Memory, conceived as the presence of the past, may be said to pervade the music of Maurice Ravel, thereby helping to unify what is otherwise an eclectic body of work. Given the breadth and flexibility of the very concept of memory, a case might even be made for its replacing Neoclassicism as a way for historians to convey the extent of the composer’s wide-ranging and enduring fascination for the antique, as demonstrated by the frequent appearance – alongside more contemporary and exotic fare – of works in such ostensibly outmoded genres as the medieval ballade, the Renaissance chanson, the Baroque tombeau, the Classical sonatine and the Romantic poème. The challenge is to avoid simply reinscribing, under this new rubric, the time-worn, unsatisfactory image of Ravel as a dilettantish pasticheur and collector of curiosities who assembled his oeuvre the way a bird builds a nest, salvaging material ad libitum from the dustbin of history and piecing it together idiosyncratically. One way to meet this challenge would be to focus on those moments in his work when memory no longer functions automatically, when the invocation of the past becomes problematic, when historical action becomes self-conscious and founders. One of the most complex and captivating examples of what Andreas Huyssen has called ‘twilight memories’ (Huyssen 1995) – not only in Ravel’s music, but arguably in Western modernism as a whole – is the Épilogue to his Valses nobles et sentimentales (1911).

The Épilogue is the eighth and final waltz of the Valses and frames the previous seven by both succeeding them and incorporating them as thematic fragments. However, rather than passing over the previous waltzes in a sweet and sentimental review, the Épilogue involves them in a melancholic musical process which inflects and is inflected by them in many ways. Thus, when I say that the Épilogue is an example of musical memory, I am referring to memory not as an aspect of music cognition – the psychological and neurological mechanisms by which we remember music – but rather as a poetics of music which helps to generate innovative formal and tonal schemes, as well as a hermeneutics which helps us to make sense of them. More specifically, I am interested in the way Ravel seems to use musical processes to represent and re-enact processes of memory, thereby reimagining musical structures as mental structures. From this perspective, thematic recollection is not simply the translocation of musical material from a past to a present context, but rather a means of substantiating and shaping a larger process of remembering. An earlier theme, when recalled, can affect the musical-mnemonic process, and any meaningful narrative we may wish to
extrapolate from it. Although many pieces by Ravel thematise memory in their musical structures – the Sonatine, the String Quartet, the Rapsodie espagnole, Daphnis et Chloé, La Valse and the Sonata for Violin and Piano, to name several notable examples – the Épilogue of the Valses nobles et sentimentales is unlike any other. Replete with dozens of thematic recollections which appear at unexpected moments in unpredictable ways, it is a unique and especially rich demonstration of this poetics.

Because the Épilogue transforms memory into music, our primary method of analysing memory in this piece is music analysis. Yet historical context also plays an important role, especially insofar as it can shed light on the broader development of a musical poetics of memory from which this piece springs – a development which stretches back to at least the early nineteenth century and spans a range of repertoires. Thus, we may begin our analysis of the Épilogue by situating it within various related contexts, including the genre of night music and the piano suites of Schumann, both of which helped memory make significant inroads into musical design.

A Little Night Music

The evaluation of a piece’s historical valence in terms of its harmonic language – particularly its degree of dissonance and reliance on techniques of chromaticism – has undoubtedly helped focus attention in the secondary literature about the Valses almost exclusively on Waltz I and its cacophonous opening. In order to shift attention to the presence of memory in the Valses, I will dwell instead on its Épilogue – the eighth and final waltz, of which Ravel was apparently very proud, according to his student Manuel Rosenthal. To realise the Épilogue properly, according to Rosenthal, is an art: the performer must carefully and meaningfully allow the motives ‘to return one above the other and vanish’. Before entering into the Épilogue’s specific design, however, we should first examine the interpretative context which Ravel had already provided for the Valses: the libretto he wrote for its 1912 production as the ballet Adélaïde, ou Le Langage des fleurs. The scenario describes a soirée at the Parisian home of the courtesan Adélaïde in 1820. A love triangle between the coquettish Adélaïde and two of her suitors, the passionate Lorédan and the arrogant Duke, plays out over the course of the first seven waltzes. As the Épilogue begins, the guests retire, including the Duke, whose rejection by Adélaïde leaves only Lorédan remaining at her side. Although the music predates the libretto, it nonetheless accommodates the latter fairly well. For example, one can easily imagine the reappearance and disappearance, at the beginning of the Épilogue, of previously heard musical themes as representing the mingling and leave-taking of the guests at the end of the soirée.

A more striking correlation between music and libretto is their shared reference to the night. The slow tempo of the Épilogue, its soft dynamics and muting (indicated by the frequent indication of ‘sourdine’ in the piano score), extended
pedal points, registral breadth, transparency of texture and alternation between expected motivic repetition and new material are all generic and recognisable traits of night music, a characteristic which has hitherto gone unnoticed in appraisals of the piece. This is not the first time that Ravel had written night music: the Épilogue’s two most important precedents in this respect are the ‘Prélude à la nuit’ from the Rapsodie espagnole, composed in 1907–8, and the Nocturne from Daphnis et Chloé, largely composed in 1909–10. At first glance, it might seem as if these two works differ fundamentally from the Épilogue, having been conceived from the outset as orchestral movements, whereas Ravel orchestrated the Valses only after receiving the commission for Adélaïde. However, as Roy Howat has noted from his vantage point as both a musicologist and an experienced performer of this repertoire, the piano texture of the Valses implicitly points to a fuller sonic realisation, requiring ‘a high degree of operatic and orchestral voicing, well beyond what a [piano] score can indicate’ (Howat 2000, p. 88). Hallmarks of musical nocturnalism common to the Prelude, the Nocturne and the Épilogue in their orchestral settings include the use of division, harmonics and glissandi in the strings and the incorporation of soft trills and tremolos throughout.

The cultivation of special effects in the Épilogue has motivated several scholars to search for precedents outside of Ravel’s music. Seizing upon the notion of mystery, Vladimir Jankélévitch has adduced two pieces by Debussy, ‘Pour la danseuse aux crotales’ and a setting of Mallarmé’s ‘Placet futile’. Others have suggested the music of Schumann, a proposal which is compelling in several respects. His deep engagement with the music of Schubert makes Schumann a natural candidate for mediating historically between Schubert and Ravel, both composers of ‘noble’ and ‘sentimental’ waltzes. Next, the inclusion of a postlude which is liminal to the set – standing both inside and outside it – is a speciality of Schumann’s, as Charles Rosen has noted with respect to Dichterliebe and the Davidsbündlertänze. Finally, the Épilogue is akin to specific works by Schumann, as some scholars have remarked (albeit incidentally). While Benjamin Ivry finds similarity between the Épilogue and the enigmatic Der Vogel als Prophet from the Waldszenen, Op. 82, Jean-Christophe Branger’s association of the Épilogue with the finale of Papillons is potentially more appropriate and revelatory.

Like Ravel’s Valses, Schumann’s Papillons is a suite of dances for solo piano, bearing an apparent debt to Schubert’s waltzes and featuring a finale which uses thematic recollection and fragmentation to frame the entire set. As the finale unfolds, its identity as a piece of night music gradually emerges through its hushed dynamics, sound effects – specifically, of bells tolling midnight – widely spaced registration and sustained pitches, including pedal points. The similarities between the two sets and their respective finales may stem from a coincidence between their dramatic scenarios, both of which illustrate an evening at a ball which involves a love triangle and ends with the departure of guests. However, they may also result from Ravel’s attempt in the Valses to pay homage to Schumann. Not only was Schumann’s music widely appreciated in France
during Ravel’s lifetime, but knowledge of the association between *Papillons* and the masked-ball conclusion to Jean Paul’s novel *Flegeljahre* had also been disseminated since the publication of the composer’s *Jugendbriefe* in 1885 and their translation into French the next year. Although it probably cannot be proven that Ravel intended the *Valses* as an homage to Schumann and his *Papillons* (and perhaps also the *Davidsbündlertänze*, whose concluding gestures of thematic return and night-time waltz are split between the final two numbers), there is a distinct possibility that Schumann represented a model for Ravel as a composer, considering the latter’s investment in such quintessentially Schumannian topics as dance, coquetry, masks, musical ciphers, humour, childhood and nostalgia. A comparison of their music and aesthetics is a potentially intriguing study which – like many on Ravel – remains to be written.

How better to illuminate the workings of memory than by the light of the moon? Like dreaming, recollection has often been conceived as the mind’s turning away from external stimuli and inward towards itself, a process well-suited to the relative calm of the night. In Ravel’s time, Henri Bergson made this movement of the mind a condition of possibility for what he called *la mémoire pure*, whose reflective nature contrasts with our reflex-oriented ‘habit memory’, which only uses mnemonic reserves to act and react unthinkingly in the present. In his classic study *Matière et mémoire* (1896), Bergson asserted that, in order for us to make full use of our *mémoire pure*, ‘we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream’. Before a single note sounds, the *Valses* has already met the first two of Bergson’s criteria. In the original Durand publication of the *Valses*, beside the title, which proclaims its debt to the nineteenth-century genre of the waltz (meeting criterion one as an escape into history), one finds an epigraph by Henri de Régnier exalting the ‘delicious and ever-new pleasure of a useless activity’ (criterion two; italics mine). Criterion three, the ‘will to dream’, becomes manifest at the other end of the *Valses* in the *musique nocturne* of the *Épilogue*. We can glean a further sense of the potential reciprocity and symbiosis between memory and night in Bergsonian thought from a passage by Jankélévitch, one of Bergson’s students: ‘as night gradually descends upon us, memory gradually rises up again within us like a prayer’. Night, then, may not descend all at once upon the *Épilogue*, but rather spreads its wings as gradually as the flow of memories increases and broadens, with both reaching their fullest extent in the penultimate phrase. Whether memory resounds simply and innocently as a ‘prayer’, however, is more doubtful, given both the profane vitality of the waltz and its rather drastic fragmentation in the *Épilogue*.

