

DARIUS MILHAUD, *ESTHER DE CARPENTRAS*, AND THE FRENCH INTERWAR
IDENTITY CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

Jennifer Walker: Darius Milhaud, *Esther de Carpentras*, and the French Interwar Identity Crisis
(Under the direction of Annegret Fauser)

Darius Milhaud's opera *Esther de Carpentras* was composed during a time when French national and cultural identity was debated anew amongst multiple factions. The merits of an identity based on Parisian centralization over provincial regionalism figured prominently both in the opera's genesis and in the composer's biography. But Milhaud's Jewish heritage was equally significant in his conception of Frenchness, and the opera demonstrates the manner in which a Jewish background, in conjunction with regional specificity, could potentially form the basis of a truly French identity.

This thesis first contextualizes the interwar identity crisis and identifies the debates that were prominent during the time. It then examines methods through which Milhaud's opera engaged with such issues; it concludes with a critical examination of the work's reception. Ultimately, it illustrates that the work, for Milhaud, served to represent an ideal *patrie* through the integration of the Parisian, the Jewish, and the Provençal.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1940, shortly after arriving in the United States, Darius Milhaud wrote that the recent Parisian premiere of his opera *Medée* felt to him like a “magnificent gift from my country before the curtain rose on the drama which destroyed it.”¹ This performance was to be one of the last given on the stage of the Opéra prior to the German invasion of France. Two years earlier, however, the Opéra-Comique devoted an entire evening to the composer; the program included his short opera *Le Pauvre matelot* (1926), a ballet based on his *Suite Provençale* (1936), and the premiere of the two-act opera *Esther de Carpentras*. This stage premiere of *Esther de Carpentras* was long overdue: completed between 1925 and 1926 and broadcast as a radio production in 1937, the opera would be shown in Paris only in 1938.

According to Milhaud, this delay in performance was the result of a logistically challenging *mise-en-scène* that had long deterred directors. But the hesitance of French opera houses to present *Esther de Carpentras* cannot merely be cast off as directorial reluctance, for surely the French operatic tradition was up to the task of staging what is, in essence, a chamber opera. There were, undoubtedly, other issues at play, issues related to questions about the national agenda of French opera and, by extension, French musical culture as a whole during the 1920s and 1930s. Such issues, however, had long been points of contention; the identity of French music and its most appropriate characteristics had been called into

¹ Darius Milhaud, “Paris Opera Just Before the Occupation,” *Modern Music* Volume 18, No. 1 (Nov./Dec. 1940), 46.

question as early as the eighteenth century by Jean-Philippe Rameau and his more conservative contemporaries, yet these concerns persisted through the nineteenth and remained an *idée fixe* throughout the first half of the twentieth century.²

In 1904, the critic Paul Landormy posed the following questions to his public: “What is it to be French in music? Does a musical tradition exist which can be called French? Where does this tradition begin? Is it interrupted with Berlioz? Is it lost or rediscovered after him? And finally, where are we at present?”³ Following on from nineteenth-century trends, interwar Parisians quickly realized that the arts could potentially serve as a cultural vessel through which a modern and distinctly French national identity could take shape.⁴ Milhaud and his contemporaries actively participated in its artistic realization; such works as *Le Boeuf sur le toit* (1919) and *La Création du monde* (1923) quickly became considered significant pieces in this context. Yet at the same time, Milhaud was also working to shape his own personal identity and to validate it within the crisis that resulted from the First World War, a crisis that called into question centralized Parisian cosmopolitanism as the signifier of French artistic identities. Milhaud’s identity was complicated by two factors that—in the eyes of his peers—challenged the conception of his persona as quintessentially French: he was a Provençal Jew. Throughout the interwar years, Milhaud negotiated his allegiance to the French nation-state by instrumentalizing

² See, for example, Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and Katharine Ellis, “Rameau in Nineteenth Century Dijon: Memorial, Festival, Fiasco,” in Barbara Kelly, ed., *French Music, Culture, and Identity 1870-1939* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 197-214.

³ Paul Landormy, “L’état actuel de la musique française,” *La Revue bleue* (26 March 1904), 394: “Qu’est-ce que d’être français en musique? Existe-t-il une tradition musicale que l’on puisse appeler française? Où commence cette tradition? S’est-elle interrompue avec Berlioz? S’est-elle perdue où retrouvée après lui? Et enfin, où en sommes nous à l’heure présente?”

⁴ For a study of the effect of political events on the act of musical creation, and the concomitant usage of music as ideological tool, see Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

his regional and religious identities in various constellations. Based on Franco-Judaic history, set in Provence, and ostensibly written for a Parisian audience and by extension, France as a whole, *Esther de Carpentras* addresses aspects of Milhaud's personal, musical, and political identities that would become contentious in interwar France. It served as a successful—albeit unconventional—encapsulation of French musical identity, but one that remained contested by more conservative forces, both cultural and musical. Thus the opera serves as a case study for the kaleidoscopic construction of a French identity rooted both in the cosmopolitan and in the local.

Chapter one provides a contextualization of the interwar identity crisis and examines its development throughout the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Beginning with the Franco-Prussian War and continuing through the Dreyfus Affair, this chapter identifies and examined issues of national identity formation, including the debate between French regionalists and those who felt that the capital was the true arbiter of national identity; it concludes with a discussion of these issues in relation to the interwar period and the ways in which Milhaud engaged with them.

The second chapter begins with detailed examinations of Darius Milhaud and Armand Lunel, the creators of *Esther de Carpentras*. It reveals the lifelong connection that these two Provençal Jews shared with their personal heritages and demonstrates how it came to be portrayed in their artistic work. Chapter two concludes with a musical analysis that illustrates the ways in which Milhaud's compositional choices drew on French musical traditions and combined them with the story of his heritage in order to create a work that had the potential to be considered quintessentially French.

The final chapter provides a critical study of the opera's reception in the French press and how critics determined *Esther de Carpentras*' success in its presentation of French identity; each of the reviews included is contextualized within the political and cultural environment during the interwar. This thesis ultimately seeks to illustrate that the opera served as Milhaud's representation of his ideal *patrie* through the integration of the Parisian, the Jewish, and the Provençal.

CHAPTER ONE

Defining France: Conflict and National Identity

France's Identity Crisis

In 1882, the philosopher and author Ernest Renan asked of France a now-famous question: what is a nation, or more specifically, what constituted the French nation? The essay, given first as a lecture at a conference at the Sorbonne, outlined Renan's call for a nation based on collective tradition and shared memory, and also on the subordination of the individual to the common good:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things which, properly speaking, are really one and the same constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is the past, the other is the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories, the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received.⁵

He continued on, claiming that “a nation is therefore a great solidarity constituted by the feeling of sacrifices made and those that one is still disposed to make. It presupposes a past but is reiterated in the present by a tangible fact: consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life.”⁶ Renan's insistence on a national identity based on the past and on tradition was almost certainly a

⁵ Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?: conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1882), 26. “Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel. Deux choses qui, à vrai dire, n'en font qu'une, constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs; l'autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis.” Translation by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Eley and Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 41-55.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27. “Une nation est donc une grande solidarité, constituée par le sentiment des sacrifices qu'on a faits et de ceux qu'on est disposé à faire encore. Elle suppose un passé; elle se résume pourtant dans le présent par un fait tangible: le consentement, le désir clairement exprimé de continuer la vie commune.”

response to the ruptured sense of identity that had begun to plague France some twelve years earlier after the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war.⁷

The heightened awareness of music's cultural role during the Third Republic was the result of numerous socio-political conflicts that challenged European as well as international conceptions of France as a nation that existed as a unified political and cultural entity. Republican leaders faced the difficult task of celebrating the Republic with its numerous challenges on the domestic front while, at the same time, projecting an idealized image of itself to the rest of the world—a task that would become exponentially more challenging as the nineteenth century drew to a close. German victory in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 and the unification of Germany into one nation, coupled with the destabilization of France's unity with the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, fractured any notion of France's power on the international stage. There were those, however, who saw in defeat the opportunity and potential for cultural and artistic revitalization—all, of course, with the reconstruction of national identity as the primary objective. Nearly forty years later, in an essay detailing modern French music, the musicologist Paul-Marie Masson retrospectively recognized the importance of the war on the cultivation of French musical identity by identifying the year 1870 as "the beginning of the contemporary period of French musical art." Indeed, so Masson wrote, "this final date of 1870, as important in our political as in our artistic history, should be chosen in preference to all others."⁸

⁷ Renan was almost certainly responding to other discourses on nationalism, national identity, and citizenship circulating in European intellectual culture over the preceding century, the likes of which had been inspired by figures such as Johann Gottfried Herder and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

⁸ Paul-Marie Masson, ed., *Rapport sur la musique française contemporaine* (Rome: Armani and Stein, 1913), 6. Quotation given in Kelly, ed. *French Music, Culture, and Identity*, 6.

If any sense of a unified national identity had survived throughout the 1870s and 1880s, it would be shattered in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair during the 1890s. The affair precipitated a political scandal that divided French opinion and brought to light fundamental questions of collective identity that began to be discussed on a large scale within the public sphere. In 1894, the French soldier Alfred Dreyfus (of Jewish descent) was indicted for treason on the grounds of selling classified military information to the German military. Two years later, following an investigation by Georges Picquart, the French director of counter-espionage, the charges against Dreyfus were found to be false, and were subsequently attributed to a French major. The French army immediately suppressed this new exculpatory evidence; the guilty major was acquitted by a military tribunal after only two days, and Dreyfus remained imprisoned for a crime that he did not commit. The military's blatant miscarriage of justice was famously brought to light in *J'Accuse!*, an open letter written by Emile Zola, in which he exposed the true culprit and publically displayed the evidence that would later exonerate Dreyfus.

The Dreyfus Affair affected all aspects of French culture, including music. Public figures—intellectuals, politicians, and musicians alike—were openly engaged with the issue, identifying with either the Dreyfusards or the more conservative anti-Dreyfusards.⁹ Spurred on by glaring anti-Semitism and increasing hostility toward Germany, the Dreyfus Affair exposed cracks in the façade of French national identity that had been widening for years—even before the end of the Franco-Prussian war. Chief amongst the challenges was the manner in which the

⁹ For more on the Dreyfus Affair's impact on music and musicians, see Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*. The Dreyfus Affair and its impact on Milhaud will be discussed in a later chapter of this thesis.

French nation wished to identify itself. By the end of the nineteenth century, France increasingly looked to the arts rather than to the military to revive national pride and to gain international respect. But seeking such validation from the arts demanded an even more precise definition of identity than did party politics or military involvement. As Jann Pasler has noted, artistic and musical success was a metaphor for French pride and progress; encouraging progress required an investment in both national infrastructure and artists.¹⁰ The idea of a unified national infrastructure, however, was fraught with complications: was France a collective community, with its center in Paris, or was France a nation of citizens with unique interests that drew from the multiple regions of the country as a whole?

Defining France I: Centralization in the Capital

The definition of French identity—even before its very essence was called into question during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—shifted between that which was based centrally in the capital and one that was founded outside of it. Indeed, the frictions inherent between centralization and regionalism as markers of identity had been issues since the Revolution: prior to the establishment of the Third Republic, Parisian centrism was a method of keeping local nobility in check; those in favor of centralization viewed regional influence and control as a step backward toward the Ancien Régime.¹¹ Furthermore, the relationship between Paris and the French provinces had long been one marked by an air of Parisian superiority: in reference to the capital, Theodore Zeldin described an “inferiority

¹⁰ Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 235-36.

¹¹ Joseph P. Roza, “French Languages and French Nationalism: The Félibrige, Occitan, and the French Identity of Southern France, 1854-1914,” Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2003.

complex of provincials” that had allowed scholars to present France as a “single, unified entity [while] assuming that what happened in Paris was decisive in the country as a whole.”¹² These tensions, however, were not merely geographical; the Parisian contempt for the provinces was not solely based on a spatial divide, but also on a sense of cultural superiority. The provinces were defined in relation to the centralization of political power and cultural accomplishment in Paris.

Alain Corbin noted that the Parisian view of the French provinces “had connotations of derision from the beginning” and that the provinces were “space[s] deprived of the king’s radiant presence.”¹³ Corbin explains that descriptions of provincials as inferior to Parisians began appearing in literature dating from the mid-seventeenth century; seventeenth- and eighteenth-century depictions of provincial citizens from a Parisian perspective portrayed provincials as comic characters to be laughed at, far removed from the cultured and sophisticated capital. Significantly, the provinces were the arenas for literal exile: those who misbehaved in the capital were sent to the regions to pay penance for their wrongdoings. A well-known example involved the seventeenth-century writer Bussy-Rabutin who was, in 1659, ordered into exile in Burgundy from Paris after his participation in an orgy.¹⁴ He was banished only from Paris and the court and not from France: such behavior was unbecoming of a Parisian and could only be punished in the regions.

The post-Revolutionary creation of the *départements* and the ensuing rearrangement of geographic and political space caused French citizens to delve

¹² Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1985*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 29.

¹³ Alain Corbin, “Paris-Province”, in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, Vol. 1, ed. Pierre Nora and Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 428.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 428-29.

deeper into their regional identities. Yet the departmental system did not radically change the relationship between Paris and the provinces. Instead, the role of the capital was reconfigured from a monolithic nucleus of control into a symbol of unity between the French regions and the nations as a whole. This change, regardless of Parisians' attempts to portray increased tolerance toward the provinces, only increased the long-standing idea that the nation's greatness had to be measured by its capital: "Paris ought to be regarded not as an individual city so much as the general meeting place and common city of all the French."¹⁵ As Zeldin claimed, "Paris got its population from the provinces, but gave it back its worst features—like its fashions—and kept for itself everything worth keeping, like painting and music."¹⁶ All success was centered in the capital: Paris housed the nation's main artistic and educational institutions and was widely perceived as the arbiter of true Frenchness.

Until the nineteenth century, the Parisian conception of the provinces demonstrated a tendency to speak of the provinces as a homogeneous, non-differentiated periphery. Indeed, even throughout the 1800s, Paris was considered as the site of the French fatherland rather than as a city within it. In the first issue of *La Révolution française* (1881), Auguste Dide wrote that regardless of the fact that many abroad considered Paris a city unto itself, the French considered it to be the "central municipality and the fatherland of all the French."¹⁷ But the nineteenth century was also a time during which the concept of "the province" shifted to one

¹⁵ Ibid., 436.

¹⁶ Zeldin, *France 1848-1985*, 33.

¹⁷ Auguste Dide, "Les fédérations rurales en 1790 et la fête du 14 Juillet" *La Révolution française* (1881), 21. "Paris, qu'on aimait à regarder non comme une municipalité particulière, mais comme la municipalité central et la patrie commune des Français, recut de toutes parts, des assurances d'amitié et des promesses de secours."

of “the provinces.” The provinces, as the Parisians found, could be constructed as sites of the national past: a fact that did not go unnoticed by the provincials themselves. The result of this reconfiguration was such that the provinces had been automatically set up by the capital as an internal exotic, yet anything that indicated provincial individuality and agency thereby increased the sense of difference between province and capital and thus depended on Paris’ centralizing and unifying force in order to neutralize the perceived difference. According to Jules Michelet, “the center knows itself and knows all the rest...the provinces see themselves in [the center]. In it they love and admire one another in a superior form.”¹⁸

The centralization of cultural taste in the capital city simultaneously created a sense of national unity and detracted from it. While Paris aimed to prescribe the criteria for French international representation, it also attempted to unify the notion of appropriate French taste amongst its provinces. But centralization did not appeal to everyone, and the enactment of Parisian centrism found detractors in the very regions that it sought to unite; the “provincials” fought to regain agency that had been lost by the capital’s arbitration of appropriate taste and identity.¹⁹ Through the preservation of folk materials and traditions, as well as the emphasis on particular regional ties to the Mediterranean, regionalists argued that local identities would produce a less uniform and yet paradoxically more inclusive sense of national unity than a wholesale adoption of Parisian taste would allow.

¹⁸ Jules Michelet, *L’Histoire de France* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1861), 156-57. Quotation given in Corbin, “Paris-Province,” 440.

¹⁹ See also Katharine Ellis, who rightly notes that “...we should not leave unquestioned the idea that the regions were docile in their acceptance of models from the capital, or that the capital was necessarily ‘ahead’ of the regions. Indeed, extrapolating conclusions about ‘the French’ from an analysis of Paris is a perilous exercise.” *Interpreting the Musical Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xxi.

Defining France II: National Identity and Regionalism

Regionalism, as a movement against centralization, began in earnest during the second half of the nineteenth century. After multiple centuries of ceding regional identity to the tastes of the capital, regionalists felt that centralization took no account of cultural diversity within the nation; instead, they maintained that Paris presented only one aspect of what made the French truly French. Key to the regionalists' agenda was the embrace of *enracinement*, a term given to the regionalist sense of rootedness to one's own region of origin; *enracinement* was adopted by artists and musicians through the creation of works that utilized source material that was specific to a particular region. It was the utilization of traditions, materials, and styles of the past that made a regional work truly national—regardless of the fact that many of these works were consistently regarded as internally exotic by the standards of the capital.²⁰

The regionalist movement was continually forced to reconcile its presentation of distinct regional cultures with the Republican need for centralized equality and unity. Yet the idea of unity espoused by the regionalists differed greatly from that of figures such as Dide who favored a centralized identity. Whereas national unity created by centralization in the capital was based on an appropriation and uniform reconfiguration of regional characteristics, national unity to the regionalists was one that embraced and recognized all regional traditions instead of erasing difference as had been typical in the capital. Led by Jean Charles-Brun, supporters of regionalism founded the Fédération Regionaliste

²⁰ Andrea Musk, "Regionalism, *Latinité*, and the French Musical Tradition: Déodat de Séverac's *Héliogabale*," in *Nineteenth Century Music: Selected Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference*, ed. Jim Samson and Bennett Zorn (Burlington: Ashgate Press, 2002), 232.

