Berlioz’s *Les nuits d’été*: Masterful Orchestration as a Vehicle for Text Expression

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Prerequisite for Honors in Music

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I thought I saw heaven open,
a heaven of love and chaste delight,
a thousand times purer and more beautiful
than the one I had so often been told about.
Such is the magic power of true expression,
the incomparable beauty of melody
that comes from the heart!

Berlioz
Acknowledgments

This is the culmination of a truly incredible thesis experience. There are many people who have contributed to it and made it the life-changing experience it has been. I would like to thank Professor Bhogal for being such a supportive advisor. I was so blessed to have an advisor who truly wanted my thesis experience to be the best experience it could be for me. Thank you for believing in me, for being so patient, and for opening my eyes to my own capabilities as a student and scholar of music.

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My gratitude also goes to Jenny Tang, who taught me how to look at a song and reveal the wonders that the composer worked into the accompaniment. I would like to thank Music Librarian Pamela Bristah for her research advice, and for helping me navigate the labyrinth of scores of *Les nuits d’été*. Thank you to Professors Fontijn and Keane for serving on my thesis committee. Professor Fontijn, I so admire your accomplishments as a musicologist. Professor Keane, you are the most fair and just person I know, and I can’t tell you how much I admire and appreciate that. Thank you both for giving of your time and yourselves!

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Chapter I: Introduction to Les nuits d’été

Introduction to Berlioz

Berlioz’s Musical Beginnings

Louis-Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) was born in La Côte-Saint-André in the département of Isère, France. He was the eldest child born to Marie Antoinette and Louis-Joseph Berlioz. Although his parents were not professional musicians, Berlioz was naturally drawn to music, and would eventually dedicate his life to it.

In his Memoirs, Berlioz heralded his First Communion ceremony in 1815 as his first musical experience. The choir broke into hymn as he approached the altar, and twelve-year-old Berlioz (2002b, 6) felt he “saw heaven open” at the melody. During the three years following his First Communion, Berlioz would study the flageolet, the flute, and the guitar, respectively. The first two he studied with his father, who quickly recognized his son’s musical talents and humbly retired as his teacher. The professional musician Imbert was hired to teach Berlioz the flute. During his studies with Imbert, Berlioz stumbled upon various treatises on harmony. He began composing small chamber works to be performed by himself, amateurs, and his teacher. Imbert moved away and was replaced by F.-X. Dorant, with whom Berlioz took guitar lessons. Dorant ended the lessons within a few months of their starting, saying that it would be ridiculous for the lessons to continue when the pupil could already play as well as the teacher. In response to his mastering of these three instruments within three short years, Berlioz (15) later asked, “Can anyone fail to recognize in this… the hand of Nature urging me towards the grandest orchestral effects and the Michelangelesque in music?”
Berlioz’s father was a prominent doctor, and his son was expected to follow in his footsteps. Although young Berlioz felt a strong distaste for the profession (“I knew for sure no power on Earth was going to make me a doctor,” [Berlioz 2002b, 17]) he was not yet ready to admit the profession he truly dreamed of entering. So in 1819 at age fifteen, Berlioz began his medical studies with his father. That same year he wrote to Paris publishers—none of whom seem to have responded favorably—with the intent to publish a sextet and some songs with piano accompaniment (Macdonald 2013). Seeing his son’s passion for music, Berlioz’s father decided to direct his enthusiasm towards his studies in medicine. He promised Berlioz a state-of-the-art flute should he commit himself to his studies and be sent to Lyons for further medical education. Berlioz felt he was being asked to “forsake the highest heaven for the wretchedest regions of earth,” (Berlioz 2002b, 18) but he was not yet ready to break away from his father’s plans. After finishing his studies in Lyons in 1821, he was sent to Paris to complete his medical education.

It was in Paris that Berlioz would encounter his first dead corpse. When he set his sights on the cadaver, he jumped out the window of the dissecting room and ran home. (This is perhaps one of the more humorous tales of a musician whose parents tried to force him to become a doctor.) Berlioz was resilient; this minor setback would not force him to forsake the education he promised his father he would pursue. Time would tell that only his inclination towards music would be strong enough to make him reject a path in medicine. Shortly after the dissecting room incident, Berlioz saw Antonio Salieri’s Les Danaïdes at the Paris Opéra. He then began attending the opera frequently, and soon learned that the library of the Paris Conservatoire was open to the public. Admittance to this “sanctuary” was the “death blow” (Berlioz 2002b, 23) to his medical career. He wrote to his father of his
determination to be a musician. His choice ignited a heated debate with his family that would last for decades.

In 1822, Berlioz was introduced to the Conservatoire composition teacher Jean-François Le Sueur\(^1\) by one of the students he met at the Conservatoire library. Berlioz began studying composition privately with Le Sueur. In that same year he would be successful in publishing a few of his compositions. Within the next few years he enrolled in Le Sueur’s composition and Anton Reicha’s\(^2\) counterpoint classes at the Conservatoire. Berlioz (2002b, 17) dedicated himself to a life of music; no curse from his mother or rescinding of allowance by his father could convince him that anything “could be finer… [than] to be able to live for such an art, [which] must be a supreme happiness.”

The Man and His Music

Belgian composer Cesar Franck said that Berlioz’s entire output is made up of masterpieces (Barzun 2014). In accordance with Berlioz’s works’ individual mastery, it is difficult for one to summarize his musical output and accomplishments. Berlioz scholar Julian Rushton emphasized the “extreme degree to which [Berlioz’s] works resist categorization.” They cannot clearly be grouped into style periods, as those of J.S. Bach. Nor can they be analyzed as the development of the composer’s musical language; “any change of manner resulted from the choice of subject” (Rushton 1983, 11). Not even genre can be used to categorize his works, as he often mixed genres (e.g. the symphony *Roméo et Juliette*, which tends toward the operatic). This gives his performers an even greater responsibility to

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2 Anton Reicha (1730-1836) was a composer, flautist, and experimentalist who theorized about quarter-tones. His wind quintets are still played today. His other pupils included Liszt, Gounod, and Franck. (Berlioz 2002, 614)
interpret his music’s individual genius and do it justice in performance. This goal has been central in my study of *Les nuits d’été*; each of the six songs is distinct from the others in structure, style and spirit, and each is incredible in its own unique way. It is a collection in which each song feels more perfect than the next.

Narratives of western music history often dwell on Hector Berlioz’s lack of academic pedigree in music. Most textbooks emphasize the fact that he was ‘self-taught.’ This can be a misleading label. Firstly, because throughout his life, Berlioz was curious about music; he made a point of engaging with and learning from musicians around him. Secondly, because the label ‘self taught’ was often interchanged with ‘untrained,’ which Berlioz was certainly not. Indeed, over the decades since his death, Berlioz’s reputation has developed into that of a caricature of the man; he is thought to have worked without concrete knowledge of technique, and to only have “composed in a kind of blind fury” (Macdonald 2013) when he was struck by inspiration. Macdonald (2013) asserts that in fact, inspiration and technique played equally important roles in Berlioz’s music. It is true that Berlioz did not benefit from the rigors of an intense conservatory education, but there is a limit to what traits of Berlioz’s music might be accredited to a lack of schooling. His style as a composer was nurtured through his own insatiable aural observation and study of other composers’ writings, as well as the instruction he persistently sought out. His style was decisive and his own, and in this sense he was the quintessential Romantic composer. If one needs proof that he was technically skilled, one need look no further than his *Treatise on Orchestration* and the influence it has had on subsequent generations to see that he was a musician of immense skill. Therefore, the implications of the labels “self-taught” and “inspired” should not mislead
one studying Berlioz to believe he was an eccentric composer without any formal knowledge of his craft.

Berlioz’s compositions are defined by a naturalness of melody, phrasing, structure, and harmony that were unconventional and innovative for Romantic music. Hugh Macdonald (2013) explains how Berlioz “spoke naturally in a flexible musical prose” by which phrases could expand, contract, and be whatever length best suited their purpose. For most listeners, Berlioz’s music is the kind that needs to be heard multiple times before the listener begins to understand it. Berlioz differed from his contemporaries in that his use of harmony is primarily expressive rather than functional (Macdonald 2013). This is a quality that could either be perceived as lack of training, or understood as Berlioz’s style. Macdonald described the songs of *Les nuits d’été* as showing “a complete maturity of style… [Berlioz] finds drama and expression in each poem; and his command of harmony is now completely assured, indeed there are few works where one may more profitably study his idiosyncratic methods and their close dependence on verbal expression.” (Macdonald, Berlioz, 125)

During his career as a musician Berlioz composed, conducted, wrote music criticism, and authored books, essays, and articles, as well as his *Memoirs*. His writings reinforce that he was a good musician, as well as an intelligent man with a sense of humor, and an effective communicator who was aware of his place in history. Most influential among his published works is his *Grand Traité d’instrumentation et d’orchestration modernes / Treatise on Instrumentation and Orchestration* (1844, revised 1856). Berlioz is considered by many composers to be one of the greatest orchestrators of all time, and his *Treatise* is highly valued for its visionary approach to instrumentation (Berlioz 2002). Also noteworthy is the chapter on conducting, which was one of the first of its kind.
History of Les nuits d’été

Context of Berlioz’s Life and Oeuvre

A discussion of Berlioz’s output allows a musician to better understand Berlioz’s language as a composer and the function of Les nuits d’été in his oeuvre. Berlioz first fell in love with music through song, and song was one of the first genres he dabbled in as a young composer. From his output it is clear that composing for the instrument of the voice and the instrument of the orchestra were of particular interest to him. The majority of his works involve voice and orchestra, and many songs that he initially composed for voice and piano, he later orchestrated.

Berlioz composed six operas, one of which has been lost. Opera was not only the chosen language of many of the musicians he most admired, but also the primary mode for making money and a name for oneself in early nineteenth-century Paris. According to Berlioz scholar Hugh Macdonald (2013), Berlioz always had an opera on his mind, and began composing many more than the five that exist today. It was for one of these unfinished operas, Erigone, that it is believed he originally wrote Les nuits d’été’s fourth song, “Absence.” Berlioz composed dozens of choral works, fourteen works for voice and orchestra (including the six songs of Les nuits d’été), and over thirty songs for voice and piano (including the six songs of Les nuits d’été). Inspired by Beethoven, Berlioz composed four symphonies that would not much resemble Beethoven’s. Berlioz transformed the symphony into a genre closely linked with other genres. His first symphony Symphonie fantastique (1830) is a five-movement personal-narrative “Episode in an Artist’s Life,”

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3 Among them, Gluck and his teacher Le Sueur (Macdonald 2013).
which uses orchestral techniques traditionally associated with opera. His second symphony *Harold en Italie* (1834) is written in the guise of a violin concerto where the viola represents the protagonist, Harold. His third symphony *Roméo et Juliette* (1839) is sub-titled “symphonie dramatique” and is the most operatic of his symphonies. The fourth *Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale* (1840) is an occasional piece for solemn public ceremony.