**Rationales for the Irrational**

On the evidence of this fragmentation, the *Épilogue*’s past can no longer be recalled in one uninterrupted act, but only in fits and starts – or, perhaps, in fits and restarts, since the end of each bout of thematic recollection connects to the...
same motive and phrase structure at the beginning of the next phrase.\(^{18}\) By
mapping out the thematic content of each phrase in the Épilogue and presenting
the contents in tabular form for easy comparison, Table 1 provides a valuable
synoptic perspective which faithfully reproduces the idiosyncratic proportions
of this piece while also charting the equally unusual fluctuation of its contents.

A glance at the far-left-hand column reveals that the Épilogue’s 74 bars are
divided into six phrases, P1–P6, and ‘P1 (1–8)’, for example, refers to phrase 1,
which comprises bars 1–8. With the exception of the initial four bars of each
phrase, the content of which can be reduced to a single column, each cell of the
table represents a single bar of the Épilogue. Each bar, in turn, contains thematic
material expressed as: (1) a roman numeral, which represents a quotation from
the corresponding waltz (but not a harmony!); (2) ‘~’, a part of the main theme
of the Épilogue; or (3) ‘0’, indicating an absence of melody. (A slash (/) is used
when two types of material appear together in the same bar.\(^{19}\)) At first glance, it
might seem that Table 1 is overly literal in its representation of form and content
in the Épilogue. However, this literalism provides a proportionally accurate
overview of the whole and allows its contents to be easily parsed.

Table 1’s uneven far-right-hand column and motley array of symbols indi-
cates the variety in length and content of the Épilogue’s six phrases. As shown by
the parentheses in Table 1, every phrase can be parsed as a presentation and a
continuation, the two halves of a Schoenbergian sentence, in which an initial
presentation of a so-called basic idea and its repetition is followed by a continu-
ation which extends this material in some way.\(^{20}\) As Table 1 also shows, the six
presentations are uniform in length and motivic content, whereas the six con-
tinuations are pluriform as a whole and individually unique. The distinction
between uniform presentation and pluriform continuation was important
enough to Ravel that he directed pianists to use the soft pedal (‘sourdine’) to
demarcate it in performance. Ex. 1 reproduces P1 to show this typical mid-
phrase demarcation.

Because each continuation relies mainly on thematic recollection, and
because these processes of recollection produce unpredictable results, it may be
most fitting to describe the operative mode of recall here as *involuntary memory*. This term, as well as the phenomenon it signifies, is most strongly associated with the writings of Marcel Proust (1871–1922), one of Ravel’s contemporaries and author of the best-known and most exhaustive treatment of memory in literature, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27). In the context of this work, involuntary memory is best explained by contrasting it with voluntary memory: voluntary memory is a consciously controlled faculty of the intellect, while involuntary memory is an unconscious faculty which brings the past suddenly and vividly to life but which cannot be summoned at will. Proust devotes the introductory section of his novel to the illustration of this dichotomy, describing the childhood in Combray of the narrator, Marcel, first from the standpoint of voluntary memory, then from that of involuntary memory. During sleepless nights he attempts, by repeated efforts of voluntary memory, to recall the evening he was separated from his mother; then one day a chance encounter with a taste from his childhood – the famous madeleine, dipped in lime-blossom tea – stimulates his involuntary memory to fully resurrect the past, lending it an immediacy which voluntary memory could never evoke.

This incident of involuntary memory does not merely show us how important the past is to Proust’s narrator, but also sets up and launches the main part of the novel. Situated at the end of a narrative, involuntary memory in Ravel’s Épilogue is no less unexpected in its effect, yet its rhetorical purpose is the opposite of that in *À la recherche*, drawing the work to a quiet close rather than beginning it with a bang. The Épilogue’s embedding of thematic recollection within a quiet conclusion recalls not only the finale of *Papillons*, but also the ending of the first movement of Schumann’s Fantasie in C major, Op. 17, which features a musical
quotation from Beethoven’s *An die ferne Geliebte*. Charles Rosen invokes the same mnemonic phenomenon to describe this moment, remarking that ‘[t]he phrase of Beethoven is made to seem like an involuntary memory, not consciously recalled but inevitably produced by the music we have just heard’ (Rosen 1995, p. 112).

Another bridge between these two musical examples of involuntary memory is an imaginary scenario prompted by the flowing textures of the music itself: a vision of Ravel freely improvising at the keyboard and occasionally being surprised by the turns which the music has happened to take under his fingers. Although this scenario may not correspond to Ravel’s actual compositional process, it is nonetheless an important heuristic that answers, at least provisionally, the question of who the subject of memory here might be, while also giving memory a corporeal dimension. Although the topic of the body continues to be neglected in the humanistic field of memory studies, it was central to Proust’s notion of involuntary memory, which was typically triggered by the physical re-experiencing of distinct sensations from the past – a taste, a smell, a sound, even a stumble.

Within the scenario of improvisation I am proposing for the Épilogue, the main memory triggers are the hand’s sense of touch and its registral position on the keyboard. When the right hand wanders down into the middle register at the ends of P1, P2, P4 and P5, it recalls music previously heard in that register (Waltz IV) and plays it, as if it had a mind and memory of its own. Likewise, when it goes up into a high register on the back of Waltz VI, as shown in Ex. 2, it begins to rehearse the swaying strains of Waltz III, which was remarkable for having sustained the highest tessitura of all the waltzes in the set.

As a matter of fact, there is good reason to speculate that it is not only register which sparks the recollection of Waltz III at this point. In the passage which immediately precedes that reproduced in Ex. 2, for instance, the right hand plays two major thirds – A♭5–C6 and E♭6–G6 – which will bracket the pitch spans of the lower and upper halves of the melody’s main motive. Although the second third lies higher and comes later than the first, it is the first third which receives dynamic emphasis. While one might wish to account for these somewhat coun-

Ex. 2 The passage between citations of Waltzes VI and III in P5 (bars 52–55)
terintuitive dynamics by describing them as simply a repetition of the previous
ascent, in this passage they serve a different purpose, laying clear stress on the
first third as a memory trigger which motivates the hand’s subsequent recollec-
tion. In my own experience as a performer, this is by far the most compelling way
to make sense of these unusual dynamics, as well as the subsequent imperative
‘Cédez’ – a direction to heed memory’s sudden call – which coincides with the
brief *decrescendo*. However, in order to realise fully the imaginative scenario I am
proposing here, the performer should try to maintain the illusion that the
moment precipitating the Waltz III recollection is a musical-muscular event
which happens involuntarily, rather than to press forward wilfully into it, as if the
notated dynamic swell were urging the performer to identify with it and ‘express’
its impulse.

At such moments of apparent subjection to the dictates of involuntary
memory, the performer’s profile blends into that of the automaton, whose
presence Carolyn Abbate has asserted to be fundamental to an understanding of
Ravel’s aesthetics.22 There is a trace of this in Ravel’s own 1913 recording of the
Épilogue, whose sudden shifts in tempo and affect from one waltz fragment to
the next suggest that the composer wished us to regard the pianist performing
the Épilogue as the plaything of involuntary memory.23 But can we make such an
assertion without succumbing to contradiction? How, indeed, can one behave
like an automaton while simultaneously being susceptible to a deep experience of
memory? Henri Bergson’s *Matière et mémoire* (1939) helps us to work through
this apparent difficulty. As is evidenced by the title, one of the book’s main
purposes was to address both materialist and idealist notions of memory instead
of treating each in isolation. Bergson maintains that the physical action of habit
memory and the mental reflection of pure memory represent extremes of con-
sciousness between which individuals continually oscillate in the course of daily
life. At one moment habit memory might guide a person smoothly through the
routines of the day; at another it might trigger an association with a long-
forgotten experience, thereby diverting the individual’s attention suddenly
inward, towards some deeper level of his or her memory. The same possibilities
are arguably in play in the Épilogue: the improvising hand ranges comfortably up
and down the keyboard, happening now and then upon a familiar space and
reacting with a musical gesture already associated with that space. However,
these physical deflections towards embodied memory, which are relatively
unconscious events, may strongly move the mind and stir the emotions of the
remembering subject. Without written testimony such as that of Proust’s novel,
the only trace of the impressions these memories make upon the individual
engaged in the act of recall is the affective design of the music, which we shall
soon investigate in depth.