Française in 1900. The federation was explicit in its demands for the recognition of regional diversity as a key aspect of national identity:

Stability, variability, tradition, progress: here are two terms, seemingly and undoubtedly contradictory; but actually not, because they are reconciled by regionalism. It makes the “fundamental concepts of our ancestors” the foundation of our present existence, insofar as these fundamental concepts result from the nature itself of the things: here is respect for the past.²¹

Brun continued by providing for his followers a list of the essential characteristics of the regionalist movement. Chief among their credo was the claim that unity was not equivalent to uniformity:

1. That national unity, the beneficiary of centralization, is now too solidly cemented that the awakening of the regional spirit cannot shake. 2. Unity and uniformity should not be confused, as we have said; 3. that wanting the life and the prosperity of each area of France is a patriotic goal in the highest degree, if the unit, as it appears, owes his strength to the strength of each one of his parts; 4. finally, that regionalism, by still creating a harmony, by treating social groups on a hierarchical basis, reconciles particularism and patriotism in the happiest way.²²

Although Charles-Brun was primarily referring to the provinces as a unified entity in his pamphlet, it is important to note that the regionalist movement focused its efforts on the cultivation of heritage and tradition from each province individually.

Yet the most noticeable distinction between Paris and the French provinces—both

²¹ Jean Charles-Brun, *Le Régionalisme* (Paris: Bloud and Co., 1911), 67. “Stabilité, variabilité, tradition, progrès, voilà les deux termes, en apparence, sans doute, contradictoires, mais non en réalité, car le régionalisme les concilie. Il fait des ‘concepts fondamentaux de nos ancêtres’ les assises de notre existence actuelle, dans la mesure où ces concepts fondamentaux résultent de la nature même des choses: voilà pour le respect du passé.”

²² *Ibid.*, 71-72. “1. Que l’unité nationale, bienfait de la centralisation, est désormais cimentée trop solidement pour que le réveil de l’esprit régional la puisse ébranler; 2. Qu’il ne faut pas confondre unité et uniformité, ainsi que nous l’avons dit; 3. Que vouloir la vie et la prospérité de chaque région de France est un dessein patriotique au premier chef, si l’ensemble, comme il apparaît, doit sa vigueur à la vigueur de chacune de ses parties; 4. Enfin que le régionalisme, en créant là encore une harmonie, en hiérarchisant les groupes sociaux, concilie de la façon la plus heureuse le particularisme et le patriotisme.” Additionally, Brun makes an implicit distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Whereas patriotism has commonly been defined as a love of one’s country that transcends difference, nationalism has often been defined as a manner of celebrating one’s homeland that is exclusive and defined by blood and race. Decentralization was also supported by the ultra-nationalists Maurice Barrès and Charles Marras, figures who have long been associated with exclusionary, anti-Semitic French nationalism. For a distinction between patriotism and nationalism within fin-de-siècle France, see Carlo Caballero, “Patriotism or Nationalism? Fauré and the Great War,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 52, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), 595-597.

conceptually and geographically—was between the north and the south: Paris' other was Provence. Zeldin has noted that Provence had a distinctly revolutionary character and an equally distinct psychology: the belief that people from Provence were different was actively embraced by the Provençaux themselves.²³ Indeed, the very foundations of the regionalist movement were laid in Provence.²⁴

Regionalism and Provence

Much of the difference between Paris and Provence dealt with language. While those in Paris spoke French, many in Provence spoke their own language, whether it was Occitan (Provençal) or a Judeo-Provençal dialect. Not surprisingly, Parisians expressed great disdain for Provençal, often referring to it as an inferior *patois*, and they frequently attempted to “improve” the perceived deficiencies of the language through exposure to and mixture with standard French.²⁵ Occitan, however, was the only regional language to rival the significance of *langue d’oil*—the language that would ultimately become the precursor to modern French, and it was the quest for the preservation of this nationally and historically significant language that led to the formation of one of the most influential regionalist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the Félibrige.²⁶

The Félibrige was an association of regionalist writers that was formed in 1854 to promote the preservation of Occitan amid the increasing presence of spoken French in the region. Although best known for their more political work at the turn of the century, the original Félibrige were concerned less with party

²³ Zeldin, *France 1848-1985*, 44.

²⁴ Musk, “Regionalism, *Latinité*, and the French Musical Tradition,” 228.

²⁵ Roza, “French Languages and French Nationalism,” 61-62.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18. The Félibrige was active from its founding in 1854 until Frédéric Mistral’s death in 1914.

politics and more with the elevation of Occitan/Provençal to its historically significant position. The group was thrust into the national spotlight after the publication of Frédéric Mistral's epic poem *Mirèio* in 1859. Originally published in Avignon, the work described in great detail the peasant farmers and the sun-drenched landscape that exemplified the local lifestyle. *Mirèio* nonetheless garnered praise in Paris; the poem, along with its author, was celebrated by the famed poet Alphonse de Lamartine. Lamartine's accolades, however, were still tinged with the flavor of Parisian superiority: he wrote that Mistral had "from a vulgar patois made a classic language of images and harmony, ravishing the imagination and the ear."²⁷ Nevertheless, Lamartine had singlehandedly thrown Mistral, the Félibrige, and the regionalist cause onto the national stage; it would be only five years later that Mistral's epic reached the stage of the Théâtre Lyrique, albeit in the form of Charles Gounod's opera *Mireille*—a validation of regional culture and tradition within the capital.²⁸ It is, of course, ironic that artists from the regions first had to gain entry into the capital in order to combat cultural, artistic, and political centralization.

Like Mistral and the Félibriges, numerous southerners continued to assimilate into Parisian culture and validate their heritage and their work in the capital city. At the same time, however, an increasing number of Provenceaux stressed their affinity with Mediterranean cultures, linking their French identity with their innate sense of *latinité*; if the French nation was to be defined as "the synthesis of its entire past [and] the inheritance of all its ancestors," then any sense

²⁷ Alphonse de Lamartine, "Littérature villageoise," *Cours Familier de Littérature*. Quotation given in Berthe Gravalda, *Lamartine and Mistral* (Paris: Amis de la Langue d'Oc, 1970), 65.

²⁸ Katharine Ellis, "Mireille's Homecoming? Gounod, Mistral, and the Midi," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Autumn 2012), 463-509.

of French identity was equally indebted to its Latin heritage.²⁹ In this frame of reference, Paris and Provence were not two different divisions of one country, but were rather two parts of the Latin world—so long as the capital understood that their Latin heritage was granted primarily through Provence by virtue of its proximity to the Mediterranean and older Latin cultures.

The French sense of *latinité* was partially the result of the transfer of religion and language from the ancient culture of Rome as well as Greece. While the seat of the Roman Catholic church had long been associated with Italy, France—specifically, Avignon—was also able to lay claim to it. Avignon had become the seat of the papacy during the thirteenth century; the town itself had been purchased from Italy by Pope Clement VI in 1348.³⁰ But such long-held claims of Provence's display of French national identity depended more on the recognition of tradition as a product and continuation of cultural transfer between southern France and ancient Hellenistic cultures. The relationship between France and ancient Greek and Roman cultures had been recognized as early as the twelfth century; the concept, known as *translatio studii*, was based on the progression of power and transfer of culture first from Greece to Rome and then from Rome ultimately to France. Writing in his *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus* (1143-1146), Otto von Freising described how cultural power had been passed from Classical antiquity to the Franks, originating in Babylonia and moving from Persia to Greece and Rome,

²⁹ Gustave Le Bon, *The Psychology of Peoples* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898), 6. Le Bon's statement also calls to mind Renan's "Qu'est ce qu'une nation?" See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Spread and Origin of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) for a study of the concept of nation of a socially constructed community that is imagined by the members who perceive themselves to be a member of that group.

³⁰ Norman Housely, *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades, 1305-1378* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

and finally from Rome to France.³¹ The French had likewise long been aware of their inheritance from Rome. Sixteenth-century courtiers had recognized Italy and its Roman heritage as “the link through which modern France could recover its own origins in ancient Greece and Rome.”³² The notion of *translatio studii* persisted well into the nineteenth century, where it was adopted into discourses of France as the “new Rome” and was heralded as the foundation of French cultural supremacy.³³

Provençal writers, artists, and musicians—not the least of whom included Milhaud himself—frequently showcased Greco-Roman cultural traits as part of a cultural tradition that provided the aesthetic foundation for the positioning of Provence as quintessentially French. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, Provençal as well as Parisian artists and composers frequently referenced a compendium of stylistic traits that were considered inherent to French cultural products. French art (particularly music) was often described as expressing a sense of “clarity, luminosity, logic, proportion, expression and precision”—all qualities that had were cast as having been passed down from ancient Greek and Latin traditions and inherited by the French: first in Provence, then in Paris.³⁴ In the

³¹ Otto von Freising, *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus*. Quotation given in Karlheinz Stierle, “Translatio Studii and Renaissance: From Vertical to Horizontal,” in *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 57.

³² Jeanice Brooks, “Italy, the Ancient World, and the French Musical Inheritance in the Sixteenth Century: Arcadelt and Clereau in the Service of the Guises,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 121, No. 2 (1996), 148.

³³ Annegret Fauser, “Gendering the Nations: Ideologies of French Discourse on Music (1870-1914),” in *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture, 1800-1945*, ed. Harry White and Michael Murphy (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001). Fauser specifically references the nineteenth-century French folklorist Julien Tiersot’s justification of French cultural superiority: “Greece had exerted her sovereign influence over the entire civilization of antiquity...Through Rome, who had become the pupil and imitator of Greece, the influence of Greek art was exerted on the greater part of the Roman empire...This rich Greco-Latin culture flourished to the highest degree in Roman Gaul.” Quotation given on p. 82. See also Jann Pasler, “Saint-Saëns and the Ancient World: From Africa to Greece” in *Camille Saint-Saëns and His World*, ed. Jann Pasler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 250-52.

³⁴ Musk, “Regionalism, *Latinité*, and the French Musical Tradition,” 234.

early twentieth century, Gabriel Fauré often wrote of the essence of French music as having been borne out of similar characteristics: he spoke of “French sensibility and French clarity,” as well as the “essentially French qualities of taste, clarity, and a sense of proportion.”³⁵ Thus by virtue of its sense of *latinité*, the Provençal spirit was vital to the concept of the regional as representative of the national. The regions—Provence in particular—had come to play key roles in the foundation of a French national and cultural identity.

The Great War, the Interwar, and Milhaud

Debates concerning appropriate French identity continued well into the twentieth century and were acutely compounded by the beginning of the First World War in July 1914. By the start of the war, the status of France’s national, political, and cultural identity was again in question—both on the international stage and on the domestic front. The aftermath of events that shook the country during the nineteenth century was still lingering, and their effects had found their way into the production and consumption of cultural products. Questions of the true essence of French identity as a product of either cultural centralization or regional influence persisted throughout the war, but they had been subsumed into an increasingly nationalist and exclusionary conception of the fatherland. France’s involvement in the Great War increased the need for the emergence of a truly French music, and the 1918 death of Claude Debussy, one of the great figureheads of French cultural identity, left the country without a firm sense of its reputation’s future success on the international stage.

³⁵ Georges Jean-Aubry, *La Musique française d’aujourd’hui* (Paris: Perrin, 1916), ix-x; 1. Quotations given in Caballero, “Patriotism or Nationalism?,” 604.

Barbara Kelly has persuasively argued for the recognition of cultural and ideological continuity in France during and after the First World War. While she acknowledged the inevitable impact of the war on cultural and musical life, she also claimed that many of the ideological concerns that predated the war continued throughout the twenties and into the thirties, albeit some in altered guises.³⁶ Kelly challenged the popular belief that the Great War facilitated a rupture between pre-and post-war generations, and argued instead for the recognition of a “fragile consensus:” the idea that while there was indeed tension across multiple factions as to how best define France, these factions still held as their objective the creation of a unified national and cultural identity.³⁷

Despite the ongoing promotion of regionalist ideology, the Great War solidified the centralization of national taste in Paris. Regardless of the efforts of the *Félibrige*, the pan-Latinists, and the *Fédération Régionalisme*, many artists and composers remained in positions that required their success in Paris if they were to serve as national representatives for French culture writ large. Typical for this trend was Darius Milhaud, a composer born in Provence who had relocated to Paris in 1909 in order to study at the Conservatoire. While in Paris, Milhaud was associated with Les Six, a group that has come to represent the interwar musical aesthetic almost exclusively through their “ambivalent regard for Debussy and the immediate past.”³⁸ Yet notwithstanding their rejection of

³⁶ Barbara Kelly, *Music and Ultra-Modernism in France: A Fragile Consensus, 1913-1939* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-14.

³⁸ Kelly, *Tradition and Style in the Works of Darius Milhaud, 1912-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 3. There has been much debate between scholars as to the formation of the group and whether or not it was intentional on the parts of its members. The members of the group included Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Germaine Tailleferre.

debussysme, the group's aesthetic—although well outside the norms of the musical establishment at the time—was intended to be expressed through the composition of essentially French music that encapsulated the increasingly modern Parisian soundscape. Even the very name of the group—“The Six”—was a direct response to its Russian counterpart (“The Five”) as it suggested that the six composers would come to serve as symbols of modernity and progress for the nation at large.

During the group's short-lived tenure in Paris, Milhaud was singled out for his modern, and thus Parisian, spirit. In 1921, Erik Satie—the group's most significant source of aesthetic inspiration—wrote that only three of the six possessed the “new spirit” of the interwar:

Auric, Poulenc, and Milhaud, who were representative of the ‘new spirit’ and showed ‘modern sensibility...spontaneity, fantasy, and audacity;’ and second, Durey, Honegger, and Tailleferre, who were ‘pure impressionists’ and more conventional in their use of ‘tried and tested formulae.’”³⁹

At the same time, however, Milhaud remained attached to tradition. He was criticized for his emphasis on the works of Hector Berlioz and Charles Gounod, as well as for his preference for the work of Satie over that of Debussy and Maurice Ravel.⁴⁰ Through his championing of French music written during the nineteenth century, Milhaud was implicitly advocating for tradition as an element of French identity—one that would become increasingly significant throughout the interwar period.

After Les Six officially disbanded in the early 1920s, Milhaud remained in Paris. Yet his extant writings indicate that his departure from the group

³⁹ Quotation given in Roger Nichols, *The Harlequin Years: 1917-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 264.

⁴⁰ Kelly, *Tradition and Style*, 8.

facilitated a shift in his conception of French identity: while Les Six was collectively concerned with the definition of France through the prism of the nation's capital, Milhaud turned to Provence and the notion of *latinité* as the ultimate arbiter of French cultural identity. Indeed, it was only after his departure from Les Six that Milhaud wrote the majority of his regionalist essays. In a lecture delivered in 1923, he clearly separated the aesthetic of Les Six from the Latin spirit that was found at the heart of the French national tradition:

The Groupe des Six in France has endeavored to restore the national and essential tradition of their country, whereas the young Viennese have sought to reclaim Mozart and Schubert...And in the face of this great clamor (where the noise of steel resounds in a foggy landscape) where the most abstract ideas express themselves in a philosophical dialectic, we have seen a Latin heart arise, bright and pure, with the breeze of the Mediterranean and the soft and perfect shape of our southern highlands...⁴¹

Several years later, he further adopted regionalist language through his linkage of the Provençal language with *latinité*, writing that: “Provençal is not a dialect. It is a language born of the dissolution of Latin that gave way to the French language, requires the triumph of centralization which is the unity of my country.”⁴²

Reshaping France's identity during the interwar years was a complex process that originated during the previous century. Both the capital and the French regions held significant power in the definition of France as a nation; this power was as much cultural as it was political. Artists such as Milhaud were required to maneuver their individual identities through the collective identities—whether defined by Paris or by the regions. Although he was successful in Paris, Milhaud

⁴¹ Milhaud, “The Evolution of Modern Music in Paris and Vienna,” *The North American Review* Vol. 217, No. 809 (April 1923): 546-547.

⁴² Milhaud, “La Musique en Provence,” unpublished manuscript (1938), 1. I am grateful to Erin Maher for sharing this document with me. Milhaud's definition of France through Provence will be further discussed in a later chapter of this thesis.

would ultimately choose to identify as French through his attachment to Provence:
a choice that would become fully manifest in *Esther de Carpentras*.

CHAPTER TWO

Esther de Carpentras: The Opera and its Creators

Milhaud once identified Armand Lunel's play *Esther de Carpentras* as the subject he had dreamed about for the basis of a comic opera. Lunel's play was published in 1922; after a three-year delay, the composer completed his opera of the same name in November 1925.⁴³ The opera occupies a unique place within Milhaud's oeuvre: on the one hand, it is the only comic opera within Milhaud's extant works and, on the other, it is perhaps the most explicit musical presentation of Milhaud's self-identification as a Judeo-Provençal Frenchman. As a Jew born in the south of France, Milhaud was often caught up in the exoticizing gaze of Paris, and was considered by many to be an "internal exotic."⁴⁴ Milhaud, however, never doubted his status as an authentic Frenchman, and during the interwar years, Milhaud emerged as a proponent of the trend to define national identity via regionalism; his most recognizable response to the French interwar identity crisis was his wholesale adoption of regionalist discourses and the promotion of Provence as the source of French national heritage and tradition.⁴⁵ But for the composer, his connection to the *patrie* depended heavily on his Provençal heritage

⁴³ Jeremy Drake, *The Operas of Darius Milhaud* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), 149; 153. Milhaud claimed that the play was the "sujet rêvé pour un opéra-bouffe."

⁴⁴ On the concept of the "internal exotic," see Ellis, "Mireille's Homecoming?," 464.

⁴⁵ See, for example, his unpublished lectures "La musique en Provence" and "La Tradition." I am grateful to Erin Maher for sharing these documents with me. See also the essay "The Evolution of Modern Music in Paris and Vienna," *The North American Review*, Vol. 217, No. 809 (April 1923), 544-54.

but also—and perhaps even more so—on his Jewish faith that had its foundation in Provence itself.

Indeed, *Esther de Carpentras* was written and ultimately performed within a deeply complicated social, cultural, and political environment: France—although this time among the victors—was recovering from the First World War, yet there remained a continual debate concerning the merits of centralization versus regionalism as arbiters of signifiers of identity. *Esther de Carpentras* functions as a window into localized French identity, particularly as it depends on *couleur locale* for its classification as French. In collaboration with librettist Armand Lunel—another Provençal-turned-Parisian Jew and Milhaud’s childhood friend—Milhaud presented a work that epitomized his conception of a French national identity, one that was based not only on regional qualities but also on religious specificity. While openly embracing his Provençal heritage—indeed, making it the subject of many of his works—he was nonetheless required to negotiate his Jewish identity into the already contested realm of his Provençal-French identity.⁴⁶ *Esther de Carpentras*—Milhaud’s “dream subject”—could be seen as an artistic resolution of an identity crisis, not only that of France, but of the composer himself.

