* (1763) in mind. Simon Morrison suggests that 'Ravel was probably referring to the Daphnis and Chloe portrait and *Loves of the Gods* tapestries by François Boucher (1703–70), and perhaps the rustic scenes by Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), though the latter concerned Roman rather than Greek deities' ('The Origins of *Daphnis et Chloé*', 56).

61 The date of Ravel's commencement of this project has been the subject of much debate. In his 'Autobiographical Sketch' Ravel states that *Daphnis* was sketched in 1907. His biographer Roland-Manuel doubts this date, suggesting that Ravel began work in 1909 when the *Ballets russes* came to Paris. Serge Lifar also suggests that Ravel began sketching by 1907, a year after he first met Diaghilev. See 'Autobiographical Sketch by Maurice Ravel', in Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader*, 31; and Lifar, 'Maurice Ravel et le ballet', 75.

62 In making this observation I am reminded of Gordon's evaluation of ornament in *fin-de-siècle* French literature. She writes, 'the ornamental quality of their literary texts [. . .] constitute[s] what is most radically innovative in their writing; it lies at the crux of their modernity' (*Ornament, Fantasy and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature*, 4–6).

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