CHAMBER MUSIC, CYCLIC FORM, AND THE IDEAL OF THE ABSOLUTE IN FRENCH MUSIC AND LITERATURE, 1890–1918

by

NAOMI PERLEY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2019
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

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Advisor: Scott Burnham

Defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) caused a radical rethinking of French cultural priorities, including a shift in musical composition from theatrical genres to purely instrumental works. As concert music rose to prominence, French writers became intrigued by absolute music’s ability to communicate expressively without recourse to verbal language. Within this context, chamber music composed during the Belle Epoque (1871–1918) became the ultimate symbol of music’s ineffability. Despite its centrality to Belle Epoque culture, the stylistic origins and context of this genre remain unexamined. My dissertation argues that Belle Epoque chamber music became the locus of a complex aesthetic in which French composers suffused Classical genres with musical innovations that paradoxically owed much to German Romanticism. This aesthetic mirrors a larger tension in Belle Epoque culture as the French, in an attempt to create their own independent national identity, simultaneously rejected Prussian culture and yet found themselves indebted to German Romanticism.
Acknowledgements

I would not have completed my dissertation without the incredible mentorship and support of my advisor, Scott Burnham. Scott arrived at the CUNY Graduate Center at a time when I had drafted approximately half of my dissertation, had recently begun working full-time, and had concluded that I did not want to pursue an academic career. After I told him that I was considering leaving the program, he made me a counteroffer: to meet with him regularly for a few months, and see how far we could get by the end of 2017, before I made any firm decision. Our meetings quickly became a high point of my regular schedule, and our wide-ranging discussions renewed my passion and interest in my dissertation topic. By the end of 2017, there was no longer any question of whether I would finish my dissertation; I had found the motivation I needed to get it done through my meetings with Scott.

The other three members of my committee have shown me unwavering support as I pursued my doctoral studies over the past decade. My first reader, Joseph Straus, has provided me with incredibly thorough and detailed feedback on each chapter of the dissertation in a shockingly short amount of time. Joe’s seminar on the music of Stravinsky taught me new methods of analysis that I suspected could be applied to the music of another twentieth century composer, Ravel. The subsequent independent study that I undertook with Joe on Ravel’s Sonatine for solo piano laid the groundwork for my eventual dissertation topic.

The chair of my dissertation committee, Anne Stone, helped me shape my early ideas into the first two chapters of the dissertation. Throughout the dissertation-writing process, she continually reminded me to consider the most important questions: how does my research fit into the big picture of musicology, and how can my research benefit this larger community? As Deputy Executive Officer for the Musicology department, Anne has also guided me through the
maze of doctoral study over the years, providing invaluable advice and filling out a lot of paperwork on my behalf.

My external reader, Steven Huebner, first introduced me to the world of fin-de-siècle French music scholarship in his seminar on Ravel’s piano music during the final semester of my undergraduate studies at McGill University. I am grateful that he has continued to mentor me throughout graduate school, providing crucial feedback on my dissertation as a specialist in my area of research.

The other mentors who supported me at McGill during my undergraduate career have profoundly shaped my worldview. I will be forever grateful to my piano professor, Tom Plaunt, who was the first to tell me that I would make a good musicologist, shortly after I joined his piano studio in the fall of 2004. The musicology professors at McGill provided a supportive environment and encouraged me to explore many different aspects of music history. I am particularly grateful to Lloyd Whitesell for the kind advice and guidance that he provided as I applied to graduate school, and for encouraging me to add the CUNY Graduate Center to my list of prospective schools.

At the Graduate Center, I have benefited from the support of many professors beyond those on my dissertation committee. Allan Atlas eagerly welcomed me to the Graduate Center, and made me feel at home before I had even arrived in New York. André Aciman’s seminar on Proust’s A la recherche du temps perdu introduced me to the pleasures of reading a couple hundred pages of fiction every week and suggested a way to provide a wider literary and aesthetic context for my work on fin-de-siècle chamber music.

My doctoral studies and dissertation have been supported by multiple awards from the Graduate Center, including the Altman Dissertation Fellowship, the Provost’s Summer Research
Fellowship, and the Enhanced Chancellor’s Fellowship. In the later stages of my degree, the CUNY Research Foundation Education Assistance Program reimbursed the cost of my tuition as a benefit of my employment at RILM.

In addition to the support I have received from my academic mentors, I am grateful to my colleagues, friends and family who have supported me through my decade-plus of graduate school. I am lucky to work in a unique environment at RILM, where nearly all of my colleagues have either received or are currently pursuing doctorates in music, many from the Graduate Center. My supervisors, Barbara Mackenzie Dobbs and Zdravko Blažeković, have provided gentle encouragement in the final months of writing; Zdravko has assured me that eleven years is exactly the right amount of time to spend on a PhD.

Among my many wonderful colleagues at the Graduate Center, I must single out three who have become my closest friends through the shared joys and frustrations of pursuing a PhD: Devora Geller, Alana Murphy, and Sarah Angello. Thank you for the “dissgroup” meetups, for the writing dates in coffee shops, and for the drinks to celebrate or mourn all the little milestones and setbacks that eventually lead to a whole dissertation.

Thank you to Stacey Clifford for being my friend when I really needed one, and for continuing to encourage and support me from across the pond in the years since we first met in Bristol.

Thank you to my parents for playing Bach to me in my crib; for buying me a tiny electric keyboard for my fourth birthday; for enrolling me in piano lessons as soon as I was old enough; for giving me the time I needed to practice; for supporting me when I decided to pursue a career in music; for sending me some extra cash when my fellowships couldn’t quite cover everything. You have made all of this possible. I’m also grateful for the support of my pet parrot, Quaker
Oats, who happily sat next to me on his cage as I worked away at the dining room table when I was back home in Ottawa, occasionally contributing a chirp, “supertime,” or “pretty birdie” when things were a little too quiet.

Finally, thank you to my fiancé, Tim Gorta, for supporting me over the past eight and a half years, as I completed my coursework, took my second exams, and eventually began working on my dissertation. Tim cut his own doctoral studies short in order to take a full-time job and support me in completing mine. He has calmly ordered delivery on the nights when my dissertation work superseded making dinner; found things to do on his own during the many weekends when I needed to focus on my dissertation; and always told me to “sleep on it” whenever I thought I couldn’t possibly continue down this path any longer. I may have spent the first eight years of our relationship married to my dissertation; I couldn’t be happier to marry you a week after defending it.
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In Loving Memory of Grandma Suzie and Grandpa John
Introduction

0.1 Research Problem

This dissertation interrogates the triangular relationship between German Romantic aesthetics, concepts of “classicism” and “neoclassicism,” and the chamber music that was composed in France between 1890 and 1918, with a particular focus on the string quartet. While Carolyn Abbate and Joseph Acquisto have acknowledged Belle Epoque writers’ interest in music as an aesthetic model, and French instrumental music composed after World War I has been contextualized by Scott Messing and Martha Hyde within the growth of the “neoclassical” aesthetic, the chamber music composed during the Belle Epoque is often dismissed as merely “classicizing,” and has received scant critical attention. I argue that composers during this period were caught between German Romantic musical aesthetics, as idealized in the music of Wagner and the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and a tendency toward a reinvigoration of classical forms. They sought to infuse absolute music with the qualities of high drama and expressivity that defined Wagner’s music dramas. They accomplished this by shifting the expressive locus of their music away from the sonata-form first movement, instead placing more dramatic emphasis on the recurrence of themes from one movement to the next (a process referred to as cyclic form) and by making the slow movement the expressive center of their compositions.

This paradigm shift in chamber music had wide-reaching effects beyond the realm of composition. Writers reflected this new aesthetic in their own discourses about the power of music as an ineffable language and the transformative experience of listening to chamber music. My dissertation uses Vincent d’Indy’s treatise *Cours de composition musicale* to define and contextualize the main features of this new aesthetic, interprets the three most influential string quartets of this period in light of this aesthetic, and argues that this new style of composition had
a major impact on Marcel Proust’s descriptions of chamber music and approach to time in his novel *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

0.2 Background and Relevant Literature

Musicologists have long marked out the period from the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 to the onset of the First World War in 1914 as a high point in French music history, when French concert music would, for the first time in two or three hundred years, assume a position of dominance on the world stage which could rival that of German music.¹ There seemed to be a general consensus among French intellectuals that France’s defeat at the hands of Germany in the Franco-Prussian War was in some way linked to the “frivolous” tastes of the Second Empire. In terms of French musical life, this “frivolity” was manifested in a predilection for light musical theatre and opera, on the part of both composers and audiences.² When orchestral and chamber music was performed during this period, it usually belonged to the German canon of classical and early romantic composers from Haydn to Mendelssohn; few French composers wrote instrumental music, believing that the public did not have an appetite for new French music beyond opera and operetta.³


² Strasser discusses in considerable depth the general intellectual climate during and immediately after the fall of the Second Empire. See also Noel Orillo Versoza, Jr., “The Absolute Limits: Debussy, Satie and the Culture of French Modernism, ca. 1860–1920” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008) for a discussion of how French critics used the duality of “idealism” and “realism” in their reactions to the fall of the Second Empire.

³ Timothy Jones argues that while orchestral and chamber music were performed before the Franco-Prussian War, including some new works, audiences were biased against new French
Following the war, however, French composers began to shift their attention from theatrical works to instrumental music. Musicologists have linked this shift with the formation of the Société Nationale de Musique in February 1871. One month after the armistice was signed between France and Germany, a group of composers including César Franck, Camille Saint-Saëns, and Gabriel Fauré founded the Société Nationale to promote the composition and performance of “serious” French music—namely, absolute instrumental music using canonical genres such as the symphony, string quartet, and sonata. The foundation of the Société Nationale aligned with the larger cultural and political shift which France was to undergo in the early years of the Third Republic. As Jann Pasler explains in her monograph *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France*, this was “a time when politicians intent on creating a lasting democracy in France saw music as integral to the public good.” As the government engaged in a program of creating enlightened, well-educated citizens, “serious” music would play an increasingly large role in French society.

At the same time that composers grew interested in the possibilities of absolute music, French writers and philosophers became intrigued by absolute music’s unique ability to works in these genres due to “the prevailing attitude that instrumental music was the province of German genius, and lyric drama the sole province of French.” See Jones, “Nineteenth-Century Orchestral and Chamber Music,” 55. The one exception to this rule is the proliferation of solo piano music, exemplified in the cults around Chopin and Liszt.

Strasser’s article provides an intellectual context for the formation of the Société Nationale, with the aim of debunking the myth that “the Société’s founders were motivated by the desire to roll back German influence on French music.” Strasser, “The Société Nationale and its Adversaries,” 226. Jones’s article aptly demonstrates the musicological clichés which Strasser tries to debunk: he labels the Société Nationale as “the organization that most changed attitudes towards new instrumental music” and states that its aim “was simply to privilege French music at the expense of the German repertoire that dominated other organizations.” Jones, “Nineteenth-Century Orchestral and Chamber Music,” 55.


communicate expressively without recourse to verbal language. Several musicologists have recently addressed this literary and philosophical fascination with music.\(^8\) Carlo Caballero writes that “music, of all the arts, dominated speculative aesthetics in France around 1900. In the novels of Proust as in the philosophy of Bergson, music came to embody an exemplary translation of the individual unconscious . . .”\(^9\) Carolyn Abbate describes “French symbolist musical doctrines” which elevate music above language, “urge poetry towards the condition of musical sound,” and suggest that “music is ineffable.”\(^10\) Jean-Jacques Nattiez has traced French novelist Marcel Proust’s musical aesthetics to Schopenhauer, arguing that Proust and Schopenhauer both assign “to music the same revelatory and transcendent function.”\(^11\)

While scholars have written extensively on this philosophical / literary interest in music as a superior expressive medium, little attention has been paid to how this conception affected and was affected by the chamber music composed in France during the Belle Epoque. Instead, scholars have often focused on composers’ attempts to bring to life the imaginary, unhearable sounds that pepper the works of such Symbolist writers as Mallarmé, Poe, and Maeterlinck; for example, Debussy’s opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, based on Maeterlinck’s eponymous play, or

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11 Nattiez, *Proust as Musician*, 84.
Debussy and Ravel’s settings of Mallarmé, Baudelaire, and Verlaine.\textsuperscript{12} Scholars have also studied the influence of Wagner (particularly Wagner’s writings, rather than his music) on these same Symbolist writers to the exclusion of all other composers.\textsuperscript{13} This omission in the literature seems all the more surprising considering the fact that absolute music, lacking any kind of literary program or text, was presumably what writers had in mind when they referred to music’s power to convey meaning without the use of verbal language.\textsuperscript{14}

While research on chamber music during the Belle Epoque is relatively scant, much more energy has been focused on addressing the so-called “neoclassical” chamber works of the interwar period. However, this research often obscures the link between interwar neoclassicism and the chamber music composed during the Belle Epoque. While “neoclassical” works are often viewed as icons of modernity that break with the Wagnerian decadence of the Belle Epoque, they, in fact, continue a tradition of French chamber music composition that flourished in the


\textsuperscript{14} Nattiez and Caballero both acknowledge this in respect to Proust and the chamber music by the fictional composer Vinteuil that Proust describes in his novel \textit{In Search of Lost Time}. Nattiez writes, “the Narrator had to experience his revelation through an \textit{imaginary} work of art, for according to the logic of the novel a real work always disappoints: attainment of the absolute could only be suggested by a work that was unrealized, unreal and ideal. Moreover, this work had to be a piece of \textit{pure music} whose content was not conveyed through words.” Nattiez, \textit{Proust as Musician}, 30. Caballero, considering “the obvious but really significant fact that Vinteuil’s great works are . . . a sonata and a septet” agrees with Nattiez: “Whilst music in general launches a return to the verbally inexpressible core of personal existence, music totally freed of words and imagery renders up the most unmediated, the purest possible expression of the artist’s personality and sensibility.” Caballero, \textit{Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics}, 48.
decades leading up to the First World War. Scott Messing’s *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept Through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* traces the development of the word “neoclassicism” in French musical writing in the early twentieth century, arguing that the term assumed a new significance in the 1920s, in conjunction with the music of Stravinsky.\(^{15}\) Martha Hyde, whose use of the term “neoclassical” is rooted in her own theory of how composers interact with classical models (rather than in the history of the term), uses Ravel’s *Tombeau de Couperin* (1917) and Stravinsky’s Octet (1923) to illustrate types of what she terms “neoclassical imitation.”\(^{16}\) The term “neoclassical” has come to be used almost as a catch-all for absolute music composed in France during and after the First World War. However, in referring to this music as neoclassical, and interpreting it as a new trend that developed after World War I, musicologists tend to downplay, if not erase altogether, the connection between the absolute music being composed before the war by the likes of Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Franck, Ravel, and Debussy, and that composed during or after the war.\(^{17}\)

Despite this tendency to distance interwar absolute music from that of the Belle Epoque, there seems to be general consensus that Belle Epoque composers of instrumental music had already embarked upon some type of “classicizing” project, in which they leapfrogged over the whole of nineteenth-century Germanic music, instead seeking out “Latin” (and thus essentially


\(^{17}\) This seems especially disingenuous in the case of composers who were active both before and after the war. For example, Ravel’s mid-war *Tombeau de Couperin* and interwar piano concertos are often treated completely independently of such pre-war works as his *Sonatine* for solo piano, String Quartet, and Piano Trio.
French) models of clarity, logic, and structure. This characterization, however, seems at odds with the actual music composed during this period. Many of the composers who wrote chamber music during this period (for example, Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Chausson, Ravel, and Debussy) set texts by Symbolist writers in programmatic works such as their chansons, operas, or symphonic poems; they clearly had some involvement with the German Romantic aesthetic that a “classicizing” composer would presumably argue against. Moreover, their chamber music features novel approaches to form, orchestration, and harmony, all of which suggest an engagement with the newest advances in music. Most notably, much of the chamber music composed during the Belle Epoque makes use of “cyclic form,” in which the same musical themes return in multiple movements of a single work. This procedure was almost entirely absent from the output of late-eighteenth-century Classical composers such as Haydn and Mozart. Beethoven was the first composer to make use of cyclic form in many of his works, most famously in his Fifth and Ninth Symphonies. While some nineteenth-century composers such as Berlioz, Schumann, and Mendelssohn made limited use of cyclic form, it is now most closely associated with the symphonic and chamber music of Belle Epoque France. If anything

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19 Strasser has addressed this misconception directly. He argues that “For the founders of the Société Nationale, as for many French intellectuals, ‘serious’ music had long been synonymous with that emanating from across the Rhine. This viewpoint is reflected in the compositions of the founders, which very obviously take as their models the late works of Beethoven, the Lieder of Schubert, the symphonic and chamber compositions of Mendelssohn and Schumann, and the tone poems of Liszt.” Strasser, “The Société Nationale and its Adversaries,” 238.  
20 The French composer Vincent d’Indy popularized the term “cyclic form” in his compositional treatise Cours de composition musicale, deuxième livre—première partie, with August Sérieyx (Paris: Durand, 1909), 375–433. He argued that Beethoven’s output featured some early experiments with cyclic form, and that the technique was perfected by French composer César Franck, d’Indy’s teacher and idol. While his position is obviously biased (his own compositions followed closely after the model of Franck’s), d’Indy nevertheless makes some valuable
has the power to make us question the label of “classicizing” which this repertoire has accrued, it should be the prominence of cyclic form. A thoroughly Romantic innovation, cyclic form allowed Belle Epoque composers to transfer Wagner’s most potent idea, the leitmotiv, from the realm of music drama to absolute music.

0.3 Methodology and Outline

The starting point for this dissertation is one key text that provides insight into contemporary attitudes toward chamber music in the Belle Epoque: Vincent d’Indy’s treatise, *Cours de composition musicale*, based on the courses he taught at the Schola Cantorum between 1897 and 1907. In his critical writings, Vincent d’Indy popularized two terms that are indispensable to understanding the chamber music of Belle Epoque France: the *sonate cyclique* (the cyclic sonata, more commonly now referred to as cyclic form) and *forme lied* (lied form). Both of these terms imply a heightened level of expressivity and vocality in the musical compositions that they describe. In a cyclic work, thematic material from one movement recurs in another. As discussed above, “cyclic themes” serve to unify the separate movements of a work, and in d’Indy’s view cyclic form was the instrumental equivalent of the leitmotivic technique that Wagner popularized in his music dramas. *Forme lied* was d’Indy’s peculiar designation for slow movements; he labeled them as such because he viewed them as the most “singing” of all the movements in a typical instrumental composition.

The first chapter of this dissertation outlines the history of the terms cyclic form and *forme lied* and explores d’Indy’s usage of the terms across his critical writings and in his analyses of Franck’s Quartet.

observations about cyclic form, including the close affinity between cyclic form and the Wagnerian music drama.
The second chapter analyzes Franck’s String Quartet in D Major (1890) through the lens of cyclic form and *forme lied*. Considered one of the great masterpieces of the Belle Epoque, Franck’s Quartet not only shows how composers were developing a radically different approach to instrumental composition centered on the narrative possibilities of cyclic form and the expressivity of *forme lied*; it also provided a blueprint for the large number of string composed in France over the ensuing decade and a half.

The third chapter discusses the two most influential string quartets of this corpus: those composed by Debussy (1893) and Ravel (1903). Like Franck’s Quartet, Debussy and Ravel’s Quartets both make use of cyclic form, follow a similar four-movement schema (which was not common in other genres of chamber music at this time), experiment with incorporating *forme lied* sections into faster movements, and have at their centers highly expressive and original *forme lied* movements.

The dissertation concludes with a short discussion of the various ways in which cyclic form, *forme lied*, and Franck’s Quartet may have shaped the most famous work of literature to emerge from this period: Marcel Proust’s novel *A la recherche du temps perdu.*
Chapter 1

Cyclic Form and *Forme lied*: Two Connecting Paths Between Absolute and Program Music

In the *Cours de composition musicale*, published in three volumes between 1903 and 1950, the composer and pedagogue Vincent d’Indy presents his own highly original vision of music history and introduces new terms not previously found in French musical pedagogy.\(^1\) The importance of d’Indy’s treatise to the study of French chamber music composed during the Belle Epoque is twofold: not only does it provide a comprehensive exposition of a single composer’s aesthetics (a comparative rarity in an era when most composers limited themselves to writing pithy articles in journals and newspapers), but it has also proved to be one of the most influential treatises of the twentieth century, with many of its terms and pedagogical strategies persisting in French musical education even today.

Fundamental to d’Indy’s historical approach to music is a distinction he makes in the very first sentence of his treatise’s second volume: “Musical compositions, no matter what their form or what era they were composed in, divide themselves very naturally into two large categories, one subject to the rhythmic laws of movement [dance], one to the laws of speech.”\(^2\) D’Indy names these two categories symphonic music (*musique symphonique*) and dramatic music (*musique dramatique*) because “the symphony and the drama can be considered the most

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1 Vincent d’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale, premier livre*, with Auguste Sérieyx (Paris: Durand, 1903); *Cours de composition musicale, deuxième livre—première partie*, with August Sérieyx (Paris: Durand, 1909); *Cours de composition musicale, deuxième livre—seconde partie*, with August Sérieyx (Paris: Durand, 1933); and *Cours de composition musicale, troisième livre*, with Guy de Lioncourt (Paris: Durand, 1950). Although the publication of d’Indy’s treatise was spread out over several decades, all four volumes are based on the lectures that he delivered to the first cohort of students to partake in the Schola Cantorum’s six-year curriculum, between 1897 and 1904.

2 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale II/i*, 5. “Les manifestations musicales, quelles qu'en soient la forme et l'époque, se répartissent assez naturellement en deux grandes catégories, soumises, l'une aux lois rythmiques du geste, l'autre à celles de la parole.”
characteristic forms to have been developed out of their respective categories of the rhythm of movement and the rhythm of language.”³ The dialectic between symphonic and dramatic music is so foundational to d’Indy’s historiography that he organizes the rest of his *Cours de composition musicale* according to these two categories: the second volume deals with symphonic music and the third volume is devoted to dramatic music. D’Indy’s discussion of the symphonic and dramatic features a chart that categorizes every genre of Western art music as either symphonic or dramatic (see Figure 1.1).

Although d’Indy considers it essential to study these two “large paths” “successively and separately,” he nevertheless acknowledges that “between these two large routes running in different directions, we will, without a doubt, encounter many connecting paths that bring us from one road to the other.”⁴ Among the “connecting paths” are two musical genres which d’Indy introduces in the second volume of his treatise in his treatment of the sonata: *la sonate cyclique* and *le forme lied*. Fundamental to both of these genres is the incursion of the dramatic on the symphonic. D’Indy developed these terms in response to what he saw as the French answer to Wagnerism: a shift toward composing instrumental music that incorporated many of the dramatic ideals of Wagnerism into an essentially classical frame, thereby creating masterpieces that transcended both the instrumental music of Beethoven and the music dramas of Wagner. Cyclic form, to d’Indy, was not merely one compositional choice among many for a fin-de-siècle composer of absolute instrumental music: it was the highest form instrumental music could take, a distinction that d’Indy couches in specifically nationalistic and religious terms.

³ D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 6. “. . . la Symphonie et le Drame peuvent être considérés comme les formes les plus caractéristiques respectivement issues du Geste et de la Parole rythmés . . . ”
⁴ D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 7. “Entre ces deux routes diversement orientées, on rencontrera sans doute un grand nombre de chemins de traverse, ramenant de l'une à l'autre.”
Figure 1.1: D’Indy’s chart categorizing symphonic and dramatic genres

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5 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 13.
Forme lied signified much more than an instrumental slow movement. The quintessential vocality of the term marks out the slow movement as the expressive heart of the sonata, while d’Indy’s appropriation of the term lied is emblematic of a fin-de-siècle nationalist musical discourse which, paradoxically, crowned France as the queen of the lied. By examining the social, historical, and aesthetic context in which d’Indy coined the two terms, we can recapture shades of meaning that these two terms have lost over the intervening century since d’Indy first used them in his Cours de composition. Since it is through d’Indy’s analyses of contemporary French works that the terms cyclic form and forme lied truly come to life, this chapter concludes with an examination of the central role d’Indy accorded these terms in his analyses of César Franck’s String Quartet (1890).

1.1 Vincent d’Indy: Composer; Pedagogue; Ideologue?

D’Indy is best remembered today as the founder and director of the Schola Cantorum, a private music conservatory which rivaled the publicly-funded Paris Conservatoire as the pre-eminent training ground for early-twentieth-century French composers. Although d’Indy studied composition at the Conservatoire in 1874 and 1875 with César Franck, he did not win any of the major prizes. In 1892, d’Indy was asked to sit on a governmental committee that would review the Conservatoire’s curriculum, which at the time was heavily biased toward practical instruction in performance and composition, with a focus on vocal genres, especially opera. D’Indy advocated for a curriculum that included additional in-depth study of aesthetics, music theory, and


7 Jann Pasler chronicles d’Indy’s time at the Conservatoire and his attempts to court success through state-sponsored competitions in the 1870s and 1880s in her article “Deconstructing d’Indy, or the Problem of a Composer’s Reputation,” 19th-Century Music 30 no. 3 (Spring 2007): 230–256.
and music history, and renewed attention to instrumental genres. His suggestions were met with derision by the other committee members, which further cemented his disdain of the Conservatoire. 

When d’Indy founded the Schola Cantorum in 1894 along with Charles Bordes and Alexandre Guilmant, he finally had the chance to implement the type of curriculum he had envisioned for the Conservatoire. For composition students, this translated into a six-year course that placed a heavy emphasis on studying the history and development of instrumental music, with dramatic music relegated to the final year. D’Indy’s composition classes held at the Schola between 1897 and 1904 became the basis for his compositional treatise, *Cours de composition musicale*, published in four volumes between 1903 and 1950.

In contemporary musicological discourse, d’Indy is often framed as a political and aesthetic arch-conservative in opposition to more progressive composers in fin-de-siècle France. As the president of the Société Nationale de Musique and, later, as the director of the Schola Cantorum, d’Indy was constantly in the public eye and had a great deal of influence on French musical life, even though his own compositions never received the type of critical acclaim accorded Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, or Saint-Saëns. He accrued both supporters and adversaries in great numbers, and these groups, along with d’Indy himself, constructed his public

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9 D’Indy outlines his vision for the curriculum at the Schola Cantorum in the article “Une école d’art répondant aux besoins modernes: Discours d’inauguration des cours de l’Ecole,” *La tribune de Saint-Gervais* 6 no. 11 (November 1900): 304–314. *La tribune de Saint-Gervais* was the Schola Cantorum’s monthly newsletter.

10 Indeed, the table of contents of each volume of the *Cours de composition musicale* maps onto the initial course outline provided in the *La tribune de Saint Gervais* article with surprising consistency, considering the fact that it took years—in some cases decades—for d’Indy’s lectures at the Schola to be transformed into the volumes of the *Cours*.

image through copious newspaper and journal articles, books, and letters. Jann Pasler has recently argued that “the case of d’Indy provides an important example of the ways in which the actions of a composer, his disciples, and even his enemies can lead to the construction of a reputation that prevents us from understanding significant aspects of his life and music.”\textsuperscript{12} In particular, it can be tempting for us to take the paper trail left behind by d’Indy and his contemporaries at face value, and to condemn him as an anti-Semitic Monarchist who stood on the wrong side of history.\textsuperscript{13} To do so would mean we must ignore a treasure trove of critical writings about music by a man widely acknowledged, even by his enemies, as one of the most learned and insightful authorities on music of his generation, whose music history and pedagogy, for better or worse, have shaped a century of French musical thought and criticism. Without condoning d’Indy’s political views, there must be a space for us to critically interrogate how those views (and others) shaped his approach to music history and to ask in what way this approach is emblematic of \textit{fin-de-siècle} musical thought more generally. The cases of cyclic form and \textit{forme lied} provide an opportunity to do exactly this.

1.2 Cyclic Form

Of the two terms, cyclic form has had the greatest effect on music analysis and pedagogy in the twentieth century. One can find references to cyclic form in music appreciation and music survey textbooks, where it is frequently cited in reference to Beethoven’s use of thematic recall

\textsuperscript{12} Pasler, “Deconstructing d’Indy,” 231.
\textsuperscript{13} Pasler accuses Jane Fulcher of doing exactly this and mischaracterizing \textit{fin-de-siècle} Parisian musical life as a series of “ideological battles.” In a similar vein, Steven Huebner takes Fulcher to task for arguing that d’Indy exerted a political influence on the Third Republic without qualifying the exact way in which his actions were political. He distinguishes between explicitly “political work,” such as policy making, and a more general definition of politics as the “values and dynamics of societies as they play out in many public and private areas of life.” Steven Huebner, “D’Indy’s Beethoven,” in \textit{French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870–1939}, ed. Barbara Kelly (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 106.
in his Fifth and Ninth Symphonies. In the realm of musical analysis, cyclic form has recently received critical attention from Benedict Taylor, Michael Puri, and Andrew Deruchie. While d’Indy did not invent the term, he appears to have been the primary force behind its widespread popularity in the twentieth century. D’Indy first introduces cyclic form by discussing its application to the genre of the sonata: *la sonate cyclique* (the cyclic sonata). He opens his chapter devoted to *la sonate cyclique* by defining it as “a work in which the construction is subordinated to certain special themes that reappear in different forms in each of the separate movements of the work, where they function as a unifying or regulating element.” The *sonate cyclique* is thus in opposition to a conventional sonata in which each individual movement has its own thematic material that does not appear in any other movement. D’Indy notes that the cyclic technique is not unique to the sonata, but that he is using the sonata as a stand-in for any of the multi-movement genres of absolute music that originated in the classical era, such as the string quartet, the piano trio, or the symphony.

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16 This is congruous with d’Indy’s approach throughout the *Cours de composition musicale*. In the first part of the second volume, focused exclusively on the sonata, he introduces concepts that apply equally to other instrumental genres such as the symphony and chamber music. In the second part of the second volume, he traces the evolution of these other instrumental genres in turn.

17 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 375.
As Benedict Taylor notes, the concept of “cyclic form” is highly problematic, as it is “neither cyclic, nor a form.” Moreover, the terms “cyclic” and “cycle” have accrued multiple meanings in relation to Western music. D’Indy seems all too aware of these issues, as he describes in detail the exact uses and applications of the term “cyclic” that he envisions:

The qualifier cyclic is applicable in the first place to motives and themes that, while modifying themselves over the course of a musical composition divided into multiple movements, remain present and recognizable in each of these movements, independent of the structure, the tempo, or the tonality that is proper to it. By an extension, or rather, by a totally natural restriction, the cell that contains a cyclic motive or the period that contains a cyclic theme are also, themselves, called cyclic. Finally, a musical form (Sonata, Quartet, Symphony, etc.) would likewise be called cyclic if it contains motives or themes that have such a character and function.

D’Indy’s precise choice of musical terminology in his definition of a composition’s cyclic elements reflects the theories of musical form that he lays out earlier in this volume, in the chapter titled “The Sonata of Beethoven.” In d’Indy’s conception, an idée musicale (musical idea) is expressed over the course of one or more phrases (phrase), each of which contains two hierarchical parts. A phrase consists of a période principale (principal period) and one or more périodes secondaires (secondary periods), and each period is built out of cellules (cells), which are the smallest possible groupings of notes. The période principale contains the thème générateur (generator theme), and the cellule contains the motif (motive). The cellule and the période principale share a common function: they give rise to additional cellules and périodes.

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18 Taylor, Mendelssohn, Time and Memory, 9.
19 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale II/i, 375. “Le qualificatif cyclique est applicable en premier lieu aux motifs et aux thèmes qui, tout en se modifiant notablement au cours d’une composition musicale divisée en plusieurs parties, demeurent présents et reconnaissables dans chacune de celles-ci, indépendamment de la structure, du mouvement ou de la tonalité qui lui est propre. Par une extension, ou plutôt par une restriction toute naturelle, la cellule qui contient un motif cyclique ou la période qui contient un thème cyclique sont dites cycliques elles-mêmes. Enfin, une forme musicale (Sonate, Quatuor, Symphonie, etc.) sera dite pareillement cyclique si elle contient des motifs ou des thèmes ayant un tel caractère et une telle fonction.”
that contain other elements of the *thème*. Put another way, the *cellule, période, and phrase* constitute functional units of music, easy enough to analyze on a score. Identifying a work’s *motif, thème, or idée musicale* requires a more complex act of interpretation: not all *périodes* contain a *thème*. This relationship is reflected in d’Indy’s definition of cyclic form quoted above: if a *cellule* contains a *motif cyclique*, or a *période* contains a *thème cyclique*, then that *cellule* or *période* would, by extension, also be considered *cyclique*. How does one know that a particular *motif* or *thème* is *cyclique*? Only by tracing its development across the course of an entire composition, and determining that the work itself is cyclic: “Thus, the true cyclic element appears only in the realization, when certain rhythmic, melodic or harmonic aspects recall, in one of the constituent movements of the work, the presence of a theme that originally belongs to a different movement within the same work.”

D’Indy’s history of cyclic form hews closely to the nationalistic conception of music history that he enacts across many different genres throughout his *Cours de composition musicale*: the current generation of French composers, drawing on the innovations of ancient French composers, Beethoven, and Wagner, have superseded all other past generations and nationalities and are composing original, beautiful music unmatched by their peers anywhere else in the world. In the case of cyclic form, the crux of d’Indy’s thesis can be found in the

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21 Evidently, d’Indy took the meanings of these terms very seriously. In a letter to his collaborator on the first and second volumes, Auguste Sérieyx, d’Indy responds forcefully to Sérieyx’s suggestion that they replace the terms *cellule, période, phrase, and idée* with *motif* and *thème* because the latter are masculine nouns in French and the former are feminine. In addition to dismissing Sérieyx’s suggestion as basically absurd, he also explains how *motif* is not a suitable substitute for the specific meanings of either *cellule* or *phrase*, and *thème*, likewise, cannot replace either *phrase* or *période*. See Vincent d’Indy et al., *Lettres à Auguste Sérieyx* (Lausanne: Éditions du Cervin, 1961), 20–21.