Darius Milhaud: “A Frenchman from Provence...”

Born in Marseilles on September 4, 1892, Milhaud grew up the son of an Italian-born mother and a Judeo-French father in the nearby town of Aix-en-Provence; he would, throughout the course of his life, maintain a keen sense of nostalgia for his early years in the south of France. As one scholar put it, “Aix, in

⁴⁶ Other works inspired by Milhaud’s Provençal heritage include the *Poème sur un cantique de Camargue* (1913), *Le Carnaval d’Aix* (1926), *Suite Provençale* (1936), and *Ouverture méditerranéenne* (1953). The opera *Les malheurs d’Orphée* (1925), also with a libretto by Armand Lunel, is a setting of the Orpheus legend in Provence.

one form or another, is rarely absent from Milhaud's music."⁴⁷ More significantly, however, Milhaud was always cognizant of the sense of *latinité* and the connection with Latin culture that his Provençal heritage granted him. He established a direct link between his maternal ancestors and the Pope, writing in his autobiography that his mother was a descendant of Sephardic Jews that had been established in Italy for centuries, one of whom was the medical advisor to the Pope in the fifteenth century.⁴⁸ When asked about his affinity with Provence in an interview with the French musicologist and critic Claude Rostand, Milhaud associated his Provençal upbringing with the Latin spirit:

“Yes. Native province,” “native town”—for me these are very special designations. “Latiness,” “Mediterranean spirit”—those words resonate very deeply within me.”⁴⁹

In a similar fashion, Paul Collaer began his biography of the composer by claiming that one could only understand and appreciate Milhaud's music by having first been transported to Provence. Collaer encouraged his readers to immerse themselves in the natural beauty of Provence, yet stresses that in Provence “nothing is merely picturesque or accessory...everything is fundamental, and the Provençal song that Aude, the curator of the Méjanès library, sings for us is as much a part of the landscape as are a typical country dwelling, an olive tree, [or] a dusty road.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Christopher Palmer, “Darius Milhaud: Poet of Provence,” in Darius Milhaud, *Ma vie Heureuse*, trans. Donald Evans, George Hall, and Christopher Palmer as *My Happy Life* (London: Marion Boyars, 1995), 11.

⁴⁸ Milhaud, *My Happy Life*, 28.

⁴⁹ Claude Rostand, *Darius Milhaud: Interviews With Claude Rostand*, trans. Jane Hohfeld Galante (Oakland: Center for the Book, Mills College, 2002), 18.

⁵⁰ Paul Collaer, *Darius Milhaud* (Geneva and Paris: Editions Slatkine, 1982), trans. Jane Hohfeld Galante (San Francisco: San Francisco Press, 1988), 5.

But even at a young age, Milhaud was often cognizant of the sense of Parisian superiority that lay at the heart of the debate between regionalism and centralization. In his autobiography, Milhaud recalled a fitting anecdote:

My uncle Michel had very definite ideas about hygiene, and Rosine [Milhaud's cousin] and I were always very amused by the row of gloves which they used for their toilet hanging out to dry on the balcony; for the "Parisians" changed them every day and used a different pair for each part of their bodies. Their luxurious ways, their elegance and their little foibles excited in my cousins and myself a feeling of inferiority mixed with a touch of irony.⁵¹

His sense of inferiority was indeed ironic, for it was in Paris that he would eventually make his name as a serious composer of French music. He moved to the capital in 1909 to study composition at the Conservatoire, but his connection to Provence did not weaken. Indeed, nearly twenty-eight years after relocating to Paris, Milhaud took great pains to emphasize that his time in the capital had not tarnished his love of, and attachment to, Provence:

Although I hate to speak of myself, I want to quote to you my works inspired by Provence. These are the *Carnaval d'Aix*, for piano and orchestra; my daily prayers of the Jews of the Comtat-Venaissin; my chants of Comtadin Liturgy for voice and orchestra; my *Suite Provençale* for orchestra, *Les malheurs d'Orphée* (a little opera set in Camargue with libretto by Armand Lunel) and *Esther de Carpentras* (also by Armand Lunel), which the Opéra-Comique in Paris has staged in February. This will prove to you how deeply I remained attached to the traditions of Provence, despite 28 years in Paris. I cannot separate the soft blue line that borders the horizon behind the dry hills planted with olive and almond trees, pine woods, and the cypresses, those faithful torches that stand guard close to the solitary bastions. I cannot, I say, separate the clear melodies that the drummers sing on their fife [galoubet], with the sustained and monotonous rhythm of the tambourines, a rhythm that is as regular and vital as the blood that beats in our arteries.⁵²

⁵¹ Milhaud, *My Happy Life*, 28-29.

⁵² Darius Milhaud, "La musique en Provence," unpublished lecture, 10. "Bien que détestant parler de moi, je veux pourtant vous citer mes oeuvres d'inspiration provençale. Ce sont le Carnaval d'Aix, pour piano et orchestre, mes Prières journalières des Juifs du Comtat Venaissin, mes chants de la Liturgie Comtadine, pour chant et orchestre, ma Suite Provençale pour orchestre, Les Malheurs d'Orphée (petit opéra sur un livret d'Armand Lunel qui se passe en Camargue) et Esther de Carpentras (également d'Armand Lunel) que l'Opéra-Comique de Paris vient de créer en février. Cela vous prouvera combien je suis resté profondément attaché aux traditions de la Provence, malgré 28 ans passés à Paris. Je ne puis séparer la molle courbe bleue qui borde les horizons derrière les collines sèches plantées d'oliviers, d'amandiers, des bois de pins, des cyprès, fidèles torches montant la garde près des bastions solitaires, je ne puis, dis-je, les séparer des claires mélodies que chantent sur leur galoubet les tambourinaires au rythme soutenu et monotone des tambourins, rythme aussi régulier et vital que celui de notre sang qui bat dans nos artères." I am grateful to Erin Maher for sharing this document with me.

Milhaud further solidified his relationship with his native Provence in the oft-quoted statement of self-identification that opens his memoirs. He named himself as both a Frenchman and a Jew by writing that “I am a Frenchman from Provence and by religion, a Jew.” In his first draft, however, the specification of Provence is only marginal and is added after the fact; the original simply read “I am a Frenchman and by religion, a Jew.” Milhaud’s decision to add “from Provence” illustrated his belief that his birth in Provence only strengthened and thus validated his status as a Frenchman.⁵³

“...and a Jew by Religion”

It would be a fundamental misstep, however, to consider Milhaud’s Jewish identity as separate from his Provençal or French identity: after identifying himself as a Jewish Frenchman from Provence, Milhaud devoted nearly the entire first chapter of his autobiography to the history of the establishment of the Jews in Provence.⁵⁴ Indeed, Milhaud’s paternal ancestry descended from the Comtat-Venaissin—specifically, from Carpentras. He noted that archival sources documented his family’s earliest appearance in Carpentras in the fifteenth century, and he took special care to include in his memoirs the achievements of his great-grandfather, Joseph Milhaud, who delivered the dedicatory speech at the opening of the temple in Aix-en-Provence in 1840; the senior Milhaud was also credited with establishing a census of all Jews who returned to France following the Revolution.⁵⁵

⁵³ Milhaud, *My Happy Life*, 23. The original French text reads “Je suis un Français de Provence et de religion israélite.” Darius Milhaud, *Notes sans musique*, manuscript draft, Library of Congress, Music Division, ML95.M459 (case).

⁵⁴ Milhaud, *My Happy Life*, 23-25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4. These names were often followed with the phrase “Naturalized French after the restoration of the Venaissin ‘Comtat’.”

For Milhaud, he was French precisely because of his Jewish identity, for a Jew from southern France was *eo ipso* a “Frenchman” in all senses of the term. As he explained in 1952:

If I emphasize “Jewish religion” it is because I am deeply religious. That being said, I don’t believe one can characterize Jews in the South of France as having been really oppressed (prior, of course, to Hitler and the Vichy regime). Remember that those communities were probably the oldest Jewish settlements in the Western World. In the Middle Ages, the Comtat Venaissin, under the control of the Papal State situated there, was a place of refuge and protection for Provençal Jews. Their particular situation is generally not well known, so it is important to dwell on the subject for a minute or two. You know that they settled the region five or six centuries before Christ, and what is important to remember is that they went by choice, not because they were oppressed or expatriated, but because they were merchants seeking trade with the city of Marseilles, founded a few years previously by the Phoenicians. As members of a monotheistic religion, incidentally, they actually managed to convert quite a few of the native inhabitants, especially the Gauls. Later they asked the Pope for asylum in Avignon and were thereby protected from the threats of King René. The granting of this asylum has always made them conscious of their unique status in relation to the rest of the Jewish people. Also, this awareness of their own special identity accounts for the fact that our Jewish ancestors from the Venaissin region were not very tolerant of Ashkenazi Jews who emigrated from Central Europe and who had quite a different mentality.⁵⁶

The history of the Jews within the region dates from as early as the twelfth century, but from the Middle Ages until the start of the French Revolution, Jews were placed into four “sacred communities” at Avignon, Cavaillon, L’Isle-sur-Sorgue, and Carpentras that were under the protection of the Pope.⁵⁷ To some degree, Milhaud’s version of Judeo-Provençal history is somewhat misleading, yet it showed nevertheless that Provençal Jews (or Jews with a heritage in the Comtat-Venaissin) were confident about their privileged status within French cultural and artistic traditions—even after the Dreyfus affair.

⁵⁶ Rostand, 20. Additionally, Barbara Kelly has stated that “if any group could argue for French status, then it would be the Comtat-Venaissin community.” (Kelly, *Tradition and Style in the Works of Darius Milhaud*, 32)

⁵⁷ René Moulinas, *Les Juifs du Pape en France* (Paris: Privat, 1981), 22. See also Barnett Singer, “A Remnant: The Jews of Vaucluse in the Nineteenth Century,” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Spring 1978), 159-176. In addition to his interview with Rostand, Milhaud also provides a detailed history of the region in *My Happy Life*, 23-24, although he lists 1274 as the year during which the communities came under papal protection. See also Milhaud, “La musique en Provence,” in which he provides the history of the Comtat-Venaissin.

Milhaud's multiple accounts of the Comtat Jews emphasized the fact that they (along with the Greeks) settled the region "six hundred years before Christ" and came not as emigrants or refugees, but instead as traders and merchants.⁵⁸ While Jewish merchants may indeed have originally settled the region as traders, their existence within the papal communities was not as fortunate as Milhaud might have lead one to believe. Their residence within these communities was confined to the Jewish quarter, or ghetto, in which the gates were kept closed, and they were made to wear yellow as a tangible and visible reminder of their difference.⁵⁹ Furthermore, their status as financiers and merchants did not go unnoticed, and the Jews were frequently exploited through the implementation of exorbitant taxes and penalties that ultimately went to fund the Catholic enterprise.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Provençal Jews were proud of their social position within the Comtat, even to the extent that they actively excluded other European Jews from their own "good" fortune. While Milhaud referred to the lack of tolerance toward Ashkenazi Jews, he failed to mention that such intolerance went so far as to include the "closing [of] doors of their quarters to the unfortunate wandering Jews, who, pursued from the depths of Germany and Poland, were seeking a haven from persecution."⁶¹

⁵⁸ Milhaud, *My Happy Life*, 23.

⁵⁹ Singer, "A Remnant," 159.

⁶⁰ Drake, *The Operas of Darius Milhaud*, 19.

⁶¹ Armand Lunel, *Mon ami Darius Milhaud* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1992), 87. "...de fermer les portes de leurs carriers aux malheureux juifs vagabonds qui, traqués depuis le fond d'Allemagne et de la Pologne, cherchaient partout et en vain un asile contre la persécution." Translation given in Kelly, p. 32. Milhaud also wrote about this in "La musique en Provence," (although indirectly blaming the Cardinal Legate) explaining that "Aussi n'aimaient-ils pas voir arriver des Juifs émigrés et on trouve, aux archives de Carpentras, bien des demandes au Cardinal Légat pour qu'il accorde quelques sergente supplémentaires pour garder les portes du ghetto provençal et en ompêcher l'entrée aux Juifs allemande ou espagnole.

Milhaud's Judeo-Provençal heritage was of paramount importance to his conception of musical tradition and its role in the creation of a French national identity: in his unpublished lecture "La Tradition," he claimed that "tradition is the purpose of music today as it is for music of all times."⁶² From Provence and the Comtat sprung a rich tradition that was as much indebted to the French sense of *latinité* as it was anything else—music was at the forefront of this tradition:

Foremost among the arts to be developed there was that of music; in an epoch in which there was as yet no opera in France, musicians from Italy directed brilliant musical spectacles at the Papal residence in Avignon. Its influence was felt even behind the closed gates of the ghetto; there the Sephardic liturgy showed traces of the peculiar atmosphere of Provence; not a few of its chants bore in their melody the mark of those ancient songs whose rhythm is as gentle as the soft curves of the hills which border its horizon.⁶³

Yet in his examination of a French musical tradition, he often adopted nationalist language of, advocating for a teleological progression of French music, one that generally began with Rameau and Couperin and continued on through Debussy into the early twentieth century.⁶⁴ Milhaud shared with many a sense of French music's linear historical movement, but in a much different fashion, his sense of history was rooted in Provence and its Jewish heritage.⁶⁵ In "La musique en Provence," Milhaud traced the origins of the French musical tradition to the troubadours of the twelfth century, through Rameau, and through the nineteenth century, all the while

⁶² Darius Milhaud, "La Tradition," unpublished lecture given at the International Congress of Music, Florence, 1938, p. 5. "La tradition est la raison d'être de la musique d'aujourd'hui comme de celle de tous les temps." I am grateful once again to Erin Maher for sharing this document with me.

⁶³ Milhaud, "La Musique Juive au Comtat-Venaissin," *Musica Hebraica*, Vol. 1-2 (1938), 18.

⁶⁴ Milhaud, "The Evolution of Music in Paris and Vienna," 546. "And if Couperin, Rameau, Berlioz, Chabrier, Bizet and Debussy and Satie are indeed the true masters to whom we have turned for tradition, it does not mean that French music has not had to suffer assaults and influences which have often blotted out its characteristics."

⁶⁵ Jann Pasler notes that Louis Bourgault-Ducoudray, the first professor of music history at the Conservatoire, taught French musical history as a linear progression that began in the Middle Ages and continued into the modern era. While Bourgault-Ducoudray recognized France's musical inheritance from ancient Hellenistic culture, he did not emphasize the role of Provence or its Jewish citizens within his curriculum. See Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 345-346.

making it clear that each was a direct result of a Provençal contribution.⁶⁶ Also clear is Milhaud's belief that the Comtat Jews were essential to the development of French musical culture: he writes that the sixteenth century was a period during which the Comtat-Venaissin "offered an artistic center that was very much ahead of the rest of France at that time."⁶⁷ Yet Milhaud did not separate a Provençal tradition from that of the Comtat-Venaissin. For him, Jewish religion and culture was inextricably linked to Provence; Provençal folklore—which had become popular within the regionalist movement—"[bore] the double trace of Jewish and Provençal influence."⁶⁸

Milhaud was always quick to point out that the Jews of the Comtat-Venaissin were situated within a uniquely privileged position and that their relationship with the French Catholics was one characterized by polite tolerance. Moreover, their interactions, relationships, and coexistence with the Greeks and Romans who arrived in the Comtat to trade gave rise to the belief amongst the Jews of southern France that, as the group who had preceded the Gauls and had assimilated French as well as Classical Greek and Roman culture, they were the true "natives" of Provence and therefore of France as a whole.

Armand Lunel: Historien des Juifs Provençaux

Milhaud's childhood and adolescence were, according to him, "lit by the glow of two wonderful friendships;"⁶⁹ both of these companions were born in Aix. The

⁶⁶ Milhaud, "La musique en Provence," 7-10.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 5. "D'ailleurs le Comtat Venaissin offre un centre artistique très en avance sur le reste de la France à cette époque."

⁶⁸ Milhaud, "La musique au Comtat-Venaissin," 18.

⁶⁹ Milhaud, *My Happy Life*, 35.

first, Léo Latil, was the son of a Catholic doctor who was killed while fighting for France in the First World War. The other, Armand Lunel, remained a faithful friend to Milhaud for most of his life and became one of the most well known historians of Provence and its Jewish history—the history that later became the basis of the libretto for *Esther de Carpentras*. Lunel’s genealogy could also be traced back to Carpentras and the Jews of the Comtat-Venaissin. Indeed, the composer later credited the origin of their friendship to their shared ancestral heritage:

I suppose it was destined that we should meet: as early as in the thirteenth century, our names appear together in the register of the Jews of Carpentras, under the insignia of the Church; and in a later age they are to be found on a milestone between Nimes and Montpellier which bears the legend: Lunel, 11 km; Milhaud, 3 km.⁷⁰

In 1909, Lunel relocated with Milhaud to Paris, where he later studied philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure. The two made frequent returns to Aix, and it was during these holidays that Lunel began to compile a history of the Comtat-Venaissin and the Judeo-Provençal tradition. He collected and studied numerous aspects of these “cultural traditions”: “enameled Judeo-Provençal words, rituals, Jewish Comtadine literature, and popular anecdotes”—interestingly enough, many of Lunel’s recovered artifacts were later handed to Frédéric Mistral for inclusion the Jewish showcase in his Museum of Provence at Arles.⁷¹

It was after Lunel left Paris that he made his most significant contributions to the preservation of the Jewish historical tradition in Provence. In 1914, he was nominated to a professorship at the Lycée Mignet à Aix; soon after, he was called into the French military to serve as an interpreter during the war. After being discharged in 1919, he was moved to the lycée in Avignon, where he remained only

⁷⁰ Milhaud, “La musique au Comtat-Venaissin,” 20.

