The Compositional Style of Francis Poulenc

An Exploration of the Text and Music of Chansons Gaillardes

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Introduction

Francis Poulenc is invariably associated with music of the 1920s in Paris. His name is inextricably linked with those of his five contemporaries Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, Arthur Honneger, Louis Durey, and Germaine Tailleferre, who, together with Poulenc, formed **Les Six**, supplanting most other French composers in the collective awareness of most listeners in respect of that era. However, **Les Six** was a contrived and short-lived medium for publicity. Poulenc's career as a composer was already established before the advent of the concept of **Les Six**, and endured for more than forty years afterwards, in which he composed prolifically, including large-scale works for stage, film scores and solo pieces in his eventual output.

A passionate lover of poetry, Poulenc immersed himself in French verse throughout his life, and devoted much time and effort to setting poetic texts to music in his songs and song cycles. ***Chansons Gaillardes***, the main subject of this thesis, was written in the mid-1920s, and was a composition with which the composer was especially pleased. Poulenc's decadent lifestyle at this time was in keeping with the images and attitudes apparent throughout the collection of eight seventeenth century poems chosen for the text of this cycle. It is probably for this reason that the texts are handled with considerable sympathy, and that the composer could derive such pleasure from the end result.

This thesis begins by examining Poulenc's background and formative influences in Chapter One. Chapter Two puts ***Chansons Gaillardes*** into historical context within Poulenc's most significant compositions, and provides an overview of the song cycle. A more detailed discussion of the work will ensue in Chapter Three. My account of

Chansons Gaillardes seeks to analyse the style and content of Poulenc's compositional techniques within this particular song-cycle; to examine the effectiveness of his text-setting; finally, to demonstrate how eight songs of varying mood, length and structure are cohesively brought together to form one single cycle.

Chapter 1. Biography

Francis Poulenc

1899-1963

Francis Poulenc was born at 2, Place des Saussaies in the affluent 8th arrondissement of Paris, on January 7th, 1899. He came from a wealthy background; his father was a co-founder of the massive Rhone-Poulenc pharmaceutical company. Poulenc's father, Emile, a devout Roman Catholic, came from the Midi-Pyrenees region of France, while his mother, Jenny, was Parisian, a humanist from a family of artists and craftsmen. It was she who passed on a love of music and the arts generally to her son, and she began teaching him piano when he reached the age of five, encouraging him in his precocious ambition to become a concert pianist and composer. By the age of eleven he was able to play and sing (in French translation) Schubert's song cycle *Die Winterreise* (1827). He was also made familiar with contemporary literature and poetry from an early age, and received a good general education at the Lycee Condoret. His mother's bachelor brother Marcel Royer, who had socialised with Toulouse-Lautrec in his own youth, allowed his young nephew to share in his joint interests in opera and theatre. Poulenc enjoyed a happy and comfortable childhood, and his day-to-day activities were overseen by a nanny until the age of fifteen. For this reason, he was viewed by some contemporaries as one for whom composition was a hobby, as his family circumstances ensured that it would never be necessary for him to earn his living.

An interest in the music of Stravinsky was awakened in Poulenc in 1915, when he heard Pierre Monteux conduct ***The Rite of Spring*** at the Casino de Paris. In the same year, he became acquainted with the music of Emmanuel Chabrier, which he declared had a lifelong influence on what he termed his "harmonic universe." He began studying with pianist Ricardo Vines, who premiered works by Debussy, Ravel, Granados, Albeniz and de Falla, and who became Poulenc's mentor, providing him with valuable introductions to Georges Auric and Erik Satie. Satie and especially Auric became most influential on Poulenc's early career as a composer; Poulenc sought much advice from others early in the creative process of each piece. 1915 was also the year in which his mother died, aged fifty.

In 1917, on the death of his father, Poulenc went to live with his older sister and her family. This was the year in which he attempted his first serious large-scale composition, ***Rapsodie Negre***, a work in three movements for piano, string quartet, flute and clarinet, the middle movement featuring a setting for baritone of a nonsense poem which he devised himself, entitled ***Makoku Kangarou***. With the manuscript of this piece, he visited Paul Vidal, professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, who was most disparaging of Poulenc's abilities, and refused him admission to study at the Conservatoire. Notwithstanding this disappointment, Poulenc continued writing, and met the soprano Jane Bathori, who premiered the work of many composers, and through whom he met Arthur Honneger, Louis Durey and Germaine Tailleferre. The verse play ***Les Mamelles de Tiresias*** by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire was premiered in 1917; Poulenc attended this, and it was later to be the source of his opera of that name, commissioned by the Paris Opera-Comique.