In addition to his songs and symphonies, he wrote a handful of other orchestral and miscellaneous works.

Berlioz composed *Les nuits d’été* in 1840 and published it in 1841. Although at thirty-seven years old, he was an experienced composer who enjoyed fame around Europe, he did not have as much financial success as he needed to support himself, his wife, and his son. By this point, he had already won a Prix de Rome, composed all four of his symphonies, and had undertaken an extensive career as a journalist and critic. In one year he would embark on his German tour and begin an affair with Marie Recio. In two years he would begin to write his *Treatise on Orchestration*. Below is a selected chronology of *Les nuits d’été* in the context of Berlioz’s other most famous works, and his most significant life events.

1828 – Second prize in Prix de Rome (*Herminie*); introduced to Harriet Smithson
1830 – *Symphonie fantastique*, Op. 14
1822 – Marries Harriet Smithson
1834 – *Harold en Italie*, Op. 16; birth of son Louis Berlioz
1834-37 – *Benvenuto Cellini*
1839 – *Roméo et Juliette*, Op. 17
1844 – Separates from Harriet
1848 – Begins his *Memoirs*
1854 – *L’enfance du Christ*, Op. 25; Harriet dies; Berlioz marries Marie; Completes *Memoirs*
1855 – Publishes *L’art du chef d’orchestre*
**1856 – *Les Nuits Dété for orchestra and piano-voice reduction***
1856 – 1858 – *Les Troyens*
1859 – Publishes *Les Grotesques de la musique*
1862 – Death of Marie; Publishes *A Travers Chants*
1867 – Death of Louis Berlioz
1869 – Dies March 8; buried March 11 in Montmartre Cemetery

**Piano-Vocal**

Why did Berlioz compose *Les nuits d’été*? Since Berlioz did not reveal his motivations in any of his writings or correspondence, one may presume that he was interested in poetry by Théophile Gautier and wanted to set specific poems to music. One may wonder whether his choice of poems projected a commentary on his own life at the time of the cycle’s composition (Kemp 1975, XI); from his *Memoirs* we know that he was not getting along with his wife, Harriet Smithson and was taking up with Marie Recio (1814-1862) at the time. Without any substantial evidence to suggest that the songs bore connection to Berlioz’s life, however, it is best to exercise caution. Five of the six songs were scored for mezzo-soprano or tenor and piano, while the fifth, “Au Cimetiere,” was scored for tenor and piano.

The composition of *Les nuits d’été* probably began in 1840, and was completed in September 1841. Berlioz does not discuss the origins of the songs in his *Memoirs* or in his correspondence, and the original autograph manuscripts are not dated. As a result, the exact dates of composition are not known (Bloom 1992, 82). The start date of 1840 was determined with the following information. The texts Berlioz set were taken from a collection of poetry by Gautier that was published in 1838. Therefore, the start date must be sometime between 1838 and 1841, the respective dates of the publications of the poetry and the music (Kemp 1975, XI). “Absence” and “Le spectre de la rose” were listed in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* on November 5, 1840, in a program for a concert to be given on
November 8, 1840. However, it is clear from reviews in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* and the magazine *L’Artiste*, both of which exhausted the concert’s program, that the projected performance by tenor Wartel and pianist Collignon did not take place (Bloom 1992, 82). The fact that the songs were projected for performance three days after the announcement of the program suggests that they were indeed composed by that time, if not rehearsed and ready for performance.

It might be argued that Berlioz had not composed the songs yet and that they were listed on the program in error. But there is one final piece of evidence to suggest that Berlioz had already begun writing a set of songs, which would later become *Les nuits d’été*. An autograph fair copy of “Villanelle,” housed in Darmstadt in the Hessische Landesbibliothek is signed and dated “Paris, 23 mars 1840.” It would seem that this copy of the original autograph was made by Berlioz for publication in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, the journal in which it was published in November 1842. It is not likely that this date represents the day Berlioz copied out the score for publication, but rather that it was Berlioz’s best recollection of when he had written the song. Berlioz was not a composer who dated his scores, and when he dated retroactively he was often imprecise, but with the information we have it is probably accurate to say that Berlioz began working on the songs in 1840 (84).

We can comment on the date of completion of these songs with more confidence. The songs were published by Adolphe Catelin no later than August 1841, after being announced in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* on September 1, 1841. They were reviewed in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* in July 1841 by Berlioz’s pianist/composer friend Stephen Heller, but it is possible that he was working from an advanced edition of the score, or from
Berlioz’s autographs. Therefore, it is best to conclude that *Les nuits d’été* was published by September 1841 (Bloom, 85).

It is also interesting to note that the music of “Absence” seems to have been meant for inclusion in a projected opera. The uncompleted opera was titled *Erigone*, and was based on Book 5, “Terpsichore—Erigone” of Pierre-Simon Balance’s (1776-1847) book *Orphée* (1822). The libretto includes an air for its title character with the exact metric scheme, structure of refrain and verse, and opening verbal plea as “Absence.” Therefore, it can be assumed that Berlioz gave the librettist the music and text of the song to work from (NBE Vol 13, XI).

Numbering on the autographed manuscripts suggests that prior to the songs’ publication, changes were made in regards to their order (NBE Vol 15, XVI). Once the final order was decided upon, it would remain consistent over future editions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Autograph Manuscript Order</th>
<th>Publication Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Villanelle</em></td>
<td><em>Villanelle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Absence</em></td>
<td><em>Le Spectre de la rose</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Le spectre de la rose</em></td>
<td><em>Sur les lagunes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>L’île inconnue</em></td>
<td><em>Absence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Sur les lagunes</em></td>
<td><em>Au cimetière</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Au cimetière</em></td>
<td><em>L’île inconnue</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1 Manuscript and Publication Order

After its first publication by Catelin in 1841, the edition was reissued some time before 1843, when publication was taken over by Richault. In 1850, Richault published a second edition with some changes (NBE Vol 13, XIII). In these first and second editions, the songs were dedicated to Louise-Angélique Bertin (1805-1877).

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*Bertin was a poet and composer. She wrote the opera Notre-Dame de Paris (1836), the rehearsals of which Berlioz oversaw at the Opéra (NBE Vol 15 XVI).*
Absence was premiered by Madame Mortier de Fontaine at the Paris Conservatoire on April 24, 1842. This song was sung twice more during Berlioz’s lifetime, both times by Marie Recio, the first in Weimar on January 25, 1843 and the second in Leipzig on February 4, 1843. These are the only known performances of any of the piano-vocal versions that took place during Berlioz’s lifetime (NBE Vol 15 XVI).

Orchestral

The first of the songs to be orchestrated was “Absence,” of which there exist two autograph full scores. The second bears a message from the composer revealing that the song was orchestrated at Dresden on February 12, 1843, for M., (Marie Recio, the singer who premiered the orchestral song) and then recopied at Brunswick on March 12, 1843. Marie gave two of the three performances of the piano-vocal which took place earlier that same year, on February 4 at Leipzig and February 17 at Dresden (Kemp 1975, XII). The premiere of the orchestral version took place at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in a charity concert to which Berlioz had been invited to contribute by Mendelssohn. The performance took place on March 12 (1843), and it is known from his writings that Berlioz was pleased with both the orchestration and Marie’s performance. He notes with satisfaction in his memoirs that Mendelssohn approached him after the performance and complimented him on the entry of the double bass (XI). Which entry he was referring to is not known. (From my study of the score, I would postulate that he was either referring to the entrance at measure 11, 37, or 63. All are entrances that begin pianissimo but crescendo to mezzo forte or forte within a measure. It seems unlikely that Mendelssohn would have been referencing any other of the bass entrances, as the other entrances are relatively nondescript, and in rhythmic unison with the rest of the string section.) In his correspondence Berlioz wrote that the song was “ten
times more effective [in its orchestrated version] than on the piano” (Kemp 1975, XII). In the same text he also included a letter in which he reflected that the song was sung “really very well.” Despite his pleasure with Marie’s performance, it is clear from later versions of the score that he thought better than to dedicate the song to her in writing, as the two were engaging in a relationship that was not yet public (XI). The full score of “Absence” was first published around 1844 by Richault (XIII).

The second of the songs to be orchestrated was “Le Spectre de la rose”. The premiere took place on February 6, 1856, at Gotha. The circumstances suggest that Berlioz orchestrated this song in order to make use of Madame Falconi, a mezzo-soprano engaged at the court of Duke Ernst II of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. She sang at Berlioz’s London concert in July 1855, and this is the occasion that is most likely to have prompted Berlioz to orchestrate the second song and ask her to give its first performance. Berlioz probably completed the orchestration in late 1855 or January 1856 before she premiered the work in February. This song received two more performances: one by Madame Falconi at the Salle Herz in Paris on April 19, 1857, and the other by Emilie Widemann at Baden-Baden on August 17, 1857 (Kemp 1975, XII).

The other four songs of *Les nuits d’été* were orchestrated in March of 1856, thanks to the interest of Swiss music-publisher, Johann Rieter-Biedermann. In a letter dated May 23, 1856, Berlioz wrote that the orchestral arrangement of “Le Spectre de la rose” had “taken on so well that a German publisher asked me to orchestrate the other pieces in the collection, and bought them from me” (Kemp 1975, XII). Berlioz returned to Paris after the Gotha concert and immediately began work on the orchestrations. During this month he wrote to
Liszt, saying that he was working on orchestrating *Les nuits d'été*, and no more than four
weeks later, he sent his copy to the publisher on April 1, 1856.