⁷¹ Ibid. “...qu’Armand recueillit les traditions culturelles des Judéo-Comtadins: provençal émaillé de mots hébreux, rites, littérature judéo-comtadine, anecdotes populaires... non sans en avoir distrait quelques pièces destinées à son ami Frédéric Mistral pour la vitrine juive du Museon Arlaten.”

briefly before being transferred to the lycée Français à l'Étranger in Monaco.⁷²

During his time in Aix and Avignon, Lunel continued to conduct archival research on Provence and the Comtat, and, while in Monaco, he began to write his extensive history of the Jews and the Comtat-Venaissin: *Juifs du Languedoc, de la Provence et des États français du Pape*.⁷³ But Lunel's history is not merely a chronicle of the history of the Comtadin Jews: like Mistral and the Félibriges, his objective was to document and preserve the Provençal language. Lunel, however, broadened Mistral's project by including the dialect that had emerged from the interaction between the Jews and the Catholics in the Comtat. For Lunel, the Provençal language spoken by the Catholics was "enriched" by Jewish expressions that were eventually incorporated into the Judeo-Provençal dialect that lasted well into the twentieth century; Lunel was himself the last known speaker of this dialect.⁷⁴

Lunel further documented the history of the region and the interaction between the Jews and the French Catholics in his play *Esther de Carpentras*. The play tells the story of the annual reenactment of the story of Esther given by the Comtadin Jews during Purim, the feast that celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from extermination in ancient Persia. The production, having been a long-standing tradition in Carpentras, required the permission of the Catholic authority:

Until the day the Revolution opened the door of the ghettos of the Comtadin, the representation of the play of Esther was given every year on the evening of Purim, outdoors on the main square in Carpentras. Such solemnity demanded a security service

⁷² Ibid., 141. "Reçu à l'École normale en 1911, puis à l'agrégation de philosophie dans l'été 1914, et immédiatement nommé professeur au lycée Mignet d'Aix, à peine avait-il commencé ses cours qu'il fut mobilisé dans le corps des interprètes comme interprète d'allemand. Démobilisé en 1919, il fut affecté au lycée d'Avignon puis très rapidement, en janvier 1920, au 'lycée français à l'étranger' de Monaco."

⁷³ Armand Lunel, *Juifs du Languedoc, de la Provence et des États français du Pape* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1975).

⁷⁴ Collaer, *Darius Milhaud*, 94.

provided by the sergeants of the Rector, and could not do without the permission of papal authority.⁷⁵

Lunel's *Esther* is the product of multiple historical and regional sources: the first, *Harcannot et Barcanot ou la Méfila de Carpentras au XVIII*, a "sketch" in which two Jews sought the protection of the Pope following a Catholic-incited burglary; and the second, a "tragi-comédie" based on the story of Queen Esther, written in 1774 by Lunel's grandfather, Jacob.⁷⁶ Lunel made it clear that his version of *la Reine Esther* was to be as authentic as possible, bemoaning the fact that other accounts of the story had not been written in Judeo-Provençal:

It is just unfortunate for the sake of true local color, that this tragedy of Queen Esther was not written in the Hebraico-Provençal dialect spoken by the Comtadin Jews, whose meridional sonorites contrast pleasantly with the harsh Yiddish of the Ashkenazim. This macaronic jargon, where the Provençal was contaminated so oddly with the Hebrew, is lost more and more.⁷⁷

For Lunel then, "true local color" was only achieved by writing the history of the region in its own Judeo-Provençal dialect. *Esther de Carpentras*, for both Lunel and Milhaud, was a presentation of regionalist identity that was indebted to a Jewish

⁷⁵ Lunel, "Pourim dans les lettres Comtadines," introduction to *Esther de Carpentras ou le carnaval hebraïque* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1926), 16. "Jusqu'au jour où la Révolution ouvrit la porte des ghettos comtadins, la représentation de la tragédie d'Esther fut donnée tous les ans, le soir de Pourim, en plein air, sur la place principale de la carrière de Carpentras. Une pareille solennité exigeait un service d'ordre assuré par les sergents du Recteur et ne pouvait se passer de la permission de l'autorité pontificale."

⁷⁶ Lunel, *Mon ami Darius Milhaud*, 84. "Voici en effet quelles furent nos deux sources: D'abord une pochade en patois hébraïco-provençal: *Harcannot et Barcanot ou la Méfila de Carpentras au XVIII siècle*, composée au début du siècle dernier, quand il était encore étudiant, par le futur bâtonnier de l'ordre des avocats de la cour de la Montpellier, Israël, Bédarride. Le sujet: deux juifs reçus en audience par l'Évêque, à l'époque où le Comtat Venaissin était terre du Pape, pour lui demander sa protection à la suite d'un larcin commis par Messieurs les Chrétiens dans le ghetto (en hébreu la Méfila). L'Évêque étant un fonctionnaire pontifical, je rêvais d'un autre titre au tableau: Délégation d'une espèce particulière d'indigènes au Palais de la Résidence. Et ensuite l'oeuvre d'un nos aïeux, la rabbin Jacob de Lunel qui, vers 1774, avait établi et publié la version définitive de la *tragédie* provençale de *la Reine Esther*, tragi-comédie en cinq actes, précédée d'un avertissement à la trompette entremêlée de plaintes et de chansons."

⁷⁷ Lunel, "Pourim dans les lettres Comtadins," 16. "Il est seulement regrettable, pour la vraie couleur locale, que cette tragédie de la Reine Esther n'ait pas été écrite dans le patois hébraïco-provençal que parlaient les Juifs comtadins, et dont les sonorités méridionales contrastent agréablement avec le rauque yiddish des Ashkenazim. Ce jargon macaronique, où le provençal s'est contaminé si drôlement avec l'hébreu, se perd de plus en plus."

history. Both considered themselves to be Frenchmen not in spite of, but rather because of their status as Provençal Jews.

Esther de Carpentras

When Lunel's *Esther de Carpentras* was published in 1926, he reserved the legal rights to a libretto for Milhaud.⁷⁸ In effect, Milhaud had finished the composition of the opera already in 1925, but the collaboration on the project had begun in earnest, three years earlier, in 1922. Lunel described their preparatory visit to Carpentras, writing that Milhaud, having never traveled there, felt compelled to “soak up [its] indispensable atmosphere:”

Before beginning the composition of our *Esther*, and to soak up better the indispensable atmosphere, Darius wanted to spend a few days with me in Carpentras where, as surprising as it may seem, he had never been; while for me it was my second hometown... My first concern was to visit the synagogue with Darius which, like that of Cavaillon, is an architectural gem, with its charming Louis XVI woodwork and gala chandeliers, so as to better show him the extent to which through their beauty and good humor our Comtadin Jews were *authentically Provençal*...[emphasis added]⁷⁹

For Milhaud and Lunel, the “authentically Provençal” culture served as the first step to the authentically French. Throughout their collaboration, Milhaud took measures to ensure that the opera, even while celebrating the Jewish history of Provence, could also be considered truly French. Even the idea of setting the story of a Carpentrassian Esther—Milhaud’s “dream subject”—with the intent that its premiere would take place at the Opéra-Comique was a first step in the direction of creating a uniquely French work. But Milhaud was hesitant as how best to engage

⁷⁸ Drake, *The Operas of Darius Milhaud*, 143.

⁷⁹ Lunel, *Mon ami Darius Milhaud*, 85-86. “Avant de s’attaquer à la composition de notre *Esther*, et pour mieux s’imprégner de l’indispensable atmosphère, Darius avait voulu venir passer quelques jours avec moi à Carpentras, où, si surprenant que cela paraisse, il n’était encore jamais venu; alors que pour ma part c’était ma seconde ville natale... Mon premier soin fut de faire visiter à Darius la synagogue qui, comme celle de Cavaillon, est un bijou d’architecture, avec le charme de ses boiseries Louis XVI et ses lustres de gala, pour mieux lui montrer jusqu’à quel point par leur belle et bonne humeur nos juifs du Comtat étaient d’authentiques Provençaux...”

with the mixture of comedy and tragedy that the work required: he later confessed that “Lunel treat[ed] this subject very freely, constantly mingling the Old Testament with the New. Dramatic scenes are immediately followed by scenes of comedy, and this made me hesitate a long time before deciding how to treat them.”⁸⁰

Milhaud’s hesitance was likely exacerbated by the importance of genre and institution to the production and reception of French opera. The Opéra-Comique was not only an institution; *opéra comique* was also a genre of opera that had long been defined by its combination of spoken dialogue with singing and its inclusion of lighthearted or comic subject matter into the fabric of the work. These distinctions were made in comparison with *grand opéra*, which, since the nineteenth century, had been defined as a serious work in three to five acts that was sung throughout.⁸¹ While the rigidity of such characteristics loosened by the end of the nineteenth century, genre classification continued to depend on the institutional context as much as the artistic one. *Opéra comique*, an “eminently French genre,” had a significant effect on the shaping of French operatic aesthetics for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: writing in 1932, Raoul Duhamel explained that *opéra comique* had a certain “affinity...with the outlook of our [French] race.”⁸² Even Richard Wagner had conceded (although certainly not in a positive manner) that *opéra comique* displayed an “essential French character.”⁸³

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, brought some changes to the Opéra-Comique as an institution. Many of the operas premiered

⁸⁰ Milhaud, *My Happy Life*, 133.

⁸¹ See Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 226-27.

⁸² Quotation given in Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, 229.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

there departed in some way from their nineteenth-century models: some included little to no spoken dialogue, and in numerous others, comedy was minimal.⁸⁴ Composers became less likely to characterize their operas explicitly as *opéras comiques*; rather, each work was individually classified in an appropriate manner according to its form and its dramatic content. Milhaud was deliberate in defining *Esther* as an *opéra bouffe*: while the opera does not contain spoken dialogue, the work maintains the tradition of comic opera that had been set forth during the nineteenth century. In effect, Milhaud stood in a tradition of genre reconfiguration that earlier authors had undertaken as well. *Opéra bouffe* was repeatedly evoked in works that claimed generic authenticity.⁸⁵

Milhaud was intentional about transforming Lunel's play into an opera whose form would fit squarely within the French operatic tradition of *opéra-comique*. In a letter to Lunel, the composer expressed his desire to shape *Esther* in the style of a number opera, with distinctly partitioned arias, duets and trios: "There is a whole tradition of sectioning arias, duets, trios, which is to resume. Perhaps it will be necessary to score more sections for *Esther* by airs, etc. (as in the song of the pestiferous physician). We will need to speak about all of this."⁸⁶ Implicit within Milhaud's demand for a number opera is his desire to separate his opera from Wagnerian-inspired endless melody: through its separation in form

⁸⁴ M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet and Richard Langham Smith, "Opéra-Comique," *Grove Music Online*. www.oxfordmusiconline.com. Accessed 5 March 2015. Works that fit this description include Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, Massenet's *Werther*, and Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs des Perles*.

⁸⁵ Mark Everist, "Jacques Offenbach: The Music of the Past and the Image of the Present," in *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830-1914*, Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 72-99.

⁸⁶ Letter from Milhaud to Lunel, dated late November 1922. Quotation given in Drake, 148. "Il y a toute une tradition de coupe en airs, duos, trios qui est à reprendre. Peut-être sera-ce nécessaire de marquer plus *Esther* en coupes par airs, etc. (comme la chanson du médecin pestiféré). Nous aurons besoin de causer de tout cela."

from the Wagnerian tradition, and its deliberate alignment with the tradition of *opéra comique* (and the Opéra-Comique), *Esther de Carpentras* was to be free from German influence and thereby French through and through.

Based in medieval Carpentras, the opera portrays the relationship between the Jews and the French Catholics through the lens of the street-carnival-based Purim play. Carpentras is home to a newly elected Cardinal Bishop and his aged valet, Vacluse.⁸⁷ The Jews of Carpentras intend to stage the traditional performance, but the Cardinal Bishop must grant his permission to the Jews in order for them to do so. The opera opens when three Jews—Artaban, Barbacan, and Cacan—approach Vacluse with their request. The valet, who is insulted by their audacity of approaching the Cardinal without a letter of invitation, openly mocks the Jews, yet nevertheless brings the trio to the Cardinal. The three are informed that they will hear of the Cardinal’s decision in due time.

Following their departure, however, the embittered valet hatches a plot with the Cardinal to transform the Jews’ play into a public scene of forced mass conversion that, if rejected, would result in the Jews’ expulsion from Carpentras. The Cardinal, hesitant at first, eventually succumbs to the idea when he realizes that his conversion of two thousand Jews would certainly bring him into higher favor with the Pope, who sent him to Carpentras as punishment for previous youthful indiscretions. The first act closes with the Cardinal asking God to “allow him to accomplish a beautiful wish,” while allowing the “Hebrew carnival” to be performed and subsequently sabotaged all in the service of the faith.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Vacluse is incidentally also the name of a *département* in southeastern France.

⁸⁸ Act I, Scene III: “Mon Dieu, vous disposez aisément de tout, permettez-moi d’accomplir un voeu magnifique et secondez mon ardeur, désormais toute au service de la foi.”

The second act begins outdoors, in front of the synagogue, where the play is to take place. Cacan, who takes the double role of impresario and guard of the seraglio, explains that each of the actors has chosen the role that best suits him and that they improvise the lines themselves. Artaban is chosen to play the king, Assuérus (Ahasuerus); Barbacan plays Mardochée (Mordecai), and the astrologer Mémucan plays the role of Aman (Haman), the would-be exterminator of the Jews; the remaining spectators form a chorus that both narrates the events on stage and participates within them. The only professional actor in the play within the play is Hadassa, a young woman from Avignon who is to portray Esther. At the moment that Queen Esther is to risk her life by pleading with the Assuérus to spare the Jews, however, the Cardinal-Bishop and Vacluse replace Artaban and take his place on stage, directing the Jews to tremble and to convert under the threat of immediate expulsion. Esther then enters, all the time unaware that she is speaking to the Cardinal Bishop himself and that her plea is no longer merely theatrical. The Jews—having been transformed from a crowd of spectators after their realization of their plight—plead for Esther to save them. She implores the Cardinal for mercy on behalf of her people and he, moved to the heart by her beauty and grace (but also by the fact that the Catholics of Carpentras do indeed benefit from their Jewish neighbors), abandons his plan and allows the Jews to remain in the city. The opera concludes as the Catholics depart to celebrate Mass, and the Jews sing a chorus of praise on their way to the synagogue.

Just as the plot of *Esther de Carpentras* emphasized the Frenchness of the Jews and of Provence, Milhaud's music further validated the notion that the region and its history were essential actors in the formation of a French national identity during the interwar years. In her examination of the opera, Kelly claimed that

“*Esther* has a lyrical warmth and diatonicism, which is unusual for Milhaud.”⁸⁹ Here, Kelly is most certainly comparing the “diatonicism” of *Esther de Carpentras* with Milhaud’s numerous polytonal works of the 1920s. Indeed, polytonality was a frequent point of contention in the interwar musical press, and was a compositional feature that quickly became associated with Milhaud in particular; Arnold Schoenberg wrote in 1922 that “Milhaud strikes me as the most important representative of the contemporary movement in all Latin countries: polytonality.”⁹⁰ Polytonality in French music—at least to some observers—took on a nationalist function, marking a return to French simplicity and clarity following the popularity of artistic trends such as impressionism. But polytonality was, for Milhaud at least, a more profound signifier of national identity: he viewed the technique as a natural Latin response to atonality. In his essay “The Evolution of Music in Paris and Vienna,” Milhaud explained that “the faith in simple triads, which is essentially Latin, was bound to give way to a technique in which several triads were employed simultaneously, which means of course, several diatonic melodies superimposed.”⁹¹ The attachment of polytonality to the historical sense of *latinité* as well as to contemporaneous nationalist trends made the usage of the technique an ideal vehicle through which to express a French musical identity.

Just as polytonality was conceived of as Latin (and therefore French), so too was modality. By virtue of their *latinité*, these compositional techniques were added to the compendium of French musical characteristics: proportion, balance, lyrical

⁸⁹ Kelly, *Tradition and Style*, 85.

⁹⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, *Briefe*, ed. Erwin Stein (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1958), 81. Quotation and translation given in Kelly, *Tradition and Style*, 142. On the appearance of polytonality in the French musical press, see François de Médicis, “Darius Milhaud and the Debate on Polytonality in the French Press of the 1920s,” *Music & Letters*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (November 2005), 573-591.

⁹¹ Milhaud, “The Evolution of Music in Paris and Vienna,” 551.

(Latin-inspired) melodies, and harmonic clarity. Indeed, many of the arias—or “airs” as they are called—provide examples of the most functionally “French” music throughout the opera; these tonal moments alternate and contrast with modal, chromatic, and polytonal episodes. Milhaud made every effort to ensure that *Esther* would include easily distinguishable sections (arias, duets, etc.) and that the opera would thus easily be situated within the number-aria tradition. Yet he further ensured the opera’s continuation of French tradition by composing the solo arias in such a way that the Latin-inspired French musical style would be unmistakable. Milhaud utilizes these techniques—sectioned vocal numbers and modal contrasted with tonal writing—not only to situate the music within the French musical landscape of the interwar period, but also to depict French heritage created and sustained through the relationship between the Catholics and the Comtat Jews: the opera addresses both historical tradition and relevant contemporaneous musical concerns.