The Épilogue offsets the inconsistency of involuntary memory by some more
consistent musical behaviours, most notably the recurrence of Waltz IV. While it
is hard to say with any certainty why Waltz IV should appear as often as it does
– apart from the preceding explanation, which links musical memory to physical
memory – the libretto for Adélaïde suggests a psychological rationale which associates this waltz with happier times and the desire to recollect them.\(^{24}\) Having no recourse to speech, the members of the love triangle communicate with each other through the ‘language of flowers’, as mentioned in the ballet’s secondary title, a convention which assigns to individual floral varieties a symbolic meaning within the ritual of courtship. Near the beginning of the Épilogue Adélaïde offers the lovesick Lorédan a poppy, which, as a symbol of oblivion, encourages him to forget their brief dalliance. He refuses this suggestion and leaves, returning later to prove the depth and sincerity of his love by prostrating himself before her and threatening to commit suicide. Lorédan’s will to remember and stay true to his passion provides another way to rationalise thematic recollection in the Épilogue – specifically, the frequent quotation of Waltz IV, the same waltz during which he and Adélaïde first danced together and demonstrated their mutual affection. (In a handwritten manuscript of the libretto, the composer designated Waltz IV a *pas de deux* for Adélaïde and Lorédan.\(^{25}\))

Unfortunately, Waltz IV cannot sustain its buoyant infatuation for long and collapses into Waltz I on the last two occasions that it is quoted in the Épilogue (at the ends of P4 and P5, bars 43 and 60, respectively). Indeed, one might even say that the Waltz I fragments quash the hopes tendered by the Waltz IV fragments: not only have their formerly vigorous leaps, culled from the opening bars of the *Valse*, now been reduced to anemic shudderings, but they also truncate the flow of musical memory in P4 and P5 to bring both abruptly to an end. Serving as Adélaïde’s poppies to Lorédan’s passionate iterations of music from Waltz IV, the Waltz I fragments also relate to the responses made by the second ‘ghost’ (*spectre*) to the questions and exclamations of the first in Verlaine’s ‘Colloque sentimental’, best known for its setting by Debussy as the final *mélodie* in the second book of his *Fêtes galantes* (1904).\(^{26}\) As will shortly become apparent, the *colloque sentimental* between the spectral fragments of Waltzes IV and I in the Épilogue is only one of several musical manifestations in this piece of an equivocation between hope and despair.

An additional and equally significant thematic exchange with Waltz IV in the Épilogue involves Waltz VI. Referring back to Table 1 will help to contextualise their alternation, which operates mostly between phrases. P1 ends with a quotation of Waltz IV, as does P2. Next, P3 diverges from the two previous phrases by quoting Waltz VI. P4 reverts to the Waltz IV recollection of P1 and P2 and even appends a second intimation. P5 emphasises Waltz VI, as P3 did, but also incorporates Waltz IV near its end. P6, the final phrase, quotes neither, thereby confirming the end of any further exchange between the two.

The alternation between Waltzes IV and VI lends a dynamic element to the Épilogue which offsets its more static qualities of tempo, rhythm and dynamics: it inaugurates a dialogue between consecutive phrases at the level of theme, injects contrast into this exchange with the rising contour of Waltz VI opposing the falling contour of Waltz IV and intensifies it in the middle of the piece while holding the initial and final phrases above the fray. Insofar as P5 (bars 46–61) is
the only phrase to include quotations from both waltzes, it emerges once again as a centrepiece for the activity of memory in the Épilogue. It should come as little surprise that we keep returning to P5 as a main site of interest, for it contains material from all of the Waltzes except for II and V. P5 is thus the frame within the framing Épilogue, a second-order *mis en abîme* of the *Valses* whose status on a micro level is important not only for the number of quotations it contains, but also for each one’s distinctive affect.

A final aspect of the Waltz IV/VI alternation is the degree to which the Waltz VI quotation in P3 refreshes the act of involuntary memory. The exclusive and repeated enactment of involuntary memory through Waltz IV in P1, P2 and P4 threatens to diminish its effect of unpredictability and surprise. The more we come to expect Waltz IV, the more it becomes habitual for both performer and listener, evoking a merely sentimental pleasure rather than the arresting enthrallement which involuntary memory is supposed to inspire. Ravel seems to have been acutely aware of this danger, for he tantalisingly courts it in the first half of the Épilogue only to dispel it in the second with some well-chosen musical-mnemonic techniques.

**A Dialectics of Memory in P1**

For Rosen, the main fascination of the Beethoven quotation in Schumann’s Fantasie is the way Schumann makes it seem as if the thematic recollection were a foreign object as well as the natural consequence of antecedent thematic activity – a quotation both within and without inverted commas. I propose that we understand this paradox to manifest an inherent doubleness in memory, whereby a recollection is the offspring of both the recollected past and the recollecting present. This idea is nothing new, for we often conceive of memory as a liaison between two temporal perspectives, with the past as the content and memory as the faculty which retrieves it in and for the present. However, I would like to suggest that, rather than thinking of memory in terms of a rigid instrumental dichotomy, we focus our attention on the way it brings its tempora to act upon each other in a fluid, dialectical process. Memory phenomena in Ravel’s Épilogue respond well to this approach, as can be demonstrated in an extended analysis of P1; this will allow us to come to terms with its musical elements and their configuration before proceeding to more encompassing hermeneutic reflections. Despite the apparently simple design of P1, at least in relation to the other five phrases, the rather complex analysis which follows will help articulate the basic conditions under which memory seems to be operating in the Épilogue.

As previously mentioned, P1 is an eight-bar sentence consisting of a four-bar presentation and a four-bar continuation. Each four-bar half can also be divided in half itself, with the presentation splitting into a basic idea and its varied repetition, while the continuation follows its own motive with a quotation of Waltz IV. P1 is stratified into three layers, as shown in Ex. 3. In the presentation, the lower layer contains a relatively slow single-voice progression (mainly of
roots), the middle layer a more active series of triads and the upper layer swift ornamental gestures. From this distribution of materials we can derive the two principles which organise the texture: a quasi-acoustic principle which places fundamentals below and upper partials above and a related rhythmic principle which increases activity as the register ascends. The Épilogue’s sympathy for acoustic materials becomes ever more apparent as the piece unfolds: note, for example, the use of the acoustic scale in the continuations of P2 and P4, as well as the acoustic tonics which end P4 and P6.

Counterbalancing these stabilising structures are more dynamic musical behaviours, including the expansion and contraction of individual layers, the migration of material between layers and the transformation of material within layers. In addition, the harmonic relationships among the layers are in constant flux. Several of these factors come into play in P1 when the presentation passes into the continuation, as is evident in Ex. 3: the bass begins to move between two different octaves, the triads rise from the middle to the upper layer before descending once again, the middle layer expands to accommodate the quotation of Waltz IV and the ornamental gestures of the upper layer disappear.

The coherence of P1 across its segmented expanse is primarily an effect of its underlying circle of fifths, which I have extracted and reduced in Ex. 4. The most salient aspect of this sequence is the fact that it coasts past the G major tonic to end up at the subdominant. If we look back at Ex. 3, we see that Ravel places the
entrance of the tonic bass in the lowest register and at the downbeat of the continuation, where it sounds alone. Nevertheless, he withholds dynamic emphasis from it, directing the pianist to mute it (‘sourdine’) upon striking it *pianissimo* and refrain from using the full resonance (‘3 cordes’) of the instrument until reaching the subdominant, whose arrival coincides with both the dynamic climax and the quotation of *Waltz IV*.

Ex. 5 shows how harmony is coordinated between the lower and middle layers. As we can see from this series of suspensions, the triadic progression of the middle layer lags behind the bass line of the lower layer. This example also points out a special dissonant sonority – a $\#\#\#57$ chord – which propels the sequence from dominant to tonic and subsequently reinterprets the tonic as a dominant. The two arrows below the stave point out this chord, which first occurs in slightly expanded form (with an additional $\#8$) in the opening bar of *Waltz I*, as shown in Ex. 6a. The first bar of Ex. 6b reconstructs the voice-leading technique which governs this progression: all the notes of the upper structure are treated as leading notes, ascending by semitone to resolve from dominant to tonic. The second bar of Ex. 6b isolates the two dominant–tonic progressions from P1 which use this altered dominant. (Here I follow Brian Hyer’s example of a Rameauian approach to tonal analysis by using the functional labels of ‘DOM’(i-nant) and ‘TON’(ic) instead of employing roman numerals.28)

Approaching Ravel’s music from a Rameauian perspective may seem anachronistic, but there are at least three good reasons to do so in the present context. First, a listener is more likely to follow the circle of fifths in the bass and hear local chordal functions than immediately and definitively to identify the key of

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*Ex. 5 Suspensions and altered dominants in P1*

![Ex. 5](image)

*Ex. 6a Waltz I, bar 1: opening*

![Ex. 6a](image)

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PI as G major, especially after it concludes on C. Second, Rameau’s interest in the dynamic role dissonances play in impelling one chord into another is well-suited to the sequential flow of PI. Third, such a viewpoint is helpful in making sense of the stacked-third verticalities which result from textural stratification. Ravel, whose personal collection of Rameau scores seems to indicate his esteem for the Baroque composer, 29 would probably not have been displeased by this approach. Nonetheless, it should go without saying that Ravel’s tonal idiom is not Rameau’s; to take the example of the Valses, tonics can sound like either subdominants (compare Ravel’s use of Rameau’s accord de la sixte ajoutée) or dominant sevenths (the acoustic tonic seventh), and dominant sevenths need further alteration and extension to maintain the effect of dissonance.

The other main source of coherence in PI is its basic idea, which features three triads: C major, B major and A minor. If the third of the triad on B were a D♮, we would consider it as merely an inconspicuous passing chord between the two triadic subsets of the A minor seventh harmony. The D♯ is an unexpected detail which commands our aural attention and suggests that PI is in E minor, not G major. However, when the bass finally moves, it gestures towards G major, thereby inaugurating a tonal equivocation between the relative major and minor which will continue to the end of the phrase, and which includes the pitting of E minor against G major in bar 6 as well as A minor against C major in bar 8. The conclusion of PI at the chordal pairing of C major and A minor should sound as if PI had gone astray. But instead it sounds as if we have come full circle, returning to the opening bars in PI – which we have, harmonically. The basic idea oscillates between the same two triads – C major and A minor – which are superposed in bar 8. Further, as Ex. 7 demonstrates, the final two bars of PI simply reconfigure the three harmonies of the basic idea: chords T, U and V.

