AN ANALYSIS FOR PERFORMANCE OF TROIS BALLADES DE
FRANÇOIS VILLON, BY CLAUDE DEBUSSY

THESIS

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by

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The primary consideration of this study is to help the vocalist to prepare *Trois Ballades de François Villon* for performance. It is the aim of this study not only to help the vocalist, but also help the accompanist to know the various problems found by the performers of this song cycle.

The study contains biographical information on the French poet, François Villon, and an analysis of his poetic style. The composer of the music, Claude Debussy, is treated in the same manner. His song style is traced through 1910, the date of *Trois Ballades de François Villon*, by choosing selected songs and pointing out the various stylistic characteristics of his music.

Each song in the cycle is analyzed separately from the standpoint of harmony, rhythm, accompaniment, vocal line, and overall musical style. The poetry of each song is also examined in relation to the music.

The thesis concludes with a look at the entire cycle. The unifying elements in both the text and the music
are discussed. Each of the songs has a poetic and musical refrain that not only unifies the individual song, but relates it to the entire cycle. The analysis also reveals characteristics of style in both the poetry and the music that contribute to the unity of the work. From this analysis recommendations are made to the performer to effect a satisfactory interpretation of the song cycle.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of this study to relate to the performer the various musical and vocal considerations in *Trois Ballades de François Villon* by Claude Debussy. This discussion will include a brief study of Debussy's song style prior to the composition of *Trois Ballades de François Villon*, 1910. Several songs that point out the musical characteristics of Debussy's song style will be used to trace his development. A brief resume of biographical information is also included to point out what, if any, effect his environment might have had on his career.

The life and style of the French poet, François Villon, will also be studied to see if his daily life had any direct effect upon his poetic style. This will also help determine the relationship between the composer and poet although there is a span of many years between the two men.

The study of the cycle will consist of a musical analysis pointed to the performance of this piece. The harmony, form, melody, rhythm, and accompaniment will be
studied in an effort to help the singer prepare this song cycle for performance.

Resume of Biography and Style of François Villon

There has been much speculation concerning the French poet, François Villon. It was only from the police records of the time that any pertinent facts concerning his life were found. He was born in Paris in 1431. His given name was François de Montcorbier or François des Loges.1 The circumstances surrounding his childhood cannot be traced. France was in a general state of turmoil. In 1431, Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. The country was also confronted with a great famine and a serious epidemic of smallpox that is said to have killed fifty-thousand people, mostly children.2

At age five he was accepted as a ward of Master Guillaume Villon, chaplain at Saint-Benoit-le-Bétourné in Paris.3 As was the custom of the day, François took the last name of his benefactor. He was still living with Guillaume Villon while a student at the university. In 1449, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree, and in 1452, his

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2 Ibid., p. xviii.
Master of Arts. According to Anaker, Villon's university days were full of drinking, brawling, and rioting.  

Villon's first literary work was probably Le Pet au Diable. This prose novel was written as the aftermath of one of the student pranks in which Villon was involved. The students stole a rock from a certain Mademoiselle de Breijeres and took it to the university. A great scandal was created when the police invaded the traditional privacy of the university to regain le pet au diable for Mademoiselle de Breijeres. There were many copies of the novel, but none are extant. 

Villon's experience with the police is a matter of record. His first serious crime was committed in 1455 when he was charged with the murder of a priest at Saint-Benoit. Villon was involved in a fight with a priest named Charmoye which Charmoye provoked, and in the ensuing fight the priest was left dead. The dispute seemed to have been centered around a young woman. This seems most natural because Villon's life was centered around women, wine, and thieves. This is seen in his poetic references to them throughout his works. In 1456, a full pardon was granted to Villon.

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5 Ibid., p. 28.
In that same year Villon's first major work, *Le Lais*, was written. Prior to this work all of his poetry had been short stanzas on various subjects. Here Villon's style, though not as refined as in *Le Testament*, is well established. There are forty stanzas of eight lines each, using a great deal of simile. For example, in lines 51-54 Villon says, "which makes my throat more parched/than that of any herring from Boulogne."\(^7\) Another example is from line 127: "ten hogheads of wine as white as chalk."\(^8\)

He also shows in this first major work one of the most important characteristics of his poetry: the use of common, everyday words. History tells of the average poet of Villon's time as being a court poet. Courtly language was not foreign to Villon but, for the most part, he was interested in conveying his thought to the common people. This desire to relate to the common man led him toward a more progressive style. Villon seemed to be more sensitive to the people with whom he lived, rather than the hierarchy, who generally ignored the common people.

Villon was again in trouble with the law at Christmas, 1456, when he and four local tavern characters robbed the Collège de Navarre. It was after this theft that Villon


left Paris and, for obvious reasons, his exact location was not known.

The summer of 1460 finds Villon at the court of Charles d'Orléans. Charles was a very well known poet of the day and liked to surround himself with other poets to pass away the time. He played a game in which he would give the poets the theme of the first line and the refrain and let them fill in the rest. If the poem met with his approval, he would enter it into his own book of poetry. Villon succeeded in writing one poem Charles liked and this is found in his album under the title "Ballade Villon."9

It is difficult to see how these two men could be artistically compatible. Charles d'Orléans was probably one of the last truly medieval poets. His poems were pretty, and the language was proper and elegant. On the other hand, Villon, by this time, had spent many months in various jails, and his style was progressing farther and farther from that of Charles. Nevertheless, Villon and Charles seemed to have developed an amicable relationship for two men of such different backgrounds and artistic aims.