“Noël Comtadin,” sung primarily by Vacluse, is the first instance of an air in *Esther de Carpentras*. The old valet has intercepted Artaban, Barbacan, and Cacan as they attempted to speak with the Cardinal, and is irritated to see the Jews in his residence. After realizing that they do not intend to leave, he attempts to convert them by singing a “Christmas” song; the three interject by protesting and professing their own faith:

Table 2.1: Act I, Scene II: “Noël Comtadin”

Vaucluse: Mutins! Sainte Cécile! Pour la conversion des Israélites, daigne inspirer mon petit Noël!	Vaucluse: Mutineers! Saint Cecelia! My small Christmas song deigns to inspire the conversion of the Jews!
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Schéma Israël.	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Shema Israel!
Noël Comtadin	
Vaucluse: O notre Maître adorable! Ton trône fut une étable et ta cour, deux animaux...	Vaucluse: O our adorable master! Your throne was a stable and your court, two animals...
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Faux!	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: False!
Vaucluse: Juifs misérables!	Vaucluse: Miserable Jews!
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Très honorés.	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Very honored!
Vaucluse: La rime, la chanson, Sainte Cécile, je suis éxaucé. Adorez le fils de votre Seigneur.	Vaucluse: I am granted the rhyme, the song, Saint Cecelia. Worship the son of our Lord.
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Oh, le rêveur! Nous n'adorons qu'un Dieu! Béni soit à jamais mais son règne glorieux!	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Oh, the dreamer! We worship only one God! But always blessed be his glorious reign!
Vaucluse: Vous allez renoncer à la loi de Moïse.	Vaucluse: You will all renounce the law of Moses.
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Plutôt mourir par le feu!	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Rather die by fire!
Vaucluse: Et nous vous ouvrons les portes de l'Eglise.	Vaucluse: And we will open the doors of the church.
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Qu'elles nous soient fermées! Il radote! Il a bu!	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: We are closed to that! He drools! He drinks!
Vaucluse: Vous ne penserez plus à vos huit jours de Pâques! Vous ne mangerez plus un baton à la main! Vous mettrez désormais du levain à la pâte!	Vaucluse: You will not think more of your eight days of Easter! You will not anymore eat of a stick in the hand! You will put the leavening in the bread!
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Il a manqué la rime!	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: He missed the rhyme!
Vaucluse: Jassuda, Salomon, David, Elie, Aaron, Levi...	Vaucluse: Jassuda, Solomon, David, Elijah, Aaron, Levi...
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Aucun de ces messieurs n'est avec nous ici!	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: None of these men are here with us!
Vaucluse: Je vous annonce la naissance du Messie!	Vaucluse: I announce the birth of the Messiah!
Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: menteur!	Artaban, Barbacan, Cacan: Liar!

When Vaucluse encounters the three Jews, he is startled. His first entrance, however, marks the first instance of diatonic tonality in the opera: his melody

arpeggiates a D major triad, and the three Jews melodically outline a dominant-seventh chord on the same pitch. Vaucluse—the first Catholic to appear in the opera—sings clearly centered in the tonic key of G major: the key area that has been prepared by both Vaucluse and the Jews.

Example 2.1: Act I, Scene I: Introduction to “Noël Comtadin”

Premiers rouflements de Vaucluse, toujours invisible. Barbacan, surpris, n'a se plus reculer.

Plus vif $\text{♩} = 72$ VAUCLUSE

A

ARTABAN

CACAN *prenant Artaban et Barbacan par le bras* Hé! Quoi? Sei -

Hé! Quoi? Sei -

Hé! Quoi? Sei -

Plus vif $\text{♩} = 72$

p *expressif*

Nouveaux rouflements de Vaucluse. Artaban, Barbacan et Cacan, pressés l'un sur l'autre par la peur, restent immobiles au milieu de la pièce et font meuble, pendant que Vaucluse mal réveillé, par cahots successifs, en frappant des talons la mesure sur le parquet déplace la bergère où il reste enseveli, et apparait de face, les yeux fermés, encore perdu dans son rêve.

il bat toujours la mesure, mais de la tête cette fois. Mouv!

A Ah! Ah! Ah!

cédez

-gneur, protége-nous.

-gneur, protége-nous.

-gneur, protége-nous.

cédez Mouv!

mf

Example 2.1, continued

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system is for the vocalists and piano introduction. It features five staves: Violin (Va.), Soprano (Srt.), Alto (Alc.), Bass (Bar.), and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Moins vif' with a quarter note equal to 84 beats (♩ = 84). The key signature is G major. The lyrics for the vocalists are: 'Mu - tins!... Sainte Cé - ci - le! Pour la conver - sion des Is - ra - ë - lites, daigne inspi - rer mon pe - tit No - ël!'. The piano part begins with a piano (p) dynamic and features multiple major seventh chords. The second system continues the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The lyrics for the vocalists are: 'Schéma Isra - ël.' and 'Schéma Isra - ël.'. The piano part continues with a piano (p) dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand.

The introduction to the “Noël Comtadin,” sung by Vaocluse, while still in G major, incorporates multiple major seventh chords; the Jews’ interjection of “Shema Israel”—although brief—is written modally, in G Lydian, with the raised fourth added to distinguish the Jews musically from Vaocluse. The importance of the Shema to the Jewish faith must not go unnoted: “Shema Israel” are the first two

words of Deuteronomy 6:4; they form the centerpiece of morning and evening prayer services and their twice-daily recitation is mandated by religious commandment.⁹² When the “Noël” begins, however, Vacluse adopts the modal harmony, singing the melody in G with the raised fourth, and the Jews answer by coming to a cadence on a G major triad—all the while declaring Vacluse’s profession of faith to be false.⁹³ Indeed, the cry of “Faux!” is musically stronger than any music sung by Vacluse thus far: the G major cadence is preceded by a cadential motion from dominant to tonic as the bass moves from F-sharp to E-flat, and then from D to its tonic, G. Yet if modal harmony is established as Latin and Jewish and common-practice tonality as cosmopolitan, then the Jews’ tonally-centered statement of “Faux!” is clever and witty: here, the Jews are portrayed as cosmopolitan and momentarily lose their designation of “Other.” Milhaud’s combination of modal harmony with functional tonality not only places the music within a Latin-inspired musical tradition, but it also demonstrates how the music characterizes both the Catholics and the Jews (Example 2.1).

Although Vacluse and the three Jews profess different faiths, they frequently share identical musical motives throughout the “Noël Comtadin.” As Artaban, Barbacan, and Cacan declare that they “worship only one God,” they echo the phrase with which Vacluse opens the aria and praises the baby in the manger. In the same manner, when Vacluse demands that the Jews “renounce the laws of Moses,” he does so with the melody that the three used to cry that his beliefs were false (see Example 2.2). From as early as the opening aria, Milhaud’s musical setting foreshadows the eventual reconciliation between the Catholics and the Jews: they

⁹² The full text of the Shema Israel is “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

⁹³ There are indeed additional dissonances here, but certainly not enough to distract from the overwhelming tonal nature of the aria.

sing the same music and share the same heritage. This heritage also includes traditional ensemble techniques of *opéra comique*, with parallel strophes and witty interjections; such can also be read in terms of French identity politics.

Example 2.2: Act I, Scene I: “Noël Comtadin”

Vaucluse chantant les yeux ouverts, mais toujours en extase si bien qu'il ne voit pas les Juifs.

NOËL COMTADIN
Modéré ♩ = 76

Va. O no - tre Maî - tre

Modéré ♩ = 76

a - do - rable! Ton trô - ne fut - une é - ta - ble Et ta cour, deux

a - ni - maux.... Juifs mi - sé - ra - bles!

ARTABAN
Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux!

CACAN
Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux!

BARBACAN
Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux, Faux!

Example 2.2, continued.

Vous al - lez re - non - cer à la loi
ja - mais son rè - gne glo - ri - eux!
ja - mais son rè - gne glo - ri - eux!
ja - mais son rè - gne glo - ri - eux!

mp

This system contains the first four vocal staves (Va., Ari., Cac., Bar.) and the piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are in a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "Vous al - lez re - non - cer à la loi" for the Soprano, and "ja - mais son rè - gne glo - ri - eux!" for the Alto, Contralto, and Baritone. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more active treble line. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present in the piano part.

de Mo - ï - se. Et nous
rall.
Plu - tôt mourir, plu - tôt mourir par - le feu!
Plu - tôt mourir, plu - tôt mourir par - le feu!
Plu - tôt mourir, plu - tôt mourir par - le feu!

rall.

This system contains the second four vocal staves (Va., Ari., Cac., Bar.) and the piano accompaniment. The vocal parts continue with the lyrics: "de Mo - ï - se. Et nous" for the Soprano, and "Plu - tôt mourir, plu - tôt mourir par - le feu!" for the other three parts. A *rall.* (rallentando) marking is placed above the vocal staves. The piano accompaniment continues with a similar texture, featuring a steady bass line and a treble line with some melodic movement. A *rall.* marking is also present in the piano part.

The first act concludes with an aria in which the Cardinal-Évêque decides to allow the play to proceed (in order to regain favor with the Pope) and prays to God for help in the execution of the plan either to convert the Jews or to expel them from Carpentras:

Table 2.2: Act I, Scene III: Air du Cardinal-Évêque

<p>Seigneur! Les voies de salut sont bien douloureuses! Avoir été l'espoir des Etats de l'Eglise; et me trouver soudain exilé à Carpentras dans cette petite enclave de mon oncle le Pape!</p> <p>L'an passé encore, le Carnaval Romain, le jeu, l'amour et toutes les folies derrière le masque!</p> <p>Mon Dieu, je me jette à vos pieds, pardonnez-moi. Par une action d'éclat, au lende main de mon arrivée, pourquoi ne point racheter toutes mes fautes? Ici il n'y a qu'un Carnaval, Le Carnaval Hebraïque! Les Juifs y seront tous réunis.</p> <p>Si je leur réservais une surprise? Mon Dieu, vous disposez aisément de tout, permettez-moi d'accomplir un voeu magnifique et secondez mon ardeur, désormais toute au service de la foi.</p>	<p>Lord! The ways of salvation are sad! Before I was the hope of the Papal States, and now I am suddenly exiled in Carpentras, this small enclave of my uncle, the Pope!</p> <p>Again last year, the Roman carnival, the play, the love, and all the madness behind the mask!</p> <p>My God, I throw myself at your feet, pardon me. By a brilliant action handed to me upon my arrival, why not buy all my faults? Here there is a carnival, the Hebrew Carnival! The Jews will all be together.</p> <p>If I reserved a surprise for them? My God, you give all things easily; permit me to accomplish a magnificent with and second my ardor, all now in the service of the faith.</p>
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Milhaud's setting of this text, however, belies the Cardinal's belief that God will indeed help him accomplish the task that Vacluse set before him only a few minutes before; constant harmonic shifts and modal mixture portray his hesitance that will eventually be exploited by Esther. The aria, while wholly tonal, comprises a continuous shift between B-flat minor and its parallel major key: the first measure of the Cardinal's text—set in natural minor—is immediately followed in the next measure by text set in B-flat major (Example 2.3). The pattern is repeated throughout the aria, but is interrupted briefly by the juxtaposition of chromatically adjacent chords: G-flat major and G minor on the Cardinal's exclamation of "Mon

Dieu!⁹⁴ As he prays to God, the harmony moves into natural minor, and Milhaud avoids an authentic cadence until the final measure of the act, moving through G-flat and A-flat but never reaching B-flat. The act ends squarely in B-flat major, the surprise of which portrays either the Cardinal's faith in God's assistance, or foreshadows his eventual failure to execute Vaucuse's fatal plan (Example 2.4).

Example 2.3: Act I, Scene III: Air du Cardinal-Évêque, opening

AIR DU CARDINAL-ÉVÊQUE
Mouv: modéré ♩ = 69

Seigneur! les voies du salut

sont bien dou...lou-reu-ses! A-voir é-té l'es-poir

des Etats de l'E-gli-se Et me trouver-soudain

⁹⁴ The same chord recurs on “pourquoi ne point racheter toutes mes fautes?”

Example 2.4: Act I, Scene III: Air du Cardinal-Évêque, conclusion

1^{er} C.
- pri - se?... Mon Dieu, vous dispo.sez ai - sément de tout, permettez-

1^{er} C.
- moi d'accomplir un vœu magni - fi - que et se.condez mon ar - deur, désormaistoute au ser.

1^{er} C.
- vi - ce de la foi.

rall.

rall.

pp

Kelly's characterization of *Esther de Carpentras* as possessing lyrical warmth is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the music that accompanies the entry of the heroine. She arrives first as the professional actress hired from Avignon to play the role of Esther:

Table 2.3: Act II, Scene III: Hadassa's Entrance/Air d'Esther

Hadassa: C'est moi. J'arrive d'Avignon pour jouer le rôle d'Esther! Il n'y a que moi.	Hadassa: It is me. I arrived from Avignon to play the role of Esther! This is only me.
Mardochée: Nous sommes tous des amateurs, mais elle, c'est une actrice de profession.	Mardochée: We are all amateurs, but she, she is a professional actress.
Air d'Esther (Maxixe) Etoile de théâtre juif; j'ai ressuscité la reine de Saba, toutes les héroïnes bibliques: Tamar, Judith, Deborah, et puis Esther, elle aussi comédienne, sut jouer la comédie au Roi,	Esther: Star of the Jewish theater, I have resurrected the Queen of Sheba, and all the biblical heroines: Tamar, Judith, Deborah, and then Esther, also a comedienne, she knew how to play the comedy of the King.
Qui mieux que moi, actrice de la Juiverie, pour jouer ce rôle avec bonheur, saura sur cette scène, jouant comme Esther à contre cœur, feindres sentiments, déguiser son origine à son amant, simuler l'amour dans la haine?	Who better than me, a Jewish actress, to happily play this role? Who will play on this stage, like Esther, against the heart, feigned feelings, disguise her origin to her lover, to emulate love within hatred?
Le Choeur: Vive Hadassa! Bravo!	The choir: Great Hadassa! Bravo!

When she arrives as Hadassa, she sings as might a heroine from an opera by Gounod or Massenet (Example 2.5). When she performs as Esther, however, she sings a *maxixe*: a dance made popular in Brazil in the late nineteenth century (Example 2.6). Both Hadassa's introduction and Esther's *maxixe* fit the French mold: they are melodic and lyrical, they are harmonically straightforward, and they are clearly proportioned. The *maxixe*, however, before its association with a Brazilian dance, was originally the name given to the free-mannered dancing of fashionable dances such as the polka and the mazurka.⁹⁵ Accordingly, Esther's second-act *maxixe* becomes comparable to Vacluse's polka in the first act as both are, in a manner of speaking, introducing a character: Vacluse, the Cardinal-Évêque, and Hadassa/Esther.⁹⁶ The Jew—Esther—is thus capable of singing the same music as

⁹⁵ Gerard Béhague, "Maxixe," in *Grove Music Online*. www.oxfordmusiconline.com. Accessed 22 February 2015. The inclusion of the *maxixe* is unsurprising given Milhaud's time spent in Brazil as an attaché in charge of propaganda to Paul Claudel from 1917-1919.

⁹⁶ Act 1, Scene 1: "Je n'ose pas vous retenir. Monseigneur est tout nouveau: arrivé hier, ç'a été une véritable surprise, ton sure toute fraîche, neveu du Pape élevé en quelques jours a moitié chemin des plus hautes dignités, enfant terrible!..."

the very Catholic who wants to exterminate an entire race: musically, the Jews and the Catholics are equal once again.⁹⁷

Example 2.5: Act II, Scene IX: Hadassa's Entrance

Modéré ♩ = 88

HADASSA avec une légère pointe d'accent du midi

C'est moi...

elle se découvre

J'ar - rive d'Avignon

voix naturelle désormais

Pour jouer le rôle d'Es - ther!... il n'y a que moi.

⁹⁷ Ironically, one of Richard Wagner's, and his disciples', main problems with European Jews was that they had always been skilled at imitating their host societies' languages, musical or otherwise, but always spoke them as Jews (in other words, somehow marked differently). The above reading would draw the opposite conclusion from anti-Semitic thinkers. Chapter 3 will address this in more detail.

Example 2.6: Air d'Esther (Maxixe), opening

AIR D'ESTHER
Mouv^t de Maxixe ♩ = 126
ESTHER (HADASSA) sur les marches de l'escalier

Etoi - le du thé - â - tre ju - da - ï - que, J'ai ressusci -
- - té la rei - ne de Sa - ba, Toutes les hé - ro - ï - nes
bi - bli - ques: Tha - - mar, Judith, De - bo -

Milhaud's effort to portray *Esther de Carpentras*' engagement with French tradition is best understood in terms of the Latin influence that is evident throughout the opera. Writing in 1938, the critic Henry Bidou remarked in *Le Temps* that the opera (specifically the overture) invoked for him a certain sense of *latinité*:

It cannot be mistaken: the opening measures form the mode on E that they call, I believe, the Phrygian mode. But this is the only echo of Milhaud's heredity. After having suggested the ancestral chant, the composer introduces an F-sharp, which then brings us back home to the key of E minor. It then modulates to C in the most traditional way, so that his music is like Provence itself, which is full of memories of the Levant and the Saracen, and yet all Latin.⁹⁸

Bidou is, indirectly, suggesting that the music of the Provençal Jews ("Milhaud's heredity") is associated with the Phrygian mode but—as soon as it is transformed into the key of E minor—it is ready to modulate to C major. These two keys, as introduced in the overture, serve as musical characterizations of the opera's main characters: the Jews of Carpentras and the Catholics—specifically, the Cardinal Bishop and Vaucluse. The vast majority of the music of the Catholic leaders throughout the opera is performed in the key of C major.⁹⁹ But Bidou's characterization comes full circle during the opera's final scene: after Esther's plea for clemency is granted, the Jews sing a chorus praising God and the Cardinal Bishop himself in the very key in which their original fate was orchestrated, thus adopting the key of the Catholics and signifying their lasting presence in Carpentras ("Alleluia! Alleluia! May God protect us and long keep the new Cardinal of Carpentras!;" Example 2.7).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Henry Bidou, "La Musique," *Le Temps*, (February 12, 1938): "On ne peut s'y tromper: cette gamme dont les premières mesures sont formées, c'est le mode de *mi*, celui qu'on appelle, je crois, le mode phrygien. Mais ce n'est qu'un echo comme l'hérédité même de M. Milhaud. Après nous avoir suggéré ce chant ancestral, le musicien ne se gêne pas pour y introduire un *fa* dièse, qui nous ramène chez nous, dans le ton de *mi* mineur. Et il modulera bientôt en ut de la façon la plus classique. De sorte que sa musique ressemble à la Provence elle-même, qui est pleine des souvenirs du Levant sarrasinois, et cependant toute latine." Phrygian modality, and other modalities for that matter, have been used in many European music traditions to signify Oriental otherness. See Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁹⁹ A notable example is found at the moment that the Cardinal Bishop and Vaucluse begin to concoct their plans for mass conversion.

¹⁰⁰ Act II, Scene XIV: "Alleluia! Alleluia! Que Dieu nous garde longtemps le nouveau Cardinal de Carpentras!"

Example 2.7: Act II, Scene XX: "Hymne National"

HYMNE NATIONAL
Animé ♩ = 126
LE CHŒUR DES JUIFS commençant à s'éloigner eux aussi

The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains four vocal staves: Soprano (SOPR.), Contralto (CONT.), Tenor (TEN.), and Basses (BASSES). Each staff has the lyrics: "Pri - ons le... Dieu de l'An -". Below the vocal staves is a piano accompaniment with the tempo marking "Animé ♩ = 126". The second system contains four vocal staves with the lyrics: "- ti - que al.li - ance, E - ter - nel, tu es no.tre". Below these is another piano accompaniment. The piano parts feature a rhythmic melody in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand.

Example 2.7, continued

père et ton nom est no . tre seul Ré - demp -
 père et ton nom est no . tre seul Ré - demp -
 père et ton nom est no . tre seul Ré - demp -
 père et ton nom est no . tre seul Ré - demp -

RIDEAU

- teur.
 - teur.
 - teur.
 - teur.

pp

CACAN *s'avançant seul au milieu de la Grande scène qui se dégarnit pendant que le rideau tombe*

La masca - ra.de s'achève en ser - mon.
rall.

p

L'ENCLOS Août 1925
 MALINES Novembre 1925
 L'ENCLOS Septembre 1927

Imp. A. Mounot. Paris. N. 29,321

Furthermore, following the opera's denouement, the Jews sing the phrase "Praise the God of the ancient alliance; you are our Father and your name is our only

redemption.”¹⁰¹ Labeled as “Hymne national,” these words allude to the belief that the God of the “ancient alliance,” regardless of specific doctrinal thought or practice, is the singular redemption of humankind. Such positioning highlights the claim that the Provençal Jews and the Catholics are historically and inextricably connected and are both, by extension, French. The hymn is performed in its entirety in the Lydian mode on C, but the opera ends with an abrupt shift to E minor, and the opera’s final words declare that “the farce has ended in a sermon,” Milhaud’s return to the sonic representation of the Carpentras Jews at once reflects their “victory” over the Catholics, their continued presence in Carpentras, and their importance—along with their connection to Provence—to Milhaud’s conception of French national identity.

¹⁰¹ Act II, Scene XX: “Prions le Dieu de l’Antique alliance, Eternel, tu es notre père et ton nom est notre seul Rédempteur.”

CHAPTER THREE

Esther and the French Press: Reception and the Negotiation of Identity

In 1940, Milhaud described the Parisian opera houses as having recently undergone a necessary renaissance. The Opéra-Comique—the house that in his opinion had “suffered for so long”—had since become an important venue for the revival of French tradition.¹⁰² While Milhaud explicitly referred to the reappearance of music of the eighteenth century and the more recent operas of Emmanuel Chabrier, his broader implications pointed to the emphasis on the continuation of a French tradition that had been so significant during the interwar years. The importance of regionalism and its contribution to shaping French cultural identity had endured: the “new upsurge” for the theater included an “authentic version of Gounod’s *Mireille*,” Mistral’s epic Provençal poem set to music.¹⁰³ The so-called “transformation” of the theater also included an evening devoted to Milhaud on February 3, 1938. On that evening, *Esther de Carpentras* premiered at the Opéra-Comique as part of a Provençal festival alongside his chamber opera *Le Pauvre Matelot* and a ballet based on *Suite provençale*.

Yet it would be naïve to assume that *Esther de Carpentras* was recognized as an arbiter of the new French national identity, for such a claim depends on an assumption that the opera was immediately successful, that the opera was collectively accepted as French by the French, and that Milhaud was, like the Jews of the Comtat-Venaissin, “immune” to anti-Semitic sentiments. Regardless of his

¹⁰² Milhaud, “Paris Opera Just Before the Occupation,” 45.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

own self-identification, Milhaud was exposed to vitriolic anti-Semitic criticism, and while performances of his music were not actively suppressed, the mere fact that he was Jewish was a factor in public commentary. Questions of identity persisted throughout the 1930s: apart from debates based on *what* was French, an increase in exclusionary nationalism raised the question of *who* was French. Although Milhaud carefully continued to negotiate the expression of his multifaceted identity, the reception of his music—and especially of *Esther*—reflected the complex network of perceived expectations that were necessary to be considered a Frenchman during the 1920s and 1930s.

***Esther* in the Press**

In the days preceding *Esther*'s premiere, Milhaud and Lunel actively attempted to prime the critical reception of the opera. Lunel's article in *Ce Soir* (30 January) was an abridged version of the introduction to his play, and would be reprinted for use as the program note at the premiere.¹⁰⁴ His commentary, apart from providing the public with a detailed summary of the plot, explained the history and traditions of Provençal Jews, his lifelong friendship with Milhaud, and their shared ancestral ties to the communities of the Comtat-Venaissin. Lunel introduced the public to the opera by emphasizing the significance of its Judeo-Provençal inspiration and validating that heritage within French history:

Esther de Carpentras is a comic opera in two acts of both Jewish and Provençal inspiration. Darius Milhaud and I are childhood friends whom, for a long time, many links have brought one closer to the other. In fact, our two families descended from one of the old Jewish communities; they formed miniature republics in Avignon and Carpentras before the Revolution in the French state of the Holy Siege. They were very proud of their privileges and very grateful to the Papacy for the ever so precious protection that they had been granted.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Kelly, *Tradition and Style*, 99, n.41.

¹⁰⁵ Lunel, "Esther de Carpentras," *Ce Soir* (30 January 1938), 6. "Esther de Carpentras est un opéra-bouffe en deux actes, d'inspiration à la fois juive et Provençale. Darius Milhaud et moi-même sommes

Lunel made it clear to his readers that residents of the Jewish communities were privileged on account of their papal protection: implicit in his comment is the indication that the coexistence between the Catholics and the Jews within these Provençal communities was founded on tolerance. He concluded his article in a similar fashion, alluding to the fact that such tolerance had continuously endured:

The drama ends with a double chorus: on the one side that of the chapter that went to get the Bishop, on the other that of the Jews who thank the Lord. Everything falls into place as well, for in the Old Jewry of Carpentras, under the tolerant and southern sky, the voices of the Old and New Testaments resonate for centuries without any false note.¹⁰⁶

However idealistic Lunel's assessment might be—there had indeed been numerous “false notes” between French Jews and Catholics—it revealed to the public Lunel's conception of the work and the manner in which he hoped it would be received: tolerance between the Jews and the Catholics was, in essence, a product of Provence.

On 31 January, an abbreviated version of an interview with Milhaud appeared in *L'Intransigeant*.¹⁰⁷ Like Lunel, Milhaud emphasized his familial history and its connection to the opera, but Milhaud's comments belied his librettist's confidence in the public's acceptance of the continuing religious tolerance between Catholics and Jews. When asked if the opera's libretto was the product of a mixture of fact

deux amis d'enfance, que de nombreux liens ont, depuis longtemps, rapprochés l'un de l'autre. Nos deux familles, en effet, descendent d'une des vieilles communautés israélites qui, avant la Révolution, formaient à Avignon et à Carpentras, dans les Etats français de Saint-Siège des républiques en miniature, très fières de leurs privilèges et fort reconnaissantes à la Papauté de la protection si précieuse qui leur avait toujours été accordée.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. “La drame s'achève par un double chœur: d'une côté celui du chapitre qui vient chercher l'évêque, de l'autre celui des Juifs qui remercient l'Éternel. Tout rentre ainsi dans l'ordre: car, dans la vieille Juiverie de Carpentras, sous le ciel méridional et tolérant, les voix de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament ont pu résonner pendant de longs siècles sans la moindre fausse note.”

¹⁰⁷ René Simon, “Trois Oeuvres d'un compositeur sur la même affiche,” *L'Intransigeant* (31 January 1938), 2.

and fiction, Milhaud responded in the affirmative: “Absolutely.”¹⁰⁸ While he was likely referring to the story’s inclusion of the Cardinal’s intended sabotage, Milhaud’s statement nonetheless weakened Lunel’s attempt to validate the work within a historically authentic framework, and it undermined his librettist’s insistence that there still existed some semblance of tolerance between the Jews and their Gentile counterparts. Furthermore, Milhaud refused to concede to the interviewer’s insistence that the opera was in any way symbolic. Rather than providing the reader with a confirmation or denial of Simon’s suspicion, Milhaud dodged the question altogether by diverting attention away from the work’s obvious symbolism towards the question of genre:

Simon: A little symbolic...this “opéra-comique?”

Milhaud: Think of it as a *dramma giocoso*, that is to say, a tragi-comic piece...¹⁰⁹

Genre, for Milhaud, had the potential to signify Frenchness. The classification of *Esther* as *dramma giocoso*—a style of Italian opera popularized during the eighteenth century and recognized most readily as the designation of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*—reflected his desire to place the opera within the tradition that, by many accounts, began with Lully during the seventeenth century and was inherited, in part, from Italy, France’s Latin neighbor. Milhaud’s attempt to orient the audience toward the genre of the work thus demonstrated his efforts to present *Esther* as a work that was conceived of as inherently French not solely on the basis of its plot, but also on the basis of its musical form.

Following the premiere, numerous critics seized the opportunity to comment on the work. Multiple reviews were favorable: the composer Louis Aubert named

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. “En somme ai-je demandé au compositeur, c’est un mélange de réalité et de fiction? ‘Parfaitement.’”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. “En peu symbolique...cet “opéra-comique? [Milhaud:] ‘Considérez-le plutôt comme un ‘dramma giocoso,’ c’est à-dire un pièce tragi-comique...’”

Esther as the highlight of the evening, and many other writers commented on the attractive nature of the opera—especially in contrast to that of *Le Pauvre matelot*.¹¹⁰ Yet many commentators' reviews recognized and emphasized features of the opera that either emphasized, or detracted from, its French qualities—in particular, those qualities which Milhaud and Lunel took pains to enhance: the opera's evocation of a Latin spirit and its genre.

After praising *Esther* as the *pièce de résistance* of the Provençal program, Aubert continued on to implore patrons of the Opéra-Comique to attend the opera since, in his opinion, performances of operas like *Esther* that were “full of character and spirit” were indeed rare; he later claimed that the score was of the “richest substance that Milhaud ever wrote.”¹¹¹ But Milhaud's opera was not immune to criticism. While Aubert enjoyed the music during the first act, he found fault with the music during the second act. Aubert's complaint was founded in his belief that the choral textures so prominent in the second act obscured the overall sense of the musical line:

Excellent and nervous where needed, in the first act, it becomes a little stagnant when the play comes to the masquerade movement. These choirs, singing constantly in extremely dense writing where the notion of "line" is deleted by the "mass", eventually overwhelm the listener and stifle his faculty of attention.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Louis Aubert, “Un spectacle Darius Milhaud à l'Opéra-Comique,” *Le Journal* (4 February 1938), 9. “Le gros morceau du spectacle est la représentation d'Esther de Carpentras, que seule la radio nous avait jusqu'ici fait connaître.” Henry Prunières wrote that the opera “delighted him,” and Henri Bidou found the score to be “charming.” See Prunières, “A la Opéra-Comique: Esther de Carpentras, Le Pauvre Matelot, Suite Provençale de Darius Milhaud,” *La Revue Musicale* Vol. 19 (1938). “Par contre, *Esther de Carpentras* m'a ravi.” See also Bidou, *Le Temps*. “Que le lecteur excuse ces explications, qui dépassent peut-être un peu la partition charmante d'*Esther de Carpentras*.”

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* “Les bons livres d'opéra-comique sont chose si rare qu'on se doit d'insister sur celui-ci, qui est plein de relief et d'esprit... les plus riches de substance que Milhaud ait jamais écrites.”

¹¹² *Ibid.* “Excellente et nerveuse à souhait, au premier acte, elle devient un peu stagnante au moment où le livret vient à manquer de mouvement. Ces chœurs chantant sans arrêt, dans une écriture extrêmement touffue noù la notion de 'ligne' est effacée par celle de 'masse', finissent par submerger l'auditeur et étouffer sa faculté d'attention.”

André Cœuroy also noted the lyrical nature of the opera:

Esther de Carpentras is, clearly, one of the strongest and most revealing works by Milhaud. The style is firm, the invention is continuous, and there is both a lively exuberance and genuine lyricism... Milhaud has done something organic, uplifting and healthy, which delights me. Of the other aspect, lyricism, I do not think you can find in the pages of contemporary musical theater pages as tightly concentrated in despair than those of the Jewish choruses and Esther's strophes in the second act.¹¹³

The primacy of the melodic line was an essential aspect of Milhaud's sense of *latinité*, and melodic clarity was an aesthetic requirement for music that was to be considered inherently French. Indeed, some of the most pointed criticism was reserved for Milhaud's orchestration as it was perceived to have precluded lyrical singing: Adolphe Boschot wrote in *L'Echo de Paris* that Esther "ha[d] an overly harsh orchestration that [was] not conducive to the voices and jostle[d] the singing."¹¹⁴ It is apparent that while the critics did not agree on the nature of the music during the second act, they did in fact agree on the significance of melodic lyricism within the context of French music: Cœuroy described the score as "organic," as if its lyricism had sprung from an innate sense of French tradition and musical style. Although neither Aubert's nor Cœuroy's review explicitly addressed questions of the opera's musical identity, each nonetheless reveals the writer's stance on the true nature of a French musical essence that had been founded upon the aesthetic characteristics of lyricism and clarity: both elements of the Latin spirit.

Yet even though Boschot was complimentary of the picturesque and thereby exotic nature of the opera, he was—along with other critics—hesitant to accept

¹¹³ André Cœuroy, "La Synagogue," *Gringoire* (11 February 1938). "*Esther de Carpentras* est, à l'évidence, une des œuvres les plus solides et les plus révélatrices de Milhaud. Le style en est ferme, l'invention y est continue, et l'on y trouve à la fois une exubérance vivante et un lyrisme authentique... Pour l'autre aspect, le lyrisme, je ne crois pas qu'on puisse trouver, dans le théâtre musical contemporaine, des pages aussi brièvement concentrées dans la désespérance que les chœurs juifs et les stances d'Esther au deuxième acte."

¹¹⁴ Adolphe Boschot, "A la Opéra-Comique: 'spectacle coupé,'" *L'Echo de Paris* (7 February 1938), 4. "Elle présente encore plus d'une rudesse, plus d'une lourdeur d'orchestration que ne favorisent guère les voix et bousculent le chant."

Milhaud's categorization of the opera as *opéra bouffe*. Boschot claimed that the turgid orchestration created a "heavy" pace that was not always compatible with the composer's desired comic effect.¹¹⁵ Cœuroy shared a similar concern:

In the end, does that make it an *opéra bouffe*, since this how it is presented to us? When Lunel, well before all the recent news, published his drama *Jerusalem in Carpentras* at the N.R.F [Nouvelle Revue Française], the subtitle was: *Parade*. I believe he was right. But since it is comic opera, I pose a question to my readers, to which answers given in good faith interest me. Here it is: if you have the opportunity to see *Esther*, and I hope you do because it is worth the trouble, does the sense of the comic take away the lyrical sentiment for you? Please let me know, and perhaps we can draw a more nuanced portrait of Milhaud than is usually done.¹¹⁶

Lyricism, in Cœuroy's opinion, was threatened by comedy; after praising Milhaud's melodic lyricism in the second act, he concluded his review by questioning whether or not the opera's "lyrical sentiment" could ultimately exist alongside its comic counterparts. His final implication was clear: the addition of lyricism to Milhaud's compositional palette would allow the public to view Milhaud in a different and more nuanced light.

The sense of *latinité* present within *Esther de Carpentras* was noticeable not only in terms of its music but also in terms of its geographic distance and spatial difference in relation to Paris. The opening lines of Boschot's review immediately made reference to the sunny landscape of the Midi that had been so effectively conjured in the popular imagination by *Esther*. Although his review was not entirely enthusiastic, Boschot nevertheless appreciated the opera's reference to the Midi as

¹¹⁵ Ibid., "Son allure parfois pesante ne correspond pas toujours au dessein qu'annonçait le sous-titre d'opéra-bouffe."

¹¹⁶ Cœuroy, "La Synagogue." "Au bout du compte, cela fait-il un *opéra bouffe*, puisque c'est sous cette désignation qu'*Esther* nous est présentée? Quand Lunel, bien avant ses toutes récentes nouvelles. *Jérusalem à Carpentras*, publia son drame à la N.R.F., le sous-titrait: *Parade*. A mon sens, il avait raison. Mais, puisque opéra bouffe, il y a, je voudrais poser à mes lecteurs une question, à laquelle des réponses de bonne foi donneraient tout intérêt. Voici: si vous avez l'occasion de voir *Esther*—et je le souhaite car elle en vaut la peine—le sentiment du comique l'emporte-t-il pour vous sur le sentiment du lyrique? Faites-le moi savoir, et peut-être arriverons-nous à tracer de Milhaud un portrait plus nuancé qu'on ne le fait d'ordinaire." N.R.F. refers to *Les Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française*, the original name of Éditions Gallimard, a prominent Parisian publisher.

he wrote that “*Esther de Carpentras, opéra-bouffe*, takes us into the landscapes of our sun-burst Midi. This is already something that more than one Parisian sentenced to a forced stay on the banks of the Seine will enjoy more pleasure.”¹¹⁷ Yet his comment also called attention to the continual divide between the alleged superiority of the capital city and the inferiority of provinces in comparison. He concluded his discussion of the opera, however in a similar fashion to that of its opening, noting that “the double chorus that ends the piece evokes happily the clamor of a festival held under sunny skies.”¹¹⁸

Simon’s interview with the composer also made mention of his Provençal heritage. In his introduction to the interview, Simon wrote of Milhaud:

Darius Milhaud belongs to the South [Midi]. Perhaps not quite if we measure the distance from Aix-en-Provence the cradle of his family—to Marseille ... and if for Parisians, Marseille is all of the South. Not quite either if we consider the calmness of his physiognomy and the orientation of his output. Nonetheless, the South may annex his fame.¹¹⁹

At the same time that Simon implicitly attempted to classify Milhaud as a Parisian—something that was no doubt necessary for his artistic success—he also emphasized the ongoing tension between the capital and the provinces: his offer to share Milhaud’s fame with the South was a clear indication of the continued perception of Parisian superiority over its regional counterparts.

While numerous writers criticized Milhaud’s musical style or his choice to advertise the opera as an *opéra bouffe*, others disparaged the opera on a deeper

¹¹⁷ Boschot, 4. “*Esther de Carpentras, opéra-bouffe*, nous entraîne dans les paysages ensoleillés de notre Midi. Voilà déjà qui fera plaisir à plus d’un Parisien condamné au séjour forcé sur les bords de la Seine.”