The marking ‘expressif et en dehors’ (‘expressive and prominent’) in bar 1 calls attention to the basic idea’s melody, whose pitch contour and distance from the bass further connect the presentation with the continuation. Ex. 8 demonstrates that we can hear the continuation motive as condensing the melody of the presentation while simultaneously reorganising its intervals with the bass into new patterns. Especially notable is the similarity between the continuation

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motive and the subsequent quotation of Waltz IV. If a composer wanted to call attention to a thematic recollection, we might assume that he or she would create a background context against which the recollection would stand out in vivid relief, thereby clearly distinguishing musical past from present. But this is not what Ravel does here. As we can see from the example (which admittedly levels out the rhythm of the waltz quotation and abbreviates it slightly), the continuation motive is virtually identical in intervallic contour to the waltz quotation. From Ex. 8, it is clear that the dialectic of past and present in memory is beginning to take musical shape.

Thematic recollection in the continuation is reminiscent not only of the distant past of Waltz IV, but also of the recent past, that is, of the presentation in P1. The chord of the middle layer which initiates the quotation is the first-inversion B major triad which appeared in bar 3. This triad, in turn, is a registral rearrangement of the root-position B major triad at the corresponding point in bar 1. By inverting this triad and transferring its root from bass to treble, Ravel causes the middle layer to touch the lower boundary of the upper layer for the first time, thereby raising the issue of boundary demarcation. The middle layer, with its sinusoidal course, is the most active layer of all three in the presentation, but its pitch-space ambitus is conspicuously constrained to the major ninth between A3 and B4, which also belong to the pitch classes of the lower and upper layers, respectively. In Ex. 9a I suggest that we think of these two boundary notes again from a Rameauian standpoint as ‘subposed’ and ‘superposed’ thirds.
around the initial C major triad of the basic idea. The bass descent in the basic idea to the subposed A6/A may receive strong emphasis, but the melodic leap up to B7/B is also quite salient for its disruption of an established pattern. Ex. 9a uses arrows and stems to highlight the three moments when the basic idea touches its boundaries, while Ex. 9b proposes a more radical way to conceive of the middle layer: as mediating – literally and figuratively – between its two bounding layers. In consequence, every time the basic idea sounds either triadic subset of the A minor seventh chord, it directs attention to the A pedal in the lower layer, whereas the B major triads direct our attention to the B octaves in the upper layer. According to this rationale, the tonal allegiance of the middle layer switches with almost every chord of the presentation and on almost every beat, thereby revealing dynamism in a texture which might otherwise seem quite static.

Having analysed P1 in detail, we can now tender its interpretation in terms of memory, an approach derived from thematic recollection in P1 and indeed throughout the Épilogue. From this point of view, musical structures and processes in the Épilogue re-enact mental structures and processes. The stratified texture separates the mind into different registers of thought and emotion, while the dynamic properties of expansion, contraction, migration and transformation which govern these musical registers figure the mixture and continual modulation of that thought and emotion. The acoustic mimicry of this stratified texture also has a place in our interpretation as a characteristic which assimilates the structure of the mind to some natural, elemental hierarchy, wherein the heavier affects rest at the bottom while the lighter ones rise to the top. The basic idea, which is both subject and subjectivity, vacillates in the first half of P1 between the melancholic brooding of the bass and the sanguine scintillations of the treble, just as it will participate throughout P1 in a tonal equivocation between relative minors and majors. The Épilogue’s subjectivity, which we encounter off-tonic –
in mid-reflection, as it were – is generally more melancholic than sanguine, however; witness the series of sighing figures, reproduced in Ex. 10, outlined by the melody of P1, and recall also the despondent sluggishness of the middle-layer suspensions against the bass. From the Épilogue’s pervasive fragmentation and disordering of earlier waltzes, the source of this melancholy seems to be the loss and, ultimately, irrecoverability of a desirable past. Yet this very hopelessness creates hope: brooding over the absence of the past may fuel a longing to make it present once again, if only in recollection.

For memory to work in its redemptive, involuntary mode, however, the mind must be primed for it. The emulation of acoustic resonance in the Épilogue is one aspect of this priming, to the extent that it imbues the music with an attitude of passivity and vulnerability, thereby opening it up to the occasion of memory as a visitation from without. Only when the mind is in this suggestible state, as it is in P1, can it receive either a premonition of memory’s visit or even the visit itself. The two bars preceding the quotation of Waltz IV act as just such a premonition, beginning in a muted pianissimo with mysterious upper harmonies which gradually float back down into the middle register, where remembering then takes place. Having first identified it as an interior fragment from Waltz IV, we might then recognise the premonition as the opening gesture of Waltz IV, which likewise floats down against a broadly arpeggiating bass. In Ex. 11 the premonition is printed on the upper stave with its putative model reproduced on the lower for ease of comparison.

Looking further back towards the beginning of P1, we find an even earlier preparation for this memory: the sparking B of the upper octaves, an ember of hope which gradually begins to smoulder in the melodic and harmonic Bs of the middle layer before flaring up at the initial B triad of the thematic recollection. Yet this hope is unfounded, for the harmonic complex of the basic idea, which is most heavily involved in representing this melancholic subjectivity in the present, is also the harmonic complex of the memorial recollection. The existential wisdom which we may derive from the conjunction of cyclicism and brooding melancholy in P1 – that memory offers only fleeting and illusory redemption from our inescapable confinement in the here and now – can be counterbalanced by a more dialectical wisdom that memory is as much an effect of the present as of the past, as proposed at the beginning of this section – a subject I shall revisit later. Accordingly, the thematic recollection of Waltz IV is not transposed directly and mechanically into the Épilogue. Rather, it has been transformed to
accommodate an ongoing P1, just as P1 has been shaped to accommodate it – and so seamlessly that we may not even recognise it as a memory until it has almost passed us by. Thus, in the opening phrase of the Épilogue, Ravel performs the sleight of hand which so impressed Rosen in Schumann’s Fantasie: making involuntary memory appear to simultaneously suspend and extend ongoing mental-musical processes.

**Resistance and Compliance**

Having analysed P1 in detail, we can now pass more quickly over the subsequent phrases. The guiding impulse of P2 (bars 9–20) is to secure the tonic from which memory deflected P1. A renewed sense of purpose is audible in its presentation, where the opening ninth chord on A is major, louder and more thickly scored than the ninth which began P1. Fate, however, has other plans for P2. At the onset of the continuation (bar 13), the dynamics drop precipitously, the bass falls a minor third and the harmony shifts to a strange sonority. (It will eventually function as a dominant in B major, but the listener does not know that yet.) At the bottom of a two-octave descent (bar 16), the melody launches into the same recollection of Waltz IV as that heard in P1, only this time it is more extensive. And just as this recollection diverted P1 from the tonic, so too does it convey P2 to a cadence in the remote key of B major, or ♯III. The contrapuntal reduction of P2 in Ex. 12a shows the compounding of this irony. At this level, P2 has indeed succeeded in transforming the linear-intervallic pattern associated with the basic
idea into a cadential formula, but it is a Pyrrhic victory, since the cadence is quite distant from the tonic. To the extent that P2 sought to avoid further distraction by involuntary memory, it does not succeed. The other tonal reductions of Ex. 12 show how P3 (bars 21–28) and P4 (bars 29–45) recast the behaviour of P2, with each striving but failing to right what went tonally astray in the previous phrase. As is evident in Ex. 12b, P3 sets the 7–6–5 intervallic progression of the basic idea and reaches a G-rooted harmony, but its local function is dominant, not tonic. In Ex. 12c, we see how P4 coordinates a 7–6–5 intervallic progression with a bass ascent to cadence in G major in what seems a satisfactory end for itself as well as the Épilogue overall. However, at the next downbeat memory scotches this ending with its most unsettling intervention so far, one which destabilises the preceding cadence. As shown in Ex. 12c, motion into an inner voice and a 5–6 exchange transform the cadential G major triad into an acoustic tonic, with its characteristic lowered seventh.

But perhaps the priorities of conventional tonal analysis have allowed us to misunderstand this moment. Perhaps this intervention is more continuous with
than discontinuous from the preceding music. Both are, after all, quotations of the same waltz, whose succession could be explained simply by the cognitive phenomenon of ‘memory chaining’, whereby one recollection leads ineluctably to another. Ironically, the shared origin of these two separate recollections of Waltz IV ends up increasing the effect of discontinuity between them. As previously noted, the first quotation of Waltz IV in P4 (bars 36–40) marks the third time we have heard it in the Épilogue, and each time it reappears, its aura of pastness and strangeness decreases. However, the second quotation of Waltz IV in P4 (bars 41–42) reverses this trend, restoring to it and to the general phenomenon of thematic recollection the power they originally had to inflect the Épilogue’s musical discourse. This renewal of discursive power derives, in part, from the relative position and function of the two quotations within Waltz IV: the first comes from an interior phrase of the waltz, while the second is modelled on its opening phrase, previously excerpted in Ex. 8. Thus, when we move from the first to the second quotation we regress temporally within the memory itself, slipping from the past to the past’s past. With the direction ‘pianississimo très lointain’ (‘very, very soft and at a great distance’), Ravel seems to wish to make audible this further wrinkling of time.31

Realising that it is powerless either to resist or to control involuntary memory’s intrusions after the disorienting phrase extension of P4 (bars 41–45), the mind surrenders itself to them. Consequently, P5 (bars 46–61) uncovers a stream of thematic recollections which begins immediately at the onset of its continuation and unfolds across two textural waves, while the bass line prolongs a tonic pedal for the rest of the piece. Now that the bass line is no longer active, its role in staging tonal dialogue among phrases – and even asserting its tonal will against the arbitrary inflections of involuntary memory – becomes apparent in retrospect, as shown in Ex. 13.