During the summer of 1461, Villon was a prisoner at the castle of Meung by Thibaut d'Aussigny, Bishop of Orléans.10

9 Anaker, François Villon, p. 31.
It is not sure what crime Villon had committed. His treatment at this prison was cruel, and after weeks of eating molded bread and drinking stale water, his health was broken. His release was obtained by a stroke of luck on October 2, 1461, when Louis XI, the new king, passed through Meung and all prisoners were released. This was the medieval custom when a King first visited a city.11

Villon, his health broken, went to the outskirts of Paris and spent the winter writing his masterpiece, Le Testament. The three ballades set by Debussy are from this work. Le Testament consists of 186 stanzas in which he incorporates 16 ballades, 1 chanson, 2 rondeaus, and two poems in the same type of stanzas as Le Lais, but completely distinct from it.12

Le Testament is the culmination of his short life. In 186 stanzas, Villon recalls his life and paints a vivid picture of medieval times in which he lived. He was not forced into any specific poetic style. His style, as his life, was not limited by restrictions. While clarity was an important factor of his style, he was not bound by medieval tradition.

12 Anaker, François Villon, p. 44.
In his life Villon had known many women and this is reflected in his poetry. Almost every stanza refers to women. In *Le Testament*, he is bitter with all women except his mother. The ballade, "La Grosse Margot," probably tells the story of Villon's life better than any other. In "La Grosse Margot," Villon tells of his life in a brothel. He describes his daily encounters with the people who frequent this establishment. He tells of living with a prostitute and vividly describes the arguments they have. Villon is also quite explicit concerning the periods of reconciliation between the two lovers. Lines 1624-1627 provide an accurate summation of Villon's life:

Bad rat, bad cat.
We both love filth, and filth pursues us;
We flee from honor, honor flees from us
in this brothel where we ply our trade.13

After Villon wrote *Le Testament*, there were several other miscellaneous poems. He continued his vagabond life, and was finally banished from Paris in 1463. At the age of thirty-two, Villon disappeared, never to be heard from again.

Geoffroy Atkinson says of Villon:

He was a poet, the first poet in the history of French letters who stated what it means to be alive and yet knows that we must die, what it is to see beauty and to know that beauty perishes, what it means in life to yearn for certainty and to find how little there is of which we can be sure.14

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Biographical Background of Claude Debussy, 
and Brief Resume of the Development of 
his Song Style

Claude Achille Debussy, "musician français," was born on August 22, 1862, at Saint Germain-en-Laye. The public records of the day indicate Debussy's ancestors were humble folk of French stock; artisans, workmen, or small farmers. His parents were not successful in their business efforts. Although Debussy did not attend school, his mother taught him all she knew about reading and writing. His father had high aspirations for his youngest son. As a boy, Debussy's early ambitions centered around his father's dreams. His father wanted him to be a sailor and Debussy was eager to please his father.

Debussy was cared for in his younger years by a paternal aunt. It was his aunt who made arrangements for his first piano lessons. In 1871, at the age of nine, Debussy attracted the attention of Madame Mante de Fleurville, a former pupil of Chopin. Mme. de Fleurville accepted Debussy as a pupil, and the next eleven years were spent under her tutelage.

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In October, 1873, Debussy auditioned in Paris for the Conservatoire. He was nervous, and it is said that he kept calm by reading a popular comic strip of the day, Les deux enfants. Debussy's audition was a success, and he was accepted. Debussy's studies at the conservatory were rather erratic. At times he would not prepare his piano lessons in favor of practicing something in which he was interested. One week was spent reducing the Haydn quartets to piano score rather than practicing his Bach F minor prelude or his Alkan etude.

Debussy's summers were spent as the household accompanist of the wealthy Madame von Meck, who also sponsored the great composer, Tchaikovsky. While Madame von Meck's pianist, Debussy toured with her. They visited Florence, Venice, Vienna, and Moscow. Debussy's contact with Russian culture was somewhat limited. He brought back an old opera score of Rimsky-Korsakov and a few songs of Borodin. He also heard the music of the gypsies at some of Moscow's cabarets. This was a definite influence on his later style because it gave him his first exposure to a free compositional style.

18 Ibid., p. 23.
Debussy's music is characterized by a harmonic style that is flexible and varied. The harmonies that he uses fit perfectly the expressive purpose desired. Debussy's harmonies, more than any one single factor, show the true greatness of this composer. Debussy used the chord of the third to a great extent. The rich ninths, the elevenths or thirteenth, are a Debussy trademark. But on the other hand, one can find throughout Debussy's work the harmonies built in fourths or fifths. Debussy also favored block chords of the ninth, eleventh, built in fourths and fifths moving endlessly in parallel motion. He also made use of unresolved harmonies. Many times the listener expects to find relief in resolution only to hear the unresolved chord fade out--never to find its resolution.