¹¹⁸ Ibid., “[L]e double chœur, qui clot la partition, évoque avec bonheur les clameurs d’une fête populaire sous un ciel ensoleillé.”

¹¹⁹ Simon, “Trois Oeuvres d’un compositeur sur la même affiche,” 2. “Darius Milhaud appartient au Midi. Pas tout à fait peut-être si l’on mesure la distance qui sépare Aix-en-Provence—berceau de sa famille—de Marseille... et si pour les Parisiens Marseille est tout le Midi... Pas tout à fait non plus si l’on considère le calme de sa physionomie et l’orientation de sa production. Néanmoins, le Midi peut annexer sa renommée.”

level by arguing that Milhaud and Lunel's account of the history of Comtat-Venaissin was, at best, exaggerated, and at worst, entirely fabricated. Henry Prunières, whose revue in *La Revue Musicale* was generally positive, recognized the importance of the friends' shared Judeo-Provençal heritage, but at the same time, implied that their Jewish ancestors could not possibly have resided in France as long as they had been claimed to:

Darius Milhaud, along with his childhood friend Armand Lunel, is passionate about the lives of the Provençal Jews. They [Milhaud and Lunel] are so sincerely rooted in the land of the Comtat that they always affirm it as them having inhabited it since before the birth of Jesus Christ!¹²⁰

Prunières' comments—although not explicitly—undermined one of the fundamental aspects of Milhaud's identification as a Frenchman; in his opinion, Milhaud and Lunel had convinced themselves that their historical exaggeration had become truth. Other critics' opinions were expressed more candidly. Henri Austruy, writing in *La Nouvelle Revue*, rebuffed any claim of historical authenticity in the story of *Esther*, and began his review by labeling it as a “Jewish ‘tall tale,’ [one that was] mounted sumptuously and in a breathtaking movement.” He continued on to explain that “the subject [was] taken from the Bible, which as everyone knows, only contains harsh things.¹²¹ Austruy indicted the opera on multiple levels: on the one hand, he argued that the story, having been fabricated, was the product of a Jewish imagination and on the other, he implicitly condemned Milhaud and Lunel for deliberately altering scriptural narrative. Austruy was not the only critic to allege infidelity to Biblical narrative. Boschot, who acknowledged the beauty of the

¹²⁰ Henry Prunières, *La Revue Musicale*, 137. “Darius Milhaud est ami d'enfance d'Armand Lunel et, comme lui, passionné par la vie des juifs provençaux. Ils se sentent si bien enracinés dans la terre des Comtats qu'ils affirmeraient pour un peu l'avoir toujours habitée dès avant la naissance de Jésus Christ!”

¹²¹ Henri Austruy, “Les Theatres,” *La Nouvelle Revue* (February 1938), 311. “*Esther de Carpentras* est une “galéjade” juive montée somptueusement et dans un mouvement endiablé. Le sujet en est emprunté à la Bible qui, comme chacun le sait, ne contient pas que des choses sévères.”

Provençal landscape, reduced the opera to nothing but a “correction of history by fantasy.”¹²² He criticized not only Milhaud and Lunel’s *Esther de Carpentras*, but also Jean Racine’s *Esther*.

Recently, a revival of Racine’s *Esther* at the Théâtre-Français recalled how this beautiful and touching Israelite saved many of her fellow Jews from massacre by capturing the heart of Ahasuerus, the king. But Racine did not tell us everything. Now if we consult the book of Esther in the Bible, we see that while she was on the throne, this touching girl obtained huge massacres in retaliation.¹²³

Boschot was hesitant to give Milhaud credit; if Racine’s *Esther* was flawed, then so too was Milhaud’s, as both had been shown to have amended scriptural narrative so achieve their own personal objectives. By undermining the validity of the opera’s narrative, critics implicitly questioned Milhaud’s status as an authentic Frenchman: it was the composer’s connection to the Comtat and its traditions and his reference to a nationally shared past that partially validated his sense of Provençal and French *enracinement*.

Criticism in Context I: France versus Germany

Criticism of *Esther de Carpentras* was tightly intertwined with ideologies of identity formation during the interwar period. Critics, subconsciously or otherwise, adopted themes present within political and nationalist discourse in their writing so as to illustrate the importance of musical composition and aesthetics in the creation and continuation of a French national tradition. Whether French identity was a product of either cultural centralization or regional influence was still debated. The national conception of the fatherland and its identification had, at the

¹²² Boschot, 4. “Autre plaisir: rajeunissons de cent cinquante ans, oublions les ennuis qui nous assaillent, et fuyons vers un XVIII siècle où l’histoire est corrigée par la fantaisie.”

¹²³ Ibid. “Récemment, une reprise de l’Esther de Racine, au Théâtre-Français, a rappelé comment cette belle et touchante israélite, en captant le cœur du roi Assuérus, sauva du massacre nombre de ses coréligionnaires. Mais Racine ne nous a rien dit de la suite. Or si l’on consulte la Bible au Livre d’Esther, on voit que cette touchante jeune fille, elle qu’elle fut sur le trône, obtenu d’immenses massacres par représailles.”

same time however, transformed and had become more and more nationalist and exclusionary. Musicians—whether critics or composers—began to function as increasingly vocal mouthpieces for political movements and parties, and they utilized the press as a propagandistic tool for their respective affiliations. In short, national consciousness progressively informed both the artist's and the critic's sensibilities and practices: the reception of *Esther de Carpentras* must be contextualized.

The embrace of French music before, during, and after the war was a way to counter the proliferation of German influence, both on the home front and abroad. Right-wing nationalist groups such as the Ligue Nationale pour la Défense de la Musique Française, founded by Charles Tenroc in 1916, fought consistently to preserve the purity of an imagined French musical tradition and to safeguard it from foreign infiltration; it went so far as to prohibit the performance of any German or Austrian musical work that was not in the public domain during wartime.¹²⁴ The league, whose members included Camille Saint-Saëns, Théodore Dubois, Gustave Charpentier, and Vincent d'Indy, took it upon itself to judge what could or could not appropriately represent France. Although not explicitly advertised as a political organization, the league appropriated nationalist language that had been in usage since the Dreyfus affair.

Austro-German music, however, was not only an external threat, for there were French musicians who supported it from within. The composer and pianist Jean Wiéner bemoaned the absence of foreign (German) music in Parisian wartime culture, declaring that he craved a heterogeneous mixture ("*salade*") of musical

¹²⁴ Kelly, *Tradition and Style*, 13.

influence within France.¹²⁵ When Les Six promoted a performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* in 1922, the critic Louis Vuillemin responded furiously, claiming, "The goal of their efforts, certainly, is to infect our organism; also to show curious foreigners, present in droves in the hall, 'the collapse of French taste after the war!'"¹²⁶ Vuillemin's xenophobic nationalism—though certainly not unique—was clear:

I grant that it would be very hard to understand nationalism by confining it to be self-sufficient and to love itself exclusively, ignoring its other, contemptuous, side. Does it make me foolish to demand everything from the nationalism of others by admiring it to the exclusion of our own? When I hear a snob of the latest say that Debussy is an outdated musician and that Schoenberg is the Messiah of the present times—a common opinion—I wince sadly. The cock has crowed three times. One—or many—Judases deny our god to preach the dogma of a minor foreign prophet. They offend beauty, clarity in favor of ugliness, confusion, and randomness... But let the two dozen "nationalists without knowing" call from the platform: "Long Live Schoenberg"; for as far as I can tell, they do work neither for music nor for our *own* nationalism!¹²⁷

Like his counterparts in Les Six, Milhaud initially supported Schoenberg's music. He was, nevertheless, careful not to express his personal opinions in his public statements and was deliberate in his disassociation of France from its German neighbors:

We in Europe are actually in front of two absolutely opposed currents...The two currents I am alluding to are the school of Paris and the school of Vienna...the *Groupe des Six* in

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²⁶ Louis Vuillemin, "Concerts métèques," *Le Courrier musical*, (1 January 1923). "...Leur effort a pour but, sans doute, de gangréner notre organisme; de démonter aussi aux étrangers curieux, présents en nombre dans la salle 'l'affaissement du goût chez: les Français d'après guerre!'"

¹²⁷ Vuillemin, "Musique et nationalisme," *Le Courrier musical*, (15 February 1923). "Je l'accorde votonliers, ce serait fort mal comprendre le nationalisme que de le borner à se suffire lui-même et à s'aimer exclusivement, en ne tenant aucun compte de nationalisme d'en face et même en le méprisante. M'accordera-t-on, en retour, qu'il y a quelque sottise à tout demander au nationalisme d'autrui en l'adorant au dommage du notre? Quand j'entends dire par un snob dernier-cri que Debussy est un musicien "périmé" et que M. Schoenberg est le Messie des temps présents—air connu,—je tressaille douloureusement. Le coq a chanté trois fois. Un—ou plusieurs—Judas renient le dieu de chez eux pour prêcher le dogme d'un petit prophète d'ailleurs. Ils offensent la Beauté, la clarté et la mesure au bénéfice de la laideur, de la confusion et de l'arbitraire... Mais laissons crier sur le quai: "Vive Schoenberg" les deux douzaines de "nationalistes sans le savoir"; car ils ne travaillent à mon sens, ni pour la Musique, ni pour notre nationalisme à nous!"

France has endeavored to restore the national and essential tradition of their country, whereas the young Viennese have sought to reclaim Mozart and Schubert...¹²⁸

While in this instance Milhaud was referring specifically to Schoenberg, the German tradition writ large was considered nevertheless a continual threat to the French interwar aesthetic. The German style was closely associated with the romantic tradition and was declared the antithesis of the classical characteristics of clarity, beauty, and simplicity that had come to play significant roles in French interwar aesthetics. Indeed, Milhaud had been criticized for his embrace of romanticism during the 1920s, and would continue to be during the 1930s: the orchestration of *Esther de Carpentras*, although never referred to as “romantic,” was explicitly condemned for its “heaviness” and implicitly for its lack of clarity.¹²⁹ Just as Vuillemin had pointed out the “ugliness” of Schoenberg’s music, so also did Dominique Sordet in reference to *Esther*: “How many music lovers will focus their attention on the music of *Esther de Carpentras*? How much will it be accorded by its ugliness, its futility, its length?” He continued on to denigrate the score as “rough and unappealing,” and he compared Milhaud’s allegedly offensive score to similar music of Stravinsky and Schoenberg.¹³⁰

The French feared that the influence of German music would tarnish the purity of the classical tradition in France. Pierre Lassere, a Parisian literary critic,

¹²⁸ Milhaud, “The Evolution of Modern Music in Paris and Vienna,” 546.

¹²⁹ For a description of Milhaud’s music as “romantic”, see Kelly, *Tradition and Style*, 25. She quotes Prunières: “Indeed, all four of them [Milhaud, Alexandre Krein, Ernest Bloch, and Arnold Schoenberg] (and one could extend the list) are expressionists, whose music is steeped in psychology; these are subjective musicians, lyrical poets whose music is an outpouring and an impassioned confession, often violent, exasperated, not without a slightly exaggerated sense of the declamatory, the theatrical, and sometimes the sentimental.”

¹³⁰ Dominique Sordet, “Chronique musicale: *Le Pauvre matelot, Suite provençale, Esther de Carpentras*” *L’Action française* (4 February 1938), 5. *L’action française* was the newspaper of the ultra-nationalist league of the same name. “Combien de mélomanes pourront fixer leur attention sur la musique d’*Esther de Carpentras*? Combien seront accolades par sa laideur, son inutilité, sa longueur?”

condemned the German exportation of a romantic style and claimed the infiltration of its utopian nature into French culture would destroy social order.¹³¹ Although Lassere was writing in 1908, his ideas remained popular during and especially after the war. Yet they also became intertwined with the wave of French anti-Semitism that began in earnest with the Dreyfus affair and continued to grow until its culmination during Vichy. Identity construction based on exclusion was no longer limited to keep Germany at bay: it had expanded to reject Jews, including those who had long resided in France.¹³²

Criticism in Context II: Anti-Semitism in France Before and During the Interwar

The Dreyfus affair, although two decades earlier, caused many French citizens to question their relatively peaceful relationship with the Jews, and catalyzed an intensification in popular anti-Semitism that would reach new heights during the 1930s.¹³³ Although a certain amount of animosity toward foreign cultural infiltration—especially toward Germany—was present in France prior to Dreyfus, the aftermath of the scandal set into motion a metamorphosis of the process of self-identification, a process whose discourses found their way into all aspects of French life.

¹³¹ Jane Fulcher, "A Political Barometer of Twentieth-Century France: Wagner as Jew or Anti-Semite?," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 84, No. 1 (Spring 2000), 48.

¹³² Literature written during the 1920s frequently included the term "boche," which carried with it the connotation of German and Jewish influence. See Fulcher, "The Preparation for Vichy: Anti-Semitism in French Musical Culture Between the Two World Wars," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 79, No. 3 (1995), 458.

¹³³ Jane Fulcher credits the development of this phenomenon to the Dreyfus affair. See Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*. See also Eric Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1996); Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), and Zeev Sternhell, "The Roots of Popular Anti-Semitism in the Third Republic," in *The Jews in Modern France*, ed. Frances Malino and Bernard Wasserstein (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985), 103-35.

Many scholars have identified the time between the Dreyfus affair and the end of the Second World War as a time during which anti-Semitism intensified in France. While the Dreyfus affair was indeed a fundamental factor in this phenomenon, it was not its sole cause. France had been, as Milhaud had frequently explained, home to a sizeable Jewish population since the time of the Crusades, but it was not until the Revolution that they became full beneficiaries of French citizenship: even the “privileged” Jews of the Comtat-Venaissin were made to live in ghettos and to wear yellow clothing as a physical reminder of their difference.¹³⁴ The Revolution and concomitant dissolution of the monarchy, however, led to their emancipation: in 1789 some forty thousand French Jews were the first in the West to be accepted (at least theoretically) as equal citizens under the law.¹³⁵ Following their emancipation, Jews were expected to behave as Frenchmen who merely happened to be of Jewish faith. As one observer declared to the National Assembly: “To the Jews as individuals—everything; to the Jews as a group—nothing. They must constitute neither a body politic nor an order, they must be citizens individually.”¹³⁶

Pierre Birnbaum noted that the Jews’ emancipation was a necessary action within the ideology of the Revolution itself, and, indeed, the century following the Revolution was a time during which assimilation was relatively successful.¹³⁷ According to Michael Maurrus, “any effort to describe the Jewish community in

¹³⁴ Singer, “A Remnant,” 159.

¹³⁵ See Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

¹³⁶ National Assembly, 23 December 1789, in “Réimpression de l’Ancien Moniteur,” *Gazette Nationale ou le Moniteur Universel* (Paris, 1859), 2. Quotation given in Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 5.

¹³⁷ Pierre Birnbaum, *Anti-Semitism in France: A Political History from Léon Blum to the Present*, trans. Miriam Kochan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1992), 16-17.

France at the end of the nineteenth century faces the fact that the Jews of France were highly assimilated into French life and that, at the same time, their assimilation was never complete and was thus a continuing problem.”¹³⁸ Part of the continuing process of assimilation was the increase of Jewish immigrants seeking citizenship in France. Concurrent with the Dreyfus affair, a sizeable number of Jews from Eastern Europe entered the country with the hopes of assimilating into French culture in the same manner as those before. But the scandal surrounding Dreyfus’ indictment elicited a response that illustrated the widely held conviction that the Jews were first and foremost their own race rather than assimilated Frenchmen, and a growing number of French politicians and intellectuals raised questions regarding the ability of Jewish immigrants to assimilate into French society.¹³⁹ Rootedness in French cultural tradition was a prerequisite for claiming a French identity; the growing consensus was that foreign Jews were, as part of a race without a homeland, unable to demonstrate an attachment to French history and tradition and could therefore never adequately display a sense of *enracinement*.¹⁴⁰

According to Zeev Sternhell, the Dreyfus affair rendered France “incapable of defining itself except in terms of opposition.”¹⁴¹ In the wake of the scandal, the formation of nationalist leagues such as the Ligue de l’Action Française transformed a rather indistinct anti-Semitism into the rallying cry of the political right. For the members of the league, Jews were *métèques*—literally, half-breeds—

¹³⁸Michael R. Maurrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 2. For the present discussion, I am adopting Maurrus’ definition of assimilation as a process by which “individuals of Jewish background assumed an *identity* which [was] essentially French.”²

¹³⁹ Maurrus, *The Politics of Assimilation*, 114-16.

¹⁴⁰ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 2. On the trope of the “wandering Jew,” see Birnbaum, *Anti-Semitism in France*, 99-105.

¹⁴¹ Sternhell, “The Roots of Popular Anti-Semitism in the Third Republic,” 115.

who were corrupting the French political and cultural establishment.¹⁴² Jews were no longer considered to be “French Jews.” Rather, they were foreigners who were feared to be infiltrating France from within.

French writers at the turn of the century were increasingly concerned with illustrating the differences between Frenchmen and Jews, and the war would only legitimate their claims further. These supposed differences, however, were no longer confined to the realm of the political, and the discourse of exclusion was coopted by musicians and critics alike. Jewish musicians were often accused of undermining the linear trajectory of the French and, by extension, the European musical tradition:

Jews have often been criticized for troubling the purity of European, or rather Aryan, music by their Semitic accents, their lamentations, their exotic language; today to this reproach we added another: the Jews bear the weight of a new responsibility because they would be the artisans of musical ultramodernism ... The composer Lazare Saminsky protests against these accusations in *Musical America*. He first observed that pure types do not exist in the anthropological field or in the psychological field, and then that the music composed by the Spaniards, Slavs, Hungarians is much more exotic, more clearly marked by ethnic characters than that written by the Jews.¹⁴³

While Saminsky argued that the music of Jewish composers occupied its own category of “exotic” music, Vallas insisted that the music’s nature as “Jewish” prevented it from being classified as creative at all. The Jews, according to Vallas, were characteristically neurotic and hysterical; these were qualities that prevented Jewish composers from creating original music. Music of Jewish composers could

¹⁴² Fulcher, “The Preparation for Vichy,” 461. Refer also to Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France 1914-1940*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20-21. The term “métèque” was coined by the founder of the Ligue de l’Action Française, Charles Maurras.