When Berlioz published the piano-vocal version of *Les nuits d'été*, he dedicated the
set to Louise Angelique Bertin. When he orchestrated them, he gave each song its own
dedication. The recipients were singers who had sung for him during his trips to Germany
(Rumbold 2005, XVI). The new dedications were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication Order</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Dedicatee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Villanelle</td>
<td>Louise Wolf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Le Spectre de la rose</em></td>
<td>Anna Bockholtz-Falconi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Sur les lagunes: Lamento</em></td>
<td>Hans Feodor von Milde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Absence</td>
<td>Madeleine Kratoch-will-Nottès</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Au cimetière</em></td>
<td>Friedrich Caspari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>L’île inconnue</em></td>
<td>Rosa van Milde</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2 Orchestral Version’s Dedicatess (Rumbold 2005, XVI)

**Piano-Voice Reduction**

Rieter-Biedermann published the full score of *Les nuits d’été* in its entirety for the
first time in 1856. He simultaneously published a piano-voice reduction of the full score,
which was made by Berlioz himself. This reduction was later reprinted as No. 1-6 in the
*Collection de 32 [later 33] Mélodies* (1863) (Kemp 1975, XIII). Only three of the orchestral
reductions are included in the New Berlioz Edition—“Le spectre de la rose,” “Sur les
lagunes,” and “Au cimetière”—they can be found with their counterpart piano-voice songs in
Volume 15 of the New Berlioz Edition. An urtext edition of the orchestral reduction exists,
published by Bärenreiter, worked on by Douglas Woodfull-Harris, which contains all six
songs. Woodfull-Harris has the songs transposed in such a way that may all be sung by one
voice. One need only read the cover of this score to figure out what it is a score of; it says,
“Six melodies avec un petit orchestre,” and later says “Vocal Score”. It is rare to find a
performance score of Les nuits d’été that is so easy to decode in terms of its identity. Most require study of the scores and knowledge of the versions to understand which version of the score, or what combination of versions, they represent.

Interestingly, the version that is most often performed by singers and pianists today is a combination of the piano-voice and orchestral reduction versions. The definitive edition of the piano-voice score is the International Music Company edition, the cover and title page of which read, “For Voice and Piano.” Nowhere inside or out does the edition specify whether it is the original or the orchestral reduction version. Without further research, a singer might not realize that he or she is not singing the piano-voice original. This edition uses the key signatures of the 1840 version, but includes the eight-measure orchestral introduction to “Le Spectre de la Rose,” and even displays the dedications to the singers from the 1856 version. The original piano-voice version has all but fallen into obscurity; an urtext edition exists in the Hector Berlioz New Edition of the Complete Works, Volume 15, edited by Ian Rumbold and published in 2005 by Bärenreiter. One would only find it if they knew how to look for it; otherwise, they would assume the other scores, (IMC among them,) which are labeled “For Voice and Piano,” were the original composition for voice and piano.

Cycle or Collection?

There is much differing opinion amongst scholars as to whether Les nuits d’été was meant to be performed as a cycle, or whether it was simply a set of songs grouped and published together out of convenience. This can be an important consideration for the performer looking to interpret the work as accurately as possible. The orchestral version further complicates matters; while the original set could have been sung by one voice, easily allowing it to be considered a cycle; Macdonald (1991, 123) said, “originally all six songs
were for mezzo-soprano or tenor, suggesting performances of the set as a cycle.” The orchestral version underwent modulations and requires as few as two or as many as four voices to perform it. Kemp also understands the set as a cycle. He says that of Berlioz’s four collections of songs, this is the only one which can be considered a song cycle. His reasoning is that this collection was originally written for one voice throughout. Furthermore, it conveys a single narrative theme, a true sequence of songs that relate this theme, and a musical structure (particularly through tempo and key relationships) that backs up that narrative.\(^5\) Kemp also maintains that the orchestral version “undoubtedly” (XII) presents a coherent cycle, since many of the unifying features of the original publication remained unchanged, and because the new and less consequential key relationships are disguised by the changing of voices.

**Chapter II: The Text**

**Introduction to Théophile Gautier and *La Comédie de la Morte***

In preparation for an analysis of *Les nuits d’été*, it is important to have a solid understanding of the texts Berlioz chose to set, as well as a basic knowledge of the poet who authored them; together, these provide insight into the cycle and the narrative significance of the poems. With an understanding of the poet’s background and his intentions for his poetry, one may better understand the content of the texts. A deeper contextual understanding also informs an analysis of the music.

\(^5\) Macdonald (1991, 125) spoke to the narrative quality of the work, but contradicted what he wrote in Grove: “Though the set of six songs is not necessarily to be considered a cycle, the four songs of despair framed by two songs of hope make a satisfying and complete exploration of romantic love.”
Pierre-Jules-Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) made many contributions to nineteenth-century French literature, most notably as a poet and author of fiction. He also wrote plays, ballet libretti, and travel literature, and was an influential literary and art critic in Paris. In 1838 he published the collection of poems *La Comédie de la Morte* (1838) from which the texts of Berlioz’s *Les nuits d’été* are drawn. Gautier was twenty-seven-years-old when he published this collection, and only eight years into his career as a poet. The collection begins with “Portail” (“Portal”) and continues with the long poem from which the collection received its title, “La Comédie de la morte.” This poem ends with the closing text, “Fin de La Comédie de la Morte,” and is subsequently followed by fifty-six shorter poems. It is from this group of fifty-six poems that Berlioz extracted the six poems of *Les nuits d’été*.

For a musician performing background research on these texts in preparation for a performance, there are a few distinctions that are important to make. It is critical not to confuse the collection *La Comédie de la Morte* with the long poem of the same title. In discussions of *Les nuits d’été*, it is common for scholars to correctly describe the texts as being drawn from *La Comédie de la Morte*. Many do not make the distinction between the collection and the long poem, so one must not incorrectly conclude that the poems are extracts from the opening poem.

Furthermore, it should not be assumed that the poems were drawn from a collection on the topic of “the comedy of death.” By crafting a purposeful separation between the title work and the remainder of the collection, Gautier confirmed that the fifty-six poems outside of “La Comédia de la Morte” should not be interpreted in relation to this title; he inserted the text “Fin de La Comédia de la Morte” at the end of the long poem to maintain this
distinction. Therefore, we can conclude that the set of poems following “La Comédie de la Morte” should not be restricted to an analysis of the collection title’s theme.

Finally, the fifty-six poems should not be mistaken for a set. In the original publication from 1838, the group of fifty-six poems was not given a title. This indicates that they were intended for interpretation as stand-alone poems, which were grouped together solely for the purposes of publication. Potential confusion comes from the collection’s subsequent publication in 1845 as part of *Poésies complètes de Théophile Gautier*. Here, the poems were given the heading “Poésies diverses 1833-1838,” and the group has been referred to in scholarship on *Les nuits d’été* as the “Poésies diverses” ever since. Although it would not be inaccurate to refer to them in this manner, it would be incorrect to consider these poems a coherent set. The heading “Poésies diverses 1833-1838” was not intended to unite the poems, but to provide organization for the content of the two volumes of the poet’s complete works. In fact, the French publisher G. Charpentier gave the title “Poésies diverses” to most sets of miscellaneous poems contained within the volumes (e.g. “Poésies diverses 1838-1845.”) Therefore, *Les nuits d’été* should not be analyzed as Berlioz’s commentary on a narrative set of Gautier’s poems.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>Publication Title</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Resulting Reference</th>
<th>Potential Misconception for the six poems of <em>Les nuits d’été</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td><em>La Comédie de la Morte</em></td>
<td>To publish a new long poem, supplemented by shorter works written around the same time, some of which had been previously published in earlier forms.</td>
<td>“Portail”, “La Comédie de la Morte”, and fifty-six shorter poems</td>
<td>Extracts from “La Comédie de la Morte”</td>
<td>They were drawn from <em>La Comédie de la Morte</em>, or from a work on the theme of the comedy of death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td><em>Poésies complètes de Théophile Gautier</em></td>
<td>To organize and contain the poetic works of Gautier within one set of volumes.</td>
<td>Larger works displayed under their own titles, shorter works grouped with their contemporaries under headings “Poésies diverses”</td>
<td>Extracts from “Poésies diverses 1833-1838.”</td>
<td>They were drawn from a unified set “Poésies diverses 1833-1838.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Poem Publications and Potential Misconceptions
The Poems: Translation from Poetry to Song

Berlioz chose six poems from *La Comédie de la Morte* for *Les nuits d’été*. Four of the poems had appeared in print prior to being published in the 1838 collection. The earlier versions of these poems differed significantly from those published in 1838. The texts Berlioz set resemble the 1838 versions much more closely; thus, it can be concluded that this publication was his source for the texts (Kemp 1975). The table below displays the original titles and sequence of the six poems from *La Comédie de la Morte*. I also indicate any instances of prior publication and prior musical settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem Title, (Berlioz’s Title if different)</th>
<th>Publication Prior to 1838</th>
<th>Prior Musical Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le spectre de la rose</td>
<td>Appeared in the periodical <em>Don Quichotte</em> on May 7, 1837.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamento: La chanson du pêcheur, (Sur les lagunes)</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Written for Hippolyte Monpou, who set it as “Sur la mer” (Paris, 1837).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamento (Au cimetière)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcarolle (L’île inconnue)</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Written under the title “Le pays inconnu” for Allyre Bureau, who set it as “Mirage” in <em>Rameau d’or</em> (Paris, 1835).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villanelle rythmique (Villanelle)</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Written for Xavier Boisselot (1811-93) who published a setting of the first stanza for voice and piano. He titled it “Villanella” (Paris, 1837).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Previous Publications of the Poems of *Les nuits d’été* (Rumbold 2005, XVI)

Gautier was a friend and admirer of Berlioz, so he could have shared his knowledge of these earlier publications and settings with him. However, since Berlioz used the 1838 versions of the text, it seems that Berlioz was either unaware of earlier publications and musical settings, or that he was aware of them but favored the 1838 versions of the poems over the original versions.
For a performer studying text settings, it is especially interesting to examine instances where the composer decided to alter the poet’s text. These changes provide performers of the work with a glance into the composer’s mind. Changes were most likely made for reasons of musicality. Analyzing the changes and speculating on the reasons why the composer may have made them provides the performer with a deeper understanding of the composer’s vision for the work, and the effect he wanted it to have in performance. In this section, I will discuss the changes that Berlioz made to the titles and texts of the poems of Les nuits d’été, speculate as to why he made those changes and discuss their consequences for the music.

The Titles

In the New Berlioz Edition, Ian Kemp states that Berlioz altered some of Gautier’s titles out of necessity, since he wanted evocative titles, and ones that would prevent the songs from being confused with other settings of the same text (Kemp 1975, XI). The table below displays the poem titles and their respective song titles in the order in which they appear in Berlioz’s song cycle. Also shown are details of previous settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of appearance in Les nuits d’été</th>
<th>Gautier’s Poem Title</th>
<th>Berlioz’s Song Title</th>
<th>Title, Composer and Date of Previous Musical Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Villanelle rythmique</td>
<td>Villanelle</td>
<td>Villanella, Xavier Boisselot, 1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Le spectre de la rose</td>
<td>Le spectre de la rose</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lamento</td>
<td>Sur les lagunes Lamento</td>
<td>Sur la mer, Hippolyte Monpou, 1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Absence</td>
<td>Absence</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lamento Au cimetière</td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Barcarolle</td>
<td>L’île inconnue</td>
<td>Le pays inconnu, Allyre Bureau, 1835</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: Poem and Song Titles
It is clear from the table above that the claim that Berlioz may have altered titles in order to make his songs distinct from pre-existing versions by other composers is unfounded. In every instance that another setting existed, Berlioz’s title change brought his title closer to that of the one he allegedly worried about it being confused with, and therefore, this could not have been his motivation in changing titles. We may turn to the other suggestion made by Kemp in the New Berlioz Edition, which posits that Berlioz may have altered Gautier’s poem titles in order to create more evocative song titles. This is plausible, especially in the instances of the third, fifth, and sixth songs, all of which were originally titled based on a form or genre, and subsequently re-titled by Berlioz to evoke grand images of nature, the impermanence of human existence, and the impossibility of faithful love. It is also possible that Berlioz had unique reasons for each change, based on aesthetic considerations and other unknown motivations. In the absence of tangible evidence in his Memoirs or other writings, we can only speculate on these choices today.