Debussy also made use of the little-used chords, II, III, and VI. One of his favorite devices is the chord with the added tone. One cannot look far into Debussy without finding the interval of the second. These added tones, and the constant use of the second, are most characteristic of Debussy's style. The musical world had felt a breaking away from tradition for some time. Wagner had broken the bonds of classical harmony. Debussy took what Wagner had strived for and expanded these new harmonic ideas into his own style.
Debussy is at his best as a melodist. Debussy's melodies are never dull. There is something of interest going on at all times. The melodic skips of a seventh or a ninth, heretofore not used frequently, are found often in Debussy's melodies. He also used the accompaniment to enhance this melody. He wove the melody around the accompaniment. At times his melodies would stand alone just when the listener expected the opposite. Debussy used his ever-changing melodies to great advantage. He molded free melody that always holds the interest of the listener.

Another trait of Debussy that relates to his music is that of strong rhythmic feelings. Debussy used the short staccatto, and long sustained rhythms in every type of combinations. He always did the unexpected; he never relied upon usual rhythmic patterns. He also used the rest to great advantage, often at the most dramatic moments of his music. He also used polyrhythms: two against three, four against five, and various other combinations.

Debussy modulated often in his music, to remote as well as closely related keys. The most frequent modulations are to keys a major third, or major or minor second removed. It has been said that Wagner modulated every bar, but that Debussy modulated every chord.  

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One of Debussy's first published songs was "Nuit d'étoiles," written around 1876. In this composition, Debussy uses block chords effectively. The rolled chords give the effect of the guitar, in keeping with the text. Debussy's use of modulation is abundant throughout the song. He also introduces the unresolved seventh, which becomes one of Debussy's strong harmonic traits.

"Mandoline," written around 1880, shows how effectively Debussy uses his skill at the keyboard to achieve the desired results. The accompaniment of this piece is representative of Debussy's style at this time. This is one song of many that illustrate the impressionistic style of the composer. The piano reminds the listener of men plucking and strumming instruments. There are chords built in open fourths and fifths, modulating frequently supplying a needed freshness. He also employs a pedal point in one tonality while he has broken chords and arpeggios in another tonality.

In 1884, Debussy was awarded the Prix de Rome for his dramatic cantata, L'Enfant Prodigue, based on a poem by Eduard Gurnand. Debussy did not enjoy his study in Rome, and as a result, was not productive as a composer during this period. His dislike for Rome and his fellow artists
caused him to leave a year earlier than the original three years which the Prix designated. Debussy never tired of his criticism of the Prix de Rome. It was, he held, an absurd institution which diverted laureates from the straight artistic path and put them on a level with prize cattle.21

After his return to Paris Debussy began composition of the song cycle, Ariettes oublies. Although it was completed in 1888, it was not published until 1903. "Chevaux de bois," a song from this cycle, shows Debussy's ability to paint a picture in song. In this song, Debussy's strong foundation in rhythm is seen. The rapid rhythmic figures suggest the whirling of the merry-go-round. He uses blocks of three and seven notes throughout the song. Polyrhythms, three against four and two against three, are also used. Debussy combines these rhythmic patterns with expanding, changing harmonies, and modal writing, yet no identifiable theme emerges nor is there any repetition.

The next years were spent in travel, including two trips to Bayreuth. He had grown tired, however, of the musical imitators of Wagner and after his last trip to Bayreuth, he was completely weaned of the Wagnerian influences. A great admirer of impressionistic painting and the literary

style of the time, he also widened his musical horizons by attending the **Exposition Universelle** in Paris in 1889. There he heard music from all over the world. The Javanese orchestras and Russian gypsy music were a great influence upon him in later years, influencing his use of harmonic colorings, whole-tone, and other exotic scales. He also was profoundly influenced at this time by Mussorgsky. He read through **Boris Godounov** and was strengthened in his belief of daring harmonies, and the complete simplicity exhibited by Mussorgsky in this work.

In 1892 Debussy drew from the works of Materlinck the text of his music drama, **Pelléas et Mélisande**. Debussy found the play in a Paris book stall and secured full rights from the author to adapt the text to his purposes. Debussy worked for ten years on this project, and in 1902, it was produced for the first time. This production, although highly controversial, brought Debussy to the forefront of the musical world. Carraud's estimate of **Pelléas et Mélisande** is perhaps the most descriptive:

In order to satisfy the noblest and most courageous of artistic ideals, M. Debussy has created a music of his own. His work overflows with it, everything in it is music. The words form a framework which sustains but never dominates. Significant expression seems to be the sole arm; yet, as a matter of fact, it remains a means. The music exists for the sake of its own beauty, its own delight.
M. Debussy takes his place, more definitely even than Wagner, amongst the sensualists in music of whom Mozart was the greatest.22

Debussy was always looking for some way to finance his high living standards. He traveled throughout many countries as conductor-composer, all the time adding to his fame. In 1904, he was invited to the home of a friend to attend a musicale. The evening began with a string quartet, and was followed by La bonne chanson by Gabriel Fauré. Debussy met for the first time Mme. Sigismond Bardac, who was the performer of La bonne chanson.23 When introduced to her, she said, "At the hour of my death, monsieur, I want to hear the slow movement of your string quartet."24 This began a new phase in the life of Debussy. He could do nothing without the thought of Mme. Bardac always being uppermost in his mind. When he brought her, fresh off the press, a copy of Fêtes galantes, they followed their impulse and left the city to be free to share their new love.