22 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 378. “Ainsi, le véritable élément cyclique apparaît seulement dans la réalisation, lorsque certains aspects rythmiques, mélodiques ou harmoniques rappellent, dans l'une des pièces constitutives de l'œuvre, la présence d'un thème appartenant originairement à une autre pièce de la même œuvre.”
opening paragraphs of the chapter, when he indicates that the elements of cyclic form were “furnished, for the most part, by the Beethovenian genius, well before being organized consciously and in all their plenitude by César Franck.”

Later in the chapter, he provides a more detailed history of the *sonate cyclique*. According to d’Indy, the generation of German musicians immediately succeeding Beethoven failed to apprehend the innovations contained within his last sonatas—most notably, the germ of cyclic form. “The incomprehension of some, the ignorance of others, provoked in the sonata, during the time of Beethoven and after him as well, the stagnation of the form.”

Out of the whole generation of composers to follow Beethoven, d’Indy writes, “only one, Mendelssohn, possessed, at the highest level, the necessary knowledge; unfortunately, the genius was absent, with the result that his works are all written in a very pure style… but perfectly conventional, if not inexpressive.”

German Romantic composers remained ignorant of cyclic form; they largely turned their attention to other genres beyond the sonata, particularly fantasies, character pieces, one-movement works, and programmatic music. Only the modern French composers, led by César Franck, could find their way back to the path that Beethoven had laid out:

> After Beethoven and the Romantics, in fact, the German Sonata did not achieve any more progress: it followed blindly the paths left by Mendelssohn, but with a lesser

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23 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 375. “. . . les éléments de la forme cyclique, fournis pour la plupart par le génie beethovénien, bien avant d’être organisés consciemment et dans toute leur plénitude par César Franck.”

24 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 388. “. . . incompréhension des uns, ignorance des autres, provoquèrent dans la Sonate, au temps de Beethoven et même après lui, une stagnation presque totale de la forme.”

25 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 389. “Un seul, Mendelssohn, possédait, au plus haut degré, le savoir nécessaire; malheureusement, le génie était absent, en sorte que ses œuvres sont toutes écrites dans un style très pur... mais parfaitement conventionnel, sinon inexpressif.”

D’Indy discusses, in passing, the sonatas of Schubert and Schumann, but he doesn’t consider either composer to have made any significant advances in the realm of cyclic composition. Since this chapter focuses on cyclic sonatas, d’Indy escapes confronting the legacy of Berlioz for the time being.
understanding of the principles of construction; and Beethovenian pretension replaced true comprehension of the lessons left by the master, with an adverse effect. . . . With Franck, the brilliant French successor of the immortal German symphonist, began a new and exclusively French period that has continued until the present. The value and the force of the best works from this period rest on all the Beethovenian innovations and on the cyclic construction, which has finally been understood and brought to life. Under this benevolent influence, the traditional form of the Sonata has already regained, in our country at least, a surprising vitality and youth after a half-century of decadence and neglect.26

D’Indy holds up Beethoven as the aesthetic standard against which all other attempts at cyclic composition (and absolute music in general) should be measured, but then argues that only Franck and the current generation of French composers following in Franck’s footsteps are able to live up to (and possibly exceed) that standard.

D’Indy’s remarkable history of cyclic form, as outlined above, is informed by two of the guiding principles of his personal philosophy that inform his pedagogical approach throughout the Cours de composition: his fervent French nationalism and his conception of historical progress as a spiral. As an arch-conservative French Catholic with an aristocratic background, d’Indy believed fervently in the superiority of the French; his writing is full of anti-Germanic and anti-Semitic vitriol. Coming of age in the wake of France’s defeat at the hands of Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, d’Indy believed that if the composers of France were to create music worthy of their nation, they had to move away from the Conservatoire model,

26 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale II/i, 390. “Après Beethoven et les Romantiques, en effet, la Sonate allemande ne réalise plus aucun progrès: elle suit aveuglément les traces de Mendelssohn, mais avec une connaissance moindre des principes de construction; et la prétention beethovénienne y remplace désavantageusement la véritable compréhension des enseignements laissés par le maître. . . . Avec Franck, génial continuateur français de l’immortel symphoniste allemand, commence une période nouvelle et exclusivement française jusqu’à présent. La valeur et la force des meilleures œuvres appartenant à cette période reposent sur toutes les innovations beethovenennes et sur la construction cyclique enfin comprise et réalisée. Sous cette influence bienfaisante, la traditionnelle forme Sonate a déjà reconquis, dans notre pays tout au moins, une vitalité et une jeunesse vraiment surprenantes après un demi-siècle de décadence et d'oubli.”
inherited from the Second Empire, of creating one “frivolous” grand opera after another, and
claim as their own both France’s pre-revolutionary musical heritage and the “serious”
instrumental genres perfected by Beethoven but neglected, d’Indy believed, by the more recent
generations of German composers.27 As we have seen, in d’Indy’s telling of nineteenth-century
music history, Franck continued Beethoven’s legacy by bringing cyclic form to its full potential,
and it was incumbent upon the next generation of French composers to carry on Franck’s legacy
into the twentieth century. D’Indy’s “history” of cyclic form is thus written against two
intertwined historical narratives: that French composers are only capable of composing frivolous
opera (a narrative promoted both inside and beyond France), and that throughout the nineteenth
century Germany, with Beethoven and Wagner at its head, produced music with a degree of
profundity and originality which French musicians could only imitate and never surpass.

D’Indy’s historical “cherry picking”—pulling inspiration from some historical sources
such as pre-Revolutionary French music and Beethoven while leaping over other historical
developments—is emblematic of his conception of historical progress as a spiral. Jann Pasler, in
her article “Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress,” argues that this vision was shared by many
conservative monarchists of d’Indy’s generation, across different disciplines, who rejected
Republican innovations of the nineteenth century (and, indeed, the Republican ideal of linear
progress) and believed that France needed to look back to pre-Revolutionary models in order to

27 Steven Huebner and Andrew Deruchie have offered two ways to reconcile d’Indy’s anti-
Republican French nationalism with his admiration of the German revolutionary Beethoven.
Huebner, in his essay “D’Indy’s Beethoven,” argues that d’Indy wrote his 1911 biography of
Beethoven to counter the widely-held image of Beethoven as a hero of the revolution. Deruchie’s
analysis of d’Indy’s Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français hinges on the hypothesis that
“despite the superlatives [d’Indy] lavished on Beethoven’s symphonies, and despite the fact that
he held them up as models to emulate, his own symphony conspicuously rejects some of their
most salient features.” Deruchie, The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle, 157.
propel itself forward.\textsuperscript{28} In an address to mark the opening of the Schola Cantorum’s new building in 1900, d’Indy eloquently summarized this view of history: “Art, in its march forward through the ages, . . . is not a closed circle, but a spiral that always rises and always progresses.”\textsuperscript{29} Elsewhere, d’Indy presented this same view in an elaborate metaphor in which art takes the form of a cathedral eternally under construction. The ideal artist, in d’Indy’s view, is “a creator bringing to the old artistic edifice, eternally in construction, new materials that are solid and coherent with the old ones.” He opposes this to the revolutionary who “wants to construct beside the monument and, finding no source of support, disappears, carried off by the centrifugal force [of the spiral].” Nor would the ideal artist “attach himself to only one point of reinforcement and indefinitely turn around this same point without seeking to rise higher.”\textsuperscript{30} Implicit in this metaphor, of course, are the greatest monuments of pre-Revolutionary France: the gothic cathedrals of Paris, Strasbourg, Reims, and so many other medieval centers. Pasler opposes this conception of progress to the linear view favored by Republicans, such as the directors of the Conservatoire in the 1890s, Ambroise Thomas and Théodore Dubois, who both sought to maintain continuity with the principles espoused by the Conservatoire throughout the nineteenth century, namely, an orientation toward dramatic music at the expense of symphonic music.\textsuperscript{31} Pasler even goes so far as to argue that d’Indy’s preference for cyclic form is rooted in this image of the spiral: that the thematic transformation inherent in cyclic form enacts, in music, the process of looking back to earlier material in order to propel the work of art forward.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29} Quoted in Pasler, “Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress,” 402.
\textsuperscript{32} Pasler, “Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress,” 405. Others have argued against this reading of d’Indy’s use of cyclic form—e.g. Deruchie’s argument, cited above, that d’Indy’s treatment of
Cyclic form emerges in d'Indy’s treatise as the apotheosis of absolute music, the ultimate means of symphonic expression. D’Indy reinforces this point by couching his discussion of cyclic form in explicitly religious terms. He begins by tracing the etymological root of cyclicism to the circle, the most perfect of geometrical shapes. From the circle, it is only a short hop to the holy trinity:

This is, in effect, the idea of unity, of returning to the point of departure, to a common principle or a permanent character, after a more or less developed path, which leads us to return to this rich image of the cycle, borrowed at the same time from geometry and symbolism, where the circle (κύκλος) represents the perfect proportion, the trinity in the unity: and it is in this sense that one could legitimately call a triptych a cycle of tableaux, or a trilogy a cycle of tragedies.33

While many authors since d'Indy have invoked this network of meanings on their path to defining cyclic form, it is usually cited as a negative, a count against the term cyclic form. Charles Rosen refers to cyclic form as “an ambiguous as well as a vague term” due to the many possible meanings of cycle in a musical context.34 Benedict Taylor argues that “the terminology ‘cyclic form’ is not the most happy of inspirations, since it is easily confused with the contemporary notion of the cycle and hence ambiguous in its definition.”35 Like d’Indy, Taylor traces the Greek etymology of cyclic form, but finds the image of circular motion to be inappropriate to works composed in cyclic form, because it implies that a work’s end is “near-
identical to the beginning, thus creating a frame to the piece.”

D’Indy, on the other hand, considers this web of meanings as a positive: cyclic form, by power of association, takes on a degree of the perfection inherent in the circle, the trinity, the triptych, the epic cycles, and so on. Even if it is not literally circular, or does not actually contain three movements, works in cyclic form reach for this same type of perfection and are endowed with some of the mystical power associated with the circle, and by extension, the Catholic trinity.

D’Indy’s offhand reference to “the trinity in the unity” toward the end of the passage quoted above alludes only obliquely to possible religious connotations embedded in the imagery of cyclic form. A couple of paragraphs later, he renders the connection between cyclic form and religious imagery explicit in a page and a half long analogy between a cyclic sonata and a Gothic cathedral. He begins in more general terms by referring to the cyclic sonata as an “architectural monument,” before going on to describe each movement in terms of different aspects of a cathedral’s architecture:

Having attained this degree of perfection, the Sonate cyclique (or any symphonic work constructed following these same principles) becomes an architectural monument, due to this close affinity, which we have already referred to, between composition and construction.

Like a “sonorous cathedral,” this Sonata opens in front of us with a grandiose entryway whose sculptural forms make us sense already who is the God who inhabits it, who is the saint to whom it is devoted. Responding to the benevolent gesture of this symbolic entryway, listen to the introductory call that is made to us: let us discover it respectfully and proceed into the immense nave.

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36 Taylor, Mendelssohn, Time and Memory, 9.
37 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale II/i, 377. “Parvenue à ce degré de perfection, la Sonate cyclique (ou toute œuvre symphonique construite d’après les mêmes principes) devient, elle aussi, un monument architectural, en raison de cette étroite affinité, maintes fois signalée par nous, entre la composition et la construction. Comme une « cathédrale sonore », cette Sonate s'ouvre devant nous par un portail grandiose dont les formes sculpturales nous font pressentir déjà quel est le Dieu qui l'habite, quel est le saint à qui elle est vouée. Répondant au geste bienveillant de ce portail symbolique, écoutons l'appel.”
Significantly, d’Indy places the slow movement at the center of this image (a topic to which I will return in the discussion of forme lied):

Calm and collected, the transept unfurls in front of us its ternary construction. Between its lateral branches, alpha and omega, beginning and end, the choir rises up, the culminating point of the entire work, from which radiates all clarity, as everyone sings the glory of God, as in a sacred Lied in which the central phrase, different from the two repetitions that enclose it, develops, in sublime accents where the inspired soul of the artist exhales ineffably.  

Arguably, the most jarring aspect of this analogy (and the reference to “the trinity in the unity” that precedes it) is the apparent ease with which d’Indy inserts Catholic imagery into an aesthetic and etymological dissection of secular, symphonic musical terminology, with no overt connection to any religion. This mingling of the religious and secular is, however, typical of d’Indy’s writing in the Cours de composition, and of his larger worldview. Catholicism was part and parcel of d’Indy’s identity as a conservative, aristocratic monarchist, and he considered service to God to be among the chief objectives of all good art. Keeping in mind that the Cours de composition was based on lectures d’Indy gave at the Schola Cantorum, we would also do well to remember that it was originally founded with the aim of promoting the study of Gregorian chant and had an explicitly Catholic orientation. D’Indy opens the first volume of

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38 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale II/i, 377–378. “Calme et recueilli, le transept étale alors devant nous sa construction ternaire. Entre ses branches latérales, alpha et oméga, commencement et fin, s’élève le chœur, point culminant de l’œuvre entière, d’où rayonne toute clarté, car tout y chante la gloire de Dieu, comme en un Lied sacré dont la phrase centrale, différente des deux redites qui l'encadrent, s'épanouit en accents sublimes où l'âme inspirée de l'artiste s'exhale ineffablement.”

39 As Steven Huebner writes, “D'Indy's credo, as explained in the first volume of the Cours de composition musicale, was that all good art in Western culture had been conceived in an altruistic spirit of service—service to, and love of, one's neighbor, coextensive with service to, and love of, God.” Huebner, “D’Indy’s Beethoven,” 96.

40 No doubt d’Indy would have found it even more essential to maintain the Catholic orientation of the Schola (and, by extension, the Cours de composition musicale) after the passage of the
the *Cours de composition* by distinguishing between utilitarian and liberal art: the former is a way of life for the body, the latter, a way of life for the soul (and only the latter category qualifies as Art with a capital A). “It is by faith,” d’Indy writes, “and, one could say, by religiosity that utilitarian art, responding to bodily needs, is transformed into liberal art, a way of life for the soul.” Arguing that the diverse types of art (architecture, painting, writing, and music) stem from a single impulse, d’Indy writes that “beneath all of the human needs glides the aspiration toward Divinity, the striving of the creature toward his Creator; and it is through Art, in all of its forms, that the soul searches for the means to connect its life to the Being which is its driving force.” If all good music must serve God, then it becomes less surprising to find analogies to religious art sprinkled across the *Cours de composition*, even when d’Indy discusses symphonic, seemingly secular genres. Indeed, when d’Indy discusses the *cellule, période*, and *phrase* in “The Sonata of Beethoven,” he can’t resist calling attention to the tripartite nature of their grouping, declaring that “each of these three elements proceeds in some fashion from the two others, and taken together, they appear to us as a veritable trinity in unity.”

With this context in mind, let us return to d’Indy’s cathedral analogy. By creating an elaborate metaphor that situates cyclic form as a sort of musico-religious monument, d’Indy elevates cyclic form above other, non-cyclic, absolute music. Conventional absolute music and  

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French law of 1905 on the Separation of the Churches and the State, which mandated that public institutions such as the Conservatoire be secular.

41 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* I, 10–11. “C’est par la foi, et même, si l'on veut, par la religiosité que l'art utile répondant aux besoins de la vie du corps, se transforme en art libéral, moyen de vie pour l'âme.”

42 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* I, 11. “Au-dessus de tous les besoins humains plane l'aspiration vers la Divinité, l'élan de la créature vers son Auteur; et c'est dans l'Art, sous toutes ses formes, que l'âme cherche le moyen de rattacher sa vie à l'Etre qui en est le principe.”

43 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 235. “Chacun de ces trois éléments procède en quelque sorte des deux autres, et leur ensemble nous apparaît comme une véritable trinité dans l'unité.”
cyclic form are not two equally valid aesthetic choices: only a cyclic composition can rise to the level of an architectural and quasi-religious monument.

In addition to making both historical and religious arguments for the superiority of cyclic form over other forms of absolute music, d’Indy also argues that it is only through cyclic form that absolute music can approach the intensity of expression found in dramatic music, and specifically the music dramas of Richard Wagner. When d’Indy expounds upon the different types of thematic development that a composer must employ throughout a cyclic work (melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, etc.), he includes a musical example taken from Wagner’s *Ring* cycle, providing the following justification:

Richard Wagner seems to have pushed to its extreme limits this truly cyclic conception of themes when he uses them to signify the emotions felt by the characters of his dramas: the *Ring of the Nibelungen*, legend of the *ring, cycle* of epic and mythological poems, offers one of the most striking examples. If there is a *cyclic* theme in the full force of the term, it is the initial melody (*Ur Mélodie*) that exposes itself in the earliest measures of *Das Rheingold* . . . 44

Once again, d’Indy connects cyclic form to the larger network of meanings invoked by the term “cyclic,” though this time he focuses specifically on epic cycles rather than the perfect circle and Christianity. He also draws a direct musical connection between the processes of thematic transformation that are employed in both the music drama and cyclic form. Later on in his analysis of the opening measures of *Rheingold*, he makes this connection concrete, stating that “the *cyclic theme*, in the symphonic realm, and the *motif conducteur* (*Leit Motiv*), in the dramatic

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44 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 385. “Richard Wagner semble avoir poussé jusqu’à ses extrêmes limites cette conception véritablement cyclique des thèmes dont il se sert pour signer les sentiments éprouvés par les personnages de ses drames: le *Ring des Nibelungen*, légende de l’*anneau*, cycle de poèmes épiques et mythologiques, en offre un spécimen des plus frappants. S'il est un thème cyclique dans toute la force du terme, c'est assurément la mélodie initiale (*Ur Mélodie*) qui s'expose, dès les premières mesures du *Rheingold* . . . ”
realm, are, by definition, one and the same thing.” Through the use of a cyclic theme, and the type of thematic transformation commonly associated with the music drama, composers can create symphonic works that have the same epic scope, monumental architecture, and dramatic expression as the music drama—minus the text.

Andrew Deruchie has noted that d’Indy’s comparisons of cyclic form to a Wagnerian drama and to a sonorous cathedral point to an important duality in the composer’s thought: “a cathedral is stable and constituted in space as opposed to a drama, which is dynamic and constituted in time.” Deruchie suggests that, for d’Indy, while musical narrative “had its place in the sonata cycle, . . . it needed to be tempered by static elements.” However, alternative readings of this duality are possible. We have already seen that d’Indy prefers to cast a wide net of allusions; within this context, it seems reasonable, or even likely, that some of his allusions would bump against each other in uncomfortable ways, and perhaps even contradict each other. We can also invoke d’Indy’s conception of progress as a spiral to explicate his allusion to Wagnerian drama. We have already seen how d’Indy singled out Beethoven and Franck as progenitors of cyclic form while denigrating the efforts of Mendelssohn, Schubert and Schumann. By linking cyclic form to the Wagnerian music drama, d’Indy is arguing that fin-de-siècle works in cyclic form can propel forward the most significant innovations of dramatic music as well as symphonic music. Finally, d’Indy’s insistence that cyclic form can outdo the music drama at its own game, or that music drama is, at its heart, essentially cyclic, serves to

45 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale II/i, 385. “… le thème cyclique, dans le domaine symphonique, et le motif conducteur (Leit Motiv), dans l’ordre dramatique, sont en définitive une seule et même chose.”
46 Deruchie, The French Symphony at the Fin-de-Siècle, 193.
47 Deruchie, The French Symphony at the Fin-de-Siècle, 193.
accrue additional prestige to cyclic form, in the same way that the cathedral analogy elevated it above other types of symphonic music to a quasi-religious monument.

Ultimately, this is what ties together the various strands of d’Indy’s discussion of cyclic form: he positions cyclic form as the ultimate form of absolute music, a destiny that the Germans have ignored at their own peril, to the advantage of French composers. He uses every possible marker of distinction at his disposal to make this argument: he frames cyclic form as Beethoven’s final innovation, inherited by Franck; as the logical successor to Wagnerism that will restore symphonic music to a position of eminence; and as a musical counterpart to the ultimate symbol of ancien régime power, the Gothic cathedral.

1.3 Forme Lied

While the term cyclic form has gained a foothold in both Anglophone and Francophone music analysis and criticism, forme lied is rarely used in Anglophone music literature, despite its widespread use in Francophone writing on music. Forme lied was rapidly accepted in French musical circles as generations trained at the Schola Cantorum rose to prominence and the publication of Cours de composition made d’Indy’s teachings widely available. D’Indy used forme lied to describe the slow movement of the sonata cycle. D’Indy’s application of the term lied to instrumental slow movements sheds light on both his fraught relationship, as a French nationalist, to the German canon, and the central role he accorded to the slow movement within the sonata cycle. In his treatise, d’Indy makes a clear distinction between the chanson, which he defines as a type of primitive or popular song, and the lied, a more refined type of song which is the product of an individual artist’s expression. By applying the term lied to the slow movement, d’Indy implies that the slow movement is the expressive heart of the sonata: the only movement that could aspire to the type of transcendent, refined expression found in the lied. In cyclic form,
the dramatic infringes on the symphonic through the introduction of a recurring theme that takes on the type of expressive meaning commonly associated with the music drama’s leitmotif. In *forme lied*, it is through the use of a highly expressive melody that seems capable of singing without words that the dramatic encroaches upon the symphonic.

Despite (or perhaps because of) its widespread popularity in French musical circles, the original meaning of *forme lied* has been considerably diluted over the past century. In addition, *forme lied* is often confused with A.B. Marx’s *Liedform*, which has a very different meaning. Jean-Pierre Bartoli, reviewing Michel Lecompte's monograph *Guide illustré de la musique symphonique de Beethoven*, provides a concise summary of the present state of affairs when he criticizes Lecompte’s use of the term *forme lied*:

> We regret the use, for other movements, of the term *forme lied*, which comes to us from Vincent d'Indy, and which is already firmly anchored in the reflexes of French formal analysis: its use provokes, in effect, incomprehension on the part of those who were trained according to another school. Not to mention, in a Germanic tradition very well-known beyond our borders which descends from the teachings of A.B. Marx, the term encompasses a minuet as well as a large movement in ternary form . . . In these conditions, it would be much simpler to speak, on the one hand, of simple binary forms and binary forms in three sections, and on the other hand, about ternary forms . . .

In other words, *forme lied*’s specific meaning, as envisioned by d’Indy, is lost on any readers who were not trained according to d’Indy’s pedagogical system; even worse, due to its similarity to A.B. Marx’s *Liedform*, some readers may conflate the two terms and come away with a completely mistaken impression. It is clear that we need to go back to the source and recuperate

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some of the original shades of meaning that \textit{forme lied} once possessed if the term is to have any significance for twenty-first-century readers (especially beyond the limited sphere of d’Indy’s continued pedagogical influence).

D’Indy first introduces the term \textit{forme lied} in the chapter of the first volume that is devoted to “La Mélodie.” Here, d’Indy establishes three basic types of melodic phrases—primary, binary, and ternary—which are differentiated according to the number of melodic periods they contain. After d’Indy defines a ternary phrase as “constituted by three melodic periods, separated by two suspended rests,” he then notes that “this form has become, in our symphonic music, the characteristic of phrases in the slow movement, the \textit{forme-lied}.”\footnote{D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale} I, 41–42.} In the second volume of his treatise, as he expounds his history of the sonata, d’Indy elaborates on the meaning of \textit{forme lied}, which he applies to the slow movement of the sonata cycle. D’Indy’s choice of terminology has less to do with any formal considerations than with what he sees as the lyrical nature of slow movements:

It seems that in all times, and possibly in all musical genres, slow movements are the most “singing.” Melody is never more apparent and more indispensable than in slow movements, which are naturally more supple and more free from what we could call the rhythmic servitude inherent in all movements of a faster tempo.\footnote{D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale} II/i, 165. “De tout temps, semble-t-il, et peut-être dans tous les genres musicaux, les fragments lents furent les plus «chantants». Nulle part, en effet, la mélodie n’est plus apparente et plus indispensable que dans les pièces lentes, naturellement plus souples et plus affranchies de ce qu’on pourrait appeler les servitudes rythmiques inhérentes à tout mouvement un peu rapide.”}

In the chapter devoted to “The Pre-Beethovenian Sonata,” D’Indy initially defines \textit{forme lied} as essentially a basic ABA ternary form, wherein the first section serves as an exposition for the phrase \textit{Lied} (the movement’s primary melodic idea), the second section modulates away from the home key, and the third section returns to the home key and recapitulates the material of the
first. However, in his discussion of “The Sonata of Beethoven,” d’Indy expands this definition of *forme lied* to encompass several other common slow-motion forms: the *Lied développé* (the developed lied, also referred to as the *grand Lied*), a five-part expansion of the *Lied simple*, in which the phrase *Lied* returns not once but three times; the *Lied-sonate*, which other theorists would simply term a sonata without a development section; and the *Lied varié*, a theme and variations in which the phrase *Lied* serves as the theme. In this extended discussion of *forme lied*, it becomes clear that, for d’Indy, the term connotes much more than a specific form: as suggested in the quotation above, his choice of term is closely connected to the tempo, affect, and, above all else, the melodic character of the movement. No matter what form the rest of the movement may take, d’Indy argues that all slow movements begin with a phrase *lied*, and the phrase *lied* is what gives the movement its essential character: “The phrase *lied* plays, in the slow movement, the role of a true character, acting on its own. It is this unity of thematic character which must be considered, in our opinion, the distinctive characteristic of type L [d’Indy’s shorthand for *forme lied*].”

D’Indy appears to have been the first to use the term *forme Lied* to connote a slow movement with a variable form. It is likely that d’Indy first came across the German cognate of *forme Lied*, *Liedform*, in the writings of either Hugo Riemann or A.B. Marx. In 1838, Marx first defined *Liedform* as “Any piece of music that comprises a main melodic line and one or more

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51 See, in particular, the chart outlining *forme lied* in D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale II/i*, 169. There is a (probably intentional) ambiguity between the terms phrase *lied* and *forme lied* in d’Indy’s writing: the first section of a *forme lied* movement consists of a phrase *lied*, and both the phrase *lied* and the *forme lied* follow a similar ternary / ABA outline, with a primary section in the home key, a modulatory middle section, and a return to the initial key and melody at the end.

52 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale II/i*, 289–301.

53 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale II/i*, 289. “La phrase lied joue dans le mouvement lent le rôle d’un véritable personnage agissant seul. C’est cette unité du personnage thématique qui doit être considérée, selon nous, comme la caractéristique spéciale du type L.”
accompanying lines, and the essential content of which is contained within a single period …”;
however, as noted in the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the term is most commonly
used to describe binary form (*zweiteilige Liedform*) and ternary form (*dreiteilige Liedform*). In
his 1899 translation and “augmentation” of Riemann’s *Musik-Lexikon*, Georges Humbert
translates *Liedform* as *forme de lied*—not quite the same as d’Indy’s *forme lied*. According to
Humbert, *forme de lied* is based on two successive themes, arranged in a three-part form (i.e.,
ternary form). While Marx, Riemann, and Humbert’s *Liedforms* may differ slightly, they all
serve to identify a type of period-based musical structure, and do not specify a particular tempo
or affect in the way that d’Indy associates *forme lied* with a slow tempo and a singing melody
(*phrase lied*).

D’Indy’s idiosyncratic choice of term, *forme lied*, raises some important questions about
the significance and meaning of slow movements in *fin-de-siècle* France. Why the German term
*Lied* instead of the French *chanson*, *mélodie*, or *air*? What is implied by his attachment of an
expressly dramatic term (*lied*) to a symphonic genre, in the context of d’Indy’s own attempts to
enact a strict demarcation between dramatic and symphonic music?

In order to address the first question, we can begin by turning to the fourth chapter of
Volume III of d’Indy’s *Cours de composition*, which is simply titled “Le Lied.” D’Indy defines
the *lied* as “the concise musical expression of an event or a sentiment.” But *lied* does not
simply refer to any type of song; rather, it is the most highly developed form of song, an ideal
state. The *lied*, he explains, “proceeds from the popular chanson: in every musical nation, the

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56 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* III, 331. "Le lied est . . . l'expression musicale concise
d'un fait ou d'un sentiment."
chanson becomes lied at a given moment.”57 D’Indy divides the history of the lied-chanson into three periods. The first, covering the twelfth through eighteenth centuries, consists of the primitive and popular chansons—epics, folk tunes, and the like. The early nineteenth century sees the development of the lied musical in Germany. What distinguishes the lied musical from earlier forms of chanson is a shift from the popular, folk expression of the people (in d’Indy’s wording, “the people express themselves”) to the individual artist’s more refined expression of a national will (“the artist expresses the people”).58 Here the reasoning behind d’Indy’s choice of the term lied becomes clear: he directly associates the origins of the lied musical with a “German push toward monodic song, to escape Italian influence, to which it had been subject for so long.”59 He identifies Beethoven as a “precursor of the genre”; Schubert and Schumann, unsurprisingly, “refine the lied to the highest artistic degree.”60 From Germany, the lied musical spreads to France, Russia, and Scandinavia.61 The final, ideal, stage of development in the history of the lied sees a shift from the lied musical to the lied dramatique—in d’Indy’s words, “the artist expresses himself.”62 The lied becomes a “small dramatic fragment” in which the expression of a phrase or sentiment impacts the musical structure of the lied for the first time.63 In the same way that, according to d’Indy, cyclic form originated with Beethoven but was perfected by Franck, this ideal stage of the lied was reached not by German composers but rather by French composers following the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.64

57 D'Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 331. “Il [le lied] procède de la chanson populaire: dans toutes les nations musicales, la chanson s'est faite lied à un moment donné.”
58 D'Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 332.
59 D'Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 339.
60 D'Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 340.
61 D'Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 348.
62 D'Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 332.
63 D'Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 348.
64 D'Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 348.
D’Indy was not the only French musician of his time to refer to art songs composed in any language as lieder. While it is common practice today to refer to French art songs as mélodies rather than lieder, fin-de-siècle composers and critics were equally, if not more, likely to use the term lied. Hector Berlioz is generally credited with applying the term mélodie to the genre of art song when he gave his setting of Thomas Moore’s Irish Melodies the French title Neuf mélodies imitées de l’anglais in 1830. Within the decade, French translations of German lieder were often published as mélodies. Yet, by the turn of the century, when d’Indy first gave the lectures that would develop into his treatise, he (and many of his contemporaries) continued to refer to French art songs as lieder. Nor was d’Indy the only one to contend that the genre of the lied found its ultimate expression at the hands of French composers of the fin-de-siècle. In a 1908 article appearing in the journal Musica, the writer Camille Mauclair argued much the same:

What Wagner has attempted in the dramatic realm, it is at least curious to think that the ancient romance will realize: and by a singular turn of events, in this Nordic and German genre, it is modern France that will take the decisive step—France, present queen of the lied.

It was only during and following World War I, as anti-German sentiment permeated French musical circles, that the application of the term lied to French art song became problematic. For instance, Charles Koechlin, writing about mélodie in 1925, insists on using the term mélodie

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65 Bergeron, Voice Lessons, 7.
67 Camille Mauclair, “Le ‘Lied’ français contemporain,” 164. “Ce que Wagner a essayé dans le domaine dramatique, il est au moins curieux de penser que l’ancienne romance le réalisera: et par un singulier retour des choses, dans cette forme allemande et nordique, c'est la France moderne qui aura fait le pas décisif—la France, reine actuelle du lied.” Mauclair’s conception of the development of the lied, and the distinctions he draws between the chanson, the romance, and the lied, are so similar to d’Indy’s that one may wonder whether the two narratives derived from the same source—and, if they did, who deserves credit. This may be impossible to ascertain. While d’Indy’s Cours de composition musicale is based on his lectures at the Schola Cantorum between 1897 and 1904, the fourth volume of the Cours (in which d’Indy expounds on the history of the lied) was published posthumously in 1950. Mauclair’s article was published in 1908, when d’Indy had already been teaching at the Schola for a decade.
instead of lied, arguing that “the French mélodie for piano and voice remains very different from the German lied.”\textsuperscript{68} In his article about modern French music published the same year in the \textit{Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du Conservatoire}, Koechlin argues that this was not merely a nationalist stance, but one motivated by the qualitative differences between German and French poetry and music: “It is by design that we are avoiding the term of lied. Not at all to take a nationalist stand by refusing to use a German word (which would be puerile). But in reality, it is that the German lied differs profoundly from the French mélodie.”\textsuperscript{69}

Despite his protestations that his choice of terminology did not arise out of a “puerile” nationalism, Koechlin’s invective against the term lied does coincide with a wider wave of anti-German sentiment that found its most prominent proponent in the composer Camille Saint-Saëns. In 1916, at the height of the First World War, Saint-Saëns published a manifesto, \textit{Germanophilie}, which denounced the influence of modern German musicians, such as Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Brahms, on the youngest generation of French composers. Implicit in \textit{Germanophilie} was Saint-Saëns’ disgust with d’Indy and the whole generation of Franckiste composers who formed d’Indy’s circle. In 1919, Saint-Saëns directly confronted d’Indy with the publication of his short book \textit{Les Idées de M. Vincent d’Indy}. In this work, Saint-Saëns took d’Indy to task for his reliance on the ideas of German theorists, including Riemann: “We find here an example of the habit which we had before the war—and not just in music—of going to

\textsuperscript{69} Charles Koechlin, “Les tendances de la musique moderne française,” in \textit{Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du conservatoire}, ed. Albert Lavignac and Lionel de la Laurencie (Paris: Delagrave, 1925), 2:1, 130. “C'est à dessein que nous évitons le terme de lied. Non du tout pour faire acte d'un nationalisme (qui serait puéril) en nous refusant à l'emploi d'un mot allemand. Mais le vrai, c'est que le lied germanique diffère profondément de la mélodie française.”
search for the truth on the other side of the Rhine. . . . M. d'Indy gives us highly developed notes on Riemann, Hauptmann, Helmholtz, von Oetlingen. . . .”\textsuperscript{70}

Both Koechlin and Saint-Saëns assume that the usage of German terminology implies a privileging of the German musical canon above the music of France. In fact, d’Indy and Mauclair both practice a type of paradoxical French nationalism in which the early-nineteenth-century German \textit{lieder} of Schubert and Schumann are held up as exemplars that can only be surpassed by the \textit{lieder} of Massenet, Fauré, Duparc, Chausson, and Debussy.\textsuperscript{71} Saint-Saëns operates on a similar premise. In \textit{Germanophilie}, he argues that all of the great masters, “from Sebastian Bach to Beethoven, present to us a happy mixture of Italian and German blood. . . . This hybridization turned the music of all of these masters into a truly international art, an art which we can say has no homeland.”\textsuperscript{72} According to Saint-Saëns, Schumann was the first “truly German” composer whose music, “of such a profound charm,” first sent the “German poison” running through the veins of French composers.\textsuperscript{73} Yet even Schumann’s nationalism may be excused, and his “ravishing” \textit{lieder} admitted to the canon, because he was only “naïvely” German, an \textit{allemand} with a lower-case a. Schumann reflects “the Germany of yore, the artistic


\textsuperscript{71} D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale} III, 348–349.