Ex. 13 lays out the bass line of the Épilogue, using numbered brackets to divide the line up according to the individual phrases, diagramming tonal relations within the line, stemming and beaming notes together to articulate motives and labelling the two motivic statements as M1 and M2, following their chronological ordering. So far, we have mainly examined and compared phrases as discrete entities. Now, however, the motivic structure of the bass line invites us to group them together. M1 spans P2 and P3, ostensibly seeking to resolve the dominant tritone of P2 into the major third of P3, as shown in the diagram, by Schenkerian unfoldings. Because the arrival on G at the end of P3 functions

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Ex. 13 Motivic design in the bass line of the Épilogue
locally as an imperfect cadence, M1 fails in its tonal purpose. M2 attempts to remedy this situation by repeating and altering M1 so as to correct it. The compositional strategy behind M2 is cunning: because the fifth and final note of M1 indicated a dominant harmony, M2 begins a perfect fourth below M1 so that its fifth note will become the dominant scale degree in G. M2 then receives a sixth note, G, which resolves its dominant. When the second quotation of Waltz IV melts the harmony above this G into an acoustic tonic, however, M2 turns out to have fared little better than M1.

**Hope, Despair and Time’s Arrow**

The general affect of the Épilogue, as noted above, is a gentle melancholy which transforms its gestures of recollection into expressions of nostalgia and regret. The main vehicle for this melancholy is the basic idea – both subject and subjectivity – with which each phrase begins. The drooping inertia characteristic of melancholy finds the same musical correlates in every version of the basic idea: a slow tempo, a dark, prolonged harmony (except, perhaps, for the major ninths of P2) and a soft but expressive melody which sighs over a low and inert bass. Although Ravel does not actually use the term *mélancolique* in the Épilogue, he nevertheless directs the pianist to play the reprise of P1 (bar 62) ‘mêmes mouvement un peu plus las’, thereby making explicit the melancholic lassitude which has governed the piece from its beginning.32

Yoked to the basic idea, the affect of melancholy comes to participate in formal processes. As shown in the upper diagram of Fig. 1, each phrase in the

![Diagram of Waltzing between memory and melancholy in the Épilogue](image)

... Memory ...

... at the downbeat of P6, the form coils into ...

... Melancholic Basic Idea ...

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*Music Analysis, 29/ii-iii (2011)*
Épilogue begins with the melancholic basic idea – situated, on the diagram, at the points where each circle intersects with the horizontal axis – before swinging away from this motive during the continuation to dally in thematic recollection, as represented by movement in the open space above; the lateral displacement of each circle along the x axis indicates that the basic idea does not remain invariant over time, but rather metamorphoses from phrase to phrase, adapting to their tonal spaces. The unexpected reprise of P1 in P6, however, terminates this potentially infinite production of repetition and difference, suddenly altering our understanding of the overall form so that we hear it not as linear but as cyclical, as shown in the lower diagram of Fig. 1.33

The lower diagram makes graphically clear a recursive structure which arises at the moment of transformation: the completion of a large-scale return that echoes the smaller-scale returns of the individual phrases. As an aspect of musical design, this nesting of circles is satisfyingly elegant. Moreover, it reveals another aspect of memory in the Épilogue: it remembers the waltz by musically simulating its dance pattern. In other words, the phrase design inscribes smaller circles inside a bigger circle, evoking the image of a waltzing couple whirling along the circumference of a ballroom; the movement of the dance is thus transferred from the dancer’s legs and feet to the pianist’s arms and hands. The Épilogue is only the spectral memory of a waltz, however, and in this waltz-like recollection, the nostalgic subject dances alone – as if anticipating the widowed Dragonfly in the valse lente américaine of L’Enfant.

The recursion in Fig. 1 also conveys melancholy’s inescapability. Hope for a situation which will bring an end to a state of melancholy arises each time a phrase swings out into the memory space of its continuation but dissolves again as the music swings back towards the basic idea to begin the next phrase. (The bookending chords of P1’s basic idea make it a prime example of such closed circuitry.) The continual mutation of the basic idea from phrase to phrase keeps alive the possibility of change – until P6, that is, when the melancholic point of departure pulls back on the music and recasts the basic idea in its original form. At both levels of form, reversion to the basic idea figures the melancholy subject’s return to self-consciousness, its awareness of its pitiable condition only momentarily alleviated by memory’s flights into the past. Although there may be no musical precedent for this recursive cyclical structure in Ravel’s music, there is a literary one: the poem ‘Si mornel!’ (‘How sad!’) by Émile Verhaeren, which Ravel set for voice and piano in 1898 under the additional heading ‘Déformation morale’ (‘Moral [or Mental] derangement’).34 After opening with the exclamation ‘Se replier toujours, sur soi-même, si mornel!’ (‘Always to fold back upon oneself, how sad!’), Verhaeren’s melancholic lament about melancholy ends as it began, invoking in its final lines the ennui which ‘folds back upon itself at night’. A melancholic strain of musical nocturnalism which folds back upon itself at two levels of form – or ‘deformation’ – the Épilogue appears to be the belated, successful realisation of the poem which had fascinated Ravel over a decade earlier, when he was still a fledgling composer.

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Owing to the intimate association between melancholy and the basic idea in the Épilogue, the large-scale reprise at P6 consolidates affect as well as form, broadcasting melancholy strongly by decelerating to an even wearier tempo and doubling the lamenting middle layer in the upper layer. A precedent for this melancholic reprise within Ravel’s oeuvre may be found in a passage in *Daphnis et Chloé* composed less than a year before: the Pantomime, in which the central couple act out the roles of Pan and Syrinx in the Greek myth of metamorphosis (Ex. 14). The Pantomime proper lasts eighteen bars and is in an ABA′ form which prepares the subsequent Dance of Syrinx by modulating to the dominant (that is, from B to F♯). During the Pantomime, Chloé’s appearance as the nymph Syrinx prompts Daphnis-as-Pan to declare his love (section A). His rejection inspires him to a second, more pressing entreaty; finally Chloé flees, disappearing into a bank of reeds (section B). The moment of reprise (section A′) finds Pan alone and ‘in despair’ (désespéré) – a state of mind similar to that of Lorédan, who is ‘sad unto death’ (triste à mourir) upon returning to Adélaïde’s salon during the Épilogue.35 Whereas Lorédan’s despair drives him to pull out a pistol and threaten to shoot himself in the head, Pan’s despair inspires him to pull up some reeds, form a pan pipe from them (as in Ovid’s myth) and play ‘a melancholic tune’ (un air mélancolique). Like the reprise in the Épilogue, the reprise in the Pantomime amplifies the initial melodic motive by thickening its texture, elevating its register and augmenting its dynamics, which combine to bring out its latent character as something we might call a heaved sigh, a characteristic

Ex. 14 The melancholic reprise in the Pantomime (rehearsal numbers 172–175) of *Daphnis et Chloé*
Ravelian trope whose descending interval is greater than a step. Unlike its precedent in *Daphnis*, however, the reprise in the Épilogue occurs within a formal scheme which is more complex and innovative than the Pantomime’s ABA, one which proceeds phrase by phrase in search of time past and mixes repetition with a more extensive process of through-composition.

The effect of any reprise, of course, depends not only on how it sounds, but also on when and where it is heard. It is only fitting that the melancholic reprise of P6 should follow the Waltz I fragments which terminate the memory flow for both P4 and P5. More bitterly ironic, however, is that P6 should follow P5, the phrase which finally managed to break through the psychic resistances of the remembering subject to explore most fully the accidental inflections of involuntary memory. In so doing, it held out the greatest promise of not only resurrecting the past in memory, but also experiencing, through memory, the true depth and character of *la vie intérieure* (the life lived within). To think of P5 in these terms is to align it with Bergsonian *durée* – usually translated as ‘duration’, for lack of a better term – in which the objects of consciousness are no longer conceived as discrete elements, juxtaposed in homogeneous space, but rather ‘penetrate each other’ (*se pénètrent*; Bergson 2001, Ch. 2) in a continuous production of heterogeneity and qualitative difference. Because music can readily be viewed as a modulatory flow wherein each part not only enlarges the whole but transforms it into something different, it is not surprising that Bergson frequently upheld music as an instance of *durée* in our everyday life. The following paragraph from Bergson’s groundbreaking doctoral thesis, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889), will further help to situate this notion within his thought:

Therefore, in fact, there would be two different selves [*moi*], of which one would be, as it were, the external projection of the other, its spatial and so to speak social representation. We attain the former [that is, the interior self] by deep reflection, which makes us grasp our internal states as if they were living beings, ceaselessly developing, states impervious to measurement which penetrate each other and whose succession in *durée* has nothing in common with juxtaposition in homogeneous space. But those moments when we grasp ourselves again in this way are rare, which is why we are rarely free. Most of the time we live outside ourselves, seeing of our true self only its colourless phantom, the shadow which pure *durée* projects into homogeneous space. Thus, our existence unfolds in space rather than in time: we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we are ‘acted upon’ rather than acting ourselves. To act freely is to reclaim the true self, to place oneself once again into pure *durée*.  

One does not need to be intimately familiar with the development of Bergson’s thought to hear intimations in this passage of his next monograph, *Matière et mémoire*. In the *Essai* he divides the self into mutually exclusive halves, attributing to one the capacity to fulfil the practical demands of social life and to the other the ability to experience – anew, at every moment – the depth and quality of its existence. The dichotomy in *Matière et mémoire* between non-reflective habit
memory and reflective pure memory is thus the progeny of this earlier dichotomy of selfhood and is equally critical – perhaps along the lines of Rousseau’s distinction between l’amour de soi and l’amour-propre – of the tendency of socialisation to alienate the individual from him- or herself.