The remainder of his life was spent in litigations concerning his first wife, Lily. He also made most of his friends angry by leaving Lily for Mme. Bardac. The one great

22Vallas, Debussy Man and Artist, p. 131.
23Dumesnil, Claude Debussy, Master of Dreams, p. 235.
24Ibid.
source of joy from this union was the birth of a daughter, Chou-Chou. Debussy loved her very much and it is said that Chou-Chou looked much like her father. She was a great source of happiness and he composed The Children's Corner piano suite for her.

Although Debussy was much influenced by contemporary poetry, he had a great respect for France's literary past, especially the medieval masters. In 1908, he published Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans, and in May, 1910, he delved still more deeply into the poetical past of France. From the famous fifteenth century poet, Francois Villon, came Trois Ballades de François Villon. They exist in two forms: the original version, with piano accompaniment, and an orchestral version. Debussy conducted the first performance with the baritone, Clarke, taking the place of Jean Lever who was taken ill.25 Debussy took great pains to wed the old poet's words to his melodies. Debussy wrote:

True verse has rhythm of its own which is, if anything, a hindrance to us. For instance, I recently set to music—I don't know why—three ballades of Villon . . . yes, I do know why. It was because I for a long time wanted to do so. Well, it is very difficult to follow; to mold rhythm satisfactorily whilst keeping to one's own inspiration.26

25 Vallas, Debussy Man and Artist, p. 212.
26 Vallas, The Theories of Claude Debussy, p. 63.
Debussy comes to the conclusion that it would be easier for the composer to write down in rhythmic prose, rather than verse, the texts he wishes to use.

Debussy's last years were not happy ones. The never ending concern of German invasion, and ill health kept him in deep depression. As has been stated, Debussy was concerned, above all else, about his beloved France. The Germans were drawing near to Paris, and this was a great source of concern to Debussy. He had begun a new work, "Ode à la France," which was never finished. This is the only work he started that dealt solely with his deep patriotic feelings. The death of Debussy came on March 25, 1918, during the last German offensive when the military situation of France was considered desperate by many.

He was buried at the Père-Lachaise cemetery on March 28, 1918, the eve of Good Friday. There were no elaborate funeral preparations, just a small processional across Paris while bombs were falling. The news of his death did not go unnoticed even though the world was in a state of turmoil. The newspapers of the allied and neutral countries hailed Debussy as a great artist.

Leroux gives the following portrait of Debussy:

Those who only knew him superficially might have thought him a fantastic, whimsical creature. But on the contrary, he was very strong-willed, and he knew
his own mind. He was capable of the most faithful and devoted friendships, was very sensitive and emotional, gay and full of verse. He was very extravagant, and could rarely resist any desire or temptation. His moods were very changeable. He delighted in all that was refined, delicate, complicated and strange. What appealed to him most of all was the expression of intimate feelings.

27 Vallas, Debussy Man and Artist, p. 39.
CHAPTER II

A MUSICAL POETIC ANALYSIS OF TROIS BALLADES DE
FRANÇOIS VILLON

Debussy's song cycle, Trois Ballades de François Villon, was composed in May, 1910. Of the two versions of these songs, the original version, with piano accompaniment and one with orchestral accompaniment, the orchestral version appears to have remained unpublished. No mention is made of an orchestral version of the cycle in the published edition
(Durand, 1910) or in any of the lists of Debussy's published works. The original version was first performed on February 5, 1911, with Paul de Lestang as the singer. The second version was performed on March 5, 1911 by a baritone identified as Clarke. Debussy conducted the orchestra at this performance.

The first song of the cycle is called "Ballade à s'amye" (Ballade to his love). The text and translation follow:

1 Claude Debussy, Trois Ballades de François Villon (Paris, 1910).


3 Ibid.
Faulse beaute, qui tant me couste, chier,
Rude en effect, hypocrite doulceur,
Amour dure plus que fer à maschier:
Nommer que puis de ma desfacon seur,
Cherme felon, la mort d'ung povre cuer,
Orgueil mussie, qui gens met au mourir,
Yeulx sans pitié, ne veult Droit de Rigueur,
Sans empirer, ung povre secourir?

Mieulx m'eust valu avoir esté sarchier
Ailleurs secours; c'eust esté mon onneur:
Riens ne m'eust sceulors de ce fait hachier.
Trotter m'en fault en fuyte et deshonneur.
Haro, haro, le grant et le mineur!
Et quesse cy? Mourray sans coup ferir,
Ou Pitié veult, selon ceste teneur,
Sans empirer, ung povre secourir.

Ung temps viendra, qui fera dessechier,
Jaunir, flestrir, vostre espanye fleur;
Je men risse,
Lors mais nennil, ce seroit donc foleur.
Viel je seray; vous, laide, sans couleur.
Or, beuvez fort, tant que ru peut courir.
Ne donnez pas à tous ceste doulere,
Sans empirer, ung povre secourir.