The last title to be discussed is perhaps the most important of the group; the title of the collection, Les Nuits D’éte, was all Berlioz’s own. Kemp (1975, XVI) suggests that Berlioz may have been inspired by Donizetti’s collection Nuits D’été à Pausilippe, Alfred de Musset’s Les Nuits, or Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Kemp’s speculation ends here. The second of these suggestions is especially interesting because it brings Gautier into the picture. In Gautier’s 1830 publication, Poésies (Paris, 1830), the first poetry collection he ever published, Gautier includes a quote from Musset, “Allons la belle nuit d’été” as an epigraph. It is possible Berlioz owned this edition and was inspired by the epigraph of the poet’s first published collection, although it was not the collection from which he drew his song texts. Of course it is possible Berlioz was not inspired by anyone, and that he came up with the phrase himself.
Berlioz used the phrase “nuit d’été” in a concert review written in 1835; he described the music as “…cette délicieuse harmonie, pure, calme et sereine comme une belle nuit d’été” (Bloom 1992, 80). These last two suggestions, which relate specifically to the works of Berlioz and of Gautier, are particularly compelling. However, without word from Berlioz himself it is impossible to do more than speculate as to which, if any of these sources, was the inspiration for the cycle’s title.

The Texts

Berlioz did not only alter some of Gautier’s titles, but some of his texts, as well. Below are two versions of the six poems of Les nuits d’été. On the left are the poems as they appear in the 1838 first edition of Théophile Gautier’s La Comédie de la Morte. This was Berlioz’s source for the poetry. On the right are the poems as they appear in the Urtext edition of the scores from the Bärenreiter New Berlioz Edition of the Complete Works.6 Attention is called to Berlioz’s changes through the use of highlighting in his version of the text.7 The motivations for the changes will be speculated upon, and their repercussions for the music discussed. The final aspect of the discussion will regard false information that performers may run into in their research of this piece: changes to the text that are attributed to Berlioz, but which do not exist in the Urtext. These are probably editorial errors that have gone uncorrected and been passed around from one source to another.8 These will be gleaned from two sources that a performer is

6 Changes made in both the 1840 and 1856 publications are included. If a particular change was made only to one or the other this is pointed out. Otherwise, all changes were made in both of Berlioz’s settings of the text. There are instances when Berlioz left out a punctuation mark from the text when he originally set them in 1840, but added it back into the 1856 version. These instances are not noted, as they can be interpreted as oversights that were later corrected, or as choices that were undone, and therefore should not be carried into interpretation today.

7 Word changes are the focus of this section. Changes in accents and punctuation are included, but not highlighted or discussed.

8 Editors’ decisions to add or alter already present punctuation, both of which are abundant, will not be included, nor will editors’ exclusion of accents.
likely to rely on in preparation for a performance of this work: the standard performance edition of the version for Piano and Voice published by the International Music Company (IMC), and the go-to website for singers who are looking for poetry translations: recmusic.org.

Villanelle Rhythmique.

Quand viendra la saison nouvelle,
Quand auront disparu les froids,
Tous les deux, nous iron, ma belle,
Pour cueillir le muguet aux bois;
Sous nos pieds égrenant les perles,
Que l'on voit au matin trembler,
Nous iron écouter les merles
Siëfler.

Le printemps est venu, ma belle,
C'est le mois des amants bénit,
Et l'oiseau, satinant son aile,
Dit des vers au rebord du nid.
Oh! viens donc sur le banc de mousse,
Pour parler de nos beaux amours,
Et dis-moi de ta voix si douce:
Toujours!

Loin, bien loin, égarant nos courses,
Faisons fuir le lapin caché,
Et le daim au miroir des sources
Admirant son grand bois penché;
Puis, chez nous, tout joyeux, tout aises,
En panier, enlaçant nos doigts,
Revenons rapportant des fraises
Des bois.

The biggest change, but one that is not unusual for a composer to make, is the repetition of the penultimate line of each stanza. Composers setting texts often choose to repeat lines for emphasis. A study of the music reveals that this alteration was likely made in order to give the
composer enough phrases to create a distinct musical section out of the final lines of the stroph. It is during the final three lines of each stroph that the constant eighth-note pulse of the accompaniment stops, leaving the accompaniment quite bare and bringing the listener’s focus to the voice and meaning of the text. The repetition of the text gives the listener two chances to absorb the meaning of the conclusive statement, while feeling the pull of the final cadence that will come at the statement’s end.

Further textual changes in this song require a more detailed inspection, but are perhaps even more interesting than the common choice to repeat lines of text. Can one letter change the meaning of a line? Berlioz replaced “le” (the) with "ce” (this), making the statement “Oh! Come then to this mossy bank” sound more specific, or even as though the speaker is making the statement while standing on the mossy bank. The effect is more intimate. The next change involved a switch to a word with similar meaning. Though he did keep it the same in his original scoring, in his orchestral publication of 1856, Berlioz changed “joyeux” to “heureux”; they are synonyms, each translating to happy, and perhaps Berlioz made the change in order to make that climbing melodic line sound a little smoother, by taking out the “j” consonant and allowing an elision that rolls off the tongue in the phrase “tout heureux.”

In its republication, “Villanelle” often contains a false change. Berlioz is credited with changing “des” (of) to “ses” (its) in the line “Dit des vers au rebord du nid”; this text change is present in the IMC score and is directly credited to Berlioz on recmusic.org. However, this change is not present in either the piano-voice or the orchestral Urtext. Therefore, this is probably an editorial error that has been passed down by editors, performers and translators who do not check the Urtext score. This change does not effect the meaning of the sentence in a significant way. However, it is worth clarifying that it was not a change made by Berlioz, so that
musicians wishing to perform the pieces with historical accuracy may do so, and so that those studying the work in detail will not read into this change and think that Berlioz meant something by it.

The first change Berlioz makes in this poem is the repetition at the end of the first stanza, where he repeats the text, “Tu me promenas” / “You carried me.” He may have made this choice to emphasize the importance of this treatment for the rose. He may also have intended for the
repetition of the first half of the line to emphasize the arrival at the line’s conclusion, “tut le soir” / “all night long.” If one interprets Gautier’s poem as containing innuendo, this line may have been Gautier’s way of making clear that the woman was the object of a man’s affection for the entire evening. Berlioz may have wanted to emphasize this through his repetition of text. Finally, it is also possible that this choice was made for musical reasons rather than semantic ones. It is with this line that Berlioz concludes a musical section; perhaps he repeated text in order to elongate the first stanza and build tension before the cadence.

This song contains one of the most glorious moments in the entire cycle. The most noticeable change Berlioz makes in this poem is the repetition of text at the climax of the song, which occurs at the closing of the second stanza. This section translates to, “This perfume is my soul, And I come from paradise.” In his reading of Gautier’s poem, Berlioz must have felt that these lines were a point of revelation and arrival, because he used the first line of text as a moment of musical tension, and the second as the resolution of that tension and the most climactic moment of the entire song. The voice part’s peak register and dynamic, as well as the numerous crescendi, ascending melodic lines, and secondary dominants of this section define it as one of tension and climax. What makes his setting of this text spectacular is that he chooses to repeat the text, allowing himself more lines over which to develop the dynamic, melodic, and harmonic growth. Without textual repetition, these lines may have formed a particularly potent phrase; but with the repetition, these lines comprise their own memorable section of music, over which tension and its triumphant resolution are prolonged to a degree they could not have been otherwise. Berlioz lengthened the poet’s lines and made this section of music one of the most powerful in the entire cycle.
The next change Berlioz made is in the second line of the final stanza: “Pour avoir un trépas si beau…” / “For a death so beautiful, more than one would have given his life.” Berlioz changed the word “trépas” / “death” to “sort” / “fate.” Berlioz’s choice may have been made for semantic reasons: “fate” has a more positive connotation than “death,” though it can still refer to the same phenomenon. However, other lines of text clearly state that the rose suffered death at the hands of she who wore it; therefore, wanting to be ambiguous about the destiny of the rose was probably not Berlioz’s motivation. It is more likely that Berlioz made this change for phonetic reasons. This line is sung over accompaniment that is marked pianissimo. It is possible that the harsh consonants and bright vowel “é” of “trépas” did not suit the prominence of the line, and Berlioz substituted “sort” to make the line sound more graceful when sung. A third option is especially tempting to consider if one is interested in the “cycle vs. collection” debate; it is possible Berlioz made this choice to tie this line of text to the refrain (“Que mon sort et amer…”) of “Sur les lagunes.”

Interestingly, the final change Berlioz made to this text was not made until 1856. Berlioz kept Gautier’s line, “Car j’ai ta gorge pour tombeau” / “For I have thy throat as my tomb” in his 1840 version, but fifteen years later, he chose to change the line to, “Car sur ton sein j’ai mon tombeau,” / “For I have your breast as my tomb.” This line has very similar meaning to the original, but phonetically sounds quite different from the original line. This line of text undeniably has more flow. Musically, the line is sung over a diminuendo that ends with a pianissimo. The grace and beauty of the descending and increasingly soft phrase is brought out by the change in text, which makes the line sound more delicate, and compliments the meaning of the rose’s statement that it has its gentle and eternal rest on the woman’s breast.
For “Villanelle,” republication history has caused a text change to be falsely attributed to Berlioz. For “Le spectre de la rose,” a different type of false information is circulating. Though it comes from a non-academic source, it is worth noting in a performer’s study of this work, as it comes from a source that young performers often use without verifying its information. On recmusic.org, Berlioz is credited with making a change that does not actually represent a change from the original text. The web page incorrectly displays Gautier’s text as "Toute la nuit," and specifies that Berlioz changed that text to make it plural. That is not the case; Gautier’s was plural, and Berlioz made no changes to it. As a performer studying a work in depth, discovering errors like this reminds one of the importance of consulting Urtext editions and original poetry sources, if available, when interpreting a piece.