Poulenc was called up for military service from 1918 to 1921, and did not enjoy the experience; much of this was spent as a typist for the Admiralty. On leave in Paris in 1918, he had several meetings with Guillaume Apollinaire, at the home of Victor Hugo. Apollinaire died later that year in an influenza epidemic which raged through Paris. Poulenc began his first major song cycle, ***Le Bestiaire ou Cortege d'Orphee***, a setting of twelve of Apollinaire's poems from a collection of thirty about animals entitled ***Le Bestiaire***. In its final form, using six out of the original twelve, this was premiered at a poetry reading to celebrate the life of Apollinaire, one year after the death of the poet.

In 1920, the concept of **Les Six** was introduced in an article by critic Henri Collet entitled "Les Cinq Russes, les Six Francais et Satie." Darius Milhaud later recalled that Collet chose the names of the six young French composers arbitrarily, because their works often appeared on the same programmes, and not because they had any musical aims in common. These composers were Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, Arthur Honneger, Louis Durey, Germaine Tailleferre and Francis Poulenc. Jean Cocteau, the highly extrovert writer, artist and publicist, publicised **Les Six**, but only for a year, after which Durey left Paris for St. Tropez.

During this period, Poulenc's work mainly consisted of musical settings of contemporary poetry, for voice and piano; throughout his life, this remained his preferred medium, inspired by the tradition of the French *chanson*. He was praised by Bartok, who expressed a wish that he might try writing on a larger scale. Before he attempted this, on Milhaud's advice, he began composition lessons with Charles Koechlin, who principally taught counterpoint and orchestration. Poulenc was unable to deal with counterpoint, and indeed there is a notable lack of the use of counterpoint in much of his output, which is usually strictly homophonic in texture. Instead, Koechlin instructed him in the art of

harmonisation, making him work through chorales by J.S.Bach. Poulenc's first significant piece after starting this course of study, was ***Chanson a boire***, an *a capella* choral setting of a ribald anonymous seventeenth century text. This was written for a member of a Harvard Glee Club whom Poulenc had met in Paris, but its performance was banned in the U.S.A. due to Prohibition laws. Serge Diaghilev requested a ballet score, ***Les Biches***, based on an original idea by Jean Cocteau, which was eventually premiered in 1924, at Monte Carlo. This proved to be one of Poulenc's favourite works, although he revised its orchestration many times until the 1940s. Nowadays, this is almost certainly the most widely recognised of his orchestral works, but is most frequently heard as a five movement orchestral suite, rather than in its original nine movement form, complete with mixed choir singing texts by Cocteau. Poulenc acknowledged that ***Les Biches*** was strongly influenced by both Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, and he consulted Nadia Boulanger for advice during its composition.

In 1924, the magazine La Revue Musicale commissioned eight prominent French composers to set texts by the sixteenth century poet Pierre de Ronsard. Poulenc took umbrage at being excluded from this project, and on his own initiative set five of Ronsard's poems. His ***Cinq poemes de Ronsard*** were praised by his peers, but he was advised by Auric that he would be better off continuing to use contemporary poetry for his settings. However, his next important project was ***Chansons Gaillardes***, a setting of eight anonymous seventeenth century texts on the subjects of wine and love, for baritone and piano. This was premiered in 1926 by Pierre Bernac. Once again, Poulenc was particularly satisfied with this cycle, and said of them "No one else could have produced this type of song, half erotic and half elegy." It is arguable that this claim is ambiguously phrased, unclear as to whether the cycle in its entirety, or each individual song is half erotic and half elegy. To the listener, it would appear that there is far more eroticism than

elegiac quality inherent in the cycle, as six out of the eight songs deal directly or indirectly with erotic themes, while the remaining two reflect on the notion of human mortality. None of the songs addresses both issues simultaneously.

His creative output was prolific at this time, and he began to pursue a neo-Classical ideal for form and structure, retained in most of his work from this time onward. In 1926, he wrote a trio for oboe, bassoon and piano, in three movements marked *Presto*, *Andante* and *Rondo*, the *Presto* and *Rondo* based on models by Haydn. All of Poulenc's compositions consisting of more than one movement or song, alternate either slow-fast-slow or fast-slow-fast etc.

By 1928, after a rebuffed attempt to enter into a marriage of convenience with a childhood friend, Poulenc's lifelong battle with depression started, and he entered into his first longterm homosexual relationship with the artist Richard Chanlaire. Wanda Landowska, a harpsichordist trying to revive the harpsichord as a contemporary instrument, commissioned Poulenc to write a concerto for her. She took much interest in his private life, encouraging him in his relationship with Chanlaire; she was to remain his friend and confidante until her death many years later, aged eighty. He also wrote another ballet, ***Aubade***, presented in Paris in 1929 by Georges Balanchine, and dedicated to Chanlaire.