ENVIOI

Prince amoureux, des amans le greigneur,
Vostre mal gré ne vouldroye encourir,
Mais tout franc cuer doit, par Nostre Seigneur,
Sans empirer, ung povre secourir.

False beauty costing me so much,
Rude, indeed, of hypocrites so sweet,
Love, more hard to chew than iron,
I call you, sister of my despair,
Criminal charms, the death of my poor heart.
Hidden pride that slay men.
Eyes without pity! Would the law
Without making it worse, come to the aid of a poor man?

Better to cry somewhere else for help that
Would make me more happy.
Nothing could keep me from acting as I have,
Now I must run in dishonor.
I cry! The great and small!
What is this? Shall I die without revenge?
Or will pity, according my fate
Without making it worse, come to the aid of a poor man?

A time will come when you will see
Your full-blown flower discolor and wither.
Then I shall laugh, if I can still walk.
But alas! No, not at all. That would be foolish.
I shall be old, you ugly and without color.
But drink deep, as long as the stream runs.
Do not give to everyone this pain.
Without making it worse, come to the aid of a poor man.

**ENVOI**

Amorous Prince. King (Lord) of all lovers.
I would not want to encounter your rath.
But every free heart, by Our Lord
Without making it worse, come to the aid of a poor man.

This ballade contains three eight-line stanzas and a
four-line **envoi** or "message." An **envoi** is addressed to a
patron of the poet, or a mythical person. The **envoi** is both
a dedication and a climax, and is usually richer in wording
and more stately in imagery than previous stanzas. The
**envoi** always takes the rhyme-scheme of the last half of the
preceeding stanza, and is half the length of the other
stanzas. The first stanza is a complaint against his
mistress' cruelty, ending with an appeal for justice. The
second stanza is much like the first, but the poet turns
inward speaking more of himself rather than of the woman
causing his misery. The mood of the third stanza is
changed somewhat in that the poet thinks about future

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revenge--a time when his mistress will be old, ugly, and withered. But in the middle of the stanza, the poet realizes that he too will be old; therefore, the idea of revenge is foolish. He ends the stanza by asking her to spare others from the fate he suffers. The envoi asks the "Prince of Lovers" to come to the aid of this poor man. The unifying line of the envoi is "Sans empirer, ung povre secourir." It appears at the last line of each stanza serving as the refrain and the unifying influence of the poem.

Debussy's treatment of this ballade clearly shows his ability to weld his music to the poetry of Villon. An examination of measure one reveals the most frequent pattern of the entire piece.

Fig. 1--Sadness Motive, "Ballade à s'amye"
This motive appears throughout the song in measures 1-7, 9-12, 14, 15, 22-24, 39, 40, 46-48. The descending intervals suggest a mood of sadness or despair. This motive of the descending second is stated in parallel thirds at times, as in measure one, or alone, as in measures four through seven. Debussy's use of this descending motive unifies the piece by the frequency of its use.

Another important unifying element of the first song is the recurrence of the minor third in the vocal line. The first entrance of the voice is that of a minor third. This characteristic melodic idea is found throughout the song, usually in ascending form. It also finds its way into the accompaniment. It is sometimes extended outlining a diminished triad or a diminished seventh chord. Debussy underscores the importance of the ascending minor thirds in measures nine and fifteen by repetition. Debussy uses this interval in the accompaniment also. The result is a diminished triad, stated as a block chord or an arpeggio. While the minor third is a guiding element, Debussy is not a composer that lets his melodic line become stale. He changes the melodic line frequently, and, of course, this is done to reflect the subtle changes in the poetry.

Also of importance is the setting of the final words of each stanza and the envoi, "Sans empirer ung povre secourir."
The recurrence of this motive-type melody gives the refrain musical as well as poetical unity. The refrain also shows Debussy's use of modal writing. It is strictly modal, Aolian on F-Sharp, while the rest of the piece often varies from the tonal center of F-Sharp.

The second stanza begins much as the first, but it soon goes its own way. As the mood becomes more desperate, the melody is more chromatic and the pitch level reaches its highest point in measure twenty. The rhythm becomes more complicated in measures 15-19 as he uses two against three rhythms, and the tempo increases to its fastest rate. In measure twenty Debussy uses the sixteenth rest to interrupt the flow of the vocal line, while the accompaniment continues. This heightens the intensity of the poet's plea for help. Debussy's use of dissonance at this point further reinforces the mood of desperation.

The melody of the third stanza is quite different from the previous stanzas. The intervals of this stanza are not as unusual as in the previous stanzas; however, the largest interval of the piece, a major ninth, occurs in measure thirty-eight. The minor thirds are still present, but not as predominant as in the two previous stanzas.

The accompaniment introduces the last characteristic melodic idea of the piece in the third stanza. It is first
heard when the poet says he will laugh when the fickle girl is old. This motive is a descriptive flourish of thirty-second notes at a high pitch level, followed by a long note (measures 31-32, 36-37, 42-44).