Lamento.
La chanson du pêcheur.

Ma belle amie est morte,
Je pleurerai toujours;
Sous la tombe elle emporte
Mon âme et mes amours.
Dans le ciel, sans m'attendre,
Elle s'en retourna;
L'ange qui l'emmena
Ne voulut pas me prendre.
Que mon sort est amer;
Ah, sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!

La blanche créature
Est couchée au cercueil;
Comme dans la nature
Tout me paraît en deuil!
La colombe oubliée,
Pleure et songe à l'absent,
Mon âme pleure et sent
Qu'elle est dépareillée.
Que mon sort est amer;
Ah, sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!

Sur les lagunes
Lamento

Ma belle amie est morte,
Je pleurerai toujours;
Sous la tombe elle emporte
Mon âme et mes amours.
Dans le ciel, sans m'attendre,
Elle s'en retourna;
L'ange qui l'emmena
Ne voulut pas me prendre.
Que mon sort est amer!
Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!

La blanche créature
Est couchée au cercueil;
Comme dans la nature
Tout me paraît en deuil!
La colombe oubliée,
Pleure, pleure et songe à l'absent,
Mon âme pleure et sent
Qu'elle est dépareillée.
Que mon sort est amer!
Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!
Sur moi la nuit immense
S’étend comme un linceul;
Je chante ma romance
Que le ciel entend seul.
Ah! comme elle était belle,
Et comme je l’aimais!
Je n’aimerai jamais
Une femme autant qu’elle.
Que mon sort est amer;
Ah, sans amour, s’en aller sur la mer!

This text underwent very little alteration by Berlioz. He chose to repeat the word “pleure” / “crying,” evoking the sound and feeling of crying through text painting: both are sung over a half step motif that becomes louder and only changes just before the end of the bar, imitating the irregular breathing pattern or hiccupping one may experience when crying. This effect would not have been achieved without repetition.

The next change comes at the end of the song. In a move that proves typical of this cycle, Berlioz extends the end of the final stanza to emphasize the conclusion of the narrative and the song. In this instance, it packs an especially powerful emotional punch. The two previous stanzas have ended with the same two lines of text set to the same music. The first line, “Que mon sort est amer!” / “How bitter is my fate!” is a heart-wrenching, rising and falling step-wise line, which is reminiscent of the ocean wave the lover is about to be carried away on. This is followed by the second line, which begins with a formatta over an “Ah,” and is completed by an evenly descending line, as though a gavel were falling and sealing the tragic fate of the speaker, for “sans amour, s’en aller sur la mer!” / “Ah! Without love, to go to the sea!” For its final iteration, Berlioz chooses to repeat the penultimate line of text a diminished fourth higher, ratcheting up the tension and the tragedy. Then, after what would have been the final descending line, he turns...
the line in on itself, and repeats the second half of it first ("S’en aller sur la mer" / “to go to the sea”) and follows it with two repetitions of the opening “Ah” as closing. Each “Ah” occurs over a decrescendo, and the second one begins pianissimo and includes a move up to a sixteenth note neighbor tone, as though the voice is wavering as it mourns its tragedy for the final time before it drifts off with the waves and is lost in the seascape.

Absence.
Absence

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée,
Comme une fleur loin du soleil;
La fleur de ma vie est fermée,
Loin de ton sourire vermeil.

Entre nos coeurs tant de distance;
Tant d'espace entre nos baisers.
O sort amer! ô dure absence!
O grands désirs inapaisés!

D'ici là-bas, que de campagnes.
Que de villes et de hameaux,
Que de vallons et de montagnes,
A lasser le pied des chevaux!

[repeat stanza 1]

This is the first time since “Villanelle” that we have seen a strictly strophic song in this cycle. Looking at the score, it may seem that the composer gave himself fewer decisions to make by choosing to set the text strophically. However, this song’s simplicity is deceptive. The performer learns this when he or she studies the poem that Berlioz set. When Berlioz came into contact with this poem, it was eight stanzas laid out on a page, equal in number of lines, syllables, and importance. Berlioz did not decide to take it easy on this song, and set it strophically so that he would have less music to compose. He had to have had true vision to
decide to set this text the way he did. First, Berlioz chose to use only the first three stanzas. Second, he made the decision to repeat the text and music of the first stanza, using that stanza as a refrain throughout such that the music conveys the form ABABA. Next, he gave each of the sections a distinct style and mood. The sixteen-measure refrain “A” section is Adagio, contains multiple formattas, and is built of drawn-out melodic lines. The ten-measure “B” section, in contrast, is “un poco più animato” and at one point, “con agitatione.”

Berlioz crafted a musical version of the poem that was quite different from the original. He was actively engaged with the text, and decided to compose an unhurried, repeating refrain that is occasionally interrupted by quick-moving, agitated moments. One would not assume when looking at the score or listening to this music that the “A” sections and “B” sections were originally equal stanzas, laid out evenly on the page by the poet, containing the same number of syllables as each other and wielding the same importance in the scheme of the poem. Berlioz crafted this song to tell a different story entirely; this story is firmly centered around the call for a lover to return.

The other textual change Berlioz makes is one word in the line “Entre nos coeurs tant de distance;” / “Between our hearts much distance;” which he changes to “Entre nos coeurs quelle distance;” / “What distance between our hearts.” His version takes what was a descriptive statement to the level of an exclamation or outcry that is parallel to the magnitude of the distance it is describing.

The republication of “Absence” is plagued by a prominent error. Gautier titled his poem “Absence,” and Berlioz titled both his 1841 and 1856 songs “Absence.” However, the International Music Company score calls the song, “L’Absence.” The presence of the article does not have much effect on the meaning of the title, but it is still important for performers to
acknowledge that these errors exist in their efforts to accurately present a composer’s work to the public. In this case, if a performer did not do research beyond their score, they would title the song incorrectly in their program.

Lamento.

Connaissez-vous la blanche tombe,
Où flotte avec un son plaintif
   L'ombre d'un if?
Sur l'if, une pâle colombe,
Triste et seule, au soleil couchant,
   Chante son chant.

Un air maladivement tendre,
A la fois charmant et fatal,
   Qui vous fait mal,
Et qu'on voudrait toujours entendre;
Un air, comme en soupirer aux cieux
   L'ange amoureux.

On dirait que l'âme éveillée
Pleure sous terre, à l'unisson
   De la chanson,
Et, du malheur d'être oubliée
Se plaint dans un roucoulement
   Bien doucement.

Sur les ailes de la musique
On sent lentement revenir
   Un souvenir;
Une ombre de forme angélique,
Passe dans un rayon tremblant,
   En voile blanc.

Les belles-de-nuit, demi-closes,
Jettent leur parfum faible et doux
   Autour de vous,
Et le fantôme aux molles poses
Murmure en vous tendant les bras:
   Tu reviendras!

Au cimetière

Connaissez-vous la blanche tombe,
Où flotte avec un son plaintif
   L'ombre d'un if?
Sur l'if, une pâle colombe,
Triste et seule, au soleil couchant,
   Chante son chant.

Un air maladivement tendre,
A la fois charmant et fatal,
   Qui vous fait mal,
Et qu'on voudrait toujours entendre;
Un air, comme en soupirer aux cieux
   L'ange amoureux.

On dirait que l'âme éveillée
Pleure sous terre, à l'unisson
   De la chanson,
Et, du malheur d'être oubliée
Se plaint dans un roucoulement
   Bien doucement.

Sur les ailes de la musique
On sent lentement revenir
   Un souvenir;
Une ombre, une forme angélique,
Passe dans un rayon tremblant,
   Passe, passe dans un rayon tremblant
   En voile blanc.

Les belles-de-nuit, demi-closes,
Jettent leur parfum faible et doux
   Autour de vous,
Et le fantôme aux molles poses
Murmure en vous tendant les bras:
   Tu reviendras!
Oh! jamais plus, près de la tombe
Je n’irai, quand descend le soir
Au manteau noir,
Ecouter la pâle colombe
Chanter sur la branche de l’if,
Son chant plaintif!

Oh! jamais plus, près de la tombe
Je n’irai, quand descend le soir
Au manteau noir,
Ecouter la pâle colombe
Chanter, sur la pointe de l’if,
Son chant plaintif!

Berlioz only makes a few changes to the text of this song. He changes the line “Une ombre de forme angelique” / “A shadow of angelic form” to “Une ombre, une forme angelique” / “A shadow, an angelic form.” He may have wanted to create parallelism in the meaning and sound of the line, or to increase the line by one syllable. His next change is to repeat the very next line: “Passe, passe dans un rayon tremblant,” / “Passes, passes in a trembling light.” He repeats the word “passes” with exactly the same stepwise melodic line and identical accompaniment. This is not an echo, as can be seen with Berlioz’s use of repetition in some of the previous songs, but an equal repetition that text paints the motion of passing. His final change in this song is the word “branche” / “branch” to “pointe”, which refers to the point of the branch. It is a similar but slightly different meaning, with a very different sound.

Barcarolle.

Dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler!

L’aviron est d’ivoire,
Le pavillon de moire,
Le gouvernail d’or fin;
J’ai pour lest une orange,
Pour voile une aile d’ange,
Pour mousse un séraphin.

L’île inconnue

Dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile enfle son aile,
La brise va souffler!

L’aviron est d’ivoire,
Le pavillon de moire,
Le gouvernail d’or fin;
J’ai pour lest une orange,
Pour voile une aile d’ange,
Pour mousse un séraphin.
Pour mousse un séraphin.

Dites, la jeune belle!
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler!

Est-ce dans la Baltique,
Sur la mer Pacifique,
Dans l'île de Java?
Ou bien dans la Norvége,
Cueillir la fleur de neige,
Ou la fleur d'Angsoka?

Dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile ouvre son aile,
La brise va souffler!

-- Menez-moi, dit la belle,
À la rive fidèle
Où l'on aime toujours.
-- Cette rive, ma chère,
On ne la connaît guère

Au pays des amours.

Dites, dites, la jeune belle, dites
Où voulez-vous aller?

La voile enfle son aile,
La brise va souffler!

La voile enfle son aile,
La brise va souffler!

La voile enfle son aile,
La brise va souffler!

La brise va souffler!

La voile enfle son aile,
La brise va souffler!

La brise va souffler!

Où voulez-vous aller?
La brise va souffler!

La voile enfle son aile,
La brise va souffler!

La brise va souffler!

-- Menez-moi, dit la belle,
À la rive fidèle
Où l'on aime toujours.
-- Cette rive, ma chère,
On ne la connaît guère

Au pays des amours.