In 1930, he wrote the secular cantata ***Le Bal Masque***, to poems by Max Jacob. This was an uncharacteristic excursion into the dark, grotesque and tragi-comic aspects of human nature, which he did not repeat. Much of his work in the early 1930s was either destroyed by him, or used to fulfil publishing contracts but for which he had little regard. This was not true of works such as the ***Concerto for Two Pianos***, commissioned in 1931 by Winnaretta Singer, the Princesse de Polignac (heiress to the Singer sewing machine

fortune, and a noted patron of the arts); also ***Quatre chansons pour enfants***, his first work for children, written in 1934, using amusing poems for children by Nohaine and Jaboune.

Politics and society entered a difficult phase throughout Europe in the 1930s. While Poulenc was not particularly sensitive to the changing political climate, this was an unhappy time for him, due to the breakup of his relationship with Chanlaire. He also felt slighted professionally as the Front Populaire theatre sidelined him in favour of other composers including Auric and Jacques Ibert. Much of his time during this period was spent at his large country retreat at Noizay, where he had his own vineyard. In 1934, Poulenc became reacquainted with the baritone Pierre Bernac, with whom he had not performed since Bernac premiered ***Chansons Gaillardes*** in 1926 (Bernac was popularly said to have been highly offended by the content of these, which he refuted). They continued performing together for the next 25 years. A longstanding collaboration was also formed with poet Paul Eluard. Some of Eluard's poems suggested a new genre to Poulenc, that of the sentimental love song, examples of which are found in the cycle ***Tel Jour, telle nuit***.

While promiscuous in his homosexual activity, he entered into another longterm relationship with Raymond Destouches. Later, during the Nazi occupation of France, Destouches narrowly avoided being arrested and imprisoned while in Paris, due to his homosexual tendencies; this caused Poulenc considerable fear and anxiety, although he remained outspoken on the subject, never troubling to conceal his lifestyle from Nazi authorities.

In 1936, deeply disturbed by the death in a car accident of a contemporary by the name of Pierre-Octave Ferroud, whom he had disliked and regarded as a rival composer, he wrote

his first religious work, ***Litanies a la Vierge Noire***, for female or children's choir, strings, timpani and organ. The following year, he wrote his ***Mass in G*** for four-part *a capella* choir. Comprised of the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei, the Credo is deliberately omitted due to the insecurity of Poulenc's faith at the time (he became religious in later life). His next large-scale works were ***Secheresses***, a cantata for mixed choir and orchestra, and his enduring ***Organ Concerto***. His ***Quatre Motets pour un temps de Penitence***, written for Holy Week, 1939, are extremely dark and actively depressing, probably the only example of Poulenc's permitting his work to be redolent of either his own mood or that of his surroundings.

Poulenc was drafted into the army as a private soldier, but served only briefly. After French capitulation, he returned to civilian life at his country retreat, and spent most of the remainder of the war there, concerned principally with his own progress as a composer. The Nazi occupation of France did not impinge on him greatly, due to his tremendous self-absorption and mildly anti-Semitic outlook. His occasional forays into scoring for films started at this time, and he did not object to accepting commissions from German producers. Eventually, he became distressed at the forced exile, as Jews, of close friends Milhaud and Wanda Landowska, and was particularly grieved at the fate of Max Jacob, with whom he had collaborated many times, and who was captured and executed due to his ethnic background, despite a recent conversion to Roman Catholicism. Poulenc began to be troubled at the treatment meted out to Jewish musicians, as he noted the loss of conductor Pierre Monteux, and the Opera orchestra depleting in numbers. Unlike Bernac, who was active in the Resistance movement, he did nothing to prevent this, nor did he co-operate with the Nazis as Honegger enthusiastically did. In 1943, he wrote ***Figure humaine***, a setting of texts by Eluard for twelve-part double choir. This was a genuinely patriotic piece, and shows Poulenc's first true mastery of polyphony.

Towards the end of the war, Poulenc began work on his opera ***Les Mamelles de Tiresias***, based on the play by Apollinaire. Commissioned for the Paris Opera Comique, this received its premiere in 1947. It is a surreal[1], burlesque, feminist work featuring a female protagonist (Tiresias), who declares her intention to take up a job outside the home, whereupon she opens her blouse, and her breasts (symbolic of her femininity) fly away on the breeze like twin balloons. This was not well received by critics or by the listening public.

In 1945, Poulenc had an uncharacteristic dalliance with a woman (a distant relative of former lover Chanlaire), resulting in his fathering a child. Known to outsiders as her godfather, he maintained a keen interest in the upbringing of his daughter, Marie-Ange, and greatly encouraged her in her career as a ballet dancer.