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 2--Laughter Motive, "Ballade à s'amye"

Debussy's accompaniment is always closely allied to the text. He uses many dotted rhythms and syncopations in the accompaniment to support the mood of anxiety. Almost every measure of the piece contains one of these elements. Debussy also employs silence in the accompaniment to point out important words or phrases. One instance is found in measure thirty-three and thirty-four. In this passage the vocal line is completely exposed to interpret the phrase. Debussy also lets the vocal line of the refrain take precedence over the accompaniment. Each time the refrain is
sung, the accompaniment is either silent or lends a minimum of support (measures 13-14, 25-26, 48-49).

The harmony of the first song is primarily certain. There are numerous instances of shifting tonalities, but the major tonality of the song is F-Sharp. Debussy employs several different harmonic ideas in this song. In measures three, four, five, eleven, and twelve, cross-relations are used to point out emotional words or ideas in the text, such as rude, hypocrite, pitié. Debussy modulates to the key of the dominant C-Sharp major in measures 6-8, but returns to F-Sharp in measure nine. After the modal refrain, the harmony in measure forty-two is a B major chord, the dominant of E major. This is followed by the new tonic E major. In measure forty-five, an augmented chord on D unsettles the tonality of E, and prepares the listener for the return to F-Sharp. The final three chords move stepwise from D, E, to F-Sharp. These chords are used melodically as the vocal line at this point is doubled.

Debussy's use of dissonance in measures nineteen and twenty has already been mentioned. Another passage in which dissonance is used to reinforce the mood is found in measures 27-30. In these measures, the text speaks of the fading beauty of the lady. Debussy uses dissonance in the
accompaniment, and dissonance between the vocal line and accompaniment to bring out the strong words of the poetry.

The performers must be aware of many things when performing this song. The key words of the text, such as rude, veulx, sans pitié, deshonneur, needs special attention. The shifting tonalities point up the anxieties of the poet, and helps the performer to use these different tonalities to express the overall effect Debussy strived to create. Debussy's expressive use of the rest is an important aspect of this song. The performer must be aware that silence in the accompaniment is there because Debussy wanted strong emphasis placed on the text. Debussy was always explicit in the score concerning tempo. This makes it easier for the performer because there is not much room for variation in this area. In measure fifteen, he clearly marks the score, Mouvement (a tempo). This is the section of the piece in which the poet calls for help, and Debussy's clear markings help the performer. The tempo markings at each of the refrain passages (measures thirteen, twenty-one, forty-one, forty-eight) are clearly marked assisting in unifying the work. The clearly marked tempo indications relate the text to the music.

The second song of the cycle is called "Ballade que Villon feit à la requeste de sa mere pour prier Nostre-Dame"
(Ballade by Villon at his Mother's request as a prayer to the Virgin Mary). The text and translation follow:

Dame du ciel, régente terrienne,
Emperière des infernaux palus,
Recevez-moy vostre humble chrestienne:
Que comprinse soye entre vos esleus,
Ce non obstant qu'oncques rien ne valus.
Les biens de vous, ma Dame et ma Maistresse
Sont trop plus grans que ne suis pecheresse,
Sans lequelz biens ame ne peut merir
N'avoir les cieulx. Je n'en suis jangleresse:
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

A vostre Filz dictes que je suis sienne;
De luy soyent mes pechiez aboulus.
Pardonne moy, comme à l' Egipcienne,
Ou comme il feist au clercl Theophilus,
Lequel par vous fut quitte et absolus,
Combien qu'il eust au dEable fait promesse.
Preservez moy de faice jamais ce!
Vierge, portant, sans rompture encourir,
Le sacrement qu'on celebre à la messe:
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

Femme je suis povrette et anciene,
Qui riens ne sçay; oncques lettre ne lus.
Au monstier voy don suis paroissienne,
Paradis paint, où sont harpes et luz,
Et ung enfer où dampnez sont boullus:
L'ung me faict paour, l'autre joye et liesse.
La joye avoir me fay, haulte Deesse,
A qui pecheurs doivent tous recourir,
Comblez de foy, sans fainte ne paresse:
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

Lady of Heaven, regent of earth
Emperess of the infernal
Receive me, your most humble Christian.
Count me among your chosen elect,
Although there is no value in me.
Your mercy, my Lady and my mistress,
Are so great compared to my sinfulness.
Without your mercies my soul would not enter
Heaven - In this I do not lie -
In this Faith I wish to live and die.
Tell your Son that I am his,  
May my sin be absolved by Him.  
Pardon me as He pardoned the Egyptian  
Or as the clerk, Theophilus  
Who you pardoned and absolved,  
Even though he promised himself to the devil.  
 Preserve me from such a fate,  
Virgin Mary, who carried unblemished  
The sacrament we celebrate at the Mass,  
In this Faith I wish to live and die.

I am a poor old woman, who knows nothing,  
I never learned to read,  
In the monastery where I am a parishioner,  
Is painted a paradise, where there are harps  
And lutes, and a Hell where the damned are being boiled.  
One frightens me, the other fills me with joy and  
Gladness. Let me have that joy, lofty goddess,  
To whom all sinners must come. Fill  
me with faith without pretense and lack of zeal.  
In this faith I wish to live and die.