Où voulez-vous aller?
La brise va souffler!

The final song in the cycle contains the most text repetition. When the speaker is insisting, “Dites, dites…” (Tell me, tell me where you want to go), the speaker really does insist and repeats that word multiple times. When the speaker answers the young girl’s request by telling her it is impossible to fulfill, he insists on its impossibility by repeating his text several times. Berlioz especially repeats text at the ends of the stanzas; this song is one of the most
narrative of the cycle, as reflected in its very clear storyline and characters. At the important parts of the story, often at the end of stanzas, Berlioz lingers, drawing out the characters’ actions and conclusions so that the story is clear to the audience and there is time to absorb, understand, and appreciate what has taken place between the two characters, and what it symbolizes about the human race and the nature of love. When the text at the end of these stanzas is repeated, it is not repeated with the same music, but in music that approaches and completes a cadence.

There are three pieces of text that Berlioz changes in this song. The first is in a line from the repeated refrain, so this change permeates the song: “La voile ouvre son aile” / “The sail opens its wing” is changed to “La voile enfle son aile” / “The sail swells its wing.” Berlioz’s image is once again more specific and evocative, and sounds more graceful in the French language. The next word he changes is “Sur la mer Pacifique” (On the Pacific Ocean) to “Dans la mer Pacifique” (To the Pacific Ocean). He probably did this to create a parallel with the speaker’s next suggestion, which also begins with “Dans.” The final word change Berlioz makes is “Ou bien dans la Norwége,” (Or to Norway) to “Ou bien est-ce en Norwége,” (Or is it to Norway), which uses the same number of syllables to express the same question more specifically.

**Conclusion**

In this section we saw that Berlioz was not a composer who stuck religiously to the text in front of him; he felt comfortable changing certain words, repeating particular lines, and sometimes even creating refrains when the shape of the song called for it. We also noted particular errors that exist in the standard performance score and the popular online source for poetry translation. This discussion has proved that an in-depth study of text can be fruitful for a performer who aims to perform a work with accuracy. As in a game of telephone, one must
remove the confounding sources that separate the performer from the composer and poet, the original bearers of the message. Rather than blindly trust the score the publishers hand out, performers must seek out the original sources of the poetry and music in order to determine for certain what the composer wanted to achieve with the poet’s text.

Chapter III: Analysis of Music and Orchestration

In this section, I will discuss the piano and orchestral scores of *Les nuits d’été* and consider their respective strengths in telling the stories of Gautier’s poems. Berlioz scholar Hugh Macdonald (1991, 125) maintained that “most of the songs in *Les nuits d’été* profit greatly from their orchestral setting.” My goal is to determine whether the orchestral songs express the text more successfully than the piano songs, and whether Macdonald is correct. Hopefully, a close comparison of the two versions of *Les nuits d’été* will reveal how Berlioz earned his legendary status as a masterful orchestrator.

In order to compare these versions, I will need specific avenues of comparison. What about the orchestral version sets it apart from the piano version? The first characteristic is obvious: instrumentation. In both the piano and orchestral versions of the work, Berlioz was able to change key, melody, rhythm, and other aspects of the music to create distinct moods for each song. One thing he could not change in the piano version was timbre. In the orchestral version, he took advantage of the opportunity to change timbre and utilized this extra dimension to evoke the mood and environment of each song. No two songs in *Les nuits d’été* have matching instrumentation. I will examine his choice of instrumentation for each song and determine whether it enhances the story-telling capabilities of that song.
The second characteristic I will compare is frequency and effectiveness of text painting; while Berlioz used text painting often in the piano-voice version, he added many more instances in the orchestral version. He also carried over instances from the piano version into the orchestral version. It will prove fruitful to compare the effectiveness of these occurrences to determine how each version expresses the text.

“Villanelle”

Instrumentation and Orchestration

Instrumentation:
2 flutes
oboe
2 clarinets (A)
bassoon
mezzo-soprano or tenor
violin I
violin II
viola
cello
contrabasso

“Villanelle” has a distinct texture in both its piano and orchestral manifestations. This is the lightest of the six poems in mood; the speaker beckons his lover to join him for a walk in the forest as the vitality of springtime blossoms around them. Berlioz’s setting of the text reflects this youthful energy, and makes it the lightest in mood of the six songs. In his piano composition, Berlioz captured this spirit through a distinct musical texture within a strophic setting. The verses are accompanied by a constant chordal eighth-note pulse in the right hand, with occasional additions from the left hand that function like a bass line. During the final two lines of each stroph, the eighth-note pulse comes to a halt and the accompaniment is largely resting, except for eighth-note chords played by both hands on the downbeats. There is slight variation within this
texture, but this is the simplified framework within which Berlioz works. Berlioz carries this structure into the orchestral version of the song. The constant eighth-note chordal pulse is maintained by the woodwind section. The string section carries the responsibilities of the left hand of the piano, and as a result, is largely resting. This orchestration and its medium-high tessitura bring the light texture and mood of the piano song to a new sound world; this timbre is unique within this cycle, and creates a soundtrack for young lovers flitting through the woods without a care. To make the general mood of both versions express the text more specifically, Berlioz adds text painting. Much of this text painting is present in the original piano version, and is incorporated into the orchestral version in a way that amplifies its effect.

**Text Painting in the piano and orchestral versions of “Villanelle”**

The first example of text painting in “Villanelle” occurs at measure 10, where a descending bass line in the left hand of the piano follows the text, “Quand auront disparu les froids,” / “When the frosts have disappeared.” This descending line represents the melting of the frosts. This is the first expressive use of the left hand in this song (previously, the left hand has only played the root of the tonic chord on the downbeat of the first measure), and it comes at a time when the voice is either sustaining the final note of its phrase or resting. The sudden addition of the low register and its strategic placement allows for this line to capture the listener’s attention, making the text painting prominent. Berlioz retains this text painting in the orchestral version, giving the line to the cellos. In addition to being noticeable due to its low register and placement during the voice’s sustained note and rests, it also stands out for the listener as the first melodic line from a stringed instrument in the song. This line is brought out of the eighth-note woodwind chordal texture by the slurred, legato voice of the cello, making it even more prominent in the orchestral texture than it was in the piano texture.
A second example of text painting occurs during the instrumental interlude between the second and third verse. In the original piano-voice version, it occurs in the left hand of the piano. From measures 83-86, preceding the text, “Loin, bien loin, égarant nos courses,” / “Far, very far, we will stray from our path,” the left hand of the piano plays the main melody in the minor mode. As in the previous example, this occurs at a time when the voice is at rest and all attention is on the left hand melody, assuring its effectiveness. This melody is a bit of foreshadowing for the text that immediately follows, expressing the risk and uncertainty that accompany venturing from the path. Again, Berlioz carries this occurrence of text painting into the orchestral score, giving the line to the clarinet, cellos and bass. With the many timbres of the orchestra at his disposal, he takes this instance of text painting to a new level in the orchestral version. For the first time in the song, Berlioz shifts the eighth-note pulse from the winds to the upper strings. This is a real shift in timbre from the rest of the song, which has previously lived in a sound world made up almost entirely of an eighth-note pulse from the woodwinds. As the cellos and bass foreshadow “straying from the path” with their statement of the main melody in the minor mode, the rest of the orchestra accompanies them on that journey; the woodwinds (except for the clarinet) rest, and the first half of the verse (through measure 104) is accompanied by an eighth-note pulse from the string section. In the piano version, the piano accompaniment for the third verse looks much like that of the other verses; but in the orchestral version, Berlioz subverts expectation by inverting the roles of the woodwind and string sections, sonically “straying from the path” and text painting unfamiliar terrain. Berlioz takes the instance of text painting that he conceived for the piano version and enhances it in his orchestral version.

A third and final example of text painting in the original piano version occurs from measures 98-105, accompanying the text “Et le daim au miroir des sources admirant son grand
bois penché,” / “And the buck in the mirror of the springs admires its bent antlers.” This text begins at measure 97, and in measure 98 the left hand of the piano begins to echo the voice’s melody. The relationship of these melodies represents the reflective quality of water referred to in the poetry. Berlioz specified that this line should be played mezzo-forte and he accented the first three notes, again calling the listener’s attention to a melody that represents a particular aspect of the text. Berlioz retained the effect of this duet relationship in the orchestral version, giving the piano’s melody to the cello. The cello was the instrument with the timber most similar to the human voice. With the voice and cello in canon, this section represents reflection on a level beyond what it was able to represent from the voice and left hand of the piano. In the orchestral version, this duet represents reflection through the doubling of a melody as well as through the doubling of a timbre.

**Text Painting Unique to the Orchestral “Villanelle”**

There are also examples of text painting in “Villanelle” that are unique to the orchestral version. One example is the trill in the first violin at measure 61, which answers the text “Et l’oiseau satinant son aile, dit des vers au rebord du nid” / “And the bird smoothing its wings says a poem on the rim of its nest.” This trill, which represents birdsong, is not included in the original score for voice and piano, though it easily could have been. Either Berlioz considered it but decided it would not be effective in the piano texture, or came up with the idea while orchestrating the piece. The fact that he did include the trill in the orchestral reduction published simultaneously with the orchestral version suggests that the latter is the case.

A second example of text painting that Berlioz added in to his orchestral version occurs from measures 91-96 and accompanies the text, “Faisons fuir le lapin caché” / “Setting to flight the hidden rabbit.” Here, the clarinet plays a chromatically descending line of eighth-notes to
represent the fleeing rabbit. After the chromatic descent, the clarinet’s line continues with staccato eighth-notes oscillating between adjacent pitches. After three measures of this oscillation, the clarinet finishes its descent, but this time through movement in leaps. This text painting with the clarinet is fascinatingly specific: the rabbit begins running away, then panics and begins tripping over its own feet as it tries to decide which way to go, and then finally tears off into the distance, to safety. The bright sound of the clarinet is heard clearly above the voice and the string accompaniment, making this another noticeable example for listeners.

In “Villanelle,” we see Berlioz utilize both the timbre and the more varied capabilities of the orchestra (compared to that of the piano, a single instrument) to heighten the expressive elements of his song. Berlioz uses text painting even more frequently in the second song in the cycle, “Le spectre de la rose.”

“Le spectre de la rose”

In a letter he wrote in 1856, Berlioz said, “Of the Nuits d’été I recommend ‘Le spectre de la rose;’ I heard it for the first time in my last visit to Germany and was quite surprised by it” (Kemp 1975, XII).