By linking Matière et mémoire to the Essai, I am suggesting that the elaborate, intensely memory-laden continuation of P5 (bars 50–61) is akin to Bergsonian durée. As in the presentations of all the other phrases of the Épilogue, the first four bars of P5 constrain the musical-mnemononic subject within predetermined parameters of motive and metre; melancholy is not only the affect being repeated here, but also the reaction to such repetition. The subsequent continuation, however, swings far out and into the recesses of memory (to invoke the circular loops of Fig. 1), reveling in the unpredictability and heterogeneity of its recollections. In Bergson’s terms, this stream of memories displays a ‘confused multiplicity’ (multiplicité confuse; Bergson 2001, Ch. 2) in the way the individual recollections ‘penetrate each other’ without assimilating, for, as Suzanne Guerlac has remarked, each moment in durée is ‘radically discontinuous from the next, even though it flows out of one and into another’ (Guerlac 2006, p. 91). From this perspective, then, quantity expresses quality. The pianissimo of the Waltz VII fragment (bar 51) is not simply quieter than the piano of the Waltz VI fragment in the previous bar; rather, the softer dynamic marks the second fragment as wholly other. The two occur in separate universes, as it were – a distinction which could make all the difference to a performer’s understanding of the piece if he or she had not in fact already intuited it. So, too, is it insufficient to describe the subsequent quotation of Waltz VI (bars 52–54) as simply the repetition of its previous quotation under specific rhythmic, tonal and textural operations. Instead, it may be more enlightening to view it as a unique occurrence which musically substantialises the activity of durée in memory – or, even better, of memory as durée.

To approach thematic recollection from this point of view raises a difficult but important question – one, in fact, which Bergsonian thought wishes to make both difficult and important for us to answer: how does time relate to memory? One plausible response is that time as we conceive of it in daily life – a thing subject to incremental and equal division, which Bergson referred to as ‘spatiolised time’ – is effectively excluded from the experience of such a profound interior phenomenon as la mémoire pure. Jankélévitch, once again, beautifully transposes this possibility into memory’s terms: ‘the time of dreamy nostalgia and poetic flânerie is no longer divided up by an agenda, nor articulated into successive segments: it is a time without schedule or calendar, a diffuent and invertebrate time whose metronomic divisions blend together and lose all rigour’. If we were the editors of the Épilogue and wished to represent it in this way, we might consider replacing the standardised rhythmic and metrical notation of the phrasal continuations – the bar lines and durations – with alternative notation which would better indicate its non-measured, momentary quality, thereby representing it as a sort of free ‘postluding’ (a complement to the
historical practice of Präludieren). This editorial experiment would not only help realise our imaginative scenario of the composer improvising at the keyboard, but also liberate those motives and patterns which were obscured by and ran counter to the triple metre of the waltz: the five-beat continuation motive of P1, P2 and P4, the duple-time phenomenon of Waltz VI in P3, the nested hemiolas of the second Waltz IV fragment in P4 and the 4/4 accompanimental pattern under Waltz I in P4, not to mention all the metrical eddies in the continuation of P5. As attractive as this immersive, even oceanic conception of time might be in some respects, however, it neglects other pertinent and important issues.

A common way to relate time and memory is to think of the latter instrumentally – that is, as a means for importing the past into the present. Though it is only natural for us to feel the predomination of the past in this transaction between temporalities, the role played by the present itself is at least equally important: it is, after all, the only time in which memory can operate, in which we are able to remember. A further consideration is the way the unidirectionality of time ensures not only the impossibility of making the past present, but also the certainty of a future in which both past and present can be recalled, among other actions. The articulation of this dilemma as well as the existential ambivalence which results from it is one of the signal contributions of Jankélévitch’s L’Irréversible et la nostalgie, which can profitably be read as both a critical development of Bergsonian thought and a valuable supplement to memory studies avant la lettre, given how little effort this field has devoted to theorising the role of the future in memory. According to Jankélévitch’s argument, the irreversibility of time breeds melancholy and despair about the incontrovertible pastness of the past (la prétérition) as well as, paradoxically, hope about the endless production of the future (la futurition) as an opportunity not only to re-experience the past in memory, but to experience it in a new way. At one point Jankélévitch brings all three temporalities together in a moment of conceptual synthesis, describing how ‘the experience of the past, which is, after all, an experience in the present, itself takes part in the production of the future; our attempt to conjure up “anew” the ghost of a former experience actually results in a new experience’. 41

Thus, the openness towards the past which we witness in the continuation of P5 is also an openness towards the future and the new experiences in memory that it will bring. This helps to explain the central role of the Waltz VI fragments (bars 50 and 52–54), which, with their ascending contour and mounting dynamics, initiate textural waves that not only clear a path for the thematic arrivals of Waltzes VII and III at their crests but actually seem to anticipate them. And yet there is no denying the melancholic consciousness of la prétérition in P5, whose presence ultimately overwhelms any optimism associated with la futurition. Compare, for example, the two thematic arrivals with their original statements. In its proper milieu, the Waltz VII passage excerpted in P5 was climactic and performed by the tutti orchestra. However, upon reappearing here (bars 51–52) it is presented by a pianissimo quartet of first violins whose delicate sound is
rendered uncanny by means of ethereal harmonics and fingerboard *glissandi* in the accompanying strings. In addition, the melancholic subject is unable to sustain the memory of Waltz III (bars 55–59), which slows down after its motivic presentation and falls silent for a beat – or, rather, gets choked up, *verklemmt*, like Beethoven’s Op. 130 Cavatina – before it can continue *pianississimo* and at an even slower tempo, ultimately trailing off instead of bringing the phrase to its expected conclusion. The sudden subsequent quotation of an energetic Waltz IV (bars 59–60) is a final flame of hope, soon extinguished in the blackness of despair which ends P5 – *un grand sommeil noir*, to invoke the depressive poem by Verlaine which Ravel had set some fifteen years earlier. The reprise at P6 is, without a doubt, the great tragic gesture of the Épilogue, especially coming after P5’s breakthrough into memory, *durée* and hope-filled *futurition*, but it is not a wholly unexpected turn of events given the persistence of melancholy across P1–P5.

**Ma Fin Est Mon Commencement**

The source of melancholy in the Épilogue which subtends its every bar is the knot which binds the desire to make the past present and whole again together with the knowledge that this is impossible. From a melancholic point of view, the fragmentation, distortion and disordering of the waltzes as they reappear in the Épilogue are traces of memory’s failure to preserve the past intact. On a broader historical level, they are the effects of an oblivion which, at the end of the long nineteenth century, was in the process of transforming the waltz from a cultural monument into a ruin – or perhaps, since the notion of ruins would likely bring to mind the blasted landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich more readily than musical genres, as a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory).

The concept of the *lieu de mémoire* stems from Pierre Nora’s historiography of modernism, in which he describes the transition into modern life at the end of the French nineteenth century as a gradual loss of social bonds, a process as much reflected in as caused by the simultaneous decline of collective memory and rise of a secular, administered society. *Lieux* are those entities which the cultural imagination values for their association with the disappearing past as well as their continued relevance to the present, for their ability to ‘stop time’ and ‘block the work of forgetting’ as well as their capacity for sustaining ‘an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications’ (Nora 1989, p. 19) – both excellent ways to grasp the uses to which Ravel puts the waltz in his *Valses*. However, any constructive characteristics of the *lieu* are ultimately subordinate to its enveloping sense of historical loss – or, rather, of history as loss. As he explains the concept further from his vantage point as a historiographer:

> Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn –
but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in
certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are lieux de
mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de mémoire, real
environments of memory. (Nora 1989, p. 7)

Even if the first seven waltzes, with their variety and exuberance, manage to
sustain the impression that the waltz is still a living tradition, the Épilogue
shatters this illusion by breaking these waltzes into fragments, thereby revealing
the genre to be, at this historical juncture, a lieu de mémoire.

Although the consciousness of historical loss permeates the presentation of P6
in both form and affect, the continuation – the Épilogue’s last word – is not as
clearly melancholic. As indicated by the ‘0’s in Table 1, the continuation of P6
(bars 66–74) is unique among previous continuations for beginning without a
melody. By the second ‘0’ bar, the prolonged absence of melody begins to suggest
that melancholy’s nihilism has shut down any further efforts by the mind to
recollect the past, voluntarily or not. However, at the upbeat to the third bar the
low D unexpectedly introduces one final melody: the lyrical theme of Waltz II.
Ravel enhances its twilit quality by transposing it down an octave from its
original statement and assigning it in the orchestral version to the lowest part of
the clarinet’s dusky chalumeau register. More apparition than revenant, this
thematic recollection exits as it entered, returning to its first note before disap-
ppearing into the background silence from which it mysteriously emerged.

At first hearing, the dolorous quotation of Waltz II seems to sing the swan
song of the waltz as a lyrical expression of its beauty-in-obsolescence. If, in the
Valses, as Marcel Marnat has asserted, Ravel ‘bids adieu to the waltz as he bid
adieu to the serenade, the minuet, the pavane, and the whole assortment of
classical dances which had become sonorous symbols of our civilisation’, the
final melody is the perfect gesture of valediction. After further thought, however,
it can also be imagined to challenge the entire melancholic perspective of the
Épilogue. A single note in this melody – the fifth, which is an F instead of an E
– indicates its derivation from the reprise of Waltz II (bars 41–44) rather than the
exposition (bars 9–12). This minute difference shifts the relationship between the
Épilogue and Waltz II into a different light. By aligning them according to their
internal reprises, the thematic recollection of Waltz II suggests a bona fide affinity
with the Épilogue, rather than the more arbitrary relation which involuntary
memory has established between it and the previous waltz quotations. Both are
Valses lentes, both begin with similar motives and both feature octave grace notes
in the treble, an ornamental gesture which appears nowhere else in the set. The
rationale behind Ravel’s having saved the recollection of Waltz II for the final
bars of the Épilogue is gradually taking shape: when the final waltz turns to Waltz
II it is not merely showing its continued dependence on external thematic
sources, but, rather, coming into its own. The internal ordering of the Valses
reveals that Waltz II is more than an alter ego for the Épilogue – it is its origin,
hidden until now.