In addition to the three stanzas shown above, there is  
a seven line *envoi* which Debussy omitted. The first and  
second stanzas are similar in content. In the first stanza,  
Villon's mother praises the virtue of the *Virgìn Mary*. In  
the second stanza, she asks Mary to intercede with Christ  
for her. She draws a comparison between herself and  
Theophilus, who sold himself to the devil. The third  
stanza differs from the first two stanzas because Villon's  
mother speaks of herself, and tells of her fear of hell, and  
requests that Heaven be hers in the next world.

In the analysis of the first song, it was possible to  
separate the discussion of the voice part from that of the  
accompaniment because the structural elements of the voice
part were usually distinct from those of the accompaniment. The second song is different in this respect. The voice part is closely interwoven with the accompaniment. At times the vocal melody and accompaniment seem to have been conceived as a melodic unit. At other times, the voice part is extracted from the accompanying harmony. There are also passages in which both vocal melody and accompaniment are clearly independent.

The introduction of the second song sets the mood for the prayer for Villon's mother. He has the single line of accompaniment in measure one move into four voices, doubled at the octave (measures two and three). In measure four, the tonality of the open fifth moving to the octave points up the idea of simplicity and the feeling of reverence. This style is used in early church music, as is seen in the use of modal writing in Gregorian chant and the parallel movement that is found in organum. Debussy uses these devices to create a mood of reverence and quiet for the prayer of Villon's mother.

The first three lines of the first two stanzas are almost identical. The accompaniment begins with one voice (measures one and twenty), and moves to a section of two
countrapuntal voices doubled at the octave (measures three and twenty-two). Debussy uses repetition of these elements in measures seven, thirty-five, and thirty-six. In both stanzas Debussy employs small cells of melody, repeats them, and uses them in sequence. This procedure is used in measures nine through twelve and twenty-four through twenty-eight.

In the third stanza, Debussy uses still another idea to set the text. He starts the third stanza with two voice counterpoint in measure thirty-two, but this soon changes into rich arpeggiated triads. This change occurs in measure thirty-six as the mother speaks "Paradis paint ou sont harpes et luz" (It is a painted paradise where there are harps). Debussy also uses another text-painting device in measures thirty-seven and thirty-eight. The chords move in fifths until the word, "boulluz," is sung. In measure thirty-eight, the music stops as the poet points out his mother's fear of hell, then speaks of the joy of heaven, "L'ung me faict paour, l'autre joye et liesse."

The dominant idea expressed by the song is found at the end of each stanza. The words "En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir" (In this faith will I live and die) provide the focal point of the entire composition. He sets this statement of the old woman's faith apart from the main body of the
song by stopping all rhythmic activity and by setting it at a low pitch level. The contrast is readily seen in the voice part, and also in the homophonic texture of the accompaniment. This refrain is the unifying element of the entire song.

Debussy's modal writing in this piece has already been mentioned. He used the Aeolian mode to weave the melody and accompaniment into one unit. The vocal melody in measures four through eight and nineteen through twenty-three is in the Aeolian mode. The medieval quality results in careful avoidance of the third degree of an implied triad. Debussy, unlike in the first song, does not use dissonance as an element in molding melody or accompaniment. The contrast between the texts of the first and second ballades provides the motivation for the differences in approach. The forsaken lover is an individual, while the prayerful mother is seeking help and dependence.

The third song of this cycle, "Ballade des femmes de Paris" (Ballad of the Women of Paris), illustrates Villon's attitude toward women. No doubt he had ample opportunity to observe the women of many countries in his travels. In this poem, Villon mentions twenty-three different countries or cities and their women. He admits that these women have
sharp speech habits, but no noe has as sharp a tongue as the women of Paris. The text and translation follow:

Quoy qu'on tient belles langagières
Florentines, Veniciennes,
Assez pour estre messaiglières,
Et mesmement les anciennes;
Mais, soient Lombardes, Rommaines
Genevoises, à mes perilz,
Pimontoises, Savoisoemmes,
Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.

Detres beau parler tiennent chaieres,
Ce dit on les Nea politaines,
Et sont tres bonnes cacquetièrès
Allemandes et Pruciennes;
De Hongrie ou d'autre pays,
Espaignolles ou Cathelennes,
Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.

Brettes, Suysses, n'y scavent guleres,
Gasconnes, N'Aussi Thoulousaines:
De Petit Pont deux harengières
Les concluront, et les Lorraines,
Engloises et Calaisiennes,
(Ay je beaucoup de lieux compris?)
Picardes de Valenciennes;
Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.

ENVOI

Prince, aux dames Parisiennes
De beau parler donnez le prix;
Quoy qu'on die d'Italiennes,
Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.

Though they are said to be good talkers,
The women of Florence and Venice,
Enough to make their ancient message plain.
The old ones, too, be they Lombards, Romans,
Genovese, to my peril,
Piedmontese, or Savoyards
There is no good mouth but in Paris.
They are good at holding speeches
The fabled women of Naples,
And very good at gossiping
Are the Germans and the Prussians;
Be they Greeks, Egyptians,
From Hungry or other countries,
Spaniards or Castilians,
There is no good mouth but in Paris.

Bretons, Swiss know barely anything,
Or Gascons or Toulousians;
Two fish-wives from the Petit-Pont
Could finish them: and the Lorrains,
English, or Calaisiennes
(Haven't I mentioned many places?)
Picards, Valencians:
There is no good mouth but in Paris.

ENVOI

Prince, to the women of Paris
Give them the prize for good talking;
Whatever's said about the Italians,
There is no good mouth but in Paris.

Debussy's setting of this poem is typical of his earlier style. There is no strong use of dissonance, nor modal feeling as in the second song, nor are there wide or unusual melodic skips. The accompaniment sets the mood of the piece, using fast sixteenth notes to represent the chatter of the women. This pattern is continued throughout the entire piece, though not always in the same manner. In measures forty-two through forty-five, polyrhythm results from combining the sixteenth-note idea in the left hand with eighth-note triplets in the right hand. There are several other instances of polyrhythm between accompaniment
and voice. In measure fifteen, two against three as mentioned in measures forty-two through forty-five, the voice also carries out the polyrhythm idea with two against three. In measures 55, 58, 72, 83, 111, and 113 are also examples of polyrhythms.

Unlike the first song, here Debussy's accompaniment often doubles the melody, and there are not many sharp dissonances between the accompaniment and the vocal part. Debussy employs some dissonance to represent the chatter of many different women at once. When these dissonances do occur, however, they are not as noticeable because of the fast tempo.

At one point in the song, the accompaniment comes to a complete halt. Villon, prior to this, has named many different countries and discussed the attributes of their women. In measures eighty-seven and eighty-eight, Villon asks if he has named enough places "Ay-je beaucoup de lieux compris?". Debussy immediately, in measure eighty-nine, picks up the chatter once again with the sixteenth-note pattern.

The *envoi* begins in measure 102. Villon asks the prince to give the prize for chatter to the Parisian women, and in measure 108, Debussy, almost arrogant in feeling, moves to the triplet figure to point up that even though
Italians are known for their speech, there is no tongue like one from Paris. Debussy uses a glissando to point up the word, Paris, at the end of the piece.

The vocal line grows out of the accompaniment, in that most of the time, the rhythm dictates the vocal line. There are few places where the singer has a sustained melody. In measures 28-31, 60-64, 95-99, 116-121, the singer sings "Il n'est bon bec que de Paris," and these places are sustained against the rapid moving accompaniment. Also in measures thirty-seven through forty-one as Villon talks of the language of the Neopolitans, Debussy's vocal line is sustained against the accompaniment's block chords with the moving sixteenth note figure. In measures 104-108, Debussy again broadens the vocal line to help bring out the words "De bien parler donnez le prix" (Give them the prize for good talking).

The strophic character of this song is strengthened by the unifying sections of the piece. These occur as a refrain-type phrase, appearing four times, in measures 28-31, 60-64, 95-99, and 116-121. The singer says "Il n'est bon bec que de Paris" (there is no good speech but in Paris). The form then is easily seen as a verse followed by a refrain. This is repeated three times. Debussy gives the first two refrains exactly the same musical treatment.
The third refrain is treated differently harmonically, but the same melodic idea is developed. The last refrain is the concluding phrase of the piece, and Debussy uses the glissando and a short staccato chord to end the piece abruptly, just as it began.
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS

In Chapter II each of the three songs contained in *Trois Ballades de François Villon* was examined separately. In conclusion the three songs will be viewed as a cycle. There are several unifying factors in this cycle. Each piece has a musical and poetical refrain that not only unifies the individual song, but also helps unify all three pieces. The songs are further related in terms of poetic style and subject matter. The poems were taken from the same work, *Le Testament*, and are based on some aspect of love. The first ballade speaks of the fickle lover and the loneliness of the forsaken lover. The second song reflects the poet's love for his mother, who in turn, speaks of her love for God. In the third song, Villon's love for women leads him to many different countries only to have him realize that his beloved Paris is really the haven for the "best" mouths in the world.

There are many musical factors of which the performer must be aware in performing this cycle. The accompaniment plays an integral expressive role throughout the cycle:
the first song with its use of dissonance, the church-like atmosphere developed in the second song, and the chattering accompaniment of the third. Many times the accompaniment prepares a change of mood, as in measure thirty-seven of the first song, when the thirty-second note flourish denotes laughter. In measure one through eight, the piano begins the chatter that is the prevailing mood of the piece.

Another important factor in this piece is the strong feeling of ensemble that the performers must strive to achieve. The preciseness of the rhythms notated is very important. As has been stated in the previous chapter, Debussy uses polyrhythms at various points throughout the cycle with a deliberate expressive purpose in mind. Accurate realization of these rhythms is prequesite to the fulfillment of Debussy's expressive aims. Rhythmic precision also aids the natural declamation of the language. Giving careful attention to pitch accuracy, the singer must also be able to color the voice to reflect the poetic meaning. Many times the aspect of vocal color is completely disregarded, and the interpretation of the music is greatly hampered.

As stated in Chapter II, there are important words and phrases in each song that need special attention by the performer. Each song has its own refrain passage that unifies the individual song, as well as relating it to the
cycle as a whole. These phrases must be completely understood, and sung with the intended meaning in mind.
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