Instrumentation and Orchestration

Instrumentation:
- 2 flutes
- oboe
- 2 clarinets (A)
- horns (E)
- harp
- contralto
- violin I
- violin II
- viola
- cello
- contrabasso
This instrumentation differs slightly from that of “Villanelle;” the bassoon is absent, and the horns and harp are added. The orchestral texture of this song provides a contrast to the previous song. The central role of the woodwind section in “Villanelle” evoked a youthful walk through the woods. For this song, Berlioz chose to give the string section the most prominent role, signifying to listeners that this song is a departure from the carefree mood of the previous setting.

The orchestral version most noticeably differs from the original piano version in two ways. The first is that it is transposed from D major to B major. The change of key may have been made to accommodate Mme. Falconi, the contralto for whom he orchestrated this song. It is also possible that he felt the orchestral timbre of D major was not what he was looking for (Kemp 1975, XII). The string section plays a leading role in this song, and in his *Orchestration Treatise*, Berlioz (2002, 32) states that on the violin, the key of D major is “gay, noisy and rather vulgar.” This description certainly does not suit the gracefully flowing lines of this song. He describes the violin’s color in the key of B major as “noble, sonorous, radiant.” This better describes a rose that glows with love for a woman, making the theory that he changed keys to best use the violins a plausible one.

The second way in which the orchestral version most noticeably differs from the piano version is that it opens with eight orchestral introductory measures. Kemp (1975) suggests that the addition of the eight introductory bars was to help the song stand on its own for the first performance. At its premiere at the Gotha concert, it was sung prior to *L’enfance du Christ*. It is possible Berlioz composed the eight introductory measures to prevent the song from being drowned by the larger work.
Text Painting Unique to the orchestral “Le spectre de la rose”

Berlioz uses text painting even more frequently in this song than in the first. The most prominent examples are only to be found in the orchestral version. The first example comes with the first measure of text; a trill in the first violin introduces the line “Soulève ta paupière close” / “Open your close eyelid” in measure 9. A trill returns in measures 12 and 13 when “Qu’effleure un songe virginal” / “Which is gently brushed by a virginal dream” is sung. Two of these trills occur specifically on the words “soulève” / “open” and “songe” / “dream.” The first trill could represent the fluttering eyelids of a sleeper who is waking up. The second may represent the sound of a dream. In general, these trills both evoke the sound of a dreamworld, and physically represent the state of slipping in and out of sleep and hovering between worlds.

Berlioz uses trills again in the first and second violins for the lines, “Tu me pris encore emperlée, des pleurs d'argent de l'arrosoir” / “You took me still sparkling with silvery tears from watering.” He inserts these trills in between the singer’s phrases, so that they can clearly be heard as part of the story, representing the watering the rose experienced. Berlioz did not include any of these trills in the orchestral reduction, indicating that it was an effect he did not prioritize when arranging the orchestral version for piano, or that he did not think it was as effective in the texture of the piano.

Berlioz uses the harp strategically; it only plays for eight measures (42-49), accompanying the text, “Ce léger parfum est mon âme, Et j'arrive du paradis.” / “This light perfume is my soul, and I come from paradise.” Within these measures, the harp plays its most detailed passage during the text, “Et j’arrive du paradis.” The harp is clearly meant to evoke paradise. It is especially capable of doing so at this point because Berlioz chose not to use it
previously; when it enters, it creates a new and exotic timbre that immediately tells the listener that the music has travelled somewhere new and spectacular.

In comparing the piano-voice and orchestral versions of “Le spectre de la rose,” it is clear that the level of text painting in the orchestral version is simply not present in the piano-voice version. This disparity is even more drastic than the disparity we saw between the two versions of “Villanelle.”

“Sur les lagunes”

Instrumentation and Orchestration

Instrumentation:
2 flutes
2 clarinets (B flat)
2 bassoons
corno I (C)
corno II (F)
baritone or contralto or mezzo-soprano
violin I
violin II
viola
2 celli II
contrabasso

When orchestrated, this song was transposed from G minor to F minor. This may have been done to accommodate the voice of one of the song’s new dedicatees, baritone Feodor von Milde. In this song we again see Berlioz strategically choose his instruments to evoke the dark mood of the text. This is the darkest timbre we have heard yet, comprised mainly of voice, strings, horns, and bassoon that are all often in a low register (Johnson 1991).

Text Painting in the Orchestral Version
This song does not contain as many specific examples of text painting as the songs that precede it. While in previous songs, instruments were given lines that clearly stood out from the orchestral texture and interacted with the text, the orchestra in this song plays a much more secondary role in expressing the text. However, the orchestral accompaniment does play an important role in painting the setting of this song. As the singer mourns having to return to the sea without his love, the orchestra creates the waves upon which his sorrow rides. While the music is very similar in the piano version, the effect is much different in the orchestral version. This is because the ocean Berlioz creates is not one that flows on quick-moving piano lines, but one that is made up of longer notes slurred together, often with a sixteenth-note upbeat neighbor tone, evoking the rocking of a ship. This is a sound that is better created on sustaining instruments, especially in the string section of the orchestra. Especially effective are the closing eight measures. As the voice closes with its sorrowful, piano-pianississimo “Ah’s,” the cellos play sixteenth-notes that jump between the interval of a fifth at a pianississimo dynamic, giving the effect of the singer’s phrase becoming softer as he is being carried away by waves, farther and farther from the love he so longs to be near.

“Absence”

Instrumentation and Orchestration

Instrumentation:
2 flutes
oboé
2 clarinets (A)
corno I (A)
corno II (D)
mezzo-soprano or tenor
violin I
violin II
viola
This was the first of the songs of Les nuits d’été to be orchestrated. The singer who performed its premiere as well as two further performances (and to whom Berlioz considered dedicating it) would soon become his mistress and later, his wife: Marie Recio. Berlioz was very pleased with the orchestration and after the first performance he wrote in one of his letters that the song was “ten times more effective [in its orchestral version] than on the piano” (Kemp 1975, XII).

The mood of this song is not as dark as that of the previous song; the instruments play in a higher register and the bassoon is replaced with the clarinet. “Absence” does not contain the level of text painting that some of the previous songs have. The orchestration does play an important role, however. This song is in rondo form, and while the piano version and orchestral versions display variation between verses and refrains in the same places, the orchestral version displays more variation because Berlioz alters the timbre along with the music. As a result, the orchestra plays an important role in providing contrasts and variety (Johnson 1991). The refrain is orchestrated identically the first and second time it appears, with slight alteration for its third and final appearance. This is the same as the accompaniment in the piano version. It is the two verses which display the most variation in both the piano and orchestral versions, and this variation is made even more clear by the altering timbres of the orchestra.

“Au cimetiere”

Instrumentation and Orchestration

Instrumentation:
2 flutes
2 clarinets (A)
The instrumentation and orchestration of this song compliments the vocal melody. The voice is relatively static in pitch, often hovering around one note, although on a few occasions, big gestures grow out of simple ones. The instrumentation is simple to match the voice part, consisting of a small woodwind section and strings. The voice is often set against either the string or the woodwind section while the other section has rests, making for a bare texture. When the big gestures start to grow, the strings have rapid sixteenth-note figures that heighten the excitement and tension and help the gestures be realized.

**Text Painting in the Orchestral Version**

This song is similar to “Villanelle” and “Le spectre de la rose” in that it contains many examples of text painting. Most of them occur only in the orchestral version. Berlioz sets the mood of the cemetery in the orchestra on the very first bar, asking them to play *pianissimo* and “con sordino,” or muted. The winds have their first entrance at measure thirteen, where they mimic the “son plaintif”, or the sound of the yew in the wind. In measure twenty-eight, in response to the text, “chante son chant” / “[the dove] sings its song,” the flutes sing a *pianissimo* duet filled with longing. When the protagonist describes the song as “a la fois charmant et fatal, Qui vois fait mal,” / “at the same time charming and deadly; it will harm you,” the flutes repeat their melody with a crescendo, to quite a different effect.

Perhaps the most enchanting example of text painting in this song accompanies the phrase “un rayon tremblent” / “a trembling light” (Johnson 1991). At this point, the flutes and
clarinets have a dissonant ninth between them, while the upper strings play harmonics, creating a ghostly, ethereal, unsettling atmosphere. Berlioz even specifies that he wants one player on each part during this section; he knows exactly how to use this expressive technique delicately and effectively. These examples of text painting are so frequent in the orchestral version, but so absent in the piano version; the language of the orchestra is one Berlioz speaks with ease.

“L’Île inconnue”

Instrumentation and Orchestration

Instrumentation:
2 flutes
oboé
2 clarinets (B flat)
2 bassoons
corno I (F)
corno II (C)
corno III (B flat)
mezzo-soprano or tenor
violín I
violín II
viola
cello
contrabasso

The orchestration of the final song in the cycle harkens back to the first. The woodwind choir returns, even larger than before, and we are returned to the bright and light sound world of “Villanelle.” The instruments are used in the warm and vibrant parts of their registers, matching the timbre and energy of the first song (Johnson 1991).

Text Painting in the Orchestral Version

As in “Sur les lagunes,” the orchestra is used to more general effect in this song. Rather than provide many different examples of text painting, the orchestra provides the ocean upon
which the vocal line floats its melody. This is especially evident at the section which begins “Est-ce dans la Baltique…” During this section, the speaker suggests different exotic locations to which the pair may travel. Meanwhile, the strings rest in alternate measures, and when they play, they play a seven-note pattern of sixteenth notes followed by one eighth-note, which ascends and descends stepwise, returning to the pitch it started on. The strings are clearly playing the ocean waves. Adding to the sense of exoticism and the rocking of a ship as one travels to an exotic locale, the voice enters on the “and” of the downbeat, or on the “and” of the upbeat, creating syncopation with the winds who have their strong beats on the downbeats.

**Reflections on the Orchestral and Piano Versions**

Comparing the orchestral and piano-voice versions of *Les nuits d’été* revealed Berlioz’s masterful orchestration. If one considers the orchestra to be a wealth of resources, Berlioz was able to understand exactly what each of those resources offered him, both on their own and in conjunction with each other. He then utilized them for the purpose of expressing the text. He did not make choices lightly; he carefully considered which instruments he wanted for each piece, and what role he wanted each section of the orchestra to play in order to create a distinct sound world for each song. From there, he added specific instances of text painting, which both seamlessly blended into the rest of the orchestral texture and stood out enough to effectively communicate. The songs are special in both their forms, but this examination has revealed that the accompaniment more directly reflects the text in the orchestral version than in the original piano-voice version. Comparing the orchestral and piano-voice versions of *Les nuits d’été* has been an invaluable
study for me as I prepare to perform the work with the orchestral reduction accompaniment. As I rehearse with the orchestral reduction, I am hearing the orchestral version, and am able to respond to the nuances of the orchestral texture as I sing.