¹⁴³ Léon Vallas, “Les Juifs et la Musique,” *La Nouvelle Revue Musicale* Vol. 22, No. 2 (December 1923), 5. “On a souvent reproché aux Juifs d’avoir trouble la pureté de la musique européenne, ou plutôt arienne, par leurs accents sémitiques, leurs lamentations, leur langage exotique; aujourd’hui, à ce reproche on en ajoute un autre: les Juifs porteraient le poids d’une responsabilité nouvelle, car ils seraient les artisans de l’ultramodernisme musical... Contre ces deux accusations, le compositeur Lazare Saminsky proteste dans la *Musical America*. Il observe d’abord que les types purs n’existent ni dans le domaine anthropologique, ni dans le domaine psychologique, ensuite que la musique compose par les Espagnols, les Slaves, les Hongrois est beaucoup plus exotique, plus nettement marquée de caractères ethniques, que celle qu’écrivent les Juifs.”

only “assimilate and exaggerate” the ideas and feelings within the music of non-Jewish composers.¹⁴⁴ Vallas labelled such music as “hysterical” and “excessively expressive:” both descriptors that would surface again over a decade later in the critical reception of *Esther de Carpentras*.

Anti-Semitism, Milhaud and *Esther de Carpentras*

In response to a series of concerts given by the Jewish composer and pianist Jean Wiéner, the critic Louis Vuillemin wrote that *métèques*:

[are] Dadaists of music, except for some very rare exceptions, they hurry to discover all that the worst international taste has produced, and they import to the capital's heart, apparently in hopes of setting its beat awry. But the heart of the city is not poisoned. It rises above and I believe it begins to vomit the half-breeds and their “coco,” pianistic, vocal, or symphonic... The last liberating spasm was quite telling! Between two heavens, Paris, or at least those in the hall who were truly Parisian, lavished a healthy helping of jeers on the importers... The goal of their efforts, certainly, is to infect our organism; also to show curious foreigners, present in droves in the hall, “the depression of taste has clicked: the French after the war!”...

He continued on to explain that:

Total abstinence would be a better way to right the wrong. One or two concerts of half-breeds given for the bench [i.e. the judges] would suffice to release Paris from their complete exoticism, corrupt as well as powerless, and to which frequent exposure borders on impertinence. Music would be released from other gods and other apostles, which is what it needs in this time!¹⁴⁵

Vuillemin's remarks were written in response to a performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* that had been sponsored by Wiéner and Les Six, the most notable of which in this

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 6. “[The Jewish race] est une race névrosée, hystérique, qui exagère, en se les assimilant, les idées et les sentiments de ses voisins.”

¹⁴⁵ Louis Vuillemin, “Concerts Métèques,” *Le Courrier musical* (January 1, 1923). “Dadaïstes de la Musique, ils s’empressent, sauf exceptions très rares, à découvrir tout ce que le mauvais goût international a produit, et l’importent au cœur de la capitale, dans l’évident espoir de la faire battre de travers. Il n’en est pas intoxiqué: il se soulève et je crois qu’il commence à vomir les métèques et leur “coco”, pianistique, vocale, ou symphonique... Le dernier spasme libérateur a été plutôt éloquent! Entre deux hoquets, Paris, ou du moins ce qui était vraiment de Paris dans la salle, a prodigué aux importateurs un joli lot de quolibets... Leur effort a pour but, sans doute, de gangréner notre organisme; de démonter aussi aux étrangers curieux, présents en nombre dans la salle l’affaïssement du goût clic: les Français d’après guerre!... L’abstention totale serait bien meilleure justicière. Un ou deux ‘concerts métèques’ donnés devant, les banquettes suffiraient à débarrasser Paris de leur exotisme intégral, faisandé autant qu’impuissant, et dont la si fréquente exposition confine à l’impertinence. La musique en serait soulagée, tant il est vrai qu’elle a besoin, en ce temps ou nous vivons, d’autres dieux et d’autres apôtres!”

context was Milhaud. Milhaud and other “half-breeds” were accused of wearing “German glasses” while infiltrating France with “poisoned propaganda.”¹⁴⁶

Such vitriol levied at Milhaud showed what challenges the composer faced when identifying himself as a Frenchman, regardless of his birthplace. Vuillemin explicitly pointed out that Milhaud’s Jewishness had been configured by contemporaries as distinctly separate from—and inferior to—French nationality, and as a result, Milhaud fell outside the realm of the internal exotic: for Vuillemin—as well as a host of other ultra-nationalist right-wing critics, any Jew is a corrupt outsider whose only objective is to infect the healthy French organism with the virus of internationalism. While tradition for Milhaud was an inheritance from his native Provence and was essentially French, his anti-Semitic critics equated Jewish tradition (Provençal or otherwise) with “complete exoticism” and thereby stripped it of the possibility of being French.

Unlike Vuillemin and Vallas, Milhaud did not consider his music to be Jewish in nature. Indeed, in his mind, his music was intrinsically French; as an assimilated French Jew, his music was a product of his country rather than that of his religion: he explained that “the more the Jews become assimilated, the more this music will have the characteristics [*sic*] of their country and not of their religion, except in certain works of religious character.”¹⁴⁷ Yet even as Milhaud insisted that his Provençal heritage validated his identification as a Frenchman, critics such as Vallas maintained that his birth in Provence and his attachment to a Latin spirit did not override his Jewish ancestry: responding directly to Milhaud’s lecture entitled “The

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, “Il faut voir la figure de ces sires, chevelus, minables et pourvus de lunettes à la bouche... Par quelle machiavélique et empoisonnée propagande...C'est ce qu'il serait intéressant de savoir enfin un de ces jours...”

¹⁴⁷ Milhaud, “The Problem of Jewish Music (1940),” *Revue des Études juives*, CLV (January-June 1996), 239.

Evolution of Modern Music in Paris and Vienna,” Vallas challenged Milhaud’s personal sense of Frenchness vis-à-vis *latinité*:

But the author of the conference seems to think that the habitat of an artist is enough to completely change its ethnic quality...[Milhaud feels that] the long stay of his paternal ancestors in the south of France would have transformed his nature, annihilated any hereditary influence, and would have made his spirit *essentially* Latin. This adverb is unexpected!¹⁴⁸

Milhaud’s “alleged *latinité*”—as Vallas countered—was, however, only a cover for his Jewish essence. Vallas went on to agree with the Swiss critic Aloys Mooser’s evaluation of the composer: being Jewish, Milhaud had no “original spirit” to be found underneath the surface of “modernism and all its artificial nature.” Mooser considered Milhaud’s music to be “mediocre” and “banal,” and determined him to be suffering from “poverty of the imagination”—an affliction that was no doubt a product of his Jewishness.¹⁴⁹

It should come as no surprise, then, that Milhaud’s Jewish heritage would come to bear on the reception of *Esther de Carpentras*.¹⁵⁰ Cœuroy’s review—

¹⁴⁸ Vallas, “Question du Race,” *La Nouvelle Revue Musicale* Vol. 22, No. 2 (December 1923), 39-40. “Mais l’auteur de la conférence semble penser que l’habitat d’un artiste suffit à modifier complètement sa qualité ethnique; il n’est autre, en effet, que Darius Milhaud... ce long séjour de ses ancêtres paternels dans le midi de la France aurait transformé sa nature, annihilé toute influence héréditaire et aurait fait de son esprit *essentiellement* latin. Cet adverbe est inattendu!” Refer to chapter two for a brief discussion on anti-Semitic beliefs that Jews were essentially imitators of European culture and tradition.

¹⁴⁹ Vallas, “Darius Milhaud,” *La Nouvelle Revue Musicale* Vol. 22, No. 2 (December 1923), 42-43. “Ce compositeur, prétendument latin, est élevé au pinacle par les uns et abaissé par les autres jusqu’au derniers barreaux de l’échelle musicale... Car nous n’avons point affaire avec lui à un esprit original dont nous puissions espérer, quelque jour, la révélation. Il n’est, pour s’en convaincre, que de considérer son oeuvre. Sous un modernisme de surface et tout artificiel, une nature s’y décèle, irrémédiablement médiocre, que sa banalité, son éloquence abondante et douceuse semblait vouer aux formes les plus basses de l’art... en vain s’efforce-t-il à voiler la pauvreté de son imagination en affectant de n’attacher aucune importance au choix de ses thèmes et en leur imprimant même, de propos délibéré, une brutale simplicité et un tour commun; en vain tâche-t-il, par d’astucieuses étrangetés, à donner le change au public et à lui faire prendre pour un essai d’expression nouvelle ce qui n’est que combinaison arbitraire et froid calcul.”

¹⁵⁰ Although these reviews were written fifteen years after Vallas and Vuillemin’s commentaries were published, anti-Semitism in the press was still rampant during the 1930s. Indeed, many scholars argue that French anti-Semitism during the 1930s was a continuation and intensification of the brand of anti-Semitism that had become widespread directly after the Dreyfus affair. See Fulcher, “The Preparation for Vichy” as well as “A Political Barometer of Twentieth-Century France.” See also

provocatively titled “La Synagogue—asserted that, as a result of its “spectacle de Darius Milhaud,” the Opéra-Comique had transformed into a synagogue:

For the past few days, Paris has gained a new synagogue: the Opéra-Comique. Did the chief Rabbi of the place, Daniel Lazarus, who performs the duties of secretary, have it in mind to invite Louis-Ferdinand Céline, the tumultuous champion of militant anti-Semitism, to the recent spectacle? This would have given him the opportunity to add a chapter to the *Bagatelles pour un massacre* that is sketched there: a chapter, however necessary, on Jewish music and the composers of Israel.¹⁵¹

Cœuroy’s reference to Céline was offensive, to say the very least. Céline was indeed the “tumultuous champion of militant anti-Semitism” in the 1930s: Paul J. Kingston has noted that his writings, namely the *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, were the most influential examples of anti-Semitic propaganda prior to and during the German occupation of France.¹⁵² Céline’s ideological construction of the Jewish race rejected its very nature as having descended from Biblical ancestry and propagated the notion that the Jews were opposed to and inferior to those of Aryan descent: “The Jew is a negro. The Semitic race does not exist, it is an invention of the Freemason; the Jew is only the product of a cross between blacks and barbaric Asians.”¹⁵³

Cœuroy continued by listing the attendees of “the synagogue:”

They were all there for the dress rehearsal of *Esther de Carpentras*, in the orchestra and by proxy: Darius Milhaud, great victor and beneficiary of the day, flanked by his very intelligent librettist Armand Lunel, and in the auditorium, Manuel Rosenthal, Reynaldo

Sternhell, 121; and Paul J. Kingston, *Anti-Semitism in France During the 1930s: Organisations, Personalities, and Propaganda* (Hull: University of Hull, 1983).

¹⁵¹ Cœuroy, “La Synagogue.” “Paris, depuis quelques jours, compte une nouvelle synagogue: c’est l’Opéra-Comique. Le grand rabbin du lieu, M. Daniel Lazarus, qui exerce les fonctions de secrétaire, a-t-il eu l’esprit d’inviter au récent spectacle israélite le champion tumultueux de l’antisémitisme militant, Louis-Ferdinand Céline? C’aurait été lui donner l’occasion d’ajouter aux *Bagatelles pour un massacre* un chapitre qui n’y est qu’esquissé: un chapitre, pourtant nécessaire, sur la musique juive et sur les compositeurs d’Israël.” Daniel Lazarus was the composer of *Symphonie avec hymne* (1933), a programmatic symphonic work that depicted the history of the Jewish people. He was also well known for his involvement in music affiliated with the Popular Front. See Fulcher, “The Preparation for Vichy,” 468.

¹⁵² Kingston, *Anti-Semitism in France During the 1930s*, 75.

¹⁵³ Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, (Paris: Denoël, 1937), 192. “Le Juif est un nègre, la race sémite n’existe pas, c’est une invention de franc-maçon, le Juif n’est que le produit d’un croisement de nègres et de barbares asiatiques.”

Hahn, Roland Manuel, etc., etc. etc... Moreover, it was a very nice company which offered this *Esther* her well-deserved success. We are presented an episode of the historical, social, and religious Jewish life in the Comtat-Venaissin in the eighteenth century. We *goyms* who have no ancestral contacts with the burlesque festival hardly had only the little in the program to understand its true meaning.¹⁵⁴

Cœuroy compared the Jewish critics or composers to the non-Jewish *goyms* who were in the audience; his sarcastic use of the Yiddish term, meaning a person who is not a Jew, only furthered the anti-Semitic tone of his comments. Yet Cœuroy's claim that *Esther* could only be successfully understood by a Jew was not unique; his sentiment was prefigured by Paul Collaer, Milhaud's best-known apologist. In a letter written to the composer, Collaer encouraged his friend to work on the adaptation of Lunel's play, but warned that its significance had the potential to go unnoticed: Collaer wrote "I am sure that you will do something great with this drama of Esther whose subject is so beautiful and can only be understood by a man of your race."¹⁵⁵ Like Cœuroy, Collaer, albeit in a less offensive manner, emphasized the separation of the opera's audience between the French (the "*goyms*") and the Jews. Ostensibly having been written for the Jews by a Jew, *Esther de Carpentras* was—at least for Cœuroy—incapable of existing as a truly French work. Yet these comments, when taken together with his previous concerns regarding melodic lyricism and comedy—become all the more insidious: Milhaud's haphazard combination of lyrical sentiment and theatrical comedy motivated Cœuroy to claim

¹⁵⁴ Cœuroy, "La Synagogue." "A la générale d'*Esther de Carpentras*, ils y étaient tous; dans l'orchestre même, et par procuration, Darius Milhaud, grand triomphateur et bénéficiaire de la journée, flanqué de son très intelligent librettiste Armand Lunel, et, dans la salle, Manuel Rosenthal, Reynaldo Hahn, Roland Manuel, etc., etc. etc... C'était une fort belle chambrée qui fit un succès, d'ailleurs bien mérité, à cette *Esther*. On nous la présentait comme un épisode à la fois historique, social et religieux de la vie juive dans le Comtat-Venaissin au XVIII^e siècle. Nous autres *goyms*, qui manquions de contacts ancestraux avec cette fête burlesque, n'avions guère que le programme pour en comprendre le sens réel. Mais nous n'avions, somme toute, qu'à en goûter la valeur poétique et musicale, s'il se pouvait, et il se put très bien."

¹⁵⁵ Letter from Paul Collaer to Darius Milhaud, dated 20 November 1922. Quotation given in Drake, 148. "Je suis sûr que vous allez faire quelque chose de très bien avec ce drame d'Esther dont le sujet est si beau et ne peut être pleinement compris que par un homme de votre race."

that as a Jew, Milhaud would never have the ability to truly grasp French operatic genres. His appeal to his readership suggested that he suspected a shared opinion by the public, and the “nuanced portrait,” while at first seemingly complimentary, became a method through which to position Milhaud the Jew as the ultimate Other. The sense of regional authenticity created by *Esther* was thus destabilized given that, at least in the opinion of interwar French critics, a Jew could never be truly French. *Esther de Carpentras*, for Milhaud, was not an attempt at cultural assimilation as much as it was the composer’s attempt to validate the significance of his Judeo-Provençal heritage in the formation of his identity as a Frenchman, whether or not he would ever be accepted as such.

Although not patriotic in the traditional sense of the word, *Esther de Carpentras* operated within multiple strands of the French desire for a national musical style during the 1920s and 1930s. Any unified conception of a French national identity had been shattered as a result of the Dreyfus Affair, French confidence upon the international stage had been virtually stripped by the First World War, and French politicians, intellectuals, and musicians were all active collaborators in the process of identity reconstruction. National by virtue of its advocacy of regionalism as well as the historic Franco-Judaic relationship, *Esther de Carpentras* was Milhaud’s gift to his *patrie*, for he was indeed a Frenchman from Provence by birth and a Jew by religion. Regardless of its reception, *Esther de Carpentras* was the representation of what the composer and his librettist held to be the essential interwar *esprit du temps*.

CONCLUSION

Esther de Carpentras has not enjoyed a happy life on the operatic stage. Even its first staged performance, originally intended to have taken place in 1928 in Monte Carlo, did not materialize; Milhaud and Lunel waited ten long years to see their work come to life at the Opéra-Comique. Nor has the opera's fate been improved by contemporary performers, audiences, and critics: to date, no commercial recording is available, and the last documented performance of the opera took place over twenty years ago, in 1992. The performance, a collaboration of the French Institute, the Alliance Française, and L'Opéra Français de New York, garnered little praise for Milhaud's opera. *Esther*, performed alongside *Le Pauvre Matelot*, was found by critics to have been inspired by "the street, the workplace, and the café."¹⁵⁶ These observations, which were no doubt influenced by the composer's association with Les Six, demonstrated that, at least in the opinion of the reviewer, "transcendence was not on Milhaud's mind."

Transcendence may not have been the driving force behind the composition of *Esther de Carpentras*, but the opera nonetheless represents a snapshot of the intricate processes at work in the formation of and agreement upon a national and international identity in interwar France, and it exemplifies the role that composers played in nationalist discourse. Milhaud's brand of nationalism was based simultaneously on centralized Paris, regional Provence, and French Judaism: a trio which, while certainly not the norm, illustrated the myriad ways in which personal identity had the potential to affect national identity and vice-versa. Milhaud's multifaceted identity challenged a monolithic notion of Frenchness, not so much

¹⁵⁶ Bernard Holland, "Classical Music in Review: L'Opéra Français de New York at Francis Gould Hall," *The New York Times* (16 May 1992). <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/16/arts/classical-music-in-review-354292.html>. Accessed 13 March 2015.

from a cosmopolitan perspective as from a regionalist one. The entrenchment of *Esther de Carpentras* within the history, heritage, and tradition of Provence indisputedly tied it both to the regional and therefore to the national. Given Jewish history in the region, the work presented all three aspects of Milhaud's identity within a discourse of national identity by turning the opera into a site of memory in the sense of Pierre Nora who, in his work on the formation and transmission of French collective history and memory, wrote that as republics rose and regimes fell, emblems of the French state—along with their meanings—also changed.¹⁵⁷ These emblems of memory, just as *Esther de Carpentras*, were intended to serve as beacons of French identity to both French and the international world alike.

¹⁵⁷ Pierre Nora, *Présent, Nation, Mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 2011. See also Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, trans. Lawrence D. Kritzman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

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