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A return to origins at the end of a work is a specific, radical example of the narrative phenomenon which Gérard Genette has called anachrony. In an anachronic narrative, the time of the narrative moves in contrast to the chronology of the narrated story, flashing occasionally forwards in prolepsis but more often backwards in analepsis, the counterchronology of which frequently forms part of a recollection made by either the narrator or a character in the story. A gradual, counterchronological trajectory is a feature not only of Ravel’s Épilogue, but also of the first movement of Schumann’s Fantasie, which ends with the Beethoven quotation from An die ferne Geliebte – which, as Rosen has argued, sounds like the source of the themes preceding it and is implicitly the impetus for its creation, insofar as Schumann’s movement performs an homage to a ‘distant beloved’ who is also the artist’s muse.

By revealing its origin the Épilogue appropriates it, thereby lessening the alienation of the one from the other and the melancholy felt in response to this alienation. The familial relation between the Épilogue and the waltzes it frames suggests that neither their difference nor the temporal difference they represent – that which separates the present from the past – is absolute. Once again, we need not simply consider the past as something absent from the present, but rather can see the two in active, ongoing negotiation with each other. Recall the dialectical interaction we observed between the waltz fragments and their context in the Épilogue: their alteration may be understood to represent not only inevitable ruination in the present, but also creative transformation. Proust’s narrator voices this insight into memory when, correcting himself, he exclaims, ‘Seek? More than that: create’.

Thus, on one level the Épilogue expresses what Richard Terdiman has called the ‘memory crisis’ of modernism – an acute, melancholic awareness of its incapacity to reproduce the past. On another, the Épilogue articulates and embraces the fact that the past is always already a construction of the present. Emulating both memory and the Épilogue, our analysis turns out to have also proceeded counterchronologically, arriving at a final insight which is a precondition for understanding the Valses nobles et sentimentales as a whole.

NOTES

I would like to thank James Hepokoski, Brian Hyer and the graduate students and faculty at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Pennsylvania for their insightful comments. I am also grateful to Sylvia Chong for her technical assistance with musical examples and to the American Philosophical Society and the University of Virginia for generous travel grants which allowed me to conduct archival research on Ravel in Paris.

1. In comparison to the abundance of writing on memory across the humanities, literature on memory in music is relatively modest. Nonetheless, there are some significant essays devoted to the topic as it relates to nineteenth-century repertoire; see for example Sisman (2000), the five essays on Schubert and memory which appear in the Winter 2000 issue of Musical Quarterly and Rosen (1995), which I cite below in greater detail.
2. Although Waltz I may not have greater intrinsic musical value than any other waltz in the set, as the first waltz which the audience hears, it has nevertheless acquired special status within the performance history of the *Valses*; this waltz and its attendant controversy are discussed briefly in Orenstein (1991), pp. 175–6. In light of the genealogy proposed by Roy Howat, Ravel may have intended to ruffle feathers with Waltz I by modelling it on the beginning of Debussy’s *Ibéria*, a piece which Ravel had recently defended in print against hostile critics; see Howat (2000), pp. 272–3, n. 26.

3. These comments are reproduced in Fischer (2005), p. 118; they are drawn from Rosenthal (1995), pp. 72–3. Sevin H. Yaraman’s suggestion that thematic recollection in the codas of Strauss’s orchestral waltzes might have served as a model for the Épilogue is useful, but does not begin to address its extraordinary strangeness and complexity; see Yaraman (2002), p. 94.

4. Deborah Mawer has made the following conjecture about the subtitle and its relation to the scenario: ‘Although there is no concrete evidence to support the claim, it is hard to imagine that Ravel’s scenario is not at some level derived from the highly influential book of the same name, *Le Langage des fleurs*, published in 1819 by Charlotte de Latour and itself much indebted to *Emblèmes de flore* by Alexis Lucot, which had appeared earlier in the year’ (Mawer 2006, p. 129).

5. The full libretto, published as part of his work catalogue, is fully translated into English and reproduced in Appendix B of Ravel (2003), pp. 510–11.

6. In other words, the premiere of the ballet on 22 April 1912 was also the premiere of the orchestrated *Valses*, performed by the Orchestre Lamoureux under Ravel’s baton at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.


8. In his ‘Autobiographical Sketch’, Ravel claims that the title alone ‘indicates my intention of composing a series of waltzes in imitation of Schubert’ (Ravel 2003, p. 31).

9. See Rosen (1995), pp. 213 and 235. The special status of the Épilogue within the *Valses* – having its own title, but deriving its material largely from previous waltzes – has dissuaded some commentators from describing it as a waltz, despite its label of ‘VIII’ within the suite. Rollo H. Myers’s description of the *Valses* as ‘eight waltzes (or rather seven and an epilogue)’ (Myers 1973, p. 168) expresses this characteristic hesitancy over an appropriate designation for it. Deborah Mawer has also singled it out not only for its title, but also for the larger potential literary and dramatic significance of this title: ‘An epilogue may denote a speech addressed directly to the audience at the end of a play, or a postscript that provides an update on the fates of the work’s characters. On two counts, therefore, the listener may wonder whether Ravel had at least an embryonic sense of programme for this music before its balletic evolution’ (Mawer 2006, pp. 128–9).


12. The two themes that overlap and even occasionally interrupt each other in number 12 of *Papillons* previously appeared in numbers 1 and 11, the ‘Grossvater-Tanz’.


15. Another piece by Ravel which arguably opens on a moonlit, melancholy landscape and explores the power of memory is the *Introduction et Allegro* for harp, string quartet, flute and clarinet (1905).


17. ‘À mesure que la nuit descend sur nous, le souvenir remonte en nous comme une prière’ (Jankélévitch 1974, p. 212; unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine). Although one could translate this sentence without using the adverb ‘gradually’, I have chosen to include it in order to capture the precise sense of *à mesure que*, especially in conjunction with the gradual actions of ‘ascending’ (*monter*) and ‘descending’ (*descendre*), as well as the special reciprocity between memory and the night which seems to me to be at issue at this point in both Jankélévitch’s argument and mine.

18. Some readers will recognise this behaviour as ‘rotational’ in the sense advanced by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, insofar as each phrase moves through a prototypical set of ordered elements but is also free to manipulate their order and appearance from one phrase to the next. Their most recent exposition of rotational form appears in Hepokoski and Darcy (2006), especially pp. 610–14.

19. I have chosen to label the thematic material of the Épilogue ‘~’, instead of ‘VIII’, in order to make a clear visual distinction in Table 1 between it and all extrinsic quotations. With ‘0’, on the other hand, I am not implying that these melodically impoverished bars are worth nothing to our analysis, but rather indicating a specific role which they play in an unfolding narrative of musical memory, as discussed below.

20. Readers will likely recognise the concept of the musical ‘sentence’ from Schoenberg (1967) and the terminology of ‘presentation’ and ‘continuation’ from Caplin (1998).


22. On this point, compare Abbate: ‘Nowhere is the machinelike status of human beings more clear than in a musical performance in which someone plays (is played by) someone else’s work’ (Abbate 2001, p. 195).

23. Ronald Woodley also notes the ‘quite radical changes of speed and mood between the fragments’ (Woodley 2000, p. 218). This performance has been released on the Pierian label as CD 0013, vol. 4 of the Caswell Collection: ‘Maurice Ravel: The Composer as Pianist and Conductor’.

24. Interpretation of the libretto helps to explain not only the emphasis on Waltz IV in the Épilogue, as I discuss below, but also the absence of any reference to Waltz V, which is the only waltz not quoted here. During Waltz V in *Adélaïde* the Duke declares his interest in the courtesan. She subsequently shows little interest in
him until, at the beginning of the Épilogue, she finally dismisses him. Thus, just as the Duke has been excluded from the love triangle during the Épilogue, so too does Waltz V fail to appear. On a purely musical level, however, it is not clear to me how one might plausibly account for the conspicuous omission of Waltz V from the Épilogue. Perhaps the idea of an absolutely comprehensive thematic quotation was too pedantic for Ravel, compelling him to omit at least one element.


26. For example, when the first ghost asks if the heart of the second ‘still beats at my name’, the latter forecloses further conversation with a simple ‘no’. And when the first ghost presses further, recalling ‘how blue the sky was, and how great our hope!’ , the second responds that ‘hope has fled, vanquished, into the black sky’. For insightful analyses of Verlaine’s poem and Debussy’s song, see Youens (1981).

27. My association of the quotidian with sentimentality and pleasure is indebted to the work of Austin (2007), in which the author argues for a notion of nostalgia – particularly prevalent in Victorian England, but theoretically rooted in Schiller’s writings – which is neither psychological nor pathological but rather aesthetic, sentimental and somatic, deriving its gentle, non-anxious pleasures from the consumption of everyday items of allegedly lesser cultural prestige, some of which we today like to call ‘kitsch’. Although these ideas are certainly pertinent to Ravel’s oeuvre as a whole, as well as the first seven waltzes of the Valses, I am arguing for a decisive and unmistakeable shift into melancholy – a more typical, psychological mode of nostalgia – as we move into the Épilogue.


29. His library included five piano-vocal scores from the Durand series edited by Camille Saint-Saëns – Castor et Pollux, Les Fêtes d’Hébé, Hippolyte et Aricie, Platée and Pigmaliôn – as well as Naïs, which Reynaldo Hahn edited for Durand in 1924. A general discussion of the content of Ravel’s personal library, which is on deposit at the Music Division of the Bibliothèque nationale de Paris, may be found in Nectoux (1987).

30. My invocation of fire is not casual but precise, for that is where the metaphor domains for hope and memory overlap. For an account of metaphor in memory discourse and an argument for metaphor as fundamentally constitutive of this discourse, see Assmann (1991). For a more detailed historical narrative, see Draaisma (2000).

31. The Bibliothèque de l’Opéra in Paris possesses a copy of the Valses into which Ravel carefully notated a preliminary draft of the Adélaïde libretto, placing each sentence above a particular moment in the score. According to this source (Rés. 2249), at the moment the music suddenly expands to accommodate the second quotation of Waltz IV in P4 (bar 41), Adélaïde throws open the windows at the back of her apartment. (In the original libretto, which is also a part of the Opéra’s library collection [LAS 14], it is Lorédan who, having scaled the balcony, opens the windows from the outside.) I am grateful to the staff at the Opéra library for granting me access to these documents.
32. The 1911 piano score has ‘même Mouvement un peu plus las’ at this point (bar 62), while the 1912 orchestral score has ‘même Mouvement un peu las’ (rehearsal number 75). I have added italics to underscore the keyword, ‘las’.

33. The double circle at twelve o’clock in the lower diagram of Fig. 1 represents the overlap between P1 and P6, which is nevertheless not total: in addition to the obvious difference between their continuations, a low, stable tonic pedal in the bass of P6 replaces the higher, less stable supertonic pedal in P1 to signal the end of the tonal process begun in P1.

34. I discovered the heading ‘Déformation morale’ in the manuscript for ‘Si morne!’, whose microfilm copy (Vm. Micr. 860) forms part of the Collection Taverne on deposit at the Music Division of the Bibliothèque nationale de Paris. I am grateful to Catherine Massip and her staff for allowing me to view this microfilm.

35. While Lorédan may indeed be desperate and ‘sad unto death’ (triste à mourir) – a phrase which, at least for me, inevitably brings to mind Kierkegaard’s Sickness unto Death (1849), a treatise on melancholy and despair – I would nevertheless caution against concluding that the Épilogue is simply a portrait of his mind at work. We must remember, first of all, that Ravel drew up the ballet libretto for Adélaïde well after the Valses had been composed, premiered and published for solo piano. In writing the libretto, Ravel undoubtedly intended Lorédan to personify the melancholic aspects of the Valses. Nonetheless, his character seems to me to be irredeemably shallow: as a stock character (the Romantic monomaniac) in a stock situation (a love triangle), he can hardly be matched with the psychological depths and sophistication indicated by the Épilogue. For recent scholarship on the monomaniac in nineteenth-century European music and literature, see Brittan (2006).

36. In addition to the heaved sigh in the Pantomime, other examples – all of which help to give Ravel’s oeuvre a melancholic tint – can be found in the Menuet antique, ‘D’anne jouant de l’espinette’, the Sonatine (the main cyclical motive), ‘Oiseaux tristes’, ‘Le Gibet’, L’Heure espagnole and L’Enfant et les sortilèges (the Mother motive). The two reprises under comparison here also differ in that the one in the Épilogue is both a reprise of melancholy and a melancholic reprise, whereas the one in the Pantomime is apparently only a melancholic reprise.

37. On this point, compare these comments by Mark Muldoon: ‘Throughout all Bergson’s works, duration is consistently described through musical metaphors. The musical metaphor of duration is an apt one since it adequately points to the complete non-spatiality of duration and excludes it from ever being employed for any form of physical measurement’ (Muldoon 2006, p. 83).

38. ‘Il y aurait donc enfin deux moi différents, dont l’un serait comme la projection extérieure de l’autre, sa représentation spatiale et pour ainsi dire sociale. Nous atteignons le premier par une réflexion approfondie, qui nous fait saisir nos états internes comme des êtres vivants, sans cesse en voie de formation, comme des états réfractaires à la mesure, qui se pénètrent les uns les autres, et dont la succession dans la durée n’a rien de commun avec une juxtaposition dans l’espace homogène. Mais les moments où nous nous ressaisissons ainsi nous-mêmes sont rares, et c’est pourquoi nous sommes rarement libres. La plupart du temps, nous vivons extérieurement à nous-mêmes, nous n’apercevrons de notre moi que son fantôme décoloré, ombre que la pure durée projette dans l’espace homogène. Notre existence se déroule donc dans l’espace plutôt que dans le temps: nous vivons pour le
monde extérieur plutôt que pour nous; nous parlons plutôt que nous ne pensons; nous “sommes agis” plutôt que nous n’agissons nous-mêmes. Agir librement, c’est reprendre possession de soi, c’est se replacer dans la pure durée’ (Bergson 2001, p. 151). The Essai is often referred to in English as Time and Free Will, the title given to it in 1910 by its first English translator, Frank L. Pogson.

39. The critique in Bergson’s Essai of ‘spatialised time’ for its homogenisation, abstraction and quantification of an essentially heterogeneous, concrete and qualitative experience could provide a promising point of departure for developing a larger critical perspective on the epistemological tendencies of music analysis.

40. ‘Le temps de la rêveuse nostalgie et de la flânerie poétique n’est plus cloisonné par les tâches, ni articulé en segments successifs: c’est un temps sans horaire ni calendrier, un temps diffus et inverbré dont la métronomie entre en fusion et perd tout rigueur’ (Jankélévitch 1974, p. 212).

41. ‘L’expérience du passé, qui est, après tout, une expérience présente, fait partie elle-même de la futurition; notre effort pour susciter “à nouveau” l’apparition d’une expérience ancienne aboutit en fait à une expérience nouvelle’ (Jankélévitch 1974, p. 34).

42. Nora’s devotion to collective memory and deploration of the historical turn towards what he calls ‘psychological memory’ – memory as a property of the private individual rather than the community or the nation – aligns him strongly with the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, author of the paradigm-shifting consideration of collective memory, Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire, first published in 1925 (see Halbwachs 1994). Like Halbwachs, Nora finds the interiorisation of memory in Bergson and others to be pernicious; like Bergson, he diagnoses modern society as alienated from itself, to which the melancholic epistemology of the lieu de mémoire is testament. Since the felicitous moment of Bergsonian durée in P5 is short-lived and relatively anomalous within the otherwise melancholic Épilogue, it is not as problematic to elucidate it by simultaneous reference to Bergson and Nora as, at first glance, it might seem to a reader well versed in memory studies.

43. Jankélévitch’s notion of musical ‘charm’ might provide an aesthetic supplement to Nora’s site of memory: ‘The charm is labile and fragile, and our presentiments of its obsolescence lend poetic melancholia to the state of grace it has engendered’ (Jankélévitch 2003, p. 120).

44. Fischer seems to be thinking along similar lines in describing the clarinet of the Waltz II quotation as having a ‘timbre nostalgique’ (Fischer 2005, p. 125).

45. ‘Ravel dit adieu à la valse comme il a dit adieu à la sérenade, au menuet, à la pavane, à tout l’arsenal des danses classiques devenus symboles sonores de notre civilisation’ (Marnat 1986, p. 299).

46. Mawer also associates II with VIII: ‘Its melodic material resembles strongly that used in waltz II for Lorédan’s entrance, and at its more intense presentation’ (Mawer 2006, p. 135). If we combine this observation with another – namely, that Waltz VII recalls Waltz I through its cadential rhythms – a double reprise is revealed: the first two waltzes recur in the last two, which is to say that Ravel bookends the Valses with two audibly related pairings of ‘noble’ (I and VII) and ‘sentimental’ (II and VIII) waltzes.
One of the anonymous reviewers of this article has also suggested that Ravel’s decision to quote the reprise of Waltz II at the end of the Épilogue may have been influenced by the tonic sonority it features. By drawing on and alluding to various conventions of tonal closure (including the tonicisation of the subdominant in codas through an applied dominant and the Picardy third), the major ninth chord on G helps to announce in both waltzes that the end of the piece is in sight.


A slightly augmented context will help to situate this phrase: ‘What an abyss of uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is at the same time the dark region through which it must go seeking and where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not yet exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day’ (Proust 1981, p. 49).

See for example Terdiman (1993), p. 44. It is also interesting to compare our analysis of memory in the Épilogue with this comment: ‘The process of memory carries an uncanny danger, which emerges in the paradigm of dispossession .... [F]or the dispossessed, memory stages not recovery but deficiency. Its representations make an absence present. Or rather, memory figures the inauthenticity of presentness, the traumatic persistence of an irreversible experience of loss. This is history under the sign of disaster’ (Terdiman 1993, p. 108).

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ABSTRACT

When conceived as the presence of the past, memory can be said to pervade the music of Maurice Ravel. The number and range of these acts of musical memory – including pieces modelled on the medieval ballade, the Renaissance chanson, the Baroque tombeau, the Classical sonatine and the Romantic poème, among others – seem at first glance to testify to an uncomplicated relation between past and present which, upon closer review, is revealed to be problematic. One of the most complex and captivating artistic testaments to what Andreas Huyssen has called ‘twilight memory’ – not only in Ravel’s music, but in Western modernism.
as a whole – is the eighth and final waltz of his piano suite *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911). In this waltz, which Ravel entitled ‘Épilogue’, the hope of making the past present is reborn with each of its numerous thematic recollections, only to be dashed repeatedly by the melancholy knowledge of its impossibility. In the present study, affinities between the Épilogue’s musical behaviours and philosophical accounts of memory by Bergson, Jankélévitch and Nora are explored, along with the compositional precedents established by Beethoven, Schumann, Debussy and others.