Conclusion

This study of *Les nuits d’été* offers an important contribution to Berlioz scholarship. *Les nuits d’été* is a work that is often performed, but not often written about or understood. My thesis provides a background for the work of poet and composer, and it is one of few studies to discuss the history of *Les nuits d’été* from a performer’s perspective. My thesis also aims to clarify confusion surrounding *Les nuits d’été* and the existence of multiple versions (piano-voice, orchestral, and orchestral reduction.) The clarification of these areas of confusion makes this a valuable study for both experienced and new singers alike. Finally, my thesis compares the orchestral version of *Les nuits d’été* with the original piano-voice version. This is a valuable discussion for performers and scholars, especially those interested in Berlioz’s techniques of orchestration. Although little has been written about his use of orchestra in this piece, I have discussed the aesthetic significance of these changes in comparison to the piano-voice version.

Future discussions of *Les nuits d’été* can expand on the topics of this thesis in three main ways. The first is in the area of music analysis. A harmonic analysis of the songs and a discussion of how the harmony relates to the text would reveal fascinating insights into the poems and Berlioz’s interpretation of them. This study would therefore also be very informative for a performer preparing to perform the songs. The discussion of harmony would provide a broad foundation for the study of instrumentation and text painting presented in this thesis.
The second topic that can be expanded upon is the similarities and differences between the piano-voice, orchestral, and orchestral reductions of each song. In some ways, they are all very similar; in most instances, the eye can quickly pick out where the left hand of the piano got spread amongst the string parts, and the right hand amongst the woodwinds. And in looking at the orchestral reduction of that same song, “Villanelle,” one sees that the orchestral reduction score is actually quite identical to the original piano-voice! The three versions of the song relate to each other in very obvious ways. In other songs, however, the similarities are more difficult to find; with “L’île inconnue,” for instance, the three versions of the score look completely different from each other. In this study, I have scratched the surface of examining the three versions and comparing them. It would be a very valuable study to dig further, and get a confident understanding of the transformation, big or small, that Les nuits d’été went through during its orchestration and reduction.

The relationship between these scores should be examined, especially because the scores in existence may lead performers to believe they are performing a version of the song that they are not. This leads me to the third discussion from this thesis that should be continued: the confusion surrounding various publications of the score. This discussion should be furthered for the sake of all future performers of this work. The labyrinth of publications is difficult to navigate because few scores state whether their pages contain the piano-voice score, the orchestral reduction, or a combination of the two. I hope that as more musicians become aware of this phenomenon, publishing companies will publish scores that are more clear.

There are a number of dependable scores and sources in existence, some of which were essential for this study of Les nuits d’été. Bärenreiter’s Hector Berlioz New Edition of the Complete Works (BNE) was the starting point for my research and analysis. Volumes thirteen
and fifteen provided Urtext editions of the piano-voice and orchestral scores, as well as background information on the piece gathered by Berlioz scholars. Bärenreiter also published an Urtext edition of the orchestral reduction. A digital copy of Gautier’s 1838 *La Comédie de la mort* also served as a primary source for my work. This digital copy was made available through Gallica.

Completing this thesis has changed the way I understand myself as a musician. As a result, it will inspire all of my future performances. I now understand the importance of using reliable sources when researching a piece, and realize just how much there is to be gleaned from close study of a work. Most importantly, I have a new understanding of myself as a player in the field of music, who can interact with sources and scholars around her in order to have a more dynamic relationship with the music she performs. The most immediate repercussion of this study will be its enhancement of my performance of *Les nuits d’été* for the Wellesley College community. Hugh Macdonald (1991, 125) said *Les nuits d’été* “is one of Berlioz’s works to treasure most.” This work would have been a treasure to perform even if I knew nothing more about it than the notes on the page. I cannot emphasize enough how much more valuable the experience of performing it will be now that I have completed this study.
Appendix: Texts and Translations

A note on the translations:
Many word-for-word translations and poetic translations of these poems exist. I chose to include this translation because I think it combines the best of both. It is very close to an exact translation, but is free enough to be poetic in itself. This translation dependably conveys the mood and meaning of each of the poems, but it should not be used to determine the exact meaning of particular words.

Villanelle

Quand viendra la saison nouvelle,
Quand auront disparu les froids,
Tous les deux, nous irons, ma belle,
Pour cueillir le muguet aux bois;
Sous nos pieds égrenant les perles,
Que l'on voit au matin trembler,
Nous irons écouter les merles
Siffler.

Le printemps est venu, ma belle,
C'est le mois des amants bénis,
Et l'oiseau, satinant son aile,
Dit des vers au rebord du nid.
Oh! viens donc sur le banc de mousse,
Pour parler de nos beaux amours,
Et dis-moi de ta voix si douce:
Toujours!

Loin, bien loin, égarant nos courses,
Faisons fuir le lapin caché,
Et le daim au miroir des sources
Admirant son grand bois penché;
Puis, chez nous, tout heureux, tout aises,
En panier, enlaçant nos doigts,
Revenons rapportant des fraises
Des bois.

Country Song

When the new season comes,
when the frosts have gone,
you and I, my dearest,
will go picking lily of the valley in the woods;
our feet will scatter the dewdrops
that tremble in the morning light.
We’ll listen to the blackbird’s call.

Spring has come, my dearest,
the month adored by lovers,
and on the edge of its nest
the bird sings poetry as it preens its feathers.
Oh, come and talk about our beautiful love
on this mossy bank,
and say in your soft voice,
“for ever!”

As we wander far, far away,
let’s scare away the lurking rabbit
and the buck admiring its great antlers
mirrored in a brook.
Then let’s go back home, happy and at ease,
our fingers entwined,
carrying baskets of wild strawberries.

Le spectre de la rose

Le spectre de la rose

The Ghost of the Rose

Soulève ta paupière close
Qu'effleure un songe virginal,
Je suis le spectre d'une rose
Que tu portais hier au bal.
Tu me pris encore emperlée
Des pleurs d'argent de l’arrosoir,
Et parmi la fête étoilée
Tu me promenas tout le soir.

O toi, qui de ma mort fus cause,
Sans que tu puisses le chasser,
Toutes les nuits mon spectre rose
A ton chevet viendra danser:
Mais ne crains rien, je ne réclame
Ni messe ni De Profundis;
Ce léger parfum est mon âme,
Et j'arrive du paradis.

Mon destin fut digne d'envie;
Et, pour avoir un sort si beau,
Plus d'un aurait donné sa vie,
Car sur ton sein j'ai mon tombeau
Et sur l'albâtre où je repose
Un poète, avec un baiser,
Écrit: Ci-gît une rose
Que tous les rois vont jalouser.

O vous, qui causez ma mort,
Every night my rose-ghost
will come and dance at your bedside,
and you will not be able to drive it away.
But have no fear, I ask for
neither a Mass nor a funeral service;
this soft perfume is my soul
and I come from Paradise.

My fate was enviable;
many would have given their lives
for so beautiful an end.
For my grave is on your breast
and on the pure whiteness where I rest
a poet wrote, with a kiss:
“Here lieth a rose
which all kings would envy.”

Sur les lagunes
Lamento

Ma belle amie est morte,
Je pleurerai toujours;
Sous la tombe elle emporte
Mon âme et mes amours,
Dans le ciel, sans m'attendre,
Elle s'en retourna;
L'ange qui l'emmena
Ne voulut pas me prendre.
Que mon sort est amer;
Ah, sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!

The fair creature
lies in her coffin.
As in nature itself,
everything seems to be mourning:
the abandoned dove
weeps and dreams about her lost one.
My soul weeps and feels no longer whole.
How bitter is my fate!
Ah, left to sail away loveless on the sea!

The immensity of night covers me like a shroud.
Only the sky can hear it.

And how much I loved her!

As much as her.

How bitter is my fate!

Ah, left to sail away loveless on the sea!
Connaissez-vous la blanche tombe,
Où flotte avec un son plaintif
L'ombre d'un if?
Sur l'if, une pâle colombe,
Triste et seule, au soleil couchant,
Chante son chant.

Un air maladivement tendre,
A la fois charmant et fatal,
Qui vous fait mal,
Et qu'on voudrait toujours entendre;
Un air, comme en soupire aux cieux
L'ange amoureux.

On dirait que l'âme éveillée
Pleure sous terre, à l'unisson
De la chanson,
Et, du malheur d'être oubliée
Se plaint dans un roucoulement
Bien doucement.

Sur les ailes de la musique
On sent lentement revenir
Un souvenir;
Une ombre, une forme angélique,
Passe dans un rayon tremblant,
En voile blanc.

Les belles-de-nuit, demi-closes,
Jettent leur parfum faible et doux
Autour de vous,
Et le fantôme aux molles poses
Murmure en vous tendant les bras:
Tu reviendras!

Oh! jamais plus, près de la tombe
Je n'irai, quand descend le soir
Au manteau noir,
Ecouter la pâle colombe
Chanter sur la pointe de l'if,
Son chant plaintif!

L’île inconnue

Do you know the white tomb
where the yew’s shadow
waves with a plaintive sound?
In the yew’s branches a pale dove,
sad and lonely, sings its song
as evening falls.

It is a sickly tender melody,
both alluring and deadly;
it will harm you,
though you always want to hear it.
It is a melody such as a lovelorn angel
might breathe to the heavens.

You would think an awakened soul
was weeping in unison
from beneath the earth,
and was sobbing
with the softest cooing
at the misery of being abandoned.

On the wings of music
you feel memories
slowly coming back;
a shadow, an angelic form,
passes in a flickering light,
dressed in a white veil.

The night flowers, half closed,
waft their faint sweet scent
over you,
and the vague outline of a ghost
reaches out to you and whispers:
“You will come back!”

Oh, I’ll never go near the grave again
as evening falls,
with its dark mantle,
to hear the pale dove
singing its plaintive song
high up in the yew.

The Unknown Isle
Dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile enfle son aile,
La brise va souffler!

L'aviron est d'ivoire,
Le pavillon de moire,
Le gouvernail d'or fin;
J'ai pour lest une orange,
Pour voile une aile d'ange,
Pour mousse un séraphin.

Dites, dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller?

Est-ce dans la Baltique,
Dans la mer Pacifique,
Dans l'île de Java?
Où bien est-ce en Norwège,
Cueillir la fleur de neige,
Ou la fleur d'Angsoka?

Menez-moi, dit la belle,
À la rive fidèle
Où l'on aime toujours.
Cette rive, ma chère,
On ne la connaît guère
Au pays des amours.

Où voulez-vous aller?
La brise va souffler!

Translations by Hugh Macdonald
Reference List


http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8525668.


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