\textsuperscript{72} Camille Saint-Saëns, \textit{Germanophilie} (Paris: Dorbon-aîné, 1916), 34. “. . . Tous, depuis Sébastien Bach jusqu’à Beethoven, nous montrent un mélange heureux du sang allemand et du sang italien. . . . Cette hybridation a fait de la musique de tous ces maîtres un art véritablement international, un art dont on pourrait dire qu’il n’a pas de patrie.” Note the similarity between this statement and d’Indy’s assertion above that the \textit{lied} was created at the moment when German music asserted its independence from Italy.

\textsuperscript{73} Saint-Saëns, \textit{Germanophilie}, 35. “Mais, par cela même que sa musique, d’un charme si profound, était essentiellement allemande, elle a commencé à glisser dans nos veines le « poison germanique ».”
and literary Germany that we had loved.”\textsuperscript{74} The same cannot be said of more recent German composers: “Since Schumann, german musicians were Germans with premeditation, they wanted to be Germans before everything . . .” This all-encompassing German nationalism was evidently the undoing of German musical creativity.\textsuperscript{75}

By choosing to identify the slow movement of a sonata cycle as \textit{forme lied}, d’Indy imbues the slow movement with a complex ideology of the aesthetic. The slow movement was the locus of a type of transcendent expression that was normally the province of the \textit{lied}. The ideal model of this expression could be found in early-nineteenth-century German music, in the \textit{lieder} of Schubert and Schumann and in the slow movements of Beethoven’s late string quartets, but had been surpassed by the compositions of the most recent generation of French composers. Even the term \textit{forme lied} was an improvement upon a German innovation: d’Indy had taken Riemann’s \textit{Liedform}, a basic formal definition, and added a significant generic dimension to the term that had not previously existed.

D’Indy’s chapter on the \textit{lied} offers some insights into the significance of his decision to apply an explicitly dramatic term, \textit{lied}, to a symphonic genre, the slow movement of a sonata cycle. On the first page of the chapter, he addresses the relationship between \textit{lied} and \textit{forme lied} in a footnote:

One must distinguish the vocal \textit{lied}, which is what we mean here, from \textit{forme lied}, which we have already studied in the sonata. But there are close affinities between the two genres, and at the base of the instrumental \textit{lied} (A.B.A.) we find the most rudimentary

\textsuperscript{74} Saint-Saëns, \textit{Germanophilie}, 34–35. “S’il est essentiellement allemand, c’est naïvement, parce que telle est sa nature; et il reflète bien cette Allemagne d’autrefois, l’Allemagne artiste et littéraire que nous avons aimée.”

\textsuperscript{75} Saint-Saëns, \textit{Germanophilie}, 36. “Depuis Schumann, les musiciens allemands ont été Allemands avec premeditation, ils ont voulu être Allemands avant tout . . .”
sense of the popular form of the rondeau (two refrains framing a couplet), a type that the vocal melody frequently adopts.\footnote{D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale} III, 331. “Il faut distinguer le lied vocal, tel que nous l'entendons ici, du lied forme, tel que nous l'avons l'étudié dans la sonate. Mais les affinités sont étroites entre les deux genres, et à la base du lied instrumental (A.B.A.) nous trouvons toujours l'acception la plus rudimentaire de la forme populaire du rondeau (deux refrains encadrant un couplet), type que la mélodie vocale adopte si souvent.”}

While d’Indy only discusses the similar forms used by both genres, he implies there are other affinities as well. As discussed above, d’Indy considered slow movements to be more “singing” than any other instrumental movement, and this was no doubt a major factor that contributed to his use of the term \textit{forme lied}. At other points in the chapter, d’Indy not only suggests other ways in which the genres of \textit{lied} and \textit{forme lied} may be related, but also points to connections between the \textit{lied} and the Wagnerian music drama. When d’Indy first defines the \textit{lied musical}, he contextualizes it within a larger push to “liberate German music from the yoke of Italy, which is manifested at the same time in the domain of theatre, where we have seen that it has lead to Weber and Wagner.”\footnote{D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale} III, 339. “Cette poussée, dont l'objet était la libération de la musique allemande au joug de l'Italie, s'est manifestée en même temps dans le domaine du théâtre, où nous avons vu qu'elle a about à Weber et à Wagner.”} Thus, the \textit{lied} and the music drama form part of the same push to Germanize dramatic music. D’Indy explores the connection between the \textit{lied} and the music drama at greater length in his discussion of the \textit{lied dramatique}. While discussing Ernest Chausson's \textit{Chanson perpétuelle}, he notes that in this song and many others, “the voice declaims, recites, but \textit{does not sing}.”\footnote{D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale} III, 352. “. . . \textit{la voix déclame, récite, mais ne chante pas}.”} He attributes this phenomenon to Wagner, in whose music dramas “all lyrical expression of the text has passed to the orchestra and one could maintain that this circumstance has created a ‘Wagnerian error’; the voice no longer has anything other than a
simple role of declamation.” D’Indy’s disquisition on the evolution of the lied reveals a paradox in his aesthetics: whereas d’Indy praises forme lied slow movements that inject vocality into a purely instrumental context, he warns against robbing the voice of its own lyrical expression in favor of instrumental vocality when a human voice is present (as in a lied).

The significance of the slow movement within d’Indy’s conception of the sonata cycle (and specifically cyclic-form incarnations of the sonata) is illustrated most clearly in the “sonorous cathedral” analogy that was discussed above. D’Indy unambiguously places the slow movement at the center of this analogy:

Calm and collected, the transept unfurls in front of us its ternary construction. Between its lateral branches, alpha and omega, beginning and end, the choir rises up, the culminating point of the entire work, from which radiates all clarity, as everyone sings the glory of God, as in a sacred Lied in which the central phrase, different from the two repetitions that enclose it, develops, in sublime accents where the inspired soul of the artist exhales ineffably.

D’Indy positions the slow movement as the transept, the section of a cathedral that runs perpendicular to the main body of the building, forming the cross shape that is an essential feature of cathedral architecture. One has to enter quite far into a cathedral to reach the transept,

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79 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale III, 352. “Or, chez Wagner, par exemple, toute l'expression lyrique du texte a passé dans l'orchestre, et on pourrait soutenir qu'il y a de ce fait une "erreur wagnerienne"; la voix n'a plus, avec lui, qu'un rôle de simple déclamation.”

80 This apparent paradox could also be attributed to the large amount of time that passed between the publication of the volumes of the Cours de composition musicale that exposited d’Indy’s theories of forme lied and the lied: the former was published in 1909 and the latter, posthumously, in 1950.

81 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale II/i, 377–378. “Calme et recueilli, le transept étale alors devant nous sa construction ternaire. Entre ses branches latérales, alpha et oméga, commencement et fin, s'élève le chœur, point culminant de l'œuvre entière, d'où rayonne toute clarté, car tout y chante la gloire de Dieu, comme en un Lied sacré dont la phrase centrale, différente des deux redites qui l'encadrent, s'épanouit en accents sublimes où l'âme inspirée de l'artiste s'exhale ineffablement.”
which usually separates the main body of the cathedral from the altar. In a similar fashion, the slow movement in *fin-de-siècle* works often appears as the third out of four movements (in contrast to many of Beethoven’s sonatas, which position the slow movement directly after the first movement). If this positioning were not sufficient to convey the importance of the slow movement, d’Indy explicitly labels it the “culminating point of the entire work” and finishes with an analogy to a “sacred Lied” which “develops in sublime accents where the inspired soul of the artist exhales ineffably.” This analogy links back to a connection that d’Indy makes in his initial discussion of *forme lied* in the first volume of the *Cours*, where he cites the ternary phrase structures found in some Gregorian chants as a precursor of *forme lied*. *Forme lied* thus distills what d’Indy considered the essence of French music (Gregorian chant) and the essence of the composer’s soul into one singular, ineffable moment, the culmination of the entire work.

Nor was d’Indy the only writer of his time to frame the power of the slow movement in such personal terms. Consider, for example, the narrator’s thoughts in Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, as he contemplates the instrumental music of the fictional composer Vinteuil: “. . . It is indeed a unique accent, an unmistakable voice, to which in spite of themselves those great singers that original composers are rise and return, and which is a proof of the irreducibly individual existence of the soul.” The narrator is discussing the deep similarities which exist between phrases in Vinteuil’s Violin Sonata and Septet, absolute instrumental music which, despite its lack of text and singers, bears an expressive and dramatic weight that can only be described through recourse to the voice.

We have arrived at the juncture of cyclic form and *forme lied*: instrumental music that is endowed with a special capacity for drama that is more commonly associated with vocal genres,

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be it the Wagnerian music drama or the lied. Ultimately, d’Indy’s treatment of these two terms reveals some of his preoccupations that inform the whole of the Cours de composition musicale: his revisionist, nationalistic approach to music history, his preoccupation with religion, his predilection for Beethoven, Wagner and Franck above all other composers. Both terms emerge as signifiers of some ultimate form of musical expression: cyclic form as the apotheosis of the sonata cycle, and forme lied as the expressive center of that cycle.

1.4 D’Indy on Franck’s Quartet

D’Indy’s pioneering use of the terms forme lied and cyclic form was rooted in a new paradigm for instrumental composition that flourished in France following the premiere of César Franck’s String Quartet in 1890. D’Indy published two extended analyses of Franck’s Quartet: one in his biography of Franck, published in 1906; and the other in Volume 2, Part 2 of the Cours de composition, published posthumously in 1933.83 The chapter on the Quartet in d’Indy’s biography of Franck provides more detail on Franck’s compositional process, while d’Indy’s treatment of the Quartet in the Cours de composition musicale provides a fuller musical analysis. Overall, d’Indy appears most concerned with the aspects of Franck’s Quartet that he found the most beautiful and novel: the genesis of the work’s cyclic theme; the unique formal design of the first movement, in which the sonata form is framed by a forme lied introduction and coda; and the unparalleled beauty of the forme lied third movement. Not only do these analyses showcase

83 See Vincent d’Indy, César Franck (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1906), 163–179 and d’Indy, Cours de composition musicale II/ii, 259–265. Although this volume of the Cours was published posthumously, nearly three decades after d’Indy’s biography of Franck first appeared, it is important to keep in mind that this volume is based on the lectures that d’Indy gave at the Schola Cantorum in 1901–1902. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain whether d’Indy’s analysis in the Cours predates the analysis that appears in the biography, or vice versa.
how d’Indy applied his own theoretical terms to the analysis of musical works; they also reveal
the extent to which the Quartet may have shaped d’Indy’s development of these new terms.

D’Indy begins the chapter on the Quartet in his Franck biography with a disquisition on
the manifold difficulties of composing a string quartet, which he considered to be “certainly the
most difficult form to treat with dignity,” a genre that must not be attempted unless one had “a
strong maturity of spirit and talent, in conjunction with solid writing experience.”84 Franck met
these criteria: he did not begin to contemplate writing a quartet until 1888, his sixty-sixth year.

D’Indy describes his surprise when he arrived one day at Franck’s house to find “spread out on
his [Franck’s] piano, the scores of the quartets by Beethoven, Schubert, and even of Brahms.”85

D’Indy then turns his attention to the first movement, to which he devotes fully half of the
chapter, dwarfing his discussions of the other three movements. The first movement, d’Indy
explains, is “the most shocking symphonic movement that had been constructed since the last
quartets of Beethoven,” as it contains “two pieces of music, each living its own life and
constituting a complete organism.”86 The “two pieces” that d’Indy refers to are the introduction,
which begins with the cyclic theme that will return throughout the Quartet, and the ensuing
sonata form, which is trapped between the introduction and its reprise in the coda and is cut in
half by a 40-measure fugue on the cyclic theme in the tempo of the introduction. Struggling to
come up with an adequate terminology to describe the formal sections of this unusual movement,

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84 D’Indy, César Franck, 165. “Le quatuor à cordes est certainement la forme la plus
difficile à traiter dignement . . .”
85 D’Indy, César Franck, 165. “Ce fut au cours de sa cinquante-sixième année que César Franck
osa penser à la composition d’un quatuor pour archets ; et encore, en cette année 1888 où nous
remarquions avec surprise, étalées sur son piano, les partitions des quatuors de Beethoven, de
Schubert et même de Brahms . . .”
86 D’Indy, César Franck, 170. “Ce premier mouvement est, en effet, la plus étonnante pièce
symphonique qui ait été construite depuis les derniers quatuors beethoveniens. Sa forme,
essentiellement nouvelle et originale, consiste en deux morceaux de musique vivant chacun de sa
d’une vie propre et possédant chacun un organisme complet . . .”
d’Indy names them after their respective forms: the introduction, *forme lied*, and the sonata, *forme sonate*. Figure 1.2 below reproduces a chart from d’Indy’s Franck biography, illustrating how the *forme lied* and *forme sonate* interact.

Figure 1.2: *Forme lied* and *forme sonate* in the first movement of Franck’s Quartet

In addition to providing formal analyses of the *forme lied* and *forme sonate* (which will be discussed at greater length below), d’Indy dwells at length on the genesis of the first movement’s *forme lied*. In order to demonstrate to “young composers who consider everything that flows from their pen to be immutable” how even a composer of Franck’s stature must be willing “to strike out everything that had already been written and to begin again from scratch,” d’Indy reproduces three versions of the initial 16 measures of the Quartet. One might wonder why d’Indy spends so much time on the *forme lied* in particular. He explains that “this Quartet is

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87 D’Indy, *César Franck*, 173.
constructed with the help of the *generative theme* [the theme which opens the *forme lied*] which will become the expressive reason for the entire musical cycle.”\(^{89}\) We can see from d’Indy’s comments that the first movement’s *forme lied* plays an outsized role in his interpretation of the Quartet. Not only does it provide the cyclic theme that would tie together all the movements; it also acts as the expressive core of the Quartet.

Following the extremely thorough discussion of the first movement, d’Indy dispenses with the second movement, a *scherzo* in F# minor, in a single, short paragraph. Besides noting its key and form, d’Indy relays that the movement was composed in only ten days, based on the dates marked by Franck at the end of the first and second movement sketches.\(^{90}\)

By contrast, d’Indy devotes several paragraphs to the third movement, which he refers to simply by its tempo indication (*larghetto*). D’Indy describes the third movement as “an admirable monument of purity, grandeur, and melodic sincerity.”\(^{91}\) He places the opening phrase of the movement, in particular, on the same pedestal as Beethoven’s string quartets, writing, “I do not think that, since the last quartets of Beethoven, it is possible to encounter, in all musical production, a phrase so elevated, so completely beautiful in thought, proportions, and effusion as this slow prayer.”\(^{92}\) As with the opening phrase of the first movement, d’Indy describes in some

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\(^{89}\) D’Indy, *César Franck*, 170. “Ce quatuor est édifié à l'aide d'un thème générateur qui devient la raison expressive de tout le cycle musical . . .”

\(^{90}\) D’Indy, *César Franck*, 174.

\(^{91}\) D’Indy, *César Franck*, 174. “Un monument admirable de pureté, de grandeur, de sincérité mélodique.”

\(^{92}\) D’Indy, *César Franck*, 174–175. “Je ne pense pas que, depuis les andante des derniers quatuors beethoveniens, il soit possible de rencontrer, dans toute la production musicale, une phrase aussi élevée, aussi complètement belle de pensée, de proportions et d'effusion que cette lente prière.”
detail how Franck had “searched” for the phrase for a long time, and his excitement once he had “found” it. However, d’Indy does not discuss the form of the movement at any length.

The fourth movement receives the most attention of any movement besides the first. As with his discussion of the first movement, d’Indy combines a description of the available sketches with a formal analysis of the fourth movement. As regards the sketches, d’Indy makes a few noteworthy observations. Probably the most-remarked-upon feature of the sketches is the inscription Franck added immediately after penning the opening motive of the fourth movement: “There must be a new phrase here, see the Quartet in E flat,” which d’Indy believed to be a reference to Beethoven’s op. 127 Quartet. Immediately following this inscription is a sketch of what would become the theme of the second movement’s trio, in the time signature of the fourth movement instead of the second, which d’Indy takes as evidence that this initial sketch for the fourth movement was drafted before the second movement. D’Indy transcribes an additional, fascinating comment from this early sketch: “In the middle of the second part, or towards the end, or before the return of the opening of the last movement, reminiscence of the Andante.”

Franck’s inscription here indicates that from the earliest stages of planning the fourth movement, he intended to bring back the third movement’s phrase lied at some point, even if he was uncertain exactly where to place the reminiscence.

As for his formal analysis of the fourth movement, d’Indy notes that “it is constructed in forme-sonate and is preceded by an introduction in which the listener rediscovers, in succession, the motifs of the preceding movements, a process that is well-known, but rarely put to good

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93 D’Indy, César Franck, 175.
94 D’Indy, César Franck, 176. “Il faut une phrase neuve ici, voir le Quatuor en mi bémol.” See Footnote 1 on this page of d’Indy’s text for the Beethoven attribution.
95 D’Indy, César Franck, 176. “Au milieu de la 2e partie, ou vers la fin, ou avant la retour du commencement du final, réminiscence de l’Andante.”
He provides a basic formal outline of the sonata’s exposition, in which he labels the main themes and demonstrates how they derive from motives first heard in the first movement. However, he does not go into very much detail about the later parts of the movement, noting that, at the end, “the obstinate rhythm of the scherzo finishes by bringing back in augmentation the radiant melody of the larghetto which closes almost religiously this magnificent work.” As this final remark indicates, the fourth movement is more complex than d’Indy’s short analytical sketch here would suggest.

D’Indy’s discussion of Franck’s Quartet in the *Cours de composition* fleshes out the analytical ideas that are sketched in the biography, and also includes full formal analyses of all four movements. This suggests that d’Indy’s comments on the Quartet in the *Cours de composition* postdate his chapter on the Quartet in the biography. D’Indy begins his discussion in the *Cours de composition* by contextualizing the Quartet within Franck’s chamber music output and discusses how Franck’s Quartet aligns with the general archetype of the string quartet that he had laid out earlier in the *Cours*. He provides a brief overview of the form and key of the Quartet’s four movements before analyzing each movement in detail.

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98 As discussed above, the actual chronology of d’Indy’s writings is difficult to ascertain. While the volume of the *Cours de composition musicale* that lays out d’Indy’s approach to sonata form was not published until 1909, three years after the Franck biography, and the volume that contains the analysis of the Quartet didn’t appear until 1933 (after d’Indy’s death), d’Indy freely incorporates musical terminology into the Franck biography that he codified in the *Cours* only afterward. To further complicate things, the relevant volumes of the *Cours* transcribe lectures that d’Indy gave between 1899 and 1902, which means the material included in the *Cours* predated the biography.
As with his discussion in the biography, d’Indy’s analysis of the first movement in the *Cours* centers on the novel form of the movement, with its two “separate pieces.” In the *Cours,* however, d’Indy stresses that the *forme lied* performs a function far beyond that of an ordinary introduction to a sonata-form movement:

As with the last Beethovenian quartets, it is a type of Introduction that acquaints us with the principal conductor motifs of the work; but look more attentively; is this really an Introduction? This *Poco Lento* that we will see reappear after the exposition of the *Allegro* and at the end of the whole movement, is a veritable *slow movement,* completely autonomous, with its two cyclic motifs (y and x) totally distinct from the two themes (A and B) of the *Allegro.*

D’Indy also argues more explicitly in the *Cours* that the *Poco Lento* introduction, fugue, and coda form a single, unified piece, with the fugue acting as a development connecting the introduction and coda. Speaking of the *forme lied*’s motifs, d’Indy writes that “these motifs are, at the beginning, presented in the tonic and the dominant; at the end, they will both be in the tonic; and the *fugato* in the middle will be the development particular to the *Poco Lento,* equally distinct from that of the *Allegro.*”

This argument does not contradict his basic description in the biography of how the *forme lied* and *forme sonate* each constitute two separate, independent pieces within the one movement, but rather extends the argument one step further. By asserting that the fugue could act as a development for the *forme lied,* d’Indy seems to suggest that one could, theoretically, string together the introduction, fugue, and coda to form an entire slow-tempo sonata, with exposition, development, and coda (Figure 1.3 sketches out this possibility).

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99 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/ii, 260. “Comme dans les derniers Quatuors beethovéniens, c’est une sorte d’Introduction qui nous fera connaître les principaux motifs conducteurs de l’œuvre: mais regardons plus attentivement; est-ce bien une Introduction ? Ce *Poco Lento* que nous verrons reparaître après l’exposition de l’*Allegro* et à la fin de toute la pièce, c’est un véritable *mouvement lent,* complètement autonome, avec ses deux motifs cycliques (x et y) nettement distincts des deux thèmes (A et B) de l’*Allegro.*”

100 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/ii, 260. “Ces motifs sont d’abord exposés à la tonique et à la dominante : à la fin, ils seront tous les deux sur la tonique; et le *fugato* du milieu sera le développement particulier du *Poco Lento,* également distinct de celui de l’*Allegro . . .*”
Similarly, d’Indy’s formal analysis of the movement’s *forme sonate* builds upon the themes and key areas that he identified in the biography, but expands the description of each section, especially the sonata’s development and recapitulation.

Figure 1.3: Imagining Franck’s Quartet, first movement, as two separate pieces (*lied* and *sonate*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lied: introduction</th>
<th>Lied: fugue</th>
<th>Lied: coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Sonate</em>: exposition</td>
<td><em>Sonate</em>: development</td>
<td><em>Sonate</em>: recapitulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D’Indy devotes a bit more space to the second movement in the *Cours* than he did in the biography. Though he identifies the *scherzo*’s various themes and provides a general formal outline, the *scherzo* still receives less attention than the rest of the Quartet. Besides the analysis, d’Indy does add one other important detail missing from the biography’s description: he notes the reappearance of the cyclic theme from the first movement’s *Poco Lento* in the second movement’s trio.

In his discussion of the third movement, d’Indy bolsters arguments that he originally made in the biography. He restates, with slightly different details, the story of how Franck labored to create the ideal phrase for the opening of this movement. However, he goes a step further in his praise of the third movement than he had in the biography when he states that the theme of the *Larghetto* marks “the climax of the entire Quartet.” D’Indy identifies the specific form of this movement, which he had not done in the biography, labeling it a *lied developpé*, a five-part expansion of the ternary *forme lied*, with the formal outline ABACA. He also makes

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101 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/ii, 263.
special note of the “totally new theme” that appears in the penultimate section (C) and then is integrated into the final section A.\textsuperscript{102}

As noted above, d’Indy provided only a basic analysis of the fourth movement in the biography, which is considerably expanded in the \textit{Cours}. His analysis focuses primarily on the treatment of the fourth movement’s opening theme, which he labels theme \textit{z}, over the course of the movement. He also describes at length the unusual formal design of the movement’s development and the lengthy coda, which is so substantial he calls it the “terminal development.” Although d’Indy’s analysis in the \textit{Cours} is more balanced overall than that in the biography, providing at least a basic formal outline for each movement of the Quartet, it nevertheless reinforces certain points of emphasis that are already latent in the analysis in the biography. In particular, d’Indy’s discussions of the first and third movements highlight how central he felt \textit{forme lied} to be to the whole Quartet. He identifies the cyclic theme that opens the first movement’s \textit{forme lied} as the expressive basis of the Quartet, and the \textit{phrase lied} of the third movement as the expressive climax of the Quartet. He also spends more time detailing the circumstances of these phrases’ composition than any other part of the Quartet. This suggests both that he found Franck’s use of cyclic form and \textit{forme lied} to be among the most novel and meaningful aspects of the Quartet, and perhaps even that he thought readers would most want to know the background of these aspects of the Quartet in particular.

These observations provide some insight into how d’Indy applied his own new terms to his analysis of Franck’s Quartet, and how he privileged \textit{forme lied} and cyclic form within his own analysis. But his analyses also suggest that Franck’s Quartet, in particular, may have shaped d’Indy’s own conception of the inner workings of these genres. Returning now to the elaborate

\textsuperscript{102} D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale II/ii}, 263. This fourth section will feature especially prominently in my own interpretation of the third movement in Chapter 2.
allegory discussed earlier in this chapter, in which d’Indy likened the cyclic sonata to a “sonorous cathedral,” the similarities between his imagined sonorous cathedral and his analysis of Franck’s Quartet are striking. Although the allegory appears in his discussion of “la sonate cyclique”—the cyclic sonata—the imagined work contains four movements. At the time when Franck composed his Quartet, four-movement instrumental works were comparatively rare—Franck’s own Trios, Quintet, and Symphony all contained three movements. Moreover, Franck switched the traditional order of the internal movements of his Quartet, placing the scherzo second and the slow movement third. While this ordering was less common in earlier Classical and Romantic four-movement works, many composers of the fin de siècle followed Franck’s lead in their own quartets, including Debussy and Ravel—and so did d’Indy in his ordering of the movements in the sonorous cathedral allegory. Finally, specific details of the allegory seem too close to d’Indy’s description of Franck’s Quartet to be purely coincidental. D’Indy describes the melody of the sonorous cathedral’s third movement as “a sacred Lied in which the central phrase, different from the two repetitions that enclose it, develops, in sublime accents where the inspired soul of the artist exhales ineffably.”\(^{103}\) Compare this to d’Indy’s description of the phrase lied found in the third movement of Franck’s Quartet, quoted above: “a phrase so elevated, so completely beautiful in thought, proportions, and effusion as this slow prayer.”\(^{104}\) While these observations don’t offer any definitive proof of a link between the sonorous

\(^{103}\) D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 377–378. “Calme et recueilli, le transept éta
alors devant nous sa construction ternaire. Entre ses branches latérales, alpha et oméga, commencement et fin, s'élève le chœur, point culminant de l'œuvre entière, d'où rayonne toute clarté, car tout y chante la gloire de Dieu, comme en un Lied sacré dont la phrase centrale, différente des deux redites qui l'encadrent, s'épanouit en accents sublimes où l'âme inspirée de l'artiste s'exhale ineffablement.”

\(^{104}\) D’Indy, *César Franck*, 174–175. “. . . Une phrase aussi élevée, aussi complètement belle de pensée, de proportions et d'effusion que cette lente prière.”
cathedral allegory and Franck’s Quartet, they suggest how d’Indy’s study of and admiration for the Quartet may have profoundly influenced his conception of cyclic form.
Chapter 2

Franck’s String Quartet: The Model for a New Generation

The 1890 premiere of César Franck’s String Quartet ushered in three decades of renewed interest and experimentation in the genre among a wide variety of French composers, including Debussy, Ravel, Saint-Saëns, d’Indy, Chausson, and even a young Milhaud (as illustrated in Figure 2.1 below).¹ Léon Vallas, in his biography of Franck, notes that the reception at the premiere on April 19, 1890, was “triumphant; twice Franck was called onto the platform to respond to the public applause, both times showing as much surprise as joy in his demeanor.”² Franck’s Quartet presented to these composers a new blueprint for the string quartet that shifted the weight of musical meaning away from the unfolding of a first-movement sonata form (traditionally the anchor of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sonata cycles), toward thematic development between movements through the use of cyclic form, and to the highly expressive forme lied. The Quartet also demonstrates how post-Wagnerian composers could harness elements of Wagner’s leitmotivic technique in order to create complex narrative structures within instrumental, absolute works, through the use of cyclic form. The Quartet reveals Franck wrestling with the Wagnerian legacy in another, more personal way, as well, through a series of striking allusions in the second and third movements to two of the most recognizable motives.

¹ The fundamental role played by Franck’s String Quartet in the revival of string quartet composition in France has been remarked upon by Franck’s early biographers, including d’Indy and Léon Vallas, and more recent scholars of French chamber music, including Serge Gut and Daniele Pistone, Marianne Wheeldon, and Michael Strasser. Timothy Jones argues that Sylvio Lazzari’s String Quartet in A Minor, op. 17, which premiered in 1888, should share the credit with Franck’s Quartet for kickstarting the trend toward string quartet composition (see Jones, “Nineteenth-Century Orchestral and Chamber Music,” 71). However, as Jones points out, Lazzari’s Quartet “met with little public success at its premiere.” The premiere of Franck’s Quartet, on the other hand, was one of the great triumphs of his career.
from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. Thus Franck’s Quartet was not only a significant contribution to the genre of the French string quartet, but also to another important *fin-de-siècle* repertoire: works that allude to the music of Richard Wagner, usually as an act of parody.³

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### Figure 2.1: French string quartets composed between 1890–1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Dubois</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d'Indy</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 1, op. 35</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Roger-Ducasse</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debussy</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Ropartz</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 2</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ropartz</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 1</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Milhaud</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 1</td>
<td>1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vierne</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Koechlin</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 1</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d'Indy</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 2, op. 45</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Milhaud</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 2</td>
<td>1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chausson</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Koechlin</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 2</td>
<td>1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Saëns</td>
<td>String Quartet op. 112</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Milhaud</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 3</td>
<td>1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samazeuilh</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Honegger</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnard</td>
<td>String Quartet, op. 16</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Durey</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravel</td>
<td>String Quartet</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Milhaud</td>
<td>String Quartet no. 4</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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³ The corpus of Wagner parodies includes Emmanuel Chabrier’s *Souvenirs de Munich* (1886), Gabriel Fauré and André Messager’s *Souvenirs de Bayreuth*, and culminates most infamously in Debussy’s “Golliwogg’s Cake-Walk” from his *Children’s Corner* suite (1908). But quotations and allusions to Wagner show up in many “serious” *fin-de-siècle* compositions as well. Wagner’s influence on Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* is perhaps the best-known such case, as documented in Carolyn Abbate’s article, “‘Tristan’ in the Composition of ‘Pelléas,’” *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 2 (1981): 117–41. Steven Huebner discusses the topic of Wagnerian influence on *fin-de-siècle* operas extensively in *French Opera at the Fin De Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford University Press, 2006). In the realm of absolute music, David Code discusses the significant role that the *Tristan* chord plays in Debussy’s String Quartet (a topic which features prominently in Chapter 3 of this dissertation) in “Debussy’s String Quartet in the Brussels Salon of ‘La Libre Esthétique,’” *19th-Century Music* 30, no. 3 (2007): 257–87. Michael Puri argues that Maurice Ravel’s Piano Trio alludes to Wagner’s *Parsifal* in “The Passion of the Passacaille: Ravel, Wagner, Parsifal,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 25, no. 3 (November 2013): 285–318.
2.1 Sonata Form versus *Forme Lied* and Cyclic Form in Franck’s Quartet

The first and fourth movements of Franck’s String Quartet both contain a sonata form that is ensconced within a substantive introduction-coda frame. Hepokoski and Darcy, in their canonical work *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, describe the function of introductions and codas within a sonata form movement in a way that seems particularly relevant to these two movements. Introductions and codas exemplify what they term “parageneric space”: the material that appears within a sonata-form movement but lies outside the action of the sonata proper (what they would call the “sonata space”). While introductions and codas are the most common types of parageneric space, they rarely appear together as a frame for a sonata movement before the nineteenth century. Hepokoski and Darcy provide an apt description of the introduction-coda frame’s function in relation to the sonata: “Whenever we find an introduction-coda frame the interior sonata seems subordinated to the outward container. The introduction and coda represent the higher reality, under whose more immediate mode of existence—or under whose embracing auspices—the sonata form proper is laid out as a contingent process, a demonstration of an artifice that unfolds only under the authority of the prior existence of the frame.”

The outer movements of Franck’s String Quartet push these characteristics to their extremes. The first movement’s introduction, fugue, and coda represent the higher reality not only of *forme lied*, but also cyclic form, under which the “contingent” sonata form, lacking external, intermovement significance, unfolds. The fourth movement’s sonata form is similarly

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overpowered by its introduction and coda, which recall thematic material from all of the previous movements.

The first and fourth movements also illustrate how the use of cyclic form, with its intrusions of thematic material from the past, introduces a new aspect of time to instrumental music: memory. The first movement, with its many discrete sections and unexpected shifts between the material of the lied and the sonata, presents a microcosm of cyclic form itself. It displays some of the techniques that will be used throughout the rest of the Quartet to herald the return of cyclic material. Chief among these is the use of an “invocation” motive: a repeated motive that alerts the listener to an impending rupture in musical time, and seems to invoke or call forth a thematic reminiscence. If the first movement enacts cyclic form in miniature, before the rest of the work unfolds, the fourth movement is the culmination of cyclic processes that have unfolded over the course of the whole work.

2.2 The First Movement: Sonata Form versus Forme Lied

As d’Indy observed, the first movement of Franck’s Quartet contains two pieces of music: the forme lied introduction, fugue, and coda, and the sonata. However, d’Indy’s assertion that the two pieces “each live their own life” is not entirely accurate. In fact, the sonata is entirely contained and constrained by the lied. Through the movement’s formal structure, large-scale key relationships, and motivic development, the lied not only traps the sonata form within itself, but renders the sonata contingent upon the lied. The movement telegraphs an important message about the newly-altered relationship between sonata form and the string quartet at large: in the new string quartet, sonata form is no longer the dominant vehicle for creative expression—that role is now being assumed by forme lied and cyclic form. Figure 2.2 illustrates how the
relationship between the 
\textit{lied} and sonata sections of the movement differs from a normative sonata with an introduction-coda frame.

Figure 2.2: Normative sonata form versus the structure of Franck’s Quartet, first movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normative sonata form</th>
<th>Franck’s Quartet, first movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Introduction)</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td>(Exposition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Fugue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapitulation</td>
<td>(Development / Recapitulation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Coda)</td>
<td>Coda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The quartet begins with the lower three instruments playing a \textit{fortissimo}, sustained D major triad as the first violin outlines the same triad in three stately quarter notes (Example 2.1 provides an overview of the movement’s form and themes). These three quarter notes, A-F#-D, form the most basic motive of the cyclic theme which will return in the later movements of the quartet (see Example 2.2). However, rather than simply introducing the cyclic theme and then proceeding on to the sonata, Franck creates an 80-measure \textit{forme lied} in D major.\footnote{D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale} II/ii, 260.} Following a 25-measure elaboration on the cyclic theme, a secondary theme in the key of the dominant, A major, is introduced (see Example 2.3). At the halfway mark of the introduction, m. 41, the cyclic theme returns in the home key of D major; the secondary theme is then reprised in D major. The introduction enacts the exposition and recapitulation sections of a typical sonata, while eschewing the development (as illustrated in Figure 2.3).\footnote{The sonata-without-development is often referred to as “slow movement form”; Charles Rosen, noting that it derived from da capo arias, even advocated the term “cavatina form,” which, in its evocation of vocal genres, provides an interesting parallel to d’Indy’s \textit{forme lied}. See Charles Rosen, \textit{Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 124. This use has been contested, however, by Barry Cooper in his review of Rosen’s \textit{Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas, Music & Letters} 84, no. 2 (2003): 297–300.} In other words, it takes on the weight and scope of an individual sonata-form movement, while avoiding the instability and

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conflict of a typical sonata. In terms of both structure and key, the introduction acts as a stable anchor for the rest of the movement: it establishes D major as the home key and enacts the reassuring and familiar large-scale harmonic motion of I-V-I.

Example 2.1: Formal divisions in the first movement of Franck’s Quartet

**Introduction:** mm. 1–80, D major

**Development:** mm. 218–270, modulating

**Exposition:** mm. 81–172, D minor-F major

**Recapitulation:** mm. 271–337, D minor-major

**Fugue:** mm. 173–217, F minor

**Coda:** mm. 338–end, D major

Example 2.2: The cyclic theme, mm. 1–3
Example 2.3: Second theme of introduction, mm. 27–30

![Example 2.3: Second theme of introduction, mm. 27–30](image)

Figure 2.3: Form in the first movement’s introduction, mm. 1–80

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposition (mm. 1–40) D major → A major</th>
<th>Recapitulation (mm. 41–80) D major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (mm. 1–26), D major → A major</td>
<td>A’ (mm. 41–56), D major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (mm. 27–40), A major / modulatory</td>
<td>B’ (mm. 57–80), D major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ensuing sonata follows a very different trajectory. Following the peaceful conclusion of the introduction, the key changes from D major to D minor and the tempo shifts from *poco lento* to *allegro*. Whereas the introduction’s main theme featured broad, stately quarter notes declaming a D major triad, the sonata’s main theme begins with a frenetic, dotted eight-sixteenth figure marked *piano* in D minor. The minor tonality of the sonata serves to underscore the power dynamic between the introduction-coda frame and the sonata. Hepokoski and Darcy argue that minor-key sonatas carry an “extra burden” that is absent from major-key sonatas:

“This is that of the minor mode itself, generally interpretable within the sonata tradition as a sign of a troubled condition seeking transformation (emancipation) into the parallel major mode.”

Of course, in the case of the movement at hand, the parallel major key (D major) has already been established in the introduction. The sonata thus begins in a state of having fallen from the

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grace of the introduction, and must attempt to regain the key of the introduction. Implicit from the opening notes of the sonata is a return to the introduction.

According to Hepokoski and Darcy, the exposition of a minor-key sonata builds a “structure of promise”: it will attempt to modulate to a major key (usually the relative major) but ultimately fail, allowing the recapitulation “to do what the exposition could not do: decisively emancipate the tonic minor by converting it into the parallel major.”\(^8\) This plays out in a spectacular fashion in the first movement of Franck’s String Quartet, pitting not only keys but also the material of the introduction and sonata against each other. Although the sonata is monothematic (and thus does not include a secondary theme in a contrasting key area), it nevertheless arrives at the relative major key of F major in m. 137 (see Example 2.4). Though Franck avoids a full perfect cadence in the new key, the exposition comes to a close in mm. 163–172 with a restatement of the sonata’s main theme in F major. This arrival is swiftly undercut as the solo viola enters with the cyclic theme in F minor (see Example 2.5).\(^9\)

Example 2.4: Modulation to F major (relative major) in the exposition, mm. 137–139

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\(^8\) Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 311.

\(^9\) Although it is true that the main sections of the movement are clearly delineated by the respective presence or absence of the cyclic theme and the sonata’s primary theme, there are, nonetheless, points of continuity between the *lied* and sonata sections, as discussed in pp. 65–69.
What follows the intrusion of the cyclic theme in F minor is most unusual: a 40-measure fugue on the cyclic theme in the tempo of the introduction. Although there is some precedent for inserting a fugue into a sonata-form movement—most notably, the development of the final movement of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata op. 101 takes the form of a fugue—this fugue takes on an entirely different function. It does not replace the development, or act as the development: a full development, in the tempo of the exposition, follows the fugue, beginning at m. 218. The fugue halts the sonata’s processes, freezes the sonata in place—and in so doing, asserts the authority that the cyclic theme, and the introduction’s *forme lied*, has over the sonata. The sonata is only unfolding under the aegis of the introduction, where the cyclic theme—and true intermovement significance—resides. The story of the sonata is local, confined to this one movement only. But the material of the introduction will unfold over the course of the entire Quartet, and thus it remains ever in control, able to sweep away the sonata at a moment’s notice.
Considered within the context of both d’Indy’s *Cours de composition* and Franck’s compositional output, the appearance of a fugue in the middle of the first movement takes on added significance. As discussed in the previous chapter, d’Indy divides all musical genres into two large categories, symphonic music and dramatic music, a division that he schematized in the diagram reproduced as Figure 1.1. Looking back at that diagram, one may be surprised to find that the fugue is not grouped with the other symphonic genres, but, in fact, resides just over the border, within the realm of dramatic music (tellingly, right next to the string quartet). In fact, d’Indy considers the fugue to be a “hybrid” genre. Though the fugue was descended from the “dramatic” genres of the motet and the madrigal, when its voices were replaced by instruments, it migrated to the sphere of symphonic music. Because its ancestry is “dramatic” rather than “symphonic,” however, it does not sit comfortably in either category; as a result, d’Indy places his discussion of the fugue at the very beginning of the volume of the *Cours* devoted to symphonic music. The fugue could be considered to have a special kinship with *forme lied* and cyclic form, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, are also hybrid genres that blur the boundaries between symphonic and dramatic. In light of this kinship, it is significant that the tempo and theme of the *forme lied* return in the guise of a fugue, which d’Indy would have considered a kindred genre of sorts.

The fugue occupies a special place within Franck’s oeuvre and d’Indy’s reception of Franck. In discussing the development of the fugue beyond the Baroque period, d’Indy asserts that “it required the genius of a Beethoven to rescue it [the fugue] from the lethargic state into which it had fallen and to give it an active function in the work of musical composition; but it was only toward the end of the nineteenth century that César Franck could enable it to give birth
to new forms.”¹⁰ Thus, with the evolution of the fugue in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we witness d’Indy tracing a familiar lineage that goes straight from Beethoven to Franck. After surveying the many instrumental works into which Beethoven incorporated fugues, such as the piano sonatas opp. 101, 106 and 110, and the string quartets opp. 131 and 132, d’Indy reaffirms that Beethoven “opened a new path [for the fugue] that would remain unexplored for nearly sixty years.”¹¹ Franck, d’Indy argues, “was the only composer of his era who understood what could be taken from the Beethovenian discoveries.”¹² D’Indy notes that in addition to the fugue in the first movement of the String Quartet, Franck also wrote fugues in many of his organ pieces. D’Indy reserves his most fulsome praise for Franck’s Prelude, Choral and Fugue for piano, which, in his opinion, rivals Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in A♭ major, op. 110, in its “novelty of conception.”¹³

D’Indy’s nineteenth-century history of the fugue betrays, as ever, his personal and ideological biases. While he devotes several pages to Franck’s use of the fugue (with a page-and-a-half-long analysis of the Prelude, Choral and Fugue as a centerpiece), d’Indy glosses over the contributions of Mendelssohn and Saint-Saëns in two small paragraphs. Yet, even if his emphasis on Franck at the expense of other composers seems overblown, it does not negate the fact that Franck engaged prolifically with the genre of the fugue and, more generally, with

¹⁰ D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 93. “Il fallait le génie d’un Beethoven pour la faire sortir de l’état léthargique où elle était tombée et lui attribuer une fonction active dans le travail de la composition musicale; mais ce fut seulement vers la fin du XIXe siècle que César Franck sut lui rendre l’aptitude à enfanter des formes nouvelles.”
¹¹ D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 96. “On peut donc conclure que Beethoven, tout en respectant les assises traditionnelles de la Fugue, sut en élargir prodigieusement la forme et lui ouvrir ainsi une voie nouvelle qui, cependant, resta près de soixante ans sans être explorée.”
¹² D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 97. “César-Auguste FRANCK (1), véritable créateur de l’école symphonique en France, fut le seul compositeur de son époque qui comprit le parti qu’on pouvait tirer des découvertes beethovéniennes.”
¹³ D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 97.
counterpoint. Franck, like Bach, held an important post as an organist throughout most of his adult life; in Franck’s case, at the church of Sainte Clotilde. It was eventually in his capacity as organist that he was appointed a professor at the Conservatoire, rather than as a composer, and his organ class became a de-facto composition class for a generation of French composers. So universally acknowledged is the influence of his work at the organ upon his composition in all other genres that nearly every analysis of Franck’s String Quartet comments on the “contrapuntal” nature of his string writing and the complex counterpoint that can be found throughout the Quartet. But if the whole Quartet may be said to have a latent contrapuntal element running throughout it, that tendency realizes its fullest expression in the first movement’s fugue. The fugue thus has multiple layers of expressive significance within Franck’s Quartet. By virtue of its hybrid symphonic/dramatic status, it occupies the same category as cyclic form and forme lied, which are marked by this same hybridity. At the same time, the fugue realizes, in the starkest possible terms, the latent contrapuntalism that runs throughout the Quartet and is a hallmark of Franck’s compositional language.

The fugue is followed by a full development that treats the material of the sonata, picking up where the exposition had left off. This, in turn, is followed by a conventional recapitulation which seems to fulfill the “structure of promise” established in the exposition by modulating to D major (the parallel tonic of D minor, the exposition’s home key) at the same moment when the exposition had modulated to F major. However, the arrival in D major is cut short. When the recapitulation reaches the moment where the sonata’s theme had been restated in F major in the exposition, it is not the sonata’s theme that sounds in D major, but instead the theme of the lied. The double-bar line at m. 340 and the change in tempo to the introduction’s poco lento affirm that the sonata has been cut off by the return of the lied. The movement concludes with a 33-
measure coda that mirrors the second section of the introduction. As in the exposition, the sonata’s recapitulation has been cut short by the intrusion of the *forme lied*. Not only does the sonata unfold completely under the auspices of the *lied*; it turns out that only the *lied* can provide tonal and structural closure at the end of the movement. By the end of the coda, the sonata recedes further back in our memory, like a bad dream that had interrupted the serenity of the *lied*.

Example 2.6: End of recapitulation and start of coda, mm. 335–341

If one were not yet certain of the extent to which the sonata of this movement is subsidiary to the *lied*, one need look no further than the sonata’s thematic material for some final reassurances. As noted above, this sonata lacks the customary medial caesura followed by a secondary theme in a contrasting key. Instead, the entire exposition elaborates on the sonata’s main theme, modulating to a contrasting key only at the end of the exposition.¹⁴ In contrast to the clear-cut primary and secondary themes of the introduction, the sonata’s exposition seems short

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¹⁴ Hepokoski and Darcy refer to these as “continuous expositions,” since they lack the medial caesura, “the brief, rhetorical reinforced break or gap” that customarily separates the spaces of the primary and secondary themes. See Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 51–64. Not only were continuous expositions less common than binary ones, they were commonly misinterpreted by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists who sought to fit them into the more-familiar pattern of the binary exposition at all costs. D’Indy falls into this trap in his own analysis of the first movement’s sonata: he labels the material at m. 138 as the sonata’s Theme B (secondary theme). But this material is not preceded by a medial caesura, comes too late in the exposition to be a secondary theme (57 measures into a 92-measure exposition), and does not sound or act like a secondary theme.
on thematic material, to the point that the exposition itself is only ten measures longer than the introductory lied. More significantly, the sonata’s main theme does not even consist of new thematic material independent of the introduction—in fact, it originates in the dotted-eighth/sixteenth figure that dominates the last several measures of the introduction (as demonstrated in Examples 2.7 and 2.8). While the lied could stand on its own, the sonata derives its thematic material from the lied—it could not exist if it had not been preceded by the introduction. The lied asserts its authority over the sonata in a number of ways over the course of the first movement: it can interrupt the sonata when it pleases; it is only through the return of the lied at the end of the sonata’s recapitulation that the movement can achieve tonal closure by returning to D major; and the sonata is dependent on the lied for its thematic material.

Example 2.7: Dotted-eighth/sixteenth figures at the end of the introduction, mm. 74–76

Example 2.8: Dotted-eighth/sixteenth figures in the sonata’s main theme, mm. 81–84

In addition to serving as the source of the sonata’s thematic material, the dotted-eighth/sixteenth figure that first appears at the end of the introduction serves another significant function in this movement: it acts as an invocation motive, announcing and foreshadowing the moments when the movement shifts between its two components, the sonata and the lied. This technique will come into play in the later movements of the Quartet as well, as a means to announce an impending rupture in musical time, usually in the form of the cyclic theme’s return. As noted above, we first encounter the dotted-eighth/sixteenth figure at the very end of the lied
This figure’s rhythmic profile stands out from the rest of the lied, as it is the first time in the composition that a sixteenth note appears in any context. While it starts in the first violin as a dotted-eighth/sixteenth (mm. 74–75), in the subsequent measures (mm. 76–78) the figure is drawn out into a dotted-quarter/eighth. Melodically, it functions as an appoggiatura, decorating the third, fifth, and finally the root of the tonic triad of D major. As it is initially presented in these measures, this motive has all the characteristics of a typical closing gesture: it provides a little burst of rhythmic energy at the beginning of each measure, subtly emphasizing the downbeat without disturbing the surface too greatly, and reaffirming the tonic through the resolution of its slight dissonance.

Example 2.9: Dotted-eighth/sixteenth and dotted-quarter/eighth figures in mm. 74–78

At the beginning of the exposition (mm. 81–82), these characteristics are turned on their head. With the key change from D major to D minor at m. 81, the figure no longer embellishes the tonic triad of D major, but rather D minor. The tempo change at m. 81 from poco lento to allegro changes the character of the motive from a slight ripple in an otherwise placid setting into an anxious, unsettling figure, from the closing motive of a peaceful lied to the opening motive of a minor-key sonata form. This dual nature of the motive makes it ideal as a kind of gatekeeper, mediating between the contrasting characters of the lied and sonata.
Following a few appearances over the course of the exposition as the sonata’s main theme is repeated and varied, this motive returns at the close of the exposition (as shown in Example 2.10). It is first heard in mm. 163–168, when the main theme is restated in F Major. But then, in mm. 169–173, it is used to round off the close of the exposition in much the same way as it rounded off the introduction in mm. 74–78. Just as the exposition seems to be drawing to a close with repetitions of the motive in the first violin on the notes B♭ and A in mm. 171–172, the final repetition in m. 173 moves from B♭ down to A♭ instead of A♮. This shift to the lowered third then ushers in the fugue on the lied theme in F minor.

Example 2.10: Dotted-eighth/sixteenth figures in mm. 163–173

The advent of the sonata’s development is similarly presaged at the end of the fugue by the return of the dotted-eighth/sixteenth motive (see Example 2.11). In mm. 209–212, the fugue’s subject dissolves into stretto imitation, as the quartet accelerates and crescendos. In m.
213, when the tension has already been ratcheted up by the stretto in the preceding measures, a
new theme enters in the first violin that features the dotted-eighth/sixteenth. The theme is
fragmented down until, at m. 217, it consists merely of repeated dotted-eighth/sixteenths—and
then, in the following measure, the development begins with a statement of the sonata’s main
theme in G minor. These utterances of the dotted-eighth/sixteenth motive could not be more
different from those at the end of the lied and the exposition. Whereas in those cases the motive
only slightly disturbed the peaceful surface, hinting at what was to come, here the motive
appears at a moment of maximal tension: against a dense texture of quarter notes and triplet
eighths in the other strings, and as a sharp, chromatically-inflected dissonance against already-
dissonant half-diminished-seventh harmonies. The dotted-eighth/sixteenth takes on an
incantatory role: it wills the development into existence by sheer force.

One might expect, based on the pattern that has been established so far, that the dotted-
eighth/sixteenth would reappear at the end of the recapitulation to foreshadow the return of the
lied. However, this does not happen; instead, the lied theme intrudes upon the recapitulation at
just the spot where we would expect the sonata’s theme to be restated in D major, before we
reach a cadence that would allow the dotted-eighth/sixteenth to return. The dotted-
eighth/sixteenth figure is delayed until the final measures of the movement, at the end of the lied,
in mm. 367–371 (see Example 2.12). At the close of the movement, it is granted, for the first
time, the opportunity to act purely as a closing gesture, without foreshadowing what will happen
next.
Example 2.11: End of development, mm. 209–218
Example 2.12: Dotted-eighth/sixteenth and dotted-quarter/eighth figures at the end of the first movement, mm. 367–373

The first movement introduces not only the cyclic theme, but also several narrative strands and devices that will come back throughout the Quartet. It sets up a fundamental tension between sonata form, the traditional center of gravity in Classical and early-Romantic string quartets, and cyclic form and *forme lied*, both of which take on a larger inter-movement significance than the first movement’s sonata. It also introduces a device that will feature prominently in the third and fourth movements: an invocation motive that returns at critical junctures of the movement to either foreshadow or propel the action forward.

2.3 The Second and Third Movements: Composing through *Tristan*

The second and third movements of Franck’s String Quartet share many commonalities. These interior movements, unlike the Quartet’s first and last movements, are not in sonata form: the second movement is a scherzo and trio, and the third movement is a textbook example of d’Indy’s *forme lied*, an extended slow movement with a rondo-like form of ABA’CA”. The movements disturb the normative flow of musical time, each in their own idiosyncratic way. The second movement is marked from the onset by disjunction, its phrases all dissolving into silence. The third movement demonstrates how the *forme lied’s* freedom from what d’Indy called the
“rhythmic servitude” of faster movements can lead to moments of uninhibited expression, in which the lied’s “endless melody” seems to escape the confines of regular musical time.

The second and third movements also share a striking intertextual connection. Hidden at the center of Franck’s Quartet is a series of allusions to two of the most recognizable motives from Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde: the Sehnsuchtsmotiv and the initial two-measure motive of Isoldes Liebestod (shown in Examples 2.13 and 2.14, respectively). In the scherzo-and-trio second movement, the Sehnsuchtsmotiv appears in conjunction with the Liebestod motive. The light, airy setting of these two motives within the trio constitutes one of the earliest parodies of Tristan und Isolde. The trio also parodies one of the fundamental characteristics of Tristan und Isolde: it completely eschews any kind of cadential closure.

Underneath the parody lies a serious message: Franck’s allusions to the two motives enact musically the struggle of composing after Tristan. The trio’s first theme, comprising the two motives, fails as a melody: after multiple attempts to turn the motives into a successful melody, which all dissolve into silence, Franck simply abandons them and starts again with a new melody. In the forme lied third movement, however, Franck successfully incorporates the Sehnsuchtsmotiv into the movement’s penultimate section, where it precipitates the emotional climax of the movement, and, indeed, the Quartet as a whole. The Tristan allusions shatter any initial impression that this Quartet, by virtue of being an absolute work, might be devoid of an extramusical narrative.

Example 2.13: The Sehnsuchtsmotiv’s first appearance in Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde, mm. 1–3
Christopher Reynolds defines a musical allusion as “an intentional reference to another work made by means of a resemblance that affects the meaning conveyed to those who recognize it.”\textsuperscript{15} The references to \textit{Tristan und Isolde} found in Franck’s Quartet fit Reynolds’s definition well, as they recall their models closely enough to immediately bring them to mind, but do not constitute exact imitations. Allusions are one of the many types of borrowing discussed by J. Peter Burkholder in his recent article, “Musical Borrowing or Curious Coincidence?: Testing the Evidence.” Burkholder outlines three main categories of evidence that scholars have used to advance claims of borrowing: analytical evidence; biographical and historical evidence; and evidence regarding the purpose of the borrowing.\textsuperscript{16} All three types of evidence, in this case, support my claim that Franck consciously alluded to \textit{Tristan und Isolde} in his String Quartet.

2.3.1 Biographical and Historical Evidence: Franck and Wagner

We can begin by analyzing the biographical and historical evidence. The mythology of Franck contains one tantalizing anecdote about \textit{Tristan und Isolde} in particular: Franck’s library supposedly contained the score of \textit{Tristan und Isolde}, across the front of which Franck had

scrawled “poison”. This myth has a particularly strong resonance when considered in light of the Quartet’s Tristan allusions, as the music of Tristan does, indeed, seem to poison the second movement. Unfortunately, this score does not survive among the portion of Franck’s music library that remains in the family’s possession; we will probably never know whether any truth lies behind this particular anecdote. Likewise, although we know that Franck’s library contained three volumes of Liszt’s collected works for piano, and Liszt’s piano transcription of the “Marche religieuse” from Lohengrin, there is no direct evidence that Franck possessed a copy of Liszt’s renowned piano transcription of “Isoldes Liebestod.”

While Franck himself did not publicly espouse strong sentiments pro or contra Wagner, Joël-Marie Fauquet notes that Franck had “more-or-less direct contacts with the Wagnerian milieu,” through his accompaniment of pro-Wagnerian singers; his relationships with some of Wagner’s closest associates (including Hans von Bülow and Wagner’s eventual wife, Cosima); and his students, many of whom were, at least temporarily, enthralled by Wagner. It is difficult to ascertain how much of an effect these relationships had on Franck’s own disposition toward Wagner, or indeed, how much of Wagner’s music Franck heard during his lifetime. One of Franck’s students, Henri Duparc, gifted Franck the vocal score of Die Walküre in 1871, but

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18 Following Franck’s death, his large collection of scores, which according to Stove, was Franck’s “sole personal extravagance” (Stove, César Franck, 273), was divided between a few different individuals, making it impossible to document the entire contents of his library. Joël-Marie Fauquet has catalogued the portion of the library that is still controlled by Franck’s descendants. The items cited here are all included in Fauquet’s catalogue. See Joël-Marie Fauquet, “Annexe III: Bibliothèque musicale de César Franck,” in César Franck (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 943–946.
19 Fauquet, César Franck, 394. The most prominent of Franck’s students to espouse pro-Wagnerian views were Ernest Chausson, Guillaume Lekeu, Henri Duparc, and Vincent d’Indy. Lekeu reportedly fainted during a performance of the prelude to Tristan und Isolde at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus in 1889. See Elliott Zuckerman, *The First Hundred Years of Wagner’s Tristan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 83.
Duparc reported to d’Indy in a letter two years later that, having read the score, Franck did not like the music.\textsuperscript{20} Of course, it is difficult to say from this scant evidence whether Franck’s opinion on \textit{Die Walküre} may have changed over the ensuing 16 years between this letter and the composition of the Quartet, and, indeed, whether Franck’s dislike of \textit{Die Walküre} extended to the rest of Wagner’s oeuvre. It seems unlikely that the latter is the case, as in the summer of 1883, Franck wrote to his student Charles Bordes that in the evenings he often played some Wagner to “warm up” for composing his own opera, \textit{Hulda}.\textsuperscript{21}

It is also impossible to know exactly how much of Wagner’s music Franck may have heard during his lifetime, especially in the years leading up to the composition of the Quartet. \textit{Tristan und Isolde} was not produced in its entirety at any of the Parisian opera halls until October 1899, ten years after Franck had composed the Quartet and nine years after his death.\textsuperscript{22} Unlike his students, Franck does not seem to have made any pilgrimages to Bayreuth or Munich to hear any of Wagner’s music dramas in their entirety. In Paris, Franck would have had a couple of opportunities to hear concert performances of Acts 1 and 2 of \textit{Tristan} in 1884, 1885, and 1887.\textsuperscript{23} The prelude, which first premiered in Paris in 1860, was performed by the main Parisian concert societies at least a dozen times in the 1880s,\textsuperscript{24} and in some cases, the prelude was paired with “Isoldes Liebestod,” as it continues to be today. It seems unlikely that Franck would not have attended at least one performance of the \textit{Tristan} prelude during this time, considering its increasing popularity.

\textsuperscript{20} Fauquet, \textit{César Franck}, 396. The score for \textit{Die Walküre} is included in Fauquet’s catalogue.  
\textsuperscript{21} Vallas, \textit{César Franck}, 190.  
\textsuperscript{22} Martine Kahane and Nicole Wild, \textit{Wagner et la France} (Paris: Herscher, 1983), 169. None of Wagner’s operas were staged in Paris between the disastrous performances of \textit{Tannhäuser} in 1861 and a production of \textit{Lohengrin} in 1887, and many were not produced until the late 1890s and even into the 1900s.  
\textsuperscript{23} Kahane and Wild, \textit{Wagner et la France}, 159–160.  
\textsuperscript{24} Kahane and Wild, \textit{Wagner et la France}, 158–160.
Although the biographical and historical evidence available today is obviously incomplete, it seems likely, at least, that Franck was familiar with the main leitmotivs of *Tristan und Isolde*. And while his infamous score of the music drama has not survived, it is clear enough that Franck had, at best, an ambivalent attitude toward Wagner. So let’s turn now to the analytical evidence.

2.3.2 Analytical Evidence: Franck’s Allusions to Wagner in the Second Movement

The two motives that Franck alludes to in his Quartet are easily among the music drama’s most recognizable leitmotivs. The *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* first appears in mm. 2–3 of the prelude, and makes copious appearances throughout the entirety of *Tristan und Isolde*. Hans von Wolzogen refers to this motive as “the chief-motive of the whole drama;”

> 25 an apt description, considering how often the motive returns in varying guises. According to Albert Lavignac, whose 1897 monograph *Le Voyage à Bayreuth* contains charts summarizing the appearance of each music drama’s leitmotivs by scene, the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* (or, as Lavignac calls it, *Le Désir*) appears in every scene except the prelude to the third act. By contrast, the *Liebestod* motive, which Lavignac calls *Le Chant de mort*, is heard in only four scenes. It first appears toward the end of Tristan and Isolde’s love duet in the second scene of Act II, as Tristan voices his desire to die with Isolde, so that they may remain forever one.

The *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* and *Liebestod* motives occupy opposite ends of the leitmotivic spectrum: the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* appears so often, in so many guises, as to become an empty signifier, whereas the *Liebestod* motive has a specific meaning. Both Lavignac and Wolzogen’s names for the former motive point to this lack of specificity: *sehnsucht* and *désir*, yearning and

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Desire, are the most basic, universal, and yet abstract, of human emotions. The whole plot of *Tristan und Isolde* can be more or less reduced to a dramatization of this most fundamental emotion. The music that represents *sehnsucht* / *désir* is the motive most closely associated with *Tristan und Isolde*, and Wagner’s oeuvre more generally; yet, its melody is so simple—a rising chromatic scale—that one could claim to hear echoes of it in nearly any late-Romantic or post-Romantic piece employing a substantial amount of chromaticism.

Figure 2.4: Lavignac’s thematic table for *Tristan und Isolde*26

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The *Liebestod* motive, on the other hand, has a more firmly delineated meaning. After its initial appearance in Tristan and Isolde’s Act II love duet, it returns a few times throughout the second scene of Act III, as the dying Tristan anticipates his reunion with Isolde. But the *Liebestod* motive is most closely associated with Isolde’s eponymous aria that concludes the music drama, when she reprises the material of the love duet as she dies next to Tristan’s body. All of the *Liebestod* motive’s appearances are closely linked to its original extramusical meaning: Tristan and Isolde’s eventual “love-death.” This might help explain why the *Tristan* allusions in the Quartet’s second movement, which include the *Liebestod* motive, seem to fail, whereas the allusions to the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* in the third movement are more successfully integrated into the fabric of the Quartet.

Franck alludes to the two motives in the opening measures of the second movement’s trio. The opening two measures of the *Liebestod* motive form the basis of the trio’s initial melodic idea. Following this allusion, the first violin tumbles down an arpeggiated diminished seventh chord in mm. 158–159, and the quartet decrescendos from this unstable harmony into a whole measure of silence at m. 160 (see Example 2.15). The second sentence attempts to begin the same way as the first, but lapses into silence even sooner, immediately after the *Liebestod* allusion. The *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* makes its first melodic appearance following the whole-measure rest at m. 165 (as shown in Example 2.16). Instead of trying to fashion a melody out of the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* following the fermata at m. 170, the quartet simply gives up, and begins an entirely new melody. By satirizing the motives with a jaunty 6/8 setting at a *vivace* tempo, creating a gulf of silence between the allusions and the rest of the trio, and ensuring that the motives fail as melodies, Franck renders two of Wagner’s most powerful motives impotent: they
are stripped of the sensuality they possessed in their original settings; trivialized; cannot blend in with the rest of the quartet; and cannot find any sense of completion.

Example 2.15: The Liebestod motive in the opening measures of the second movement’s trio, mm. 152–160

Example 2.16: The Liebestod motive and Sehnsuchtsmotiv in the trio’s second sentence, mm. 161–169

Each of Franck’s references to the Tristan und Isolde motives maintains enough of its model’s material to constitute a recognizable allusion, albeit with some modifications. In both Tristan’s initial utterance of the Liebestod motive in the third scene of Act II and Isolde’s first statement of it at the end of the music drama, the motive itself is sung on the pitches E♭-A♭-A♭-G and then answered with a rising motive of G♭-A♭-B♭. Then the Liebestod is repeated up a minor third, on the pitches G♭-C♭-C♭-B♭. Franck’s allusion cuts out the rising-step response, and stitches two statements of the Liebestod motive together, without interruption. Although the initial statement at mm. 152–153 is a semitone lower than in Tristan und Isolde (D-G-G-F#), the second statement at mm. 154–155 (F♯-B-B-A♯) is enharmonically equivalent to the motive’s repetition in Tristan und Isolde. While the melody is instantly recognizable as the Liebestod
motive, Franck’s allusion does not share the rhythm, tempo, or harmony of its model. The static bass line in the original has been replaced with a rising chromatic scale that mimics the Sehnsuchtsmotiv.

Franck’s allusion to the Sehnsuchtsmotiv a few measures later constitutes a slightly closer imitation of its model. In order to directly compare the original statement of the Sehnsuchtsmotiv in mm. 2–3 of the Tristan prelude with this initial quotation in Franck’s Quartet, Example 2.17 features a four-voice reduction of the Sehnsuchtsmotiv, transposed up a major second, next to mm. 166–167 of the quartet’s second movement. The two motives share the same pitches in both the soprano line (A♯-B-♭-C♯) and the bass (G♮-F♯). The movement of the inner voices in the first measure of each motive differs slightly, with the result that Franck’s motive does not begin with the “Tristan” chord, but rather a G minor triad enharmonically respelled with an A♯ instead of a B♭. However, the inner voices end up in the same place, sustaining an E♮ and an A♯ in the second measure of both motives. Rhythmically, the two melodies share the same triple-meter lilting quality, but Franck’s motive flattens out the more complex 6/8 rhythm of Wagner’s melodic line into a simpler quarter-eighth pattern. Franck’s motive is similar enough to call to mind the Sehnsuchtsmotiv, yet does not identically reproduce its model.

Example 2.17: Wagner, Tristan und Isolde, mm. 2–3, transposed up a major second (left), vs. Franck, String Quartet, second movement, mm. 166–167, at pitch (right)
Both of the motives are anticipated before their appearance in the trio, in the final moments of the scherzo (mm. 140–143; see Example 2.18). The first violin’s melody in the first two measures of the scherzo’s final cadence features the Sehnsuchtsmotiv. The following two measures of the cadence contain a variation on the Liebestod motive’s melodic contour: C#-G#-F#. By anticipating the two motives at the end of the scherzo, Franck obscures their origins in Tristan und Isolde, making it seem as if the motives have naturally arisen out of the Quartet, rather than from an outside source. Franck employs a similar technique in the first movement, where the conclusion of the forme lied introduction, with its dotted eighth-sixteenth invocation motive, anticipates the main theme of the sonata. In the second movement, this technique becomes another facet of Franck’s attempt to neuter Wagner’s influence: in this case, by nullifying Wagner’s compositional agency.

The Sehnsuchtsmotiv appears several more times in the second movement, without the Liebestod motive, often precipitating some kind of thematic crisis. After the trio’s initial melody fails to get off the ground, a new melody featuring running eighth notes emerges at m. 171, and initially seems to do better than its predecessor (see Example 2.19). However, at the point sixteen measures into the new melody, where one would expect it to be headed for a cadence, the music instead continues straight into a fresh iteration of the Sehnsuchtsmotiv, now underlaid with a running-eighths accompaniment in the cello (see Example 2.20). Following this intrusion, the first violin seems to lose its footing as it tumbles down from the Sehnsuchtsmotiv’s final high D through a series of arpeggiated triads reminiscent of the final notes of the trio’s failed first sentence.
Example 2.18: Foreshadowing of Sehnsuchtsmotiv and Liebestod motive at scherzo’s final cadence, mm. 140–143

Example 2.19: Trio’s new melody, following Liebestod / Sehnsuchtsmotiv melody, second movement, mm. 171–174

Example 2.20: Sehnsuchtsmotiv disrupting the trio’s new melody, mm. 187–194
Following this intrusion of the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv*, the quartet does not lapse into silence, but leads directly back into a repetition of the new melody at m. 195. The *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* intrudes again after 16 measures; this time, it does eventually bring the quartet to a halt at m. 220 (see Example 2.21). After a whole-measure rest, the quartet begins the melody for the third time, but this time is considerably different from its previous iterations. While the top three instruments begin playing *ppp*, the cello remains silent for the initial five measures. When the cello finally does enter in m. 225, it plays the initial 3-measure phrase of the first movement’s *forme lied* melody (the Quartet’s cyclic theme), adapted to the second movement’s 3/8 time signature (see Example 2.21). When the cello finishes its short recall of the cyclic theme, the ensemble once again decrescendos into silence. Not only did the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* cause the new melody to fail (twice); it also precipitated the return of the cyclic theme. Moreover, the first complete appearances of both the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* and the cyclic theme were framed by whole-measure rests, set apart from the rest of the movement as fragments.

Example 2.21: *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* disrupts the new melody a second time, mm. 211–219

![Example 2.21: Sehnsuchtsmotiv disrupts the new melody a second time, mm. 211–219](image-url)
Example 2.22: Cyclic theme appears in cello as upper instruments repeat new melody, mm. 222–233

Following this intrusion of the cyclic theme upon the trio’s new melody, the quartet gives up on any hope of seeing this melody through cadential completion, and returns once again to the trio’s opening material. While the first sentence and the opening of the second sentence are restated note-for-note, the restatement of the Sehnsuchtsmotiv is followed not by a whole-measure rest, but rather by a crescendo leading to a dramatic outburst at m. 255, which winds down into a retransition back to the scherzo (see Example 2.23). While in its other appearances, the Sehnsuchtsmotiv cuts off whatever musical process had been underway, in this case, it propels the music forward and out of the awkward, halting trio.

Example 2.23: Sehnsuchtsmotiv precipitates a new dramatic outburst, mm. 251–258
The first scherzo had shared some of the trio’s halting characteristics: its initial attempts to get going and arrive at a cadence repeatedly faltered, leading to whole-measure rests at mm. 6, 12, 14, 19, 29, 35, and 41. Even when the scherzo’s initial melody found a semblance of closure at m. 48, the lower voices were unwilling to agree on the tonic triad of F# minor, with the second violin moving from an initial hesitation on B# to C#, and then oversharpening into D♮; the viola attempting a picardy third by moving from A to A♯; and the cello initially starting on D♯ and self-correcting a sixteenth too late onto F#. But after the trio took the scherzo’s sense of disjunction and dissonance to new heights, the repeat of the scherzo removes all of the initial scherzo’s hesitations and moments of sharp dissonance. The rests that had appeared between the two halves of the scherzo’s first period (at mm. 6 at 12) are now filled in with some transitory pizzicato eighth notes at mm. 277 and 283. In the initial scherzo, when the quartet couldn’t agree on a tonic triad at m. 48, the whole quartet comes together on an unambiguous F# minor triad on the downbeat of m. 290 (as shown in Example 2.24).

Example 2.24: Ambiguous cadential “closure” at the end of scherzo’s first melody, m. 48, versus unambiguous cadential closure at same point in repetition of scherzo, m. 290

The Liebestod motive and Sehnsuchtsmotiv make one final appearance together in the movement’s coda. Following the scherzo’s final cadence, the movement rounds off with a short
reprise of material from the trio, now in the tonic major of F# major. The quartet plays through the trio’s initial two sentences, featuring the two Wagnerian motives. After a whole-measure rest, the quartet briefly rehashes the trio’s second melody for four measures, before that, too, dissolves into silence. Still unable to cadence, the movement simply ends with a *pizzicato* iteration of the F# major triad. This abrupt ending points to a meta-parody of *Tristan* that runs throughout the trio: just as the music drama famously does not cadence until its final measures, so, too, does the second movement’s trio avoid any kind of cadential closure. Franck’s parody exaggerates this feature by withholding cadential closure even in the movement’s final measures.

2.3.3 *Forme Lied*, Unending Melody, and Allusions to Wagner in the Third Movement

If the second movement of Franck’s Quartet is marked, above all, by moments of disjunction and the failure of several melodies to progress harmonically to some type of cadence, the third movement overcompensates in the opposite direction, with an overflow of lyricism and Wagnerian unending melody that culminates in the movement’s second-to-last section, which breaks free of the musical patterns established in the previous sections of the movement in a kind of ecstatic outburst. One way to comprehend this movement is by taking seriously d’Indy’s classification of it as a *forme lied*—a genre that d’Indy described as free from the “rhythmic servitude” of faster movements. This freedom can lead to moments of uninhibited expression, in which the music seems to escape the confines of regular musical time. While the climax of the movement’s second-to-last section may be the most readily apparent breakaway from normal musical time, there are several smaller moments scattered throughout the movement when the melody seems to overpower the phrase structure and force phrases to extend beyond their normative, four-square duration.
The third movement occupies a singular place within the larger structure of the Quartet. It is the only movement that does not reprise the cyclic theme, yet it still participates in the work’s cyclic processes in two important ways. First, it recalls and further develops the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* at a pivotal moment in the movement’s climactic penultimate section. Second, the movement’s initial melody, its *phrase lied*, becomes cyclic fodder for the Quartet’s finale, where it returns (along with themes from the other movements) in the movement’s introduction, but more importantly, at the apotheosis of the entire work, in the finale’s coda. In this way, the third movement fulfills what Janet Schmalfeldt describes as:

> The tendency within early nineteenth-century instrumental works toward cyclic and processual formal techniques that draw new kinds of attention to deeply felt, song-inspired interior movements and secondary (as opposed to main) themes. In such pieces, the music itself would indeed seem to ‘turn inward’: an interior moment, or movement, becomes the focal point of the complete work—the center of gravity toward which what comes before seems to pull, and from which all that follows seems to radiate.\(^{27}\)

In the case of Franck’s Quartet, the third movement is both set apart from the other movements (due to its omission of the cyclic theme) and yet is intimately connected to the cyclic fabric of the Quartet as a whole: it looks backward to the second movement through its development of the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv*, and provides additional cyclic material in the form of its own *phrase lied*, which will assume outsize importance in the finale.

One possible explanation for the lack of an appearance by the cyclic theme in the third movement owes to the chronology of the Quartet’s composition. As Christiane Strucken-Paland notes in the introduction to Bärenreiter’s critical edition of the Quartet, both Robert Jardillier and Joël-Marie Fauquet suspect “that the third movement, being the heart of the entire piece, was the

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first to be written.” an additional piece of evidence that can be read to either support or negate this theory is an undated and unaddressed letter in which franck refers to the third movement in connection with his work on Psyché, which was completed in 1887 (two years before franck composed the other three movements of the quartet). however, as strucken-paland points out, the letter could equally have been written about the piano transcription of Psyché, which dates from 1889, when franck was working on the other movements of the quartet. stove seems to endorse the latter theory when he claims, without attributing a source, that franck “finished the third [movement] only after having completed the first, second, and fourth.” the autograph score cannot help solve this mystery, since, as strucken-paland notes, there is no indication on the autograph of when franck began work on the third movement. the theory that the third movement was, in fact, composed first presents some tantalizing possibilities: that the Sehnsuchtsmotiv, as presented in the third movement, was integral to franck’s original conception of the quartet, that he later incorporated it into the second movement in an effort to integrate the material of the third movement more fully into the rest of the work, and that the third movement’s phrase lied may have initially played a larger role in his conception of the quartet than the first movement’s phrase lied.

as d’indy points out in his analysis of this movement, it follows the form he calls lied dévelopé: ABA’CA”. in other words, the movement is a forme lied that follows a structure similar to a rondo. d’indy’s preferred terminology for slow movements—forme lied—has much in common with margaret notley’s discussion of what she calls “the cult of the Adagio” among

28 Christiane Strucken-Paland, “Introduction,” in Quatuor by César Franck (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 2010), xi–xviii.
29 Strucken-Paland, “Introduction,” xii.
30 Stove, César Franck, 275.
31 Strucken-Paland, “Introduction,” xii.
late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century German musicians and music critics.\textsuperscript{32} Notley argues that by this period, “the Adagio often seems to have constituted an elevated genre unto itself, distinguished not only by its tempo but also by its melodic style and quality of expression.”\textsuperscript{33} This is in contrast to the predominant tendency, common among both nineteenth- and twentieth-century musicians, to classify movements according to their formal patterns, with little regard to the distinctive characteristics implied by a movement’s tempo designation. The latter mindset would consider such a movement an example of “a modified sonata form in the tempo of an adagio,” whereas the former would regard the same movement as “an adagio in a modified sonata form.”\textsuperscript{34} Although d’Indy does not distinguish between different slow tempos (in the \textit{Cours de composition}, he considers movements with indications of andante, adagio, largo, larghetto, and lento to all be exemplars of \textit{forme lied}), his definition of \textit{forme lied} is similarly rooted in the melodic and rhythmic qualities endemic to slow movements. Moreover, he labels \textit{forme lied} movements in the same way as Notley suggests: always beginning with the word \textit{lied}, indicating the slower tempo and singing quality common to all slow movements, followed by a formal designation, e.g., \textit{lied simple}; \textit{lied développé}; \textit{lied sonate}; and so on.

D’Indy and the German musicians that Notley discusses share a common historical model for their conception of the adagio: the slow movements of Beethoven’s sonatas and chamber music. This affinity for Beethoven (and general disregard for post-Beethovenian composers of instrumental music) was shared among both pro- and anti-Wagnerians alike: Notley writes that “For Nohl and other acolytes of Wagner, chamber music had peaked and in effect ended with

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[$\textsuperscript{33}$] Notley, “Late-Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music,” 35.
\item[$\textsuperscript{34}$] Notley, \textit{Lateness and Brahms}, 172.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Beethoven’s late string quartets. . . . Yet Ehlert, who otherwise had little in common with the Wagnerian or so-called futurist camp, also wrote about the deterioration in the post-Classical string quartet, with particular attention to adagios after Beethoven.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, this same pattern also plays out in d’Indy’s *Cours de composition*, with one notable difference: whereas the German writers that Notley discusses dismiss all post-Beethovenian adagios with equal contempt, d’Indy, of course, makes an exception for Franck, “the brilliant French successor of the immortal German symphonist.”

Notley connects this late-nineteenth-century cult of the adagio with another musical concept that also has special relevance for a discussion of both d’Indy’s *forme lied* and the third movement of Franck’s Quartet: the unending melody of the Wagnerian music drama. As Notley states, “After Wagner introduced the phrase *unendliche Melodie* in the essay “Zukunftsmusik” in 1860, some of these musicians found that the concept conveyed their experience of the Adagio both as an emotional and/or spiritual revelation—the latter potentially equivalent to the former—and as a musical-textural type whose forms were to be subordinated to a more fundamental, overriding melodic ideal.”

As she parses possible meanings behind the application of *unendliche Melodie* to a genre that on the surface seems as removed as any could possibly be from the realm of music drama, Notley arrives at a key hypothesis that undergirds the rest of her discussion of the adagio: “in the highest kind of adagios, melodic process often overrides points of structural articulation.”

The tropes of the sublime adagio, Beethovenian in inspiration, with an unending melody at its core, converge in contemporaneous discussions of the third movement of Franck’s Quartet

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36 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 390.
38 Notley, *Lateness and Brahms*, 175.
by d’Indy and other fin-de-siècle writers. Julien Tiersot, reviewing the Quartet’s 1890 premiere, referred to the movement’s opening phrase as “magnificently developed, with an overflowing melody, and a Beethovenian inspiration.”

Guy Ropartz, writing in 1898, referred to the movement as “one of the most sublime inspirations of César Franck, of modern music, of all music!”

D’Indy, in his biography of Franck, also invokes Beethoven in his effusive description of the third movement: “I do not think that, among all the music composed since the andantes of the last Beethoven quartets, it would be possible to find a phrase so elevated and so perfectly beautiful in conception, in proportion, and in effusion as this long prayer.”

Accounts of Franck’s compositional process play into these tropes as well. Pierre de Bréville recalls Franck telling him that “I wanted a very long, expressive phrase, with a single origin [d’une seule venue], without repetition, without turning back on itself.”

D’Indy recounts the scene when he visited Franck shortly after he had found the phrase that had so far been eluding him:

For this, too, he had searched for a long time. . . .—He made us, his old pupils, privy to his hopes, his frustrations, his endless searches for this subject, and with what joy he called to me from the other end of his sitting-room, before even shaking my hand, when I went to see him one day: ‘I’ve found it at last! . . . It’s a beautiful phrase; you’ll see for yourself! . . .’ and he immediately sat down at the piano so that I could share in his happiness.

40 Guy Ropartz, “Analyse du quatuor en ré de César Franck,” Revue internationale de musique, August 1, 1898, 567.
41 D’Indy, César Franck, 174–175. “Je ne pense pas que, depuis les andante des derniers quatuors beethoveniens, il soit possible de rencontrer, dans toute la production musicale, une phrase aussi élevée, aussi complètement belle de pensée, de proportions et d’effusion que cette lente prière.”
43 D’Indy, César Franck, 175. “Celle-là aussi, il la chercha longtemps. . . . — A nous, ses anciens élèves, il faisait part de ses espoirs, de ses déceptions, de ses recherches incessantes à ce sujet, et avec quelle joie, un jour que j’allais lui rendre visite, il s’écria, du bout de son salon et avant même de m’avoir serré lamain: « Je l’ai trouvée ! . . . c’est une belle phrase; vous allez voir. . . .»; et de se mettre aussitôt au piano pour me faire partager son bonheur.”
These early accounts respond to a sense of endless or overflowing melody that is rooted in the actual phrase structure and larger organization of the third movement. Figure 2.5 is a graphic representation of the entire third movement, divided into its five constituent sections. Reading the graph horizontally, each cell represents one measure. By comparing the total lengths of each section, two features stand out immediately. Section C is significantly longer than the other sections. Whereas the other sections all clock in between 33 and 36 measures long, section C is 48 measures long—in other words, it exceeds the other sections’ average length of 34.5 measures by some 13.5 measures. The other notable feature that emerges from comparing the different sections in this graph is that, leaving aside section C, each successive section is one measure longer than the section that preceded it: the first section is 33 measures long; the second, 34 measures; the third, 35 measures; and the fifth, 36. Each successive section (except section C) slightly oversteps the boundaries of the previous section—the melody “overflows” its structural confines just a little bit each time, but not by too much. Section C, however, completely abandons the pattern laid out by the previous three sections.

Figure 2.5: Formal outline of Franck’s Quartet, third movement
Within each section of the movement, individual phrases also push against their boundaries. The first phrase of section A establishes the normative time-flow of the movement: it is twelve measures long in total, subdivided into three units of four measures each. The second phrase initially seems to follow this plan, beginning with a four-measure unit that is then transposed down a step. However, the third unit escapes the confines of this structure: at the end of four measures, we find ourselves not at a perfect cadence, but rather in the midst of considerable harmonic and melodic strife. Whereas the twelfth measure of the first phrase featured a simple perfect cadence in the key of the subdominant (C# minor), with the cello moving effortlessly from G# on the first beat up to C#, in the twelfth measure of the second phrase the cello inverts this movement, dropping from a C# down to a G♮ that anchors a diminished seventh chord. Things only begin to come into focus in the fifteenth and sixteenth measures of the phrase, once the bass reaches F# and the other voices coalesce on the dominant of B major. The phrase’s final resolution comes five measures too late, in m. 29 (the seventeenth measure of the phrase). Section A is then rounded off with a four-measure coda reiterating the arrival at B major.

Section B follows a similar pattern. The first phrase takes the form of a perfectly foursquare, 16-measure compound period, which can be further subdivided into two sentences. Despite being a near-perfect Classical-style model of a compound period, this phrase extends beyond the normative phrase length of twelve measures that had been established at the outset of the movement—it still has a quality of stretching out beyond its allotted time. The second phrase of this section does not follow the first phrase’s sixteen-measure pattern at all: after an initial four-measure unit, the second unit oversteps its allotted length by two measures, rendering any neat division into foursquare phrases and eight- or sixteen-measure periods or sentences
impossible. The phrase is then rounded off with another four-measure unit, for a total length of fourteen measures. Intriguingly, although this phrase is shorter than the preceding one, it still manages to stretch out time and push boundaries with its middle, six-measure unit. Following this second phrase, section B concludes with a four-measure coda. While section B follows a similar structural pattern to section A, it exceeds section A’s length by one measure, for a total of 34 measures.

The third section, a reprise of section A, dutifully retraces the footsteps of the initial section for its first 33 measures. But when the music reaches its final cadence in m. 100, it stumbles (see Example 2.25). The first violin repeats its pre-cadential melodic figure of a syncopated augmented triad (D#-B-G♮). When the rest of the quartet tries to pull the violin down to the dominant, F#, and back into the cadence, the whole group gets stuck. The first violin oscillates between F# and the preceding G♮ in a loop; the rest of the quartet between the dominant seventh chord and the preceding French 4/3 chord.

Example 2.25: Transition from section A’ to section C, mm. 97–103

The first violin’s stumble over the augmented triad at m. 100 echoes a similar moment that occurs at the end of section B, after reaching a perfect cadence at m. 63 (see Example 2.26). In that case, upon reaching a perfect cadence in m. 63, the first violin gets hung up on its final three-note descending figure of 3-2-1 (A-G#-F#), flattening the motive’s initial two-eighths-and-
quarter rhythm out into three quarter notes. After two repetitions of the initial A-G♯-F♯ motive, the quartet moves up a perfect fourth, and the violin takes up the same motive on the notes D♭-C♯-B, as if straining to remember a tune that’s not quite right. Finally, after intoning the motive twice at this new transposition, the violin realizes its mistake and corrects itself from a D♭ to a D♯. This sharpened configuration, D♯-C♯-B, is, of course, the first three notes of the movement’s initial phrase. There is another crucial similarity between these two moments: when the violin finally sharpens on the last beat of m. 67, leading into the reprise of section A, the quartet sounds the same augmented triad that would later trip up the violin at m. 100. In both cases, the quartet seems to momentarily lose track of time; it forgets exactly where it is, jarred by the similarity of this moment to another one it has played through before, and tries multiple times to get its bearings. In the earlier instance, the quartet eventually did remember where it was headed and started the reprise of section A only one measure too late. The crisis of memory at m. 100 heads in another direction entirely.

Example 2.26: Transition from end of section B to reprise of section A, mm. 64–68
After a couple of measures of tug-of-war with the rest of the ensemble, the first violin breaks free partway through m. 102 and reverses direction, soaring upward in an arpeggiated G♯ augmented triad—the sonority that got it into trouble in the first place. At m. 103, we arrive somewhere totally new: the accidentals have all been erased, and the bass slides down from E#/F♯ to E♮ (see Example 2.27). We find ourselves transported to a new landscape. Not only has the key shifted suddenly and unexpectedly flatward to C major, but the texture is unlike anything else heard previously in the whole Quartet. Whereas the earlier sections of this movement were dominated by a melody in the first violin, with the other instruments providing a fairly staid and homophonic accompaniment, the music in this new world soon veers toward polyphony, with each instrument operating on its own rhythmic and melodic plane. By m. 107, the first violin is cycling through arpeggiated eighth notes; the second violin has a melody in quarters and half notes; the viola plays arpeggiated sixteenth notes; and against the viola and first violin, the cello’s disjunct bass line features triplet eighth notes (see Example 2.28).

Example 2.27: Beginning of section C, mm. 103–106
This is the alien landscape of the penultimate section of the movement, totally removed from what came before. Yet, against a backdrop of polyphony, chromatic harmony unlike anything heard elsewhere in the movement, and a sudden tonal shift flatward, one feature anchors this section to what preceded it: a preponderance of foursquare melodic units. Indeed, the first sixteen measures of section C form a compound period, as in section B.

Hidden within this compound period, in its final four measures, is the Sehnsuchtsmotiv (see Example 2.29). As in its initial appearance in the second movement’s trio, the Sehnsuchtsmotiv again appears at the end of a period, as an attempt to answer the preceding measures’ question. Although, in this appearance, the Sehnsuchtsmotiv is not marked on either side by rests, it is nevertheless carefully delineated from its surrounding material. While Franck marks the beginning of each of the preceding three melodic units in this section as both fortissimo and appassionato, the return of the Sehnsuchtsmotiv is marked as pianissimo and molto espressivo. As in the second movement, the Sehnsuchtsmotiv acts as a catalyst for what comes next: section C’s second phrase, whose initial eight measures (mm. 119–126) form the most dissonant and dramatic moment of the entire movement (see Example 2.30).
These eight measures mark not only the dramatic apex of the movement, but also a type of tonal climax, as well. The movement’s A sections (and thus the movement as a whole) have a five-sharp key signature; each A section begins in G# minor, but ends in the relative key of B major. Section B retains the five-sharp key signature, but is in F# minor. Section C, however, is devoid of a key signature altogether. While the initial period of section C begins with a first-inversion C major triad and moves on to prepare the dominant of C major, mm. 111–114 begins with a first-inversion A♭ major triad. The dramatic climax of mm. 119–126, while so dissonant in character, essentially elaborates the dominant of A♭ major. This flatward territory, while seemingly the furthest removed from the movement’s tonal complex of G# minor / B major, is, in fact, enharmonically linked to the initial key of G# minor: A♭ major is the enharmonic equivalent of G# major, the tonic major of G# minor. One of the movement’s defining features is
the constant tension between raised and lowered thirds, major and minor. The movement’s initial phrase displays this amply, with the first violin’s interplay between A♯ and A♮ in mm. 4–5, the D and G’s in m. 6, and the tension between D♭ and D♯ in the first violin’s melody in m. 8. As discussed above, the tension between D♭ and D♯ also plays a major role in the transition from section B back to the reprise of section A. Arguably, section B’s most beautiful moment comes in the interplay between F major / A minor / A major in mm. 50–53. Missing from all this major/minor interplay, however, is any inflection from G♯ minor toward G♯ major. The climax of section C, which so skillfully builds up toward the dominant of G♯ major, comes closer to reaching G♯ major than any other part of the movement. But here, too, this sonority ultimately remains out of reach, as the final four measures of the phrase (mm. 127–130) veer away from any resolution.

If section C had ended at this point, it would have been approximately the same length as the other sections of the movement. Instead, it adds on a varied repeat of its initial phrase before concluding. While the first three units of the period proceed similarly to before, the final unit, featuring the Sehnsuchtsmotiv, goes in an entirely new direction. For the first time in the Quartet, the melody of the Sehnsuchtsmotiv is beautifully ornamented, elongated from its usual four-measure presentation into eight measures (see Example 2.31). The melody overpowers the movement’s formal processes, stretching out the phrase’s allotted sixteen measures into twenty. Time seems to stop as the Sehnsuchtsmotiv stretches ever higher in the violin’s range, until, eventually, it reaches a high D♯—leading straight back to the movement’s opening melody.
Example 2.31: The Sehnsuchtsmotiv’s ornamented statement at the end of section C, mm. 143–150

The final reprise of section A cannot and does not unfold like its previous iterations. The opening melody begins an octave too high, with the inner voices providing a heavily ornamented accompaniment. When the ensemble reaches the F# major triad (V/vi in the key of G# minor) on the second beat of the phrase’s eighth measure (m. 158), it is halted by a pause, unable to continue as before. The previous three beats repeat an octave lower, as if the musicians had suddenly realized their “mistake” in starting an octave too high, but this gesture is also followed by a pause. After the pause, the same figure is inflected toward B major instead of B minor, leading to a new phrase that takes us back to the most dissonant and climactic part of section C (beginning at m. 164). Eight measures later, at m. 172, the ensemble returns to the music of section A, this time echoing the section’s final measures. However, the movement does not simply end with this echo of the initial section’s closing cadence. Instead of arriving at a final cadence in B major at m. 180, the cello rises up from F# to G#, forming a deceptive cadence in G# minor. Following the deceptive cadence is a short recollection of section B. After only six measures, the quartet comes to rest on the delayed B major triad, and the movement ends.
Example 2.32: Final reprise of section A, starting an octave too high, mm. 151–158

Example 2.33: Section A restarts an octave lower, then returns to section C, mm. 158–164

Example 2.34: Deceptive cadence at end of section A, mm. 177–180
If section C broke the movement’s train of thought and disrupted the normal flow of time established in the preceding sections, the final section of the movement suggests that there was no going back to the way things were before. It is as though the quartet, wrapped in the frenzy of emotion and authentic expression of section C, has lost its will to concentrate: it starts in the wrong octave, stops and starts unexpectedly, and shifts back in time to bits of music that don’t belong there. It also mimics, on a small intramovement scale, the type of memory processes that occur across movements in a cyclic work. Themes from other places return to disrupt the normative flow of time, but in this case, they only come from earlier in the movement, rather than earlier in the work as a whole. This process also occurs in the first movement, where, as we have seen, the material from the lied returns in a quasi-cyclic manner to disrupt and ultimately overwhelm the sonata. Of course, what the two movements also have in common is their use of forme lied. Perhaps what d’Indy meant when he listed a certain freedom from “rhythmic servitude” as one of the form’s defining features was that the intensity of expression in a forme lied is so powerful it ruptures the normal flow of time in a movement, and creates opportunities for a kind of spontaneous and unexpected show of emotion that cannot happen within the other movements of a sonata.
The *Sehnsuchtsmotiv*’s appearances in the third movement unite several different strands running throughout the Quartet. *Forme lied* and cyclic form both respond in different ways to the Wagnerian music drama. Cyclic form translates leitmotivic technique into the realm of instrumental music, by providing a means to create a thematic narrative over the course of a whole work. *Forme lied* allows for unfettered melodic expression, similar to the “unending melody” of the music drama. The *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* appears in the third movement at moments when the musical expression has transcended even the bounds of what *forme lied* would usually allow. In its first appearance, it ushers in the climax of the entire movement; in its second appearance, it pushes against the boundaries of phrase structure, eventually leading to the return of the movement’s *phrase lied*.

The *Tristan und Isolde* allusions in the third movement have a completely different quality than those in the second movement. The second movement’s allusions suggested that any attempt to strictly imitate Wagner would end in failure, and allowed Franck a chance to aggressively neutralize Wagner’s influence. In the third movement, Franck fully incorporates Wagner into his own compositional style, by placing the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* at the center of the movement’s narrative. Franck’s treatment of the motive in the third movement pulls back the curtain on his own compositional agency, revealing that he knew all along how to solve the problem posed by Wagner, and he chose to set up the Wagnerian allusions to fail in the second movement.

The allusions to the *Tristan* motives in the inner two movements of Franck’s Quartet rupture any initial impression that the Quartet is an absolute work, hermetically sealed against any extramusical meaning or influence. Instead, these allusions allow us to sketch out a reading of the Quartet’s inner movements in which Franck struggles, but ultimately prevails against
Wagner’s outsize influence. In the second movement, the motives poison the quartet, leaving uncompleted phrases and frustrated cadences in their wake. In the third movement, Franck incorporates the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* into the movement’s climax, where it propels the music toward the movement’s most pivotal moments. The *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* has been assimilated into Franck’s compositional voice: it has traversed the gulf from destructive influence in the second movement to productive influence in the third movement.

**2.4 Cyclic Form versus Sonata Form in the Fourth Movement**

If the first movement’s sonata is overwhelmed by the material of the *forme lied* introduction, the fourth movement’s sonata is awash in a sea of cyclic reminiscences. Not only do the fourth movement’s introduction and coda feature extended quotations from the previous movements; the cyclic theme from the first movement’s *lied* permeates the thematic material of the sonata itself, appearing as the sonata’s main theme and also in an extended recall in the development. The fourth movement’s narrative is not so much one of antagonism between the sonata and its introduction-coda frame, as was the case in the first movement. Instead, the fourth movement folds the material of the previous movements into one structure that is governed by two thematic elements: the cyclic theme and a new theme, not heard previously in the Quartet, that acts as an invocation motive along the same lines as the first movement’s dotted-eighth/sixteenth figure. The tension in the fourth movement resides not in a battle between *lied* and sonata, but between the opposing dramatic functions of the cyclic theme and the invocation motive: overt cyclic recall and foreshadowing of the recall.

The fourth movement begins with the invocation motive, a short, incisive quarter-note theme in 2/2 that quickly rockets upward (see Example 2.36). Although the movement is marked with the key signature of D major, the tonality is not clear from this initial motive, whose first
utterance, is centered around F#, and is then transposed up a minor third. A suspended half note in the cello then leads directly into a recall of the third movement’s opening melody (as shown in Example 2.37). Although it is transposed from its original key of G# minor to D major, it retains its original time signature of 3/4 and tempo indication of Larghetto. After only four measures, the music reverts to its original tempo and time signature, for a more extended passage elaborating the invocation motive. By m. 24, the invocation motive dies out, and the cello carries a suspended C# across another time signature change into the world of the second movement (see Example 2.38). In short succession, we hear brief snippets of the scherzo’s opening theme (at its original pitch of F# minor), followed by the opening of the trio (transposed to B major to accommodate the cello’s C# pedal). After a long pause, the invocation motive returns for a third time, and settles again on a suspended A. The tempo and time signature shifts again, this time to the opening of the first movement, for a brief recall of the cyclic theme in its tonic key of D major (see Example 2.39). The melody is cut off partway through a phrase; after a pause, the time signature shifts back to 2/2 and the sonata begins in earnest.

Example 2.36: Invocation motive, mm. 1–7

Example 2.37: Recall of third movement, mm. 7–11
Example 2.38: Recall of second movement, mm. 25–35

Example 2.39: Recall of first movement, leading into start of sonata, mm. 53–60

The introduction thus recalls each of the Quartet’s earlier movements in reverse chronological succession. But what is the effect of these reminiscences, and who is remembering what? Borrowing from Edward Cone, we could consider the invocation motive to be the musical persona of the fourth movement: not only does this material start off the movement, thus becoming inalienably associated with the movement’s identity, but it is one of the few musical ideas in this movement that has not been previously heard elsewhere. The motive plays, and the persona strains to remember what had come before. The strain is audible in the very character of the motive: fortissimo, allegro molto, the first three notes detached. The most recent memory, the third movement, is the first to bubble up to the surface. As quickly as it comes, it falls out of the
The invocation motive struggles again to summon up another memory, casts a bit further back, and drags up the second movement. This memory, too, evaporates as quickly as it had appeared, so once again the invocation motive returns and casts even further back, bringing up at last the cyclic theme from the first movement’s introduction. Each time the invocation motive returns, it lingers a bit longer. The first utterance remains fortissimo throughout its brief six-measure appearance. The second time, it begins fortissimo, extends from six to thirteen measures, and peters out pianissimo. The third time, it begins a fourth lower than the first two times, on the C# that had been sustained throughout the reminiscence of the second movement. That is not the only change: this time the motive begins pianissimo, crescendos to fortissimo, and, after seventeen measures, fades to a pianissimo. We can hear the persona casting back further in its memory, trying a little harder each time to recall that earlier melody, through these increases in length and complexity.

One might wonder why the introduction recalls each movement in reverse chronological order. When the exposition of the movement’s sonata begins, the answer becomes evident: because the cyclic theme, which initially appears in the first movement, forms the basis of the sonata’s first theme. The reminiscences must proceed in this order so that the introduction ends with the return of the cyclic theme. The introduction’s main function, therefore, is to prepare for the arrival of the sonata’s exposition. Thus, even though the fourth movement’s introduction occupies similarly outsize proportions to the first movement’s, its function is more in line with a “traditional” sonata-form introduction (Figure 2.6 provides an overview of the fourth movement’s form). Whereas the first movement’s introduction evoked formal and tonal stability and the its exposition fell from the introduction’s state of D-major grace, the fourth movement begins in a place of instability, to be resolved by the exposition. Although the key signature at
the outset of the movement is marked as D major, the invocation motive itself is highly chromatic, and the introduction modulates from key to key as it recalls the earlier movements. The introduction also lacks formal stability: it floats from reminiscence to reminiscence without establishing any larger sense of form. It is only when we reach the recall of the cyclic theme that the music finally settles into D major for a few measures. Here, the point is not to get comfortable in D major, as the first movement’s introduction did: it is to prepare the dominant of D major so that the opening of the exposition can resolve it (see Example 2.40). In place of the angst-ridden, D-minor theme that begins the first movement’s exposition, the fourth movement’s exposition begins with a comparatively serene theme in D major.

Figure 2.6: Formal outline of Franck’s Quartet, fourth movement

| **Introduction:** mm. 1–58, modulating (F♯ minor → D major) |
| **Exposition:** mm. 59–281, D major → A major / minor |
| **Development:** mm. 282–504, modulating |
| **Recapitulation:** mm. 505–703, D major |
| **Coda:** mm. 704–880, D major |

Example 2.40: Standing on dominant at the end of the introduction; opening of sonata in D major, mm. 56–60

The invocation motive also peppers the sonata itself, where it appears in the exposition and recapitulation as a bridge between each of the major themes of the movement. As with the
first movement’s exposition, the fourth movement’s exposition adheres only loosely to the traditional blueprint of an exposition, with no medial caesura and several loosely connected thematic episodes. The invocation motive acts as a bridge between these disparate episodes, intruding at m. 83, after the statement of the exposition’s first theme (which itself is built upon the cyclic theme), and again at m. 165, leading eventually to the exposition’s secondary key of A major. In contrast to the moments when the cyclic theme from the first movement’s introduction intruded on the fabric of that movement’s sonata, disrupting the progress of the sonata, the invocation motive’s intrusions in the fourth movement’s sonata propel the sonata forward and act as a unifying force. The invocation motive also appears in the development, both in its original form and disguised, stretched out into half-note values and played at a ppp whisper, at the opening of the development (as shown in Example 2.41).

Example 2.41: Altered invocation motive, opening of development, mm. 282–285

![Example 2.41: Altered invocation motive, opening of development, mm. 282–285](image)

Vincent d’Indy grappled with the tension between this new invocation motive and the thematic recall that permeates the rest of the movement. Introducing the movement, he writes that “the last movement, where we rediscover all the thematic personalities of the work, to which is added a special theme \( z \), offers, by contrast [with the third movement], an extremely complex architecture.”\(^{44}\) Struggling to classify the function of this theme, he rules out the possibility that it makes up the refrain of a sonata-rondo: “The frequent periodic returns of this theme could lead us to consider it as a sort of refrain, in which case the form of this piece would correspond to that

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\(^{44}\) D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/i, 264. “Le Final, où l’on retrouvera tous les personnages thématiques de l’œuvre, auxquels vient s’ajouter un thème spécial \( z \), offre au contraire une architecture assez complexe.”
of a Rondo (RS) [d’Indy’s abbreviation for sonata rondo]; but this analogy is entirely rhythmic, as the eminently variable tonalities of the reappearances of this theme z, always ‘on its way’ to something, give it an entirely different role.”

While d’Indy does not entirely solve the question of the invocation motive’s function in the fourth movement, he does open up at least two intriguing avenues of inquiry. At one point in his analysis, d’Indy suggests a provocative possibility when he refers to the theme as “le thème conducteur”—the conductor theme, or, perhaps, the leading theme. Of course, this translation is only one word away from leading motive—leitmotiv—suggesting some kind of kinship between the narrative function of this motive in the fourth movement’s complex structure, and a leitmotiv in a Wagnerian music drama. At the end of his analysis, while discussing the conclusion of the movement, d’Indy suggests a second possibility: that the invocation motive gets its power from the fact that it is “the only [theme] that truly belongs to the fourth movement.” The coda provides the strongest evidence for this hypothesis.

The fourth movement’s coda mirrors the introduction, in that it also contains reminiscences of the earlier movements. However, the form that these reminiscences take and the order in which they appear is considerably altered from the introduction (as demonstrated in Figure 2.7). The introduction featured short recalls of each theme that adhered closely to their initial appearances in their respective movements, in each instance maintaining the time signature, tempo, and, in the case of the second and third movement recalls, the voicing of the

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45 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/ii, 264. “Ces retours périodiques fréquents de ce thème pourraient le faire considérer comme une sorte de refrain, par quoi la forme de cette pièce s'apparenterait à celle du Rondeau (RS); mais cette analogie est surtout rythmique, car les tonalités éminemment variables de ces réapparitions du thème toujours «en marche» vers quelque chose, lui donnent un tout autre rôle.”

46 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/ii, 264.

47 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/ii, 265. “. . . le thème z le seul qui appartienne en propre au Final.”
originals. Each recall was abruptly cut off after only a few measures. These short memories were each “summoned” by the invocation motive, which was the only material that was allowed to develop over the course of the introduction. The coda, by contrast, features extended recalls of each movement’s theme, in which the material, now transposed to the time signature and tempo of the fourth movement, is allowed to freely develop. The thematic recalls also appear in a different order than in the introduction.

Figure 2.7: Comparison of thematic recall in fourth movement introduction and coda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction (mm. 1–58)</th>
<th>Coda (mm. 704–880)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invocation motive (mm. 1–7)</td>
<td>Invocation motive variant (mm. 704–713)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third movement (mm. 7–11)</td>
<td>Second movement (mm. 714–721)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invocation motive (mm. 12–24)</td>
<td>Invocation motive variant (mm. 722–739)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second movement (mm. 25–35)</td>
<td>Second movement + cyclic theme (mm. 740–783)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invocation motive (mm. 36–52)</td>
<td>Third movement (mm. 784–838)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyclic theme (mm. 53–58)</td>
<td>Cyclic theme (mm. 839–866)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Invocation motive (mm. 867–880) |

The first recall we hear in the coda is the second-movement scherzo theme, presented in triplet quarters to fit the 2/2 time signature (see Example 2.42). After this initial recall of the scherzo dies out, the same theme begins again, but this time it is accompanied by the cyclic theme in counterpoint (see Example 2.43). The first violin’s cyclic theme eventually gets stuck on a repeated D major triad, which transforms into a broken D-augmented triad that descends and ascends repeatedly (see Example 2.44). After five measures, the first violin breaks free of this loop, ascending upward in a D-augmented-triad arpeggio. This transition, with its looped melody and augmented-triad harmony, bears a strong resemblance to the passage that immediately precedes the climactic penultimate section of the third movement (compare Example 2.44 to Example 2.25). It leads into a striking apotheosis of the third movement’s opening theme, in which the dazzling accompaniment and *sempre fortissimo* dynamic markings cloak the opening theme in the luxurious texture of the third movement’s section C. Benedict
Taylor calls this “the defining moment of the Quartet.” This description seems even more apt when one considers that this moment not only recalls the third movement’s opening theme, but also the third movement’s climax.

Example 2.42: Initial recall of the second movement’s scherzo in coda, mm. 714–721

Example 2.43: Second recall of scherzo, in counterpoint with cyclic theme, mm. 756–759

Example 2.44: Transformation of cyclic theme into D augmented triad; third movement recall, mm. 781–788

After two statements of the third movement’s opening theme, the texture and harmonies grow more dense and dissonant, preparing for a final cataclysm: a series of \textit{fff} dominant-ninth chords, over which the cyclic theme returns, the \textit{recitando} theme begging for a final resolution to D major (see Example 2.45). Instead, the suspended A dominant-ninth harmony eventually leads instead to another dominant-ninth harmony, this time rooted on C#, over which the cyclic theme sings out again. The cello jumps up to E#, then flats through E\natural to E\flat, the quartet eventually settling on an E\flat major seventh chord. Just as the possibility of resolution to D major seems to have slipped through our fingers, we finally reach it in m. 860, but all that remains of the cyclic theme is a repeated descending D major triad in the first violin line. This bizarre harmonic sequence, however, is grounded in the opening measures of Franck’s Quartet: it presents the harmonies of mm. 7–14 of the first movement in retrograde, reaching back through them to eventually land on the work’s opening sonority of D major.

Example 2.45: The coda’s final cataclysm and eventual resolution to D major, mm. 839–859
It seems as though the whole work will conclude with the cyclic theme gradually fading out, as did the first movement. But this is not the case. After sustaining a *dolce* D major triad that could have made the perfect conclusion to the work, the quartet erupts in a final, *fortissimo* statement of the invocation motive, transposed to D major (see Example 2.47). It is while trying to explicate this final eruption of the invocation motive that d’Indy notes that this is the only theme that truly belongs to the fourth movement. But this hardly seems a satisfactory explanation as to why Franck ends the entire work with the invocation motive rather than the cyclic theme. In fact, by ending the Quartet with a theme that only appears in the final movement and lacks the intermovement significance of the cyclic theme, Franck seems to deny the cyclic theme the agency that it had accrued throughout the work.
Example 2.47: Invocation motive and conclusion of fourth movement, mm. 867–880

One possible explanation is presented by the coda’s links to the development. The variant of the invocation motive that appears throughout the coda, augmented rhythmically into half and whole notes, first appears in the opening of the development. Additionally, the treatment of the earlier movements’ themes in the coda is markedly developmental, to the point that d’Indy referred to the coda in his analysis as the “second development.” Moreover, the recitando treatment of the cyclic theme at the end of the coda (mm. 835–866) closely echoes the theme’s appearance at the end of the development (mm. 476–504). The hypothesis that the coda functions as a second development may raise more questions than it answers: why does this movement need a second development, and why could the material from the earlier movements only be properly developed in the coda rather than in the “first” development, in the sonata proper? Nor does it answer the question: why does this “second development” end with a jarring statement of the invocation motive?
Another possibility arises from comparing the final measures of the fourth movement with the final measures of the first movement. The first movement concludes with a coda that reprises the introduction, returning to the tonal and formal stability of the introduction, as well as the introduction’s thematic material—that is, the cyclic theme. But the first movement does not actually conclude with a statement of the cyclic theme itself. In fact, the final measures of the movement conclude with that movement’s invocation motive—the dotted-eighth/sixteenth figure—ornamenting a D major triad. Unlike in the fourth movement, the first movement’s invocation motive blends into the texture of the coda and appears at a moment when we would expect it, occupying the same position as it originally did in the introduction (where it also appeared in the final measures). Although the sudden incursion of the invocation motive in the final measures of the fourth movement disrupts what would have otherwise been a placid conclusion, it also provides a sense of closure, as it echoes the final appearance of the first movement’s invocation motive. Moreover, the fourth movement’s invocation motive is transposed, in its final appearance, into D major for the first and only time. If the cyclic theme was not quite powerful enough to completely subsume the invocation motive within its texture, it at least managed to assimilate it to its own tonality.

There is one final, tantalizing hypothesis as to why Franck ends the Quartet with the invocation motive rather than the cyclic theme, and it relates specifically to the motive’s melodic composition. Following an initial minor third leap upward from F♯ to A, the motive then traces a descending chromatic scale from A through F♯; the whole kernel is then repeated up a minor third. The four-note descending chromatic scale at the heart of the motive is an inversion of the Sehnsuchtsmotiv, which comprises a four-note ascending chromatic scale, also repeated immediately up a minor third. Of course, chromatic scales are ubiquitous in late-Romantic
compositions, and without any corroborating evidence, such as a rhythmic echo of the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* or the presence of a Tristan chord, it is impossible to reach any definitive conclusion as to whether the invocation motive is a veiled allusion to the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv*. Still, such a reading would afford some tempting interpretive possibilities. The Quartet’s Wagnerian allusions would not be limited to only the second and third movements, but, in fact, could be seen to radiate outward to the final movement as well, eventually overtaking even the Quartet’s cyclic theme in significance to end the entire cycle. One could also read this possible allusion as a sign of Franck’s control over Wagner’s influence. At the end of the third movement, Franck begins to adapt and integrate the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* into his own compositional language. He completes the task in the fourth movement by dissolving it into a barely-recognizable version of itself that is finally subsumed into the Quartet’s overarching tonality of D major in the work’s final moments.

By choosing to hear echoes of the *Sehnsuchtsmotiv* in the fourth movement’s invocation motive, one would also choose to privilege a programmatic, intertextual, and, indeed, extramusical reading of the movement over the other, more formalist, interpretations that I had initially suggested. Although it may risk going too far into the realm of hypothesis and conjecture, I find that the programmatic aspects of this reading make it the most compelling of the available interpretive possibilities.

The premiere of Franck’s Quartet was a watershed moment for music in fin-de-siècle France. By re-orienting the weight of meaning in his Quartet away from a typical sonata-form first movement and toward cyclic form and the *forme lied*, and by incorporating Wagnerian techniques through the use of cyclic integration and unending melody, as well as allusions to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, Franck provided a blueprint for the composers who would
immediately follow him in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. The next chapter will trace this influence through the two most influential string quartets composed in the subsequent decades: those by Debussy and Ravel.
Chapter 3
The String Quartets of Debussy and Ravel: In Franck’s Footsteps

Of all the string quartets composed in France in the two decades following the premiere of Franck’s String Quartet in 1890, none have gained as much critical acclaim as those by Debussy (1893) and Ravel (1903). Despite all they owe to Franck’s Quartet, the Debussy and Ravel Quartets have long eclipsed Franck’s Quartet in the canon: they are performed and recorded far more frequently, and have also been the subject of much more critical discussion. While Marianne Wheeldon has examined the influence of the cyclic design of Franck’s Quartet on those by Debussy and Ravel, and James Briscoe has noted the resemblance between the large-scale form of the Franck and Debussy Quartets, the impact that Franck’s treatment of *forme lied* had on Debussy and Ravel’s Quartets has not previously been discussed.¹ As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the third movement of Franck’s Quartet, with its overflowing melody and climax that seems to step out of time, provides a sublime model that both Debussy and Ravel emulated in the third movements of their works. Additionally, both Debussy and Ravel experimented with interjecting slow, *forme-lied*-like sections into the faster movements of their Quartets, as Franck did in his first movement.

All three works employ cyclic form and follow a similar large-scale formal design, as shown in Figure 3.1: a fast, sonata-form first movement, followed by a scherzo and trio, a *forme lied* third movement, and a fast final movement. As discussed in the previous chapter, Franck’s Quartet features a multivalent cyclicism, with both a main cyclic theme that appears at the

opening of the work and returns in three of the four movements, as well as cyclic recall between the second and third movements, in the form of the Tristan und Isolde allusions, and a final movement that recalls themes from all of the previous movements. Debussy’s engagement with cyclic form is more straightforward: the cyclic theme, which opens the first movement, returns as the main thematic material in the second and fourth movements, and is the only theme that appears in multiple movements.\textsuperscript{2} At the other end of the scale is Ravel’s Quartet, which is the most nuanced and complex cyclic work among the corpus of post-Franck string quartets. Ravel’s Quartet features a network of cyclic themes, deriving from the first movement’s primary and secondary themes, which appear across all four movements.\textsuperscript{3} While Ravel’s indebtedness to Franck is generally less acknowledged than Debussy’s, his tightly woven cyclicism is actually closer to Franck’s nearly Wagnerian approach than the monothematic cyclicism of Debussy’s Quartet (and many other quartets of this period).

Figure 3.1: Large-scale form in the Franck, Debussy and Ravel Quartets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Franck</th>
<th>Debussy</th>
<th>Ravel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Forme lied / sonata</td>
<td>Sonata</td>
<td>Sonata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D major / D minor</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>F major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Scherzo and trio</td>
<td>Scherzo and trio</td>
<td>Scherzo and slow trio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F♯ minor</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>A minor / major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Forme lied</td>
<td>Forme lied</td>
<td>Forme lied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G♯ minor / B major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
<td>G♭ major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sonata</td>
<td>Slow introduction / sonata</td>
<td>Sonata / rondo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D major</td>
<td>D♭ major / G minor / G major</td>
<td>F major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{2} As Wheeldon notes in “Debussy and La Sonate Cyclique,” Debussy’s omission of the cyclic theme from the third movement parallels Franck’s. Wheeldon makes a compelling case that Debussy employs a kind of timbral cyclicism in the Quartet’s fourth movement, in which the timbres of the second and third movements are recalled instead in lieu of direct thematic quotation.

\textsuperscript{3} The development of these theme groups in the first movement of Ravel’s Quartet is expertly detailed in Sigrun B. Heinzelmann, “Sonata Form in Ravel’s Pre-War Chamber Music” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2008).
3.1 Debussy’s Quartet: Context and Premises

Debussy’s only String Quartet premiered on December 29, 1893, at a concert of the Société Nationale. As Marianne Wheeldon has noted, Debussy was present at the highly successful premiere of Franck’s Quartet at a Société Nationale concert three years earlier, and he undoubtedly had that success in mind when attempting to get his own Quartet premiered at the same venue. In fact, Debussy’s decision to compose a quartet relatively early in his career, in his early thirties, is emblematic of a certain paradox surrounding the surging popularity of the string quartet as a genre among French composers of the 1890s and 1900s: whereas Franck felt himself inadequate to the task of composing a string quartet until quite late in his life, eventually completing his only quartet less than a year before passing away in 1890 at age 67, the composers who sought to emulate his success in the genre were significantly younger. In addition to Debussy, Ropartz, Vierne, Samazeuilh, and Ravel were all in their twenties or thirties when they composed their first (or only) quartets.

Wheeldon sees in Debussy’s choice of genre a certain cynicism: by composing in the vein of the Société Nationale’s grand maître, Franck, Debussy would increase the odds of the Société granting him a premiere at one of their concerts. But there were other, less cynical, factors that influenced his decision to compose a quartet: as Wheeldon herself points out, Debussy publicly praised Franck’s compositions on several occasions, and seems to have genuinely admired and respected Franck’s music. Perhaps more significantly, Debussy

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4 According to Teresa Davidian, the exact date that Debussy began to compose the quartet is unknown. He probably started in 1892, as he wrote to Prince Poniatowsky in February 1893 that the Quartet was completed. However, he continued to work on it throughout 1893. See Teresa Maria Davidian, “Debussy’s Sonata Forms” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 1988), 110.
5 Wheeldon, “Debussy and La Sonate Cyclique,” 647.
6 Wheeldon, “Debussy and La Sonate Cyclique,” 646–647.
7 Wheeldon, “Debussy and La Sonate Cyclique,” 646.
composed his Quartet at a time when he was developing a very strong friendship with Ernest Chausson. He originally intended to dedicate the work to Chausson, to mark, as Debussy put it, “the beginning of a friendship, which, in time, is due to become the best and most profound of my life.”\(^8\) However, Chausson was apparently displeased with the Quartet, as Debussy later wrote to him that he was “upset for several days” by what Chausson had said about it, and promised to “write another one which will be for you, in all seriousness for you, and I will try and bring some nobility to my forms.”\(^9\) In fact, Debussy never did write another quartet; in the end, he dedicated his only one to the Quatuor Ysaïe, which premiered the work.

In his article “Debussy’s String Quartet in the Brussels Salon of ‘La Libre Esthétique,’” David Code provides a deeply insightful analysis of Debussy’s Quartet that situates the work within the context of the Libre Esthétique salon in Brussels where the Quartet received its second performance. For the 1894 salon, the violinist Eugène Ysaïe programmed a series of concerts that, in Code’s words, constituted “the most blatant expression imaginable of the Société Nationale’s compositional ideals,” an unsurprising programming choice considering that in previous years, d’Indy had been in charge of selecting the music for the salon’s concert series.\(^10\) Debussy’s Quartet was the first work on the first all-Debussy concert ever produced; it was followed by Proses lyriques and La Damaeselle èlue. The programming for the other concerts situates both Debussy’s Quartet and other recent French chamber works securely within the Beethovenian lineage that d’Indy would claim for French music a few years later in the Cours de composition musicale. On the first concert, d’Indy’s first String Quartet, op. 35, was nestled between Schubert’s Quintet in C Major, D. 956, and Beethoven’s “Serioso” Quartet, op. 95. The

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8 Quoted in Davidian, “Debussy’s Sonata Forms,” 112.
9 Quoted Davidian, “Debussy’s Sonata Forms,” 112.
third concert began with Franck’s String Quartet and concluded with Beethoven’s op. 131 Quartet. The final concert included Beethoven’s op. 59 Quartet and Chausson’s Concert for violin, piano and string quartet.¹¹

Code regards this context as an invitation to consider Debussy’s Quartet as an “outgrowth” of the same Beethovenian lineage that d’Indy claims for Franck (and, indeed, for the other Franckiste composers, including himself), while also acknowledging that Debussy composed the Quartet at the period when he felt the anxiety of Wagner’s influence most strongly. He argues that “through its studied adaptation of Beethovenian compositional principles, ‘opus 10’ [Debussy’s designation for the Quartet, the only work to which he assigned an opus number] effects a distinct, ‘absolute’ contribution to Debussy’s post-Wagnerian negotiations. To trace this interwoven pair of influences is to derive a more robust account of the work’s post-Classical logic . . . than has yet been offered.”¹²

Code argues that the “opening paragraph” of the Quartet’s first movement (its initial 12 measures) contains five premises that are composed out to provide the structure for the rest of the movement, which are summarized in Figure 3.2. These are: 1) the half-diminished seventh chord D-F-Ab-C that first appears on the second beat of m. 1 and, in the first movement’s G Phrygian mode, acts as a substitute dominant seventh; 2) the hint of B♭ Mixolydian suggested by the arrival on B♭ on the third beat of m. 2; 3) the chromatic inflection of F# to F♮ in mm. 3–4 that reminds us of the absent leading note in the G Phrygian environment; 4) the “problem dyad” of A♭/B♭, which, like the famous C# in Beethoven’s Eroica Symphony, causes the opening phrase of Debussy’s Quartet to expand from a standard eight measures to twelve, and saturates mm. 6–

¹¹ Code, “Debussy’s String Quartet,” 261. Code reproduces in his article the complete concert programs for the salon.
¹² Code, “Debussy’s String Quartet,” 262.
10; and 5) the enharmonic respelling, at pitch, of the original Tristan chord that arises out of the problem dyad in mm. 9–10.\textsuperscript{13}

Figure 3.2: Code’s five premises\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Code, “Debussy’s String Quartet,” 266–268. In addition to the prominent role played by the Tristan chord in Debussy’s Quartet, the work is pervaded by a more general Wagnerian atmosphere, owing to Debussy’s reliance on chromatic harmony and his occasional adoption of a Wagnerian approach to melodic fragmentation. This Wagnerian flavor particularly comes to the fore in the dramatic climaxes of the first and third movements.

\textsuperscript{14} Reproduced from Code, “Debussy’s String Quartet,” Example 1, 267.
While Code’s analysis traces the composing-out of these five premises across only the first movement, he acknowledges their centrality to the construction of the entire work, and argues that “while the blatant thematic ‘cyclicity’ that binds the work is impossible to miss, it is arguably through its continuing composing-out of the new syntactical implications of its modal-harmonic language that it most richly enacts a post-Classical version of cyclic integration.” In other words, while Debussy’s Quartet is obviously cyclic, with a theme that dominates the first and second movements, and comes to permeate the second half of the finale, there is also a subtler cyclicism at play across the Quartet, based on the recurrence and composing-out of Code’s five premises.

In the third and fourth movements of Debussy’s Quartet, the composing-out of the premises becomes intertwined with Debussy’s application of *forme lied* to create a rich environment in which the ideals of cyclicism, unending melody, and the stepping out of time all meld together. Debussy’s third movement shares many similarities that of Franck’s Quartet. Like Franck’s third movement, Debussy’s does not contain any overt references to the cyclic theme; however, it does enact a subtler form of cyclicism through the recurrence of Code’s premises. Moreover, since the Tristan chord (the fifth premise) appears at structurally important moments, Debussy’s third movement, like Franck’s, has a Wagnerian connection. Debussy’s third movement occupies a similar position in the large-scale tonal structure of the whole Quartet to Franck’s third movement, and the two share similar formal / narrative arcs. Debussy’s third movement takes the idea of “endless melody” that is so beautifully embodied by Franck’s third movement to new extremes, creating phrases that refuse to cadence at all until the end of each large formal section. Both movements feature a dramatic climax that leads to a final restatement.

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of the movement’s initial melody, which is set apart from the rest of the movement by a change in register and a sense that the normative time-flow of the movement has been disrupted by what came before.

The fourth movement of Debussy’s Quartet begins with a slow introduction that is stuck in the key, time signature, and tempo of the third movement. Like the introduction of Franck’s fourth movement, Debussy’s introduction recalls the cyclic theme, the timbres of the previous movements, and Code’s premises. While this introduction eventually gives way to a fairly standard-seeming sonata-form exposition, the development is derailed by a return of the introduction’s slow tempo and the cyclic theme, and a recapitulation of the sonata’s themes is abandoned in favor of taking care of the cyclic theme’s unfinished business. The fourth movement’s sonata form, with its localized themes that don’t have any larger intra-movement significance, is subsumed within the larger frame of forme lied introduction and a development and recapitulation that are preoccupied with resolving the inter-movement narrative rather than the local narrative of the sonata form—much in the same way that the first-movement sonata form of Franck’s Quartet was constrained by its own introduction-development-coda forme lied frame.

3.1.1 Forme lied and Unending Melody in the Third Movement

The third movement of Debussy’s String Quartet, like Franck’s, is a beautiful forme lied; more specifically, it is what d’Indy would have termed a lied simple due to its basic ternary form. Dukas and d’Indy both praised the third movement in strikingly similar terms. Dukas, in a review following a performance of the Quartet in 1894, declared the first and third movements
his favorites, due to their “truly exquisite poetry” and “supreme delicacy of thought.” D’Indy, in a paragraph-long discussion of Debussy’s Quartet in the *Cours de composition musicale*, also made special mention of the third movement’s “exquisite poetry.”

Debussy’s third movement occupies a similar position in the large-scale formal and tonal structure of his Quartet to that of Franck’s. In both works, the third movement serves as the slow movement (*forme lied*), and is a tritone away from the work’s global key signature (as illustrated in Figure 3.1). The first and final movements of Franck’s Quartet are in D major, and the third movement begins in G# minor (though it ends in B major). The first, second and fourth movements of Debussy’s Quartet are all in either G minor or major, and the third movement is in D♭ major.

**Figure 3.3**: Formal outline of Debussy’s Quartet, third movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of measures:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Section A (mm. 1-27), D flat major**
  - Intro (mm. 1-4)
  - Phrase 1 (mm. 5-16)
  - Phrase 2 (mm. 17-27)

- **Section B (mm. 34-67), C sharp minor**
  - Phrase 1 (mm. 28-40, solo viola interrupted by chords)
  - Continuation (mm. 41-47)
  - Phrase 2 (mm. 48-75, leading to climax)
  - Climax (mm. 76-94)
  - Phrase 1 recap (mm. 95-106)

- **Section A’ (mm. 107-123), D flat major**
  - Phrase 1 (mm. 107-115)
  - Coda (mm. 116-123)

Debussy’s third movement also follows a similar narrative arc to Franck’s. As noted above, it follows a basic ternary (ABA) form, but the three sections all have greatly disparate

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17 D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* II/ii, 271.
lengths: section A, in 6/8 time, is 27 measures long; section B, in 3/8, is 79 measures long, and
the reprise of section A that concludes the movement (again in 6/8) is a mere 17 measures. This
disparity is evident in Figure 3.3, which sketches out the overall form of the third movement. As
in Franck’s third movement, where the climactic section C extends far beyond its normative time
limit, here, too, the middle section exceeds its allotted time due to the dramatic climax at its core.

The third movement of Debussy’s Quartet begins not in one of the keys implied by the
group signature, but rather, with a snippet of melody played solo by the second violin that
strongly implies the work’s global tonic of G (in this case G major), as shown in Example 3.1.
However, in the second measure, the second violin settles on an A♭, instead of the expected A♮,
and the cello then plays a pizzicato F♭ major triad. The juxtaposition of B♮ in the first measure
and A♭ in the second composes out Code’s fourth premise, the B♮-A♭ dyad. In the third measure,
the viola takes up the second violin’s initial snippet of melody, again centered around G major,
but this time moves up from an initial sustained A♭ to A♮. As the viola continues to sustain this
A♮, the second violin and cello enter with D♭, and the first violin takes up the opening melody,
now transposed to fit the new key signature. Importantly, this new transposition enacts another
one of the premises: the first two notes, F-G♭, are an enharmonic respelling of the F-F♯ dyad that
forms the third premise. In this context, however, the G♭/ F♯ is not a missing leading note, but
rather, the tonic of the implied local key of G♭ major suggested by the C♭ accidentals in mm. 6,
9, and 10.

Following this mysterious opening, mm. 5–12 begin to develop the opening motive into a
standard-issue eight-measure. However, the phrase does not arrive at some kind of cadential
closure at m. 13, as one might expect, but instead at the enharmonic respelling of the original
Tristan chord that is Code’s fifth premise, built above another restatement of the opening melody
(see Example 3.2). The ensuing four-measure phrase from mm. 13–16 ends even more remotely: with a B♭♭ triad (enharmonically equivalent to A major). In m. 17, a new melody begins, which climaxes with a turn toward G♭ major at m. 21. At m. 24, the cello returns to the opening melody, once again centered around G♯ (see Example 3.3). The melody gives way to a G♭, leading to a plagal cadence of sorts in D♭ major at m. 26, which concludes the movement’s initial section. The absence of cadences earlier in this section renders its melodies truly endless—each phrase dissolves smoothly into the next, with no formal articulation between them.

Example 3.1: Opening of third movement, mm. 1–5

Example 3.2: End of first phrase and beginning of second phrase, mm. 12–17

Example 3.3: Plagal cadence at end of section A, mm. 24–27
Section B is marked by a change of key signature to four sharps (the key of the tonic minor by enharmonic equivalent, C# minor) and a change of time signature from 6/8 to 3/8 (see Example 3.4 above). The melody, played without accompaniment by the viola, evokes a Baroque sarabande—an affect that is only heightened by the open fifths that punctuate the ends of phrases at mm. 32, 35, and 39–40. It could not sound more removed from the lush, unending melody of the opening section. Despite the large tonal and stylistic gulf between the two sections, there is one significant link between the two sections: the opening motive of section B is derived from the second measure of section A’s melody. This motive sounds just before the end of section A, in m. 26 (the motive’s appearances in m. 26 and m. 28 are marked on Examples 3.3 and 3.4).
thus acts as a kind of thematic bridge from one section to the next. As discussed in the previous chapter, Franck employed the same tactic of embedding one section’s primary motive in the end of the previous section in his own Quartet, where the tail motive of the first movement’s *forme lied* introduction becomes the primary theme of the ensuing sonata form and the final measures of the second movement’s scherzo contain the kernel of the trio’s opening theme.

Following the initial solo statement of the melody, each of the subsequent statements (beginning at mm. 41, 48, and 54) adds one more instrument to the texture. As each instrument joins in, the initial quasi-Baroque mask slips just a little, as the sound gets closer to the lush harmonic language of the movement’s opening section, starting with the second violin’s crunchy, chromatic counterpoint in mm. 42–47. At m. 48, the viola enters with a new, mournful melody that implies G♯ minor, but the violins’ pentatonic wash of an accompaniment, combined with the lack of a raised leading tone, preserves the initial melody’s modal quality. The cello enters at m. 55, taking up the viola’s new melody, transposed to C♯ minor, with the pentatonic accompaniment still in place. At m. 62, the mask slips several inches, revealing a truly Debussian setting of the melody, whose contour is now adjusted to fit a whole-tone scale. This is followed in rapid succession by statements, shifted up a major second, that evoke first F Lydian / A minor at m. 66, then another whole tone scale.

Example 3.5: New melody in G♯ minor, mm. 48–51
At m. 74, the ensemble gets stuck on the final notes of the phrase, repeating them in a loop, just as happened in the measures prior to the climax at the heart of Franck’s third movement (compare Example 3.6 to Example 2.25). Rather than breaking free from the loop into a previously uncharted musical territory, however, the quartet breaks out into a passionate and emphatic restatement of the melody that had led to this harmonic breakdown in the first place (see Example 3.7). Newly harmonized with a plagal progression from G# minor through E major to B major, and an emphatic syncopated accompaniment in the inner voices, we finally get to hear this melody sing in its own voice, rather than muffled behind its distancing, pseudo-Baroque mask. It just so happens that this most authentic harmonization of the melody acts out, in four short measures, the central tonal tension of Franck’s third movement, moving from an initial G# minor sonority through to a satisfying cadence in B major. This moment of triumph is fleeting: by m. 81, we have returned to the reality of C# minor. However, the ensemble is unwilling to stay grounded in C# minor, precipitating another outburst at m. 83, this time accompanied by highly dissonant diminished harmonies (as shown in Example 3.8). After a few measures of strife, the quartet gradually gives up the fight, leaving the cello to murmur the final few notes of this melody, which descends to a low C# and the return of section B’s opening melody. The mask has been put back on.
Following a short, 12-measure recapitulation of section B’s opening melody, a sustained D in the cello leads back to the movement’s initial key and time signature, and a return of the opening melody. Although the shortened reprise of section A seems simple enough from a formal perspective, it enacts the most ineffable qualities of a *forme lied* movement in a spectacular fashion. The initial statement of the opening melody, accompanied by lush seventh chords over the cello’s sustained D⁴, seems not so much a return to the opening measures of the movement, but rather, an anticipation of a return that has yet to fully materialize. The second statement of the melody at m. 111 is played in octaves by the first violin, a breathtaking doubling that is heard nowhere else in the movement (see Example 3.9). Yet this moment is also not quite the arrival that the quartet has been seeking: the viola sustains a C♭, and it becomes apparent that
the harmony in these two measures is not actually affirming the tonic of D♭ major, but rather acting as the dominant seventh of G♭ major. When the quartet arrives at G♭ on the downbeat of m. 113, it ushers in the most magical moment of the movement: instead of repeating the opening melody, the violin plays a new countermelody that soars ever higher above the rest of the ensemble, until it peaks at a high B♭ at m. 115. The violin, half a beat out of step from the rest of the quartet, seems to be yearning to break free — to reach beyond the confines of the quartet to some infinite expanse beyond sound. But as it reaches the high B♭, the rest of the quartet settles into the dominant of D♭ major, and the violin sinks back down to earth for the only perfect cadence in D♭ major of the entire movement.

Example 3.9: Octave doubling of section A melody leading into perfect cadence and final measures of movement, mm. 111–123
The final measures of the movement stretch out toward a dimension beyond conventional musical time. In mm. 118–119, the first violin gets stuck on a loop of the melody’s descending-scale motive, while the second violin oscillates between E♮ and F and the viola and cello sustain the open fifth D♭-A♭. In m. 120, the descending-scale loop transfers to the cello, its rhythm flattened out into a series of straight eighth notes repeatedly sounding the motive like a ticking clock slowly running out of time. As the inner strings sustain an improbable chord of B♭♭, D♭, and E♭, the first violin stretches up again toward infinity. This time, the violin does attain some higher plane, reaching a high A♭ as the rest of the quartet settles into a D♭ major triad below it.

Debussy’s third movement shares certain key characteristics with Franck’s. It occupies a similar position in the overall formal and tonal structure of the Quartet; although it contains no references to the cyclic theme, it engages with cyclic principles and Wagnerian allusions on a subtler level; and it has a similar narrative structure to Franck’s movement, with the climax at the heart of section B surrounded by phrases that take the ideal of “endless melody” to a new level. It also uses some novel devices that prove influential for Ravel’s Quartet: an introduction that delays the move from a white- to black-key area; the avoidance of cadences between phrases within a section; and a climax that gets to the essence of the composer’s own voice.

3.1.2 Sonata Form versus Forme Lied and Cyclic Form in the Fourth Movement

The fourth movement of Debussy’s Quartet follows an outline that recalls fundamental aspects of both the first and fourth movements of Franck’s Quartet. The form of Debussy’s fourth movement is outlined in Figure 3.4. Like Franck’s fourth movement, it begins with an introduction that alludes to the previous movements (albeit in a more oblique fashion). Whereas Franck’s fourth movement started with a bang (and with a new motive that had not appeared previously in the Quartet), Debussy’s fourth movement begins with the same key signature,
tempo, and general affect of the slow third movement. This initial 14-measure slow introduction gives way to a second introductory section that ratchets up the tempo and tension in a fashion more comparable to the opening motive of Franck’s fourth movement, leading into a quasi-exposition that does not include any reference to the cyclic theme. At the end of the exposition, the key abruptly shifts to five sharps, and Debussy indicates a return to the original tempo of the slow introduction (as happened in the first movement of the Franck Quartet). The intrusion of the slow introduction completely derails the course of the rest of the movement, as the cyclic theme, which returns in this slow interlude, dominates the rest of the movement and denies any semblance of a recapitulation to the material of the fourth movement’s exposition.

Figure 3.4: Formal outline of Debussy’s Quartet, fourth movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Introduction (mm. 1–30)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section A (mm. 1–14): Très modéré, D♭ major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section B (mm. 15–30): En animant peu à peu, chromatic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exposition (mm. 31–124)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary theme: G minor, mm. 31–38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition: mm. 39–68 (cadence in F major at m. 68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary theme: F major, mm. 69–97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing section (primary theme): mm. 97–124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>“Development” section: return to tempo of introduction (mm. 125–247)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Return to tempo of introduction and cyclic theme: C# Dorian, mm. 125–140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faster tempo, alternation of cyclic theme and exposition themes, mm. 141–247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>“Recapitulation”: cyclic theme supplants exposition’s themes (mm. 252–end)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key change to G major at m. 252; recapitulatory-style statement of cyclic theme; cyclic theme dominates the thematic material till the end of the movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the higher plane attained by the first violin at the end of Debussy’s third movement seems hard-won, that impression is only compounded by the opening measures of the fourth movement, which refuse to move on from the key signature, tempo, and the general affect of the previous forme lied movement (see Example 3.12). As in the opening of the third movement, the fourth movement begins with a solo line—this time, the cello, rather than the second violin. The
The cello’s opening notes recapitulate the most significant musical aspects of the Quartet. The initial motive of $D\flat-Ab-C\flat-C$ is a variation on the Quartet’s cyclic theme, $G-F\#-D-F\flat$, with the order of the middle two pitches swapped (as demonstrated in Example 3.11). Following this opening motive, the cello arpeggiates the pitches of the original Tristan chord (Code’s fifth premise).18 When the whole quartet joins the cello in m. 3, the first violin enters with a hushed statement of the cyclic theme, this time with the pitches in the original order, but transposed to begin on $G\#$, rather than the archetypal $G\flat$. The second violin and cello both sound $B\flat$ while the viola echoes the first violin’s $G\#$ an octave lower—an enharmonic respelling of Code’s fourth premise, the “problem dyad” of $A\flat-B\flat$. Following these two statements of the cyclic theme, the first violin introduces a new motivic idea based on a succession of minor thirds, beginning with the $G\#-B\flat$ “problem dyad” heard moments before in a vertical arrangement.19 This new idea gets stuck on an $A$ dominant seventh chord, with the second violin oscillating back and forth between a flattened sixth ($F$) and fifth ($E$). In m. 7, the cello, viola, and first violin all shift down a semitone to an $A\flat$ dominant seventh that then resolves to a widely-spaced $D\flat$ major triad in m. 8. This triad evokes both the cello’s $pizzicato$ $F\flat$ major triad in m. 2 of the third movement and the series of widely spaced triads that punctuate the opening phrase of third movement’s second section at mm. 32, 35, and 39 (see Examples 3.2 and 3.5).20

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18 While Code focuses almost exclusively on how these premises are composed out in the Quartet’s first movement, he makes special note of this arpeggiation at the opening of the fourth movement. See Code, “Debussy’s String Quartet,” 281.

19 While this minor-third motive does not appear previously in the Quartet, this interval is the enharmonic equivalent of an augmented second, i.e. Code’s “problem dyad.” Despite the enharmonic respelling, this is without doubt a significant interval for the Quartet as a whole.

20 Marianne Wheeldon also notes the resemblance between the widely-spaced triads in the opening of the fourth movement and the second section of the third movement; she argues that this opening section constitutes an instance of “timbral recall.” See Wheeldon, “The String Quartets of Debussy and Ravel,” 10 and “Debussy and La Sonate Cyclique,” 648–649.
Example 3.10: The “canonical” version of the cyclic theme (left), vs. the cyclic theme as it appears in m. 1 of the fourth movement, with the middle two pitches swapped

Example 3.11: Fourth movement introduction, mm. 1–8

Following the D♭ major triad in m. 8, the first violin reprises the cello’s opening melody. However, when the minor-third motive is taken up again in m. 11, it begins a minor third higher than at m. 5, leading eventually to a widely-spaced E major triad at m. 14, rather than D♭ major (see Example 3.12). The choice of E major is significant: it is an enharmonic respelling of the F♭ major pizzicato triad played by the cello in m. 2 of the third movement. Not only are the fourth movement introduction’s two widely-spaced triads linked by the structurally significant interval of the augmented second / minor third; but each one also echoes sonorities that played crucial roles in the third movement.
The double bar line and fermata following the sustained E major triad at m. 14 leads to a change in time signature from common time to 12/8, and a faster tempo indication: *en animant peu à peu*. In this second section of the introduction, the instruments enter in a quasi-fugato fashion, quickly building up to a dissonant moment of crisis at m. 25 (see Example 3.13). The crisis dissipates in the subsequent measures, and the section ends with the solo cello uttering a single, *pianissimo* A♭ eighth note in m. 30. At m. 31, the key signature changes from five flats to two, the time signature shifts again to cut time, and the movement’s exposition begins with a new theme in G minor (the key of the first movement).

Example 3.12: Restatement of minor-third motive leading to E major triad, mm. 11–14

Example 3.13: Crisis at end of fourth movement introduction, mm. 25–31
The fourth movement’s exposition hews more closely to a typical sonata-form exposition than did the first movement’s. The primary theme is rigidly foursquare to a degree not found elsewhere in the Quartet. David Code has argued that when Debussy employs four-measure phrasing in his works of the early 1890s, including the Quartet, he does so self-consciously.\(^{21}\) That certainly seems to be the case here, where the primary theme’s initial statement falls neatly into an 8-measure sentence (as illustrated in Example 3.14). Following this sentence, the primary theme begins again, giving an initial impression that these two statements of the theme will together form a compound period. However, after only six measures, the second sentence abruptly cuts off, leading into a tension-filled transition. The transition eventually leads to a surprisingly clear-cut cadence in F major at m. 67 (the exposition’s medial caesura, shown in Example 3.15), which is followed by a secondary theme fashioned out of a melodic idea initially found in the primary theme’s second measure. Like the primary theme, the secondary theme’s initial statement also forms a neat, 8-measure phrase (see Example 3.16).

Example 3.14: Exposition’s primary theme

\(^{21}\) Code is specifically arguing against the common tendency to interpret Debussy’s melodic ideas as a sequence of 2-measure phrases, rather than 4 or 8 measures—a tendency that he argues has been erroneously bolstered by Debussy’s criticism of foursquare phrases in the music of composers such as Franck. Code, “Debussy’s String Quartet,” 265–266.
The final measures of the exposition seem headed for another cadence in F major. However, the buildup on the dominant in mm. 118–122 is undercut when the second violin lands on an A♭ on the downbeat of m. 123, and gets stuck oscillating between A♭ and B♭ as the cello and viola sustain a low C♮ and E (see Example 3.17). At m. 125, the key changes to five sharps, Debussy indicates a return to the movement’s initial tempo, and the cello resolves from C♮ to C♯. The second violin remains stuck on its two-note ostinato, now respelled as G♯-A♯, and the viola continues to sustain an E♮. Together, the three lower voices constitute an inverted half-diminished seventh chord (C♯-E-G♯-A♯), which functions essentially as an added-sixth tonic in a modal environment that might best be described as C♯ Dorian (see Example 3.18). This inverts the harmonic paradigm of the first movement, in which a root-position half-diminished seventh chord (D-F-A♭-C) functioned as the dominant of G Phrygian (Code’s first premise). Above this
chord, the first violin enters with the first statement of the cyclic theme since the movement’s introduction. The melodic range of the theme is slightly compressed in this iteration, from a perfect fourth to a diminished fourth (E-B♯). The final skip up is reduced from a minor third to a semitone step (B♯-C♯), effectively re-centering the cyclic theme around the final note instead of the initial note.

Example 3.17: Evaded cadence at the end of the exposition, mm. 118–124

Example 3.18: Beginning of development, featuring cyclic theme with compressed melodic contour, mm. 125–131

The development’s return to the movement’s initial tempo, coupled with the return of the cyclic theme, derails the movement’s almost-too-easy progress through the main signposts of sonata form. The development section is saturated with statements of the cyclic theme. At mm. 141–148, it appears twice with its canonical intervallic arrangement (D-C♯-A-C♮), driving the
quartet from the slower *tempo primo* back to the exposition’s pace (see Example 3.19). At mm. 167–170, it appears in counterpoint against a restatement of the exposition’s primary theme, a configuration that returns in several variations throughout the rest of the movement (as illustrated in Example 3.20). This leads to an apotheosis of the cyclic theme at m. 181, where it appears in the diminished-fourth variant first heard in the opening of the development, now reharmonized with a wash of diatonic color rooted on a C-G pedal in the bass (see Example 3.21). The C-G pedal, which functions essentially as a raised-third subdominant of G minor, remains in place for over thirty measures, as the cyclic theme is liquidated in an unambiguously Beethovenian process. Following this remarkable episode, the focus returns to the exposition’s themes at m. 216, and the bass pedal gradually shifts upward from C-G to D-A (see Example 3.22).

Example 3.19: Cyclic theme leading to faster tempo in the development, mm. 141–148

Example 3.20: Exposition’s primary theme in counterpoint with the cyclic theme, mm. 166–170
The final section of the development evokes many tropes of a classic development section, from full-fledged standing on the dominant and dissolution of the exposition’s thematic material, to a ratcheting-up of tension, particularly in the final measures. Yet, when we finally reach the expected moment of resolution at the start of the recapitulation, the sound that emanates from the quartet is not the exposition’s primary theme, but rather the cyclic theme, in a pared-down configuration that has been transformed into G major and yet stubbornly maintains the F♯ and A♭ “sore notes” of the original (see Example 3.23). The exposition’s primary theme is appended to the cyclic theme, as the continuation of the recapitulation’s initial sentence. The remainder of the movement—what should have been the recapitulation—bears no resemblance whatsoever to the movement’s exposition. After a restatement of the cyclic theme (with the
primary-theme appendage), a variant of the secondary theme briefly returns at m. 268, but it sounds more transitory than thematic, leading to a climactic return of the cyclic theme at m. 282 (see Example 3.24). From this point onward, the movement is entirely preoccupied with taking care of the cyclic theme’s unfinished business, traveling through a dizzying array of keys before dissolving into a diatonic wash that ends with an emphatic G-major triad (see Example 3.26).

Example 3.23: Beginning of recapitulation with cyclic theme supplanting the primary theme, mm. 252–259

Example 3.24: Return of secondary theme, modified to act as transition, mm. 268–271

Example 3.25: Climactic return of cyclic theme in recapitulation, mm. 282–285
The fourth movement’s sonata form is sacrificed to the larger inter-movement narrative. At the beginning of the movement, the quartet is unwilling to move on from the languor of the third movement. The movement’s slow introduction is saturated with reminiscences of both the Quartet’s cyclic theme and the overarching premises encapsulated in the Quartet’s opening measures. As in the first movement of Franck’s Quartet, the sonata form begins in a state of contingency—it is already set up to fail, thanks to the framing device of the slow introduction and cyclic theme. The sonata first veers off course at the start of the development section, which abruptly returns to the slow tempo of the introduction and the cyclic theme; it fails outright when the “recapitulation” begins not with the primary theme in G major, but the cyclic theme. The rest of the movement is dedicated not to recapitulating the material of the exposition (which is more or less absent from this section), but instead acts as a meta-recapitulation for the Quartet as a whole, tying up the cyclic theme’s loose ends in dramatic fashion.

3.2 Ravel’s Quartet: A Twentieth-Century Approach to Forme Lied and Cyclic Form

Ravel’s String Quartet premiered a little over ten years after Debussy’s, under similar auspices, at a Société Nationale concert on 5 March 1904. Ravel was a year or two younger than Debussy had been when he composed his Quartet a decade earlier: he was still auditing Fauré’s composition class at the Paris Conservatoire, and trying annually for the Prix de Rome. He even
submitted the first movement of the String Quartet, before he had completed rest of the work, for
the Conservatoire’s competition prize in 1903; when it failed to win the prize, Ravel was
expelled from the Conservatoire.\footnote{Arbie Orenstein, \textit{Ravel: Man and Musician} (New York: Dover Publications, 1991), 38.} At the same time as Ravel’s Conservatoire career faltered, however, his reputation as a composer was beginning to take off. His piano works \textit{Pavane pour une Infante défunte} and \textit{Jeux d’eau} had already been premiered a year earlier at the Société Nationale. The premiere of his Quartet at the same venue helped secure his reputation, so that by the time that Ravel failed to even advance to the final round of the Prix de Rome competition in his final year of eligibility (1905), it caused a great scandal.\footnote{For more details about the Prix de Rome scandal, see Alexis Roland-Manuel, \textit{Maurice Ravel}, trans. Cynthia Jolly (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 33–39; Orenstein, \textit{Ravel}, 33–46; and Roger Nichols, \textit{Ravel} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 42–65.}

Nearly every description of Ravel’s Quartet, from the initial reviews of the work’s premiere to Roger Nichols’s recent biography of Ravel, has remarked upon the obvious similarities between Ravel and Debussy’s Quartets: the circumstances of their respective premieres; the four-movement design; their use of cyclic form; their innovations in texture, particularly in the scherzo-and-trio second movements.\footnote{Pierre Lalo, reviewing the premiere of Ravel’s Quartet, may have been the first to note that “in its harmonies, in its chord progressions, in its sound, in its form, in all the elements that it contains and in all the sensations that it evokes, it offers an incredible resemblance to the music of M. Claude Debussy.” See Pierre Lalo, “La musique,” \textit{Le temps}, April 19, 1904.} However, Debussy’s Quartet was not the sole model available to Ravel at this period. Many of the similarities commonly ascribed to Ravel and Debussy’s Quartets are also shared by their common ancestor: Franck’s Quartet. Additionally, some aspects of Franck’s Quartet find a much stronger resonance in Ravel’s Quartet than Debussy’s. Although Ravel does not employ a fugue anywhere in his Quartet as Franck did, the overall texture of his Quartet is considerably more polyphonic than Debussy’s. Ravel’s approach to cyclicism is also more in line with Franck’s than Debussy’s. Like Franck’s
Quartet, Ravel’s features multiple recurring thematic ideas across the whole work. Ravel, like Franck, interjected an entire veritable *forme lied* movement into one of the faster movements of his Quartet—in Ravel’s case, a *forme lied* takes the place of the trio in his second-movement scherzo. There are also some striking similarities between the climax of the *forme lied* trio in Ravel’s second movement and Franck’s third-movement climax.

If the second movement of Ravel’s Quartet reveals a close affiliation with Franck’s Quartet, the *forme lied* third movement tends closer to Debussy’s. However, Ravel also develops the concept of *forme lied* in novel ways not attempted by either Franck or Debussy. Rather than constructing long, seemingly endless melodies similar to those employed by Franck and Debussy, Ravel’s third movement consists of short, fleeting phrases that add up to create a mosaic that conveys the same ineffable expressivity of *forme lied*, while abandoning one of its central features. Additionally, Ravel is the only one of the three composers to incorporate the work’s main cyclic themes, originating in the first movement, into the slow third movement. (Debussy’s contains no reference to the cyclic theme, and Franck’s refers not to the first movement’s *forme lied* theme, but to the second movement’s *Tristan und Isolde* allusion.)

### 3.2.1 Cyclicism in Ravel’s Quartet

Before delving into the Quartet’s second and third movements, Ravel’s singular approach to cyclicism merits some attention. The vast majority of thematic material running throughout Ravel’s Quartet can be grouped into one of two motivic families, whose roots consist of the first movement’s primary and secondary themes. Sigrun Heinzelmann has demonstrated how virtually all of the first movement’s thematic material derives from these two themes.²⁵ This

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²⁵ Heinzelmann examines the first movement’s motivic transformations in Section 4.3 of her dissertation. Example 4.2, in particular, provides a helpful overview of the first movement’s
argument can be extended to the whole Quartet, creating an overarching narrative in which these two thematic families vie for prominence over the course of the work. In Ravel’s Quartet, the cyclic principle thus extends beyond direct thematic recall, to a kind of evolutionary cyclicism, which incorporates new themes that make subtle references back to their thematic ancestors from earlier in the Quartet.²⁶

The two themes in question feature several typically Ravellian characteristics. The primary theme’s most salient characteristics can all be found in its first measure (and are illustrated in Example 3.27): the initial A-G-A neighbor motion; the ensuing leap down a fourth to E; and its simple duple-meter rhythm, consisting of quarter and eighth notes. The secondary theme, shown in Example 3.28, strongly contrasts these characteristics: it begins not with a neighbor motion, but with a leap up a fifth from A to E; and not with a simple quarter-eighth rhythm, but a quarter and syncopated half note, followed by a triplet turn figure that encircles the E. The contrasts between these basic features—fourth leap down versus fifth leap up; simple quarter-eighth rhythm versus sustained notes and triplets—form the building blocks of all of the Quartet’s thematic relationships. Figure 3.5 illustrates how the Quartet’s various themes derive from these two main groups.

²⁶ Marianne Wheeldon considers Ravel’s engagement with cyclicism in the Quartet to be “far less influenced by Franck” than Debussy’s had been. However, I come to the opposite conclusion: Ravel’s subtler cyclicism, in which a much broader network of themes are brought into inter-movement relationships with each other, seems to me closer to Franck’s cyclicism than Debussy’s monothematic approach. See Wheeldon, “The String Quartets of Debussy and Ravel,” 25.
Example 3.27: First movement’s primary theme, mm. 1–2

Example 3.28: First movement’s secondary theme, mm. 55–57

Figure 3.5: Thematic relationships over the course of Ravel’s Quartet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) Primary theme, first movement, mm. 1-2</th>
<th>j) Secondary theme, first movement, mm. 55-57</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b) First movement, mm. 37-38</td>
<td>k) Second movement, mm. 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) First movement, mm. 46-47</td>
<td>l) Second movement, m. 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Second movement, mm. 13-14</td>
<td>m) Second movement, m. 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Second movement, mm. 89-90</td>
<td>n) Third movement, mm. 14-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Third movement, mm. 1-3</td>
<td>o) Third movement, mm. 21-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Third movement, mm. 19-20</td>
<td>p) Third movement, mm. 29-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Fourth movement</td>
<td>q) Fourth movement, mm. 74-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Fourth movement, mm. 54-55</td>
<td>r) Fourth movement, mm. 174-176</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The first movement, as one might expect, features the largest number of variations on the two thematic groups. Less expected, perhaps, is the extent to which these thematic variants recur in the subsequent movements. The first movement’s thematic variants also help us to identify the most crucial components of each thematic family—which components of the original theme one needs to hear in order to identify a subsequent motive as being thematically related to one of the two families. Upon hearing the primary theme in its original setting, one may easily enough conclude that the downward fifth leap of A-D, outlined in the first measure, is more essential to the motive’s character than the leap down of a fourth: after all, the fifth is the total range of the first measure’s melody, and it also outlines the lower pentachord of the D minor scale. However, the variants that appear throughout the first movement often omit the final D. As the theme is developed and varied over the course of the first movement, it becomes apparent that the downward fourth leap is much more intrinsic to the theme’s character than the outline of a fifth. Indeed, the most obvious recalls of the theme in the third movement are based on the variant that first appears at m. 46, which omits the final D. Similarly, although the simple rhythm of this theme may at first seem unremarkable, the quarter-eighth-eighth-quarter-quarter pattern proves to be the most enduring facet of the theme over the course of the movement, staying intact even in instances when Ravel drastically alters the theme’s intervallic content to suit the surrounding harmonic environment, as at mm. 5, 35, and 114. Figure 3.6 displays the eight main variants on the primary theme that appear across the first movement.
The second movement’s scherzo features two main themes, each of which derive from one of the first movement’s thematic families. The first theme of the scherzo, in A minor, echoes the first movement’s secondary theme, with its opening fifth of A-E and the repeat of the E on the first beat of the second measure. Yet it omits certain key features of the secondary theme. Although the E is on the second beat of the measure, as it was in the first movement, it is only one quarter note long, instead of a half note. This is due to the second movement’s time signature of 3/4 (6/8), which is one beat shorter than the first movement’s common time. Additionally, the triplet turn figure has been modified into a pair of eighth notes, C-D. Despite these changes, the basic metric positions of each component of the theme remain unchanged: the initial A on a downbeat; the leap up on the second, weaker beat; the turn figure on the weakest beat of the measure; and a repetition of the leap’s upper note on the following downbeat. (The two themes appear on Figure 3.5 as examples j and k.)
The scherzo’s second theme (Figure 3.5d) is loosely derived from a variant of the first movement’s primary theme group that first appeared at m. 114 (Figure 3.5b). This theme’s affiliation is made somewhat ambiguous by the fact that it contains triplet eighths on its upbeat, which is a signature of the secondary theme group. But there are two variants of the primary theme that also contain the triplet, including the variation that appears at m. 114. What makes the identification of this theme’s origins even more thorny is the loss of the extra beat of cut time: this theme omits the eighth notes that are so characteristic of the primary theme. Despite this omission, the scherzo’s second theme and its putative model have the same melodic contour; the only difference is that the scherzo version is less chromatically inflected than the original, which fits its modal context. Additionally, the second measure of the scherzo’s second theme features a downward-fourth leap. Although it does not appear in the same rhythmic or melodic context as the primary theme’s fourth, it still seems significant that the scherzo’s second theme balances out the initial theme’s upward fifth leap with a downward fourth, since those two intervals are so closely tied to the identity of the first movement’s primary and secondary theme families.

The second movement’s trio introduces a third theme (Figure 3.5e) that is very loosely related to the primary theme group. Although it does not directly imitate any of the primary theme’s variants, its repeated traversal of the notes A-D-C-A, with the rising fourth ornamented with the neighbor-tone C, is a near-inversion of the primary theme, with its circling of the pitches A-G-E-A. The rhythmic profile of this new theme, which features eighth-note pairs in each of its first four measures, also recalls the eighth-note pairs of the primary theme.

All three of the second movement’s main themes thus recall aspects of one primary theme group, without constituting exact thematic recalls. By grouping the second movement’s themes together with their respective families, we can identify meaningful inter-movement
thematic relationships, even if those relationships don’t quite amount to a full-fledged cyclic recall.

Michael Puri and Marianne Wheeldon have identified and analyzed some of the instances of thematic recall that occur in Ravel’s third movement, but I would argue that this movement is layered even more richly with allusions than they may have suspected, featuring both direct recalls of the primary theme group and new melodic ideas that bear a familial resemblance to the secondary theme group. The viola’s opening melody (Figure 3.5f), as Wheeldon points out, is fashioned out of the initial six notes of the first movement’s primary theme, though it is rendered “virtually unrecognizable” due to the drastic changes in rhythm that give it a “recitative-like quality.” Indeed, this setting is so unlike the original theme that it seems to have escaped Puri’s attention altogether. Both Puri and Wheeldon’s analyses focus mainly on the more easily recognizable recalls, sprinkled throughout the third movement, of a specific variant on the primary theme that initially appeared at m. 46 in the first movement (Figure 3.5c). This variant turns up half a dozen times across the course of the third movement.

In between section A’s recalls of the primary theme, the viola begins a series of melodic fragments that never quite reach fruition (Figure 3.5n, o, and p). If one considers the fragments together, certain common traits emerge: all four melodic fragments outline the interval of a rising fifth in their opening notes; all are five or six measures in length; and the first and last fragments are nearly identical. Although none of the fragments precisely allude to the Quartet’s secondary theme group, the initial rising-fifth interval that links all the fragments also links them to the secondary theme group.

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Ravel’s use of thematic recall in the fourth movement bears many similarities to Franck’s. Ravel’s fourth movement, like Franck’s, begins with an aggressive, chromatic figure not heard previously in the Quartet (see Examples 3.29 and 3.30). Ravel’s opening gesture does not immediately give way to reminiscences of the earlier movements’ themes in their original tempos, as Franck’s had done. But it does, eventually, lead to a whirlwind of fleeting reminiscences of the primary and secondary theme groups, radically pared down into mechanized ostinatos, as suits the finale’s hair-raising tempo (Figure 3.5h–i are the finale’s primary theme variants; Figure 3.5q–r are the finale’s secondary theme variants). These new variants of the primary and secondary theme groups bear some resemblance to the mechanized version of Franck’s cyclic theme that acts as a counterpoint to the final movement’s sonata-form primary theme, and also runs throughout the coda, eventually precipitating the coda’s climax (see Example 3.31).

Example 3.29: The opening of Franck’s finale, mm. 1–7

Example 3.30: The opening of Ravel’s finale, mm. 1–7
Ravel’s finale features one additional instance of cyclic recall, unconnected to the thematic families, that also points to the influence of Franck’s finale: the final measures of both fourth movements allude to their respective third movements. The coda of Franck’s finale features an apotheosis-like return of the third movement’s opening melody, beginning at m. 808 (see Example 3.32). The moment is striking not only because it makes clear that Franck considered the third movement’s phrase lied to be so central to the overall meaning of the Quartet that he devoted the final measures of the Quartet to it, but also because of his extraordinary re-orchestration of this melody. When it appears in the third movement, it is somber and elegiac, with a simple, homophonic accompaniment, marked dolce and cantabile. When it appears in the finale’s coda, it is reimagined as a powerful climax, with fortissimo dynamics and a lush accompaniment featuring tremolos in the second violin and arpeggiated triads in the viola. This moment folds two different aspects of the third movement in upon themselves: the opening melody has been combined with a texture that evokes the climactic penultimate section of the movement.

Example 3.32: Recall of Franck’s third movement phrase lied in the coda of the fourth movement, mm. 808–813
In the final measures of his Quartet, Ravel does something analogous: he quotes the climax of his own third movement, rather than the opening melody, but he so thoroughly subsumes the climax into the finale’s moto-perpetuo texture that it would be easy to miss the reference (see Examples 3.33, 3.34, and 3.35). This is especially true of the first allusion to the climax, at mm. 244–247, which combines the climax’s melody, hidden in the viola, with the tremolo-eighth figuration of the fourth movement’s opening theme. The second allusion to the climax, at mm. 257–260, is easier to recognize: the melody is now played by the first violin, and the inner voices’ arpeggios evoke the strident triplet sixteenths that accompanied the third movement’s climax. The reminiscences do not cause the quartet to break its stride: they lead swiftly on to the final dissolution of the primary theme in a bonfire of tremolos.

Example 3.33: Climax of Ravel’s third movement, m. 77

Example 3.34: First allusion to the climax of Ravel’s third movement in the coda of the fourth movement, mm. 244–247
3.2.2 Scherzo and *Forme Lied* in the Second Movement

The second movement of Ravel’s Quartet, like those of Franck and Debussy, takes the form of a scherzo and trio, as illustrated in Figure 3.7. However, hidden at the center of this movement, in place of a more typical trio, is a miniature slow movement that ruptures the sleek exterior of the scherzo. The *forme lied* culminates in a magical moment, similar in nature to the climax of the third movement of Franck’s Quartet, in which time seems to be suspended. As discussed above, the scherzo features two main themes, each of which derive from one of the first movement’s two main thematic groups. Each thematic section is repeated once, forming a binary structure of ABA’B’, followed by a coda. At the end of the coda, following the final statements of the opening theme in mm. 79–81, the three top voices of the quartet decrescendo into silence, leaving the cello alone to gradually transition from its A-G♯ ostinato to repeated A quarter notes. As the cello’s repeated A’s come to a stop, the viola sounds an accented A an octave higher, which is held over the bar line into the start of the trio.

The trio is strongly marked as a departure from its surroundings by a shift in key signature from no accidentals to two flats, a shift in time signature to 3/4, and the tempo marking of *Lent* (as illustrated in Example 3.36). The trio’s form is more episodic than that of the scherzo.
Whereas the scherzo has five distinctly delineated sections, each of which develops one thematic idea, the trio is composed of several short, fleeting phrases that bubble up in a well of emotion and then recede, with no real development—the opposite of Franck’s unending melodies.

Figure 3.7: Formal outline of Ravel’s Quartet, second movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scherzo (mm. 1–88), A minor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase A (mm. 1–12): A minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase B (mm. 13–39): three sharps (C♯ dorian?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase A’ (mm. 40–51): A minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase B’ (mm. 52–68): C major / octatonic / A minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda (mm. 69–88): Descending chromatic line; final statement of Phrase A; A minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trio (mm. 89–128), B♭ major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 89–103: new melody with scherzo phrase B as counterpoint; B♭ major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 104–114: scherzo phrase B; A♭ major → C♯ minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 115–119: transition; scherzo phrase A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 120–123: climax → new melody with scherzo phrase A; F bass pedal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 124–128: retransition to scherzo (E pedal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scherzo (mm. 129–198), A minor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retransition (mm. 129–149): in the style of scherzo phrase A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase A (mm. 150–161): A minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase B (mm. 162–178): three sharps → A minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda (mm. 179–198): Descending chromatic line; final statement of Phrase A; A minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 3.36: Transition from scherzo to trio, mm. 88–90

While the trio seems far removed from the scherzo in time, key, and affect, much of its thematic material comes from the scherzo, beginning with a variant of the scherzo’s second
theme that acts as a counterpoint to the new melody in the trio’s opening measures (see Example 3.36). Following the cadence in B♭ major at m. 102 (the first real confirmation of the trio’s key signature), the cello slips down a semitone, back to A. In m. 104, the cello slips down another semitone to A♭, and the first violin plays a particularly tender transformation of the scherzo’s second theme (see Example 3.37). Following this passage, the first violin’s repeated A♭’s in mm. 107–110 are enharmonically respelled as G♯’s, leading into another statement of the scherzo’s second theme, this time underpinned by unstable minor-seventh and half-diminished-seventh chords played in fleeting arpeggios by the second violin and viola, while the cello maintains a C♯ pedal (as shown in Example 3.38). At m. 114, the cello slips down a semitone to C♮, ushering in the transition to the trio’s climax.

Example 3.37: Cadence in B♭ major, followed by repetition of scherzo’s second theme, mm. 101–106

In the transition passage (mm. 115–119) that connects the preceding music of the Lent section to the trio’s climax, the scherzo’s first theme is transformed into a mechanized ostinato that flits between the different parts. Throughout this transition, the cello reiterates the fifth C–G; in the final measure, the cello descends to a sustained F#. Although the tempo had been picking up since m. 112, where Ravel had indicated Pressez in the score, the measure that precedes the climax at m. 120 is marked rallentando, and all the instruments decrescendo; something is about
to happen. On the downbeat of m. 120, the cello descends another semitone to F♮, a pitch that it sustains through m. 123.

Example 3.38: Transition to the second movement’s climax, mm. 115–119 (mechanized ostinato based on scherzo’s first theme is marked by rectangles)

At the climax of this movement (see Example 3.39), the scherzo’s first theme and the trio’s new theme come together in a moment that defies conventional expectations of musical time. Although the notated time signature for all parts has shifted from 3/4 at the start of the trio to cut time at m. 120, each instrument’s part sounds in its own time signature (irrespective of the notated time signature). The first violin plays the trio’s opening melody, rhythmically augmented from its original setting in 3/4 to cut time (it is the only instrument whose part lines up with the notated time signature). Below this melody, the second violin strums, quasi arpa, the scherzo’s first theme, its note values unchanged from the original time signature of 3/4. Each half note within the notated measure of cut time has been replaced by triplet quarter notes, meaning each
measure of cut time effectively contains two measures of 3/4. Below the first violin’s cut time and the second violin’s heard time signature of 3/4, the viola plays shimmering triplet sixteenths, barred to resemble one measure of 6/8 for each group of triplet quarter notes played by the first violin, meaning that in one measure of cut time, the viola is effectively playing two measures of 6/8. In other words, the second violin and viola are together enacting the scherzo’s unorthodox time signature of 6/8(3/4). Underneath it all, seemingly removed from time, the cello sustains a low F throughout the entire passage, with four tied whole notes—which could be grouped together as one measure of 4/1.

Example 3.39: Second movement’s climax, mm. 120–123

These four measures synthesize the trio’s new melody (with its suggestion of the first movement’s primary theme group), the scherzo’s first theme (evoking the first movement’s secondary theme), and the two main time signatures of the second movement (6/8 and 3/4),
under an overarching frame of cut time (a time signature that does not appear elsewhere in the Quartet), collapsing multiple vistas into one still image. This moment’s large-scale harmonic role in both the second movement and the work as a whole adds another dimension to this sensation of a moment that cuts through multiple layers of time. The manner in which the cello’s sustained F was reached—with the tritone jump up from C♮ to F#, and then the semitone drop to F♮—make it seem removed from the surrounding harmonic landscape. However, the sustained F♮ plays two important roles. On a global level, the sustained F hints at the Quartet’s global tonic of F major. In terms of the second movement’s key relationships, the F♮ is the submedian of A minor, the scherzo’s initial key, and in mm. 120–123, it acts as a pre-dominant substitution. At m. 124, the time signature reverts back to 3/4, and the cello descends immediately from F to E♮, the dominant of A minor, to prepare for the return to the scherzo’s home key. The first violin immediately repeats the trio’s new melody, now compressed back into its original time signature. Underneath it, the other instruments trade off the mechanized-ostinato version of the scherzo’s first theme, once again sped up into triplet eighths and sixteenths, leading back to the original tempo and a reprise of the scherzo (see Example 3.40).

Example 3.40: Transition from trio to reprise of scherzo, mm. 124–128
The climax of Ravel’s second movement resembles that of Franck’s third movement in many ways. In both movements, the transition to the climax is achieved, in part, by the cello sliding down a semitone into an unfamiliar harmonic territory. Meanwhile, the upper voices get stuck on a repetitive figure that lulls the ensemble into some kind of trance state. In the case of Franck’s third movement, it is the repetition of section B’s final three notes (see Example 2.25). In the case of Ravel’s second movement, it is the mechanized-ostinato version of the scherzo’s first theme, traded back and forth between the violins in mm. 118–119. It is easy to see a parallel between Ravel’s layering of multiple states of time in the second movement’s climax and Franck’s juxtaposition of eighth notes, half notes, sixteenth notes, and triplet eighths in mm. 107–109 of his third movement (see Example 2.28). The two climaxes also occupy similar positions in terms of the large-scale form of their respective movements. Franck’s climax constitutes the entire penultimate section of the third movement. The climax’s second phrase elaborates the dominant of A♭ major, the tonic major of G♯ minor, eventually leading to a final statement of the movement’s opening phrase. As noted above, Ravel’s second-movement climax takes place entirely over a sustained F♮, which acts as a preparation for the ensuing dominant, E, and retransition to the reprise of the scherzo in mm. 124–128.

While the trio’s climax shares many similarities with that of Franck’s third movement, the fact of the trio’s existence as a self-enclosed forme lied in the midst of a fast-tempo scherzo suggests the influence of the unorthodox forme lied that frames the first movement of Franck’s Quartet. In the case of Ravel’s scherzo and trio, however, the situation is reversed: instead of providing the frame within which the faster-tempo portion of the movement unfolds, Ravel’s slow-tempo trio is located at the center of the movement, framed on the outside by the scherzo and also reliant on the scherzo for some of its motivic content. Whereas Franck’s first-movement
sonata form is contingent upon its *forme-lied* frame, Ravel’s *forme lied* trio relies upon its scherzo frame. Despite this reliance, however, the *forme lied* trio provides the movement with something essential: its dramatic climax.

3.2.3 A New Approach to *Forme Lied* and Unending Melody in the Third Movement

The *forme lied* third movement of Ravel’s Quartet is part of the same tradition as the third movements of Franck and Debussy’s Quartets. There are many superficial similarities between the third movements of the Ravel and Debussy Quartets, in particular. Yet Ravel incorporates a level of cyclicism into this movement that goes far beyond either Franck or Debussy’s *forme lied* movements, including allusions to the Quartet’s two main theme groups, as well as to specific textures found in earlier movements of the Quartet (what Wheeldon had identified as “textural cyclicism” in her analyses of Debussy’s Quartet). In addition, Ravel turns the aesthetic of “endless melody” that is so beautifully developed in the Franck and Debussy Quartets on its head, creating a similarly luxuriant soundscape out of a mosaic of short, fleeting snippets of melody. At the heart of Ravel’s third movement is a stunning climax that weaves together several different threads running throughout the Quartet.

As noted above, the third movement begins with an oblique reference to the Quartet’s primary theme, in which the theme’s initial six notes are stretched out into a long, incantatory phrase that wills the rest of the movement into being (see Example 3.41). This initial phrase brings to mind another moment from earlier in the Quartet: the opening of the second movement’s slow section, which also began with a suspended A on the viola (albeit an octave higher), followed by a similarly recursive melody that circled the primary theme’s steps and quartal leaps without ever directly quoting it. This opening phrase also brings to mind the introduction of Debussy’s third movement (see Example 3.1). Both movements begin with solo
melodies in the same range, played by the second violin in Debussy’s case and by the viola in Ravel’s, accompanied rather sparsely by the other instruments. The two melodies even circle the same pitches, A and G, although to different ends: while Debussy’s melody focuses on the tension between G-A-B in mm. 1 and 3 and A♭ in mm. 2 and 4, Ravel’s melody begins by oscillating between A and G in mm. 1–2 before eventually filling in the remaining notes of the Quartet’s primary theme.

Example 3.41: Quotation of primary theme in opening of third movement, mm. 1–4

Ravel’s and Debussy’s movements share similar harmonic tensions between an opening white-key melody and an ensuing flat-saturated soundscape. The initial statement of Ravel’s melody fits squarely into the lower pentachord of a D Dorian or D minor scale, with the sparse accompaniment adding some modally-appropriate coloring with the second violin’s B♭’s in mm. 1 and 2 and the first violin’s C# in m. 4. The second statement features a significantly more chromatic accompaniment, and the melody itself dips down to an E♭ in m. 7, followed by D, finally settling on C# (see Example 3.42). The third and most chromatically inflected statement of the melody at mm. 10–13 is accompanied by C# ninth chords, which are revealed by the change of key signature at m. 14 to be dominant preparation for the ensuing key of G♭ major (as
illustrated in Example 3.43). Ravel’s and Debussy’s opening melodies are both caught between two opposite poles of tonality: one modality consisting of mostly white keys, and a distant, flatward soundscape. In both cases, the opening melody provides some kind of preparatory grounding: it establishes a home terrain, rooted in the work’s larger key relationships, from which the third movement can launch off into a distant tonal space. Wheeldon interprets this initial section of Ravel’s third movement as a “fantasia-like episode” that precedes the movement’s section A and returns, somewhat modified, between each of the larger sections of the movement’s ternary form, as illustrated in Figure 3.8. (Puri also follows Wheeldon’s model.)

Example 3.42: Second statement of primary theme (in cello), mm. 5–7

Figure 3.8: Formal outline of Ravel’s Quartet, third movement

| Episode (introduction), mm. 1–13 |
| Section A, mm. 14–47 |
| Episode (transition), mm. 48–64 |
| Section B, mm. 65–80 |
| Episode (retransition), mm. 81–88 |
| Section A’, mm. 89–108 |
| Episode (coda), mm. 109–119 |

28. Based loosely on Wheeldon, “The String Quartets of Debussy and Ravel,” 16, Figure 1.2.
Example 3.43: Third statement of primary theme (in first violin), accompanied by C# minor ninth chords (aka dominant ninths in G♭ major), mm. 10–14

The ensuing section A is characterized largely by the alternation between direct recalls of the primary theme variant and the development of several fragmentary melodies that bear a familial resemblance to the secondary theme group, with intrusions of the primary theme repeatedly cutting short the viola’s attempt to develop a melody out of the secondary theme’s material. Puri describes this section’s primary theme recalls as “a benediction that looks back upon each phrase and blesses both it and its singer.”²⁹ He considers the benedictions to be a rather benign presence in the movement, stating that “at no point do we sense any significant tension between the remembered past and the remembering present.”³⁰ Puri’s narrative responds directly to the section’s surface affect: the slow tempo, hushed dynamics, and lyrical melodies do, indeed, suggest a calm, tension-free atmosphere, perfectly evoking the quintessential characteristics of *forme lied*. But it ignores the tensions simmering below the surface between the primary theme’s recalls and the viola’s melodic fragments.

Wheeldon offers a more nuanced analysis of the primary theme’s recurrences. Whereas Puri argues that the “benedictions” maintain a fixed meaning throughout the movement,

Wheeldon demonstrates that, in fact, the primary theme undergoes a subtle transformation in formal function over the course of the movement. While the early appearances act as “interpolations” that strongly contrast with the surrounding viola melody, the third appearance at m. 47 instead takes on a quality of “closure.” Wheeldon observes that “the wide spacing and harmonic stasis of each cyclic recall strongly contrasts with the *expressif* sonority of the viola melody and the close counterpoint of its accompaniment.” Her observations are reinforced by the repeated changes in time signature that accompany each switch between the viola melody and the recalls of the primary theme. When the viola begins its first fragment (following the introductory episode) at m. 14, the time signature changes from common time to 3/4. For each recall of the primary theme, it returns to the initial common time signature (which is also the first movement’s time signature). The returns of the primary theme cut short the viola’s melodies, never allowing them to fully develop. Example 3.44 illustrates how this plays out with the viola’s first melodic fragment and the ensuing recall of the primary theme.

Example 3.44: Viola’s initial melodic fragment, cut off by recall of primary theme in first violin, mm. 14–20

The one near-exception to this pattern is the viola’s third melody, which by mm. 33–34 is heading toward some kind of arrival. This melody is cut off by a new melodic idea in the first

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violin at m. 35, which faintly echoes the second movement’s second theme (see Example 3.45). This new phrase blossoms into the section’s climax at m. 38, in which the first violin’s melody tumbles down from a high F♯ over a minor-tinged diatonic wash rooted in the bass’s E♭. The climax shakes the opposing primary and secondary themes out of their preordained roles, so that the repeat of the viola’s initial melodic fragment at mm. 41–44 comes to rest on a G♭ that is sustained through to a final repetition of the primary theme, whose lowered and narrowed range brings it more closely into alignment with the texture of the viola’s melody (as noted by Wheeldon). Through this extended juxtaposition and eventual resolution, section A rehashes the essential tension between the first movement’s primary and secondary theme groups, albeit in a far more lyrical setting than the sonata-form first movement.

Example 3.45: Viola’s third melody, leading to climax, mm. 33–39
Example 3.46: Repeat of viola’s initial melody, leading to primary theme recall and conclusion of Section A, mm. 40–47

The resolution at the end of section A is quickly undercut in m. 48, when the cello’s G♭, sustained from the previous measure, crescendos and then abruptly cuts off, leading to an 11-measure chromatic descent that comes to a rest on C, a tritone below where the cello started, in m. 59 (see Example 3.47). This transitional episode and the section that follows it return to the no-accidentals key signature of the movement’s introduction. Section B weaves together reminiscences of several musical moments from earlier in this movement and the Quartet’s previous movements. The texture of section B’s initial phrase, in which the second violin’s melody is accompanied by arpeggiations and pizzicato strummed triads, brings to mind the singular texture of the climax of the second movement’s trio (see Example 3.48). While the initial three measures of the second violin’s melody are not linked to previously heard material, the Quartet’s primary theme sneaks into the second violin’s line in mm. 68–69. The second violin’s reminiscence was perhaps prompted by the viola’s melody that began in the previous measure, which is none other than the viola’s initial melodic fragment from section A. In m. 70, the first violin and cello take up a variant of the viola’s third melodic fragment.
Example 3.47: End of section A and beginning of transition, mm. 47–49

Example 3.48: Section B’s initial phrase, mm. 65–70
By m. 73, however, the reminiscences are temporarily suspended, as a new melodic idea, repeated several times by the violins over an increasingly frenetic arpeggiated accompaniment in the viola and a cello pedal on F♯, leads directly to the movement’s climax. At m. 77, the tension built up over the previous four measures explodes: the violins tumble down from a high F♯ in a typically Ravellian minor/pentatonic gesture, while the cello and viola furiously arpeggiate an E minor seventh chord below (see Example 3.49). This moment brings together several key features of the movement, the Quartet, and Ravel’s style more generally. The first violin’s melody evokes its line from section A’s climax. The minor-wash sonority of mm. 77–78, which consists of two minor triads, a fifth apart, superimposed on each other (here, E minor and B minor), is one of Ravel’s signature sounds; in fact, this is the same sonority heard in section A’s climax at m. 38, now shifted a semitone higher. This moment’s texture evokes a similar climax that occurs in the first movement, at the end of the development in mm. 119–121, though the harmonies of that climax are very similar to those in the measures preceding this one. Finally, the harmonic motion from the cello’s F♯ pedal of mm. 73–76 to E♮ in mm. 77–78 also has a larger significance: F♯ and E♮ are enharmonically equivalent to G♭ and F♭, the first two notes of the most frequently repeated transposition of the primary theme in the third movement.

The reprise of section A that follows this climax begins approximately halfway through the music of the initial section A, with the viola’s third melodic fragment, now accompanied more robustly than in its original iteration. When the viola takes up its final melodic fragment, it is ornamented in a manner highly reminiscent of the section A reprise in Debussy’s third movement. In the final two measures of the viola’s melody (mm. 104–105), the first violin

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32 This sound is so characteristic of Ravel that, as Mark DeVoto points out, “almost note-for-note, this same harmony and melody appears in Daphnis et Chloé, at the moment where Lyceion drops her second veil.” Mark DeVoto, “Harmony in the Chamber Music,” in The Cambridge Companion to Ravel, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 102.
ascends up to a high B♭; as the viola recalls the primary theme in m. 106, the violin remains in its high range and provides a countermelody in the form of a loose variant on the primary theme (see Example 3.50). The two passages share too many similarities for their resemblance to be accidental: the flat-saturated key signatures; the texture; the range; and their situation at the very end of the movement.

Example 3.49: Section B’s climax, mm. 77–80

Example 3.50: Primary theme in viola; high countermelody in first violin, mm. 104–108
Just as the final moments of Debussy’s third movement continue to stoke the tension between E₉-F and A₉-Ab, so, too, do the final moments of Ravel’s third movement continue to tease out its harmonic tensions. At mm. 115–116, the viola plays the A-G-A neighbor figure of the movement’s opening measures, before yielding to B♭ and then A♭ in the last beats of m. 116. The following two measures also feature white-key shadings, as the viola and cello trade G, A and B back and forth. The movement ends with a version of the primary theme in which the falling fourth is stretched out into a fifth, from A♭ to D♭ (see Example 3.51). This version of the primary theme is first heard in the first movement, initially at the climax toward the end of the development, and then in the final measures of the first movement, where its setting is akin to the one it receives here. Ravel’s third movement thus conjures up a rich web of allusions, both to melodies, textures, and harmonies from earlier in the Quartet, and to its immediate predecessor, the slow movement of Debussy’s Quartet.

Example 3.51: Final moments of Ravel’s third movement, mm. 115–119

The Franck, Debussy, and Ravel Quartets inhabit a triangle of influence: while Franck’s Quartet was undeniably influential for Debussy’s, and Debussy’s for Ravel’s, one can also trace a line directly between Franck’s and Ravel’s Quartets. Debussy’s third movement follows the general template of Franck’s in terms of form, affect, and narrative, and Debussy’s fourth
movement juxtaposes slow introduction and fast sonata in a manner reminiscent of Franck’s first and fourth movements. Ravel’s Quartet has long been noted for its many echoes of Debussy’s Quartet, which are most pronounced in the third movement. But it also imitates certain aspects of Franck’s Quartet that had been less influential for Debussy. Ravel’s multivalent cyclicism, in which the two cyclic themes undergo significant thematic transformations over the course of the work, the contrapuntal texture of the Quartet, the insertion of a \textit{forme lied} in the midst of the scherzo-and-trio second movement, and the recall of the third movement’s climax in the coda of the finale all point back toward Franck.
Conclusion

Proust and the Ideal of the Absolute

The three preceding chapters have traced a path through the three most influential string quartets composed in the fin de siècle, guided by d'Indy’s concepts of forme lied and cyclic form. Franck established a new paradigm for the string quartet by centering every aspect of his Quartet around forme lied. The first movement’s sonata is rendered contingent upon its forme lied frame, and the forme lied frame provides the cyclic theme that guides the work’s larger narrative. The forme lied third movement proves to be the heart of the entire work, developing the second movement’s Wagnerian allusions in a beautiful new direction and providing a phrase lied that will return to crown the finale. Debussy and Ravel each distill different aspects of Franck’s novel approaches to forme lied and cyclic form in their Quartets. Debussy composes a forme lied third movement that takes the concept of unending melody and ineffable beauty to new heights, and subsumes his sonata-form finale within a forme lied frame. Ravel extends Franck’s multivalent approach to cyclicism even further, by developing a family of cyclic themes that are related to the first movement’s primary and secondary themes. Like Franck and Debussy, he also interjects forme lied into a fast movement, though in his case it is the scherzo that receives a forme lied trio. The scherzo’s forme lied features a climax that, like Franck’s third-movement climax, steps out of time. Ravel further innovates with forme lied by exchanging Franck and Debussy’s unending melodies for short, fleeting phrases that nevertheless capture the essential character of forme lied.

This discussion of Franck, Debussy, and Ravel’s Quartets has been grounded in the framework put forth by Vincent d’Indy in his Cours de composition musicale. Developed in response to the works of his contemporaries, his personal experience as a composer, and his
particular aesthetics and ideology, d’Indy’s concepts of cyclic form and forme lied provide an ideal lens through which we can approach these works over a century after their original composition. If he had perhaps the most systematic response, he was certainly not the only writer to respond powerfully to this corpus, nor even the best known. That title, without any doubt, would have to go to Marcel Proust.

In some ways, Proust’s tastes in music strangely echoed d’Indy’s: he shared d’Indy’s love of the Beethoven Quartets, Wagner, and Franck, and he held Saint-Saëns in similarly low regard. But in other respects, Proust’s tastes were more progressive: he particularly loved Debussy, listening to as many performances of Pelléas et Mélisande on his bedside théatrophone as possible. It is unclear whether he was familiar with the Debussy and Ravel Quartets, but he easily rivaled d’Indy in his adoration of Franck’s Quartet. On one evening in 1916, Proust was so overcome with the need to hear the Franck Quartet that he took a taxi to the home of Gastor Poulet, leader of the Quatuor Poulet, at eleven at night, and begged him to round up the members of his ensemble and come play Franck’s Quartet for him at his home at once. William C. Carter,

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1 Proust’s dislike of Saint-Saëns is particularly well-known, because he mentioned it in the famous dedication that he wrote in the edition of Du côté de chez Swann that he gave to Jacques de Lacretelle, in which he describes the many different works that inspired various aspects of the imaginary petite phrase from Vinteuil’s Sonata: “Insofar as reality has been of use to me (which is not very much, to be honest), the little phrase of the Sonata—and I have never told this to anyone—is (to begin at the end), at the Saint-Euverte soirée, the charming but ultimately mediocre phrase of a violin sonata by Saint-Saëns, a musician I do not care for.” Quoted in Jean Jacques Nattiez, Proust as Musician, trans. Derrick Puffett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3. Gaston Poulet confirmed that Proust did not like Saint-Saëns and never requested his music. It seems Proust’s attitude toward Saint-Saëns was colored by the latter’s nationalist screed against the German influence on French music, especially Wagner, Germanophilie, published at the height of World War I in 1916, which Proust disdained.

2 The théatrophone was a subscription service that allowed users to listen live to performances at various Parisian theaters through their telephone. William C. Carter, Marcel Proust: A Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 497.

3 Carter, Marcel Proust, 619.
in his biography of Proust, describes the performance that ensued in such incredible detail that it merits being quoted at length:

By the time Proust had collected all the musicians and their instruments and arrived back at boulevard Haussmann, it was nearly one in the morning. . . . The men removed their overcoats, opened their cases, and took out their instruments. Massis [the violist] remembered playing in a bedroom lighted solely by candles. Just beyond a circle of light a divan covered in green velvet had been placed in the semidarkness; near the bed stood a mountain of manuscripts. The opening of the chimney had been covered, as Poulet had recommended, to prevent any of the sound from escaping. While Celeste [Proust’s maid] assisted the musicians in setting up makeshift music stands, Proust stretched out on the divan.

During the playing Proust lay with his eyes closed, without making the slightest movement. So solemnly eerie was this concert deep in the night that the musicians dared not speak to each other between movements. When the last notes of the Franck piece were no longer audible, Proust opened his eyes and asked the musicians to begin again. The stricken instrumentalists looked at each other. The Franck quartet took forty-five minutes to perform. It was now around two in the morning, and the musicians felt dead with fatigue. Sensing their distress, Proust asked Massis to bring him a small Chinese box from a nearby shelf. The novelist opened it and removed a stack of fifty-franc bank bills redeemable for gold. He handed each musician three of the bills. According to Massis's recollection, 150 of these gold francs were worth 45,000 ordinary francs. Their energy restored at the sight of so much money, the musicians immediately began again to play the entire quartet. The room filled once more with the strains of the Pater Angelus.4

Even this double performance of Franck’s Quartet was not enough to sate Proust’s appetite; a few weeks later, he asked Quatuor Poulet to come back perform Franck’s Quartet for him again, this time alongside Beethoven’s thirteenth Quartet.5 What was it about the Quartet that so appealed to Proust? We will probably never know the whole answer, but Proust’s descriptions of

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4 Carter, Marcel Proust, 619–620.
5 Carter, Marcel Proust, 620. Carter does not specify the Beethoven Quartet in question any further, by key or opus number, beyond stating that it was the thirteenth. Although the numbering with respect to Beethoven’s Quartets is ambiguous, since the numbering that was initially applied to them did not actually correspond to the order in which they were composed, odds are that Carter is referring to the “traditional” numbering, which places op. 130 as the thirteenth Quartet. This would be consistent with general practice at the time; both d’Indy’s Cours de composition musicale and Joseph de Marliave’s Les quatuors de Beethoven (Paris: Alcan, 1925) employ the traditional numbering.
music in *A la recherche* do provide some clues as to what he valued most in the chamber music of this time.

Several critics have attempted to draw direct parallels between the structure of Proust’s novel and different musical compositions, the most rehearsed among these arguments being that *A la recherche* employs a leitmotivic structure derived from Wagner’s music dramas.\(^6\)

Comparisons between *A la recherche* and fin-de-siècle absolute works that employ cyclic form are also fairly common; one critic has even posited Franck’s Quartet as a structural model for the entire novel.\(^7\) Both types of comparisons make, essentially, the same argument: that Proust created a structure of themes that span the course of the entire novel, returning in various guises at structurally significant moments, in much the same way as leitmotifs govern the structure of a Wagnerian music drama, or cyclic themes that of a cyclic instrumental work. Both comparisons fall prey to the same weakness, as well: discussing recurring concepts within a novel as literary themes is surely one of the most basic items in the literary critic’s toolbox—there is nothing inherently “musical” about the recurrence of themes across the length of a novel.

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7 For the comparison between Proust’s novel and Franck’s Quartet, see J. M. Cocking, “Proust and Music,” in *Proust: Collected Essays on the Writer and his Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 109–129. Cocking misreads d’Indy’s analysis of Franck’s Quartet, mistakenly interpreting the chart in which d’Indy analyzes the first movement’s form (reproduced as Figure 1.2) as applying to the whole Quartet, and incorrectly asserting that the *forme lied* recurs independently of the cyclic theme. Georges de Lauris compares the structure of the novel to a symphony; see Georges de Lauris, *Souvenirs d’une belle époque* (Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1948). More recently, Benedict Taylor has tried to establish direct parallels between the structural and formal processes of Proust’s novel and Mendelssohn’s String Quartet in A minor, op. 13, in his article “Cyclic Form, Time, and Memory in Mendelssohn’s A-Minor Quartet, op. 13,” *The Musical Quarterly* 93 (2010): 45–89. An expanded version of this article appears in Taylor’s monograph *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
Typically, critics argue that what makes Proust’s network of themes specifically musical in nature is the fact that some of the recurring symbols in his novel are pieces of imaginary music. André Coeuroy, for example, argues that the petite phrase makes for a better leitmotiv than any of those found in Wagner’s music dramas:

Throughout the whole of Wagner’s work there is not a single leitmotiv of greater importance, or used with greater skill, than this petite phrase de Vinteuil, right on from the moment when it appears at the birth of Swann’s love, accompanies the various phases and developments of this love, rekindles the memory of it, and then passes into the service of the story-teller himself and, quitting the image of Odette, attaches itself to that of Albertine.⁸

Piroué, likewise, argues that if Wagner was the first to “introduce literature into music” (a dubious claim in and of itself), Proust achieved the inverse through music: “Proust had done nothing other than this by elevating the ‘little phrase’ to the status of a symbol of love and the Septet to a symbol of a metaphysical revelation. Simply, the factors are inversed: this is the introduction of music into literature.”⁹ While it may be novel that Proust used the music of Vinteuil as a recurring theme throughout the novel, it remains just that: one literary theme among many, including the artwork of the fictional painter Elstir, the madeleine, and the “two ways” near his childhood home in Combray.

Putting aside the clear difficulties with ascribing a specifically musical nature to Proust’s use of themes across the novel, if one were to accept that Proust’s network of themes was inherently musical, it would be difficult to ascertain what kind of music: Wagnerian leitmotivs or Franckian cyclic themes. In favor of the former, one might cite, as Pierre Costil did, Proust’s comment to his friend Lucien Daudet, in advance of the publication of Du côté de chez Swann in

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⁸ Coeuroy, “Music in the Work of Marcel Proust,” 139.
1913, that the themes in his novel are “like those bits of music that one cannot possibly understand to be leitmotifs when one hears them in isolation.”\textsuperscript{10} But this quotation does not prove that Proust consciously modeled his novel after a Wagnerian music drama; it seems more likely that he only compared his unfinished novel to Wagner’s music dramas in order to make a rhetorical point, probably in an attempt to self-aggrandize.

Another count against the Wagnerian argument has to do with the material that critics usually cite as evidence that Proust’s novel has a specifically musical structure: the music of Vinteuil. Both of Vinteuil’s works that feature prominently in the novel are pieces of absolute chamber music: a Sonata for piano and violin and a Septet. Why should we consider Vinteuil’s \textit{petite phrase} to be a leitmotiv, when we know that it is none other than a cyclic theme that returns in different movements of Vinteuil’s Violin Sonata and Septet? While it is clearly dangerous to try and ascribe a particular musical structure to \textit{A la recherche}, it is nevertheless clear that cyclic chamber music, in general, must have been in Proust’s mind. More specifically, the aesthetic of \textit{forme lied} permeates his descriptions of the Sonata and Septet.

The most famous aspect of Vinteuil’s music is the \textit{petite phrase} that the character Charles Swann initially hears in a performance of Vinteuil’s Sonata and the narrator, Marcel, later encounters in a performance of Vinteuil’s Septet. Early on in the first volume of the novel, Swann is greatly moved by a performance of Vinteuil’s Sonata for Violin and Piano. Swann, a generation older than the novel’s main protagonist, the narrator Marcel, acts as a foil to Marcel, making all of the mistakes that Marcel manages to avoid. In the case of Vinteuil’s music, Swann fails to turn his artistic epiphany at the hands of Vinteuil’s Sonata into his own masterwork;

\textsuperscript{10} Quoted in Costil, “La construction musicale de la « Recherche du temps perdu »,” 93. “Au cours de l’été 1913, peu avant la publication de \textit{Swann}, il écrivait à Lucien Daudet que les thèmes qui dessinent l’armature de son oeuvre sont « comme des morceaux dont on ne sait pas qu’ils sont des leitmotive quand on les a entendus isolément ».”
Instead, the *petite phrase* of Vinteuil’s Sonata becomes for Swann a symbol of his torturous affair with Odette, the déclassée woman he would eventually marry. When Marcel encounters Vinteuil’s Septet by chance at a concert several years later, he sees in the Septet the model for his own masterwork, the great novel which he has struggled to write since childhood. Where Swann failed to apprehend the true message of Vinteuil’s music, Marcel succeeds, and sets to work. Nattiez argues convincingly that the Septet scene serves another purpose as well: it unites the “two ways” that led away from the narrator’s family home in Combray. These two ways, each associated with main characters in the novel, take on several layers of meaning over the course of the novel.\(^{11}\) The Méséglise way passed by the Swann residence—hence the title of the first volume, *A côté de Chez Swann*, or *Swann’s Way* in English—and the Guermantes way passed by the Guermantes residence.

From its first description, it is clear that the *petite phrase* come from the Sonata’s *forme lied* movement. When M. Verdurin, the host of the soirée that Swann is attending, suggests that the pianist play “the sonata in F sharp which we discovered,” his wife reacts strongly:

“No, no, no, not my sonata!” she screamed, “I don’t want to be made to cry until I get a cold in the head, and neuralgia all down my face, like last time. Thanks very much, I don’t intend to repeat that performance. You’re all so very kind and considerate, it’s easy to see that none of you will have to stay in bed for a week.” . . .

“Well, all right, then,” said M. Verdurin, “he can play just the andante.”

“Just the andante! That really is a bit rich!” cried his wife. “As if it weren’t precisely the andante that breaks every bone in my body. The Master is really too priceless! Just as

\(^{11}\) It would be impossible to summarize the many layers of meaning that the two ways take on without reference to specific plot points in the novel. In the case of the Septet scene, Proust weaves together a description of the Narrator’s aesthetic experience of the Septet, which takes into account his earlier aesthetic epiphanies which occurred along the Guermantes way, with a detailed description of how the immoral actions of Vinteuil’s daughter, which the Narrator witnessed while walking along the Méséglise way, were eventually redeemed through the publication of the Septet.
though, in the Ninth, he said ‘we’ll just hear the finale,’ or ‘just the overture’ of the *Mastersingers*.\(^\text{12}\)

Eventually the pianist does begin playing the piano reduction of the Sonata’s Andante, and subsequently Swann recognizes the *petite phrase*, which he had initially heard a year before at a dinner party, but had been unable to identify. This episode satirizes the cult of the adagio—or, as the case may be, the cult of the *forme lied*. Proust notes that this “little scene” was “re-enacted as often as the young pianist sat down to play,” “as a proof of the seductive originality of the ‘Mistress’ and of the acute sensitiveness of her musical ear.”\(^\text{13}\) While Proust may here be mocking Mme Verdurin’s exaggerated attempts to prove her artistic pedigree to the attendees of her salon, he nevertheless provides several sincerely moving descriptions of the *petite phrase* over the course of the novel. These descriptions all bear certain hallmarks of the type of lyrical, unending melody that Franck and his contemporaries would employ in their *forme lied* movements. Proust’s description of Swann’s first encounter with the *petite phrase* is clear in this regard:

With a slow and rhythmical movement it [the phrase] led him first this way, then that, towards a state of happiness that was noble, unintelligible, and yet precise. And then suddenly, having reached a certain point from which he was preparing to follow it, after a momentary pause, abruptly it changed direction, and in a fresh movement, more rapid, fragile, melancholy, incessant, sweet, it bore him off with it towards new vistas. Then it vanished.\(^\text{14}\)

The general outline of a slow and lyrical melody that meanders along, then suddenly shifts direction, could easily describe several of the *phrases lied* that have been analyzed in detail in the preceding chapters.


\(^{13}\) Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 291.

\(^{14}\) Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 296.
Another essential aspect of cyclic chamber music that directly appealed to Proust was its seeming removal from the literary (and worldly) concerns of the music drama. Building on the work of Bonnet, who established that Proust had initially intended for the scene in which Marcel has his final artistic revelation to center around a performance of a Quartet, rather than a Septet, Jean-Jacques Nattiez has convincingly demonstrated that, in fact, these early drafts of the Quartet/Septet scene borrowed from an even earlier description that Proust had penned of the Good Friday Spell from Wagner’s *Parsifal*. Nattiez argues that the reason this scene wound up centering around a Septet, rather than a performance of *Parsifal*, was precisely to do with the absolute nature of instrumental music, and the ineffable ideal of imaginary instrumental music, at that:

> Once Proust had had the idea that the Narrator’s revelation of the artistic absolute would come to him through the medium of a work of music, and that this work would be an expansion of the Sonata which had been the cause of Swann’s failure, there was no longer any reason for him to keep a specific reference to *Parsifal* in *Time Regained*. The Narrator had to experience his revelation through an *imaginary* work of art, for according to the logic of the novel a real work always disappoints: attainment of the absolute could only be suggested by a work that was unrealized, unreal and ideal. Moreover, this work had to be a piece of *pure music* whose content was not conveyed through words. . . . The work could not even be the Franck Quartet, which was explicitly cited in the dedication to Lacretelle, as we have seen. The redemptive work cannot be of this world.\(^\text{15}\)

Nattiez establishes definitively in this passage both the centrality of absolute instrumental music to the novel’s most significant scene—when the narrator finally heeds the call to focus on his art—and also the futility in trying to establish any specific real-life models for Vinteuil’s music.

While it is fruitless to go looking for specific composers and real works in Proust’s descriptions of Vinteuil, the mark of various composers nonetheless shines through at certain points in the novel. One passage in *La prisonnière* brings to mind Franck’s Quartet, and particularly, its hidden Wagnerian allusions—allusions which, by their nature, taint the idealized

\(^{15}\) Nattiez, *Proust as Musician*, 30.
image of absolute music that is so central to Proust’s novel. It occurs as the novel’s protagonist, Marcel, sits at the piano and plays Vinteuil’s Sonata:

As I played the passage, and although Vinteuil had been trying to express in it a fancy which would have been wholly foreign to Wagner, I could not help murmuring “Tristan,” with the smile of an old family friend discovering a trace of the grandfather in an intonation, a gesture of the grandson who has never set eyes on him. And as the friend then examines a photograph which enables him to specify the likeness, so, on top of Vinteuil’s sonata, I set up on the music-rest the score of Tristan, a selection from which was being given that afternoon, as it happened, at a Lamoureux concert.16

Proust eloquently captures in this passage the experience of realizing that there is some kind of relationship between two pieces of music that one knows well, and then thumbing through the score, fumbling at the piano, to try and pin down the exact nature of that resemblance. Although there is no proof that Proust had Franck’s Quartet in mind when he wrote this passage, or even that Proust was aware of the allusions to Tristan in the Quartet, it doesn’t seem beyond the realm of conception, either. He was deeply familiar with both the Quartet and Tristan, and it is already clear that Franck was among the many influences behind his fictional composer Vinteuil.

This passage also serves to teach us a deeper lesson about the fallibility of labels like “absolute.” By having the narrator openly mull over the possible musical connections between the absolute music of Vinteuil and the dramatic music of Wagner, Proust acknowledges the difficulty inherent in any attempt to put absolute music on a pedestal and treat it as an idealized, ineffable substance, beyond the reach of words and literal meaning. He creates, in effect, a path connecting d’Indy’s two separate “ways,” dramatic and symphonic music, analogous to the paths forged by cyclic form and forme lied. How appropriate that Proust does so through the music of Vinteuil, which, in the Septet scene, will also unify the two “ways” that have run through the entirety of Proust’s novel: the Guermantes way and the Méségilse way.

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———. “Sonata Form in Ravel’s Pre-War Chamber Music.” PhD diss., City University of New York, 2008.