After the war, professional engagements with Bernac began again overseas. ***L'Histoire de Babar***, described as a melodrama for children, was a BBC commission completed in 1945. Unlike Britten's ***Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*** or Prokofiev's ***Peter and the Wolf***, there is no pedagogic aspect to this; it exists simply as a piece of entertainment. The original version of this was for narrator and piano, the piano part providing incidental music for the reading of Jean and Laurent de Brunhoff's children's story about the Babar the elephant. This story, with characteristic illustrations by Jean de Brunhoff, was and still is similar in its appeal to French children, as Enid Blyton's *Noddy* (1949), with its trademark characters originally drawn by Harmsen van der Beek, continues to be in this part of the world. Initially performed by Poulenc and Bernac, it was orchestrated in 1959 by composer Jean Francaix, at Poulenc's request, and subsequently performed by

Madeleine Milhaud, wife of Darius Milhaud, who also narrated Stravinsky's ***L'Histoire du Soldat***.

The late 1940s proved to be a relatively unproductive period for Poulenc, and he began setting texts by Racine and Lorca. However, his most successful song cycle from this period was ***Calligrammes***, written in 1948, using seven poems by Apollinaire. The poems in Apollinaire's 1914 book of ***Calligrammes***, are printed in a distinctive manner, the words clustered together to form pictures and abstract patterns. This dual function of the printed word was not unique to Apollinaire; the technique was employed from the early part of the century, an example being the 1900 portrait of Theodor Herzl by L. Rotblat and M. Horwich, arranged from a text narrating Herzl's life story, and executed in Hebrew lettering.[2] The subject matter of Poulenc's setting of ***Calligrammes*** resembles that of ***Chansons Gaillardes***, but is much more explicit in its exploration of libidinous themes. In 1949, Poulenc visited America for the first time, with Bernac. Their tour resulted in a number of commissions, including a piano concerto for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, but this resulted in being unsatisfactory for the composer, and was not critically well received. More successful was the song cycle ***La Fraicheur et le feu***, using poems by Eluard. This is dedicated to Stravinsky, and contains thematic quotations from Stravinsky's ***Serenade in A*** for piano (1925). This was the last cycle Poulenc composed for four years.

Following the death of artist Christian Berard in 1949, Poulenc embarked upon a large-scale religious work, ***Stabat Mater***, in his memory. He had by now resolved all doubts pertaining to his religious beliefs, and the work is a true act of devotion. Scored for

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[1] Apollinaire coined the words "surrealist" and "surrealism," which entered into common usage after the publication of his *Calligrammes* in 1918.
[2] This is currently exhibited at the Irish Jewish Museum, Dublin.

soprano, mixed five-part choir and orchestra, it comprises of twelve movements alternating between slow and fast, and which feature dramatic contrasts in dynamics. ***Stabat Mater*** was a piece with which Poulenc was thoroughly satisfied, and he entered into a creatively rewarding period at the start of the 1950s, with more religious choral work, and his sonata for two pianos, commissioned by an American duet partnership.

1950 heralded the start of a new relationship with a much younger man, Lucien Roubert. After a prolonged period of casual encounters, Poulenc experienced emotional difficulties in coping with a monogamous relationship. In 1953, the year in which he was awarded the Legion D'Honneur, he was approached with a view to writing a ballet for La Scala, Milan, on the subject of St. Margaret of Cortona. He was uninterested in this project, and expressed a desire to write an opera instead. The Italian publishers Ricordi recommended a play by Georges Bernandos entitled ***Dialogue des Carmelites***, on the subject of the wholesale beheading of an entire convent of Carmelite nuns during the French Revolution. Bernandos had adapted this from a screenplay of his based on the novel ***Die letze am Schepotl*** (the last to the scaffold), by Gertrud von le Ford. Poulenc viewed the play many times, and began work in August of that year. By September, he had completed three scenes, after which he made slow progress, due to his incipient hypochondria and his increasingly volatile relationship with Roubert. He abandoned the score for two years, and returned to it in 1955, by which time Roubert had become terminally ill. Roubert died shortly after the completion of this opera, which was premiered at La Scala in 1957, achieving much critical acclaim. Poulenc quoted extensively from the ***Stabat Mater*** within this opera, and the final scene is particularly gruesome, being a graphic enactment of the beheading of each individual nun. Between 1957 and 1958, it was also performed at the Paris Opera, the San Francisco Opera and Covent Garden, and was revived in 1977 in

New York. Poulenc received an honorary doctorate from the University of Oxford in 1958.

In 1959, he wrote a smaller-scale opera, ***La Voix Humaine***, based on a one-act monologue from 1932 by Cocteau, about a girl abandoned by her lover. He entered into a period of extreme depression, turning down many commissions. He finally agreed to write the ***Gloria***, for the same ensemble as the ***Stabat Mater***; this is undoubtedly less moving and devout than the latter, but was equally successful. Late in 1959, Leonard Bernstein commissioned Poulenc's last large-scale work, ***Sept Repons de Tenebres***, for boy soprano, SATB choir (boys' and mens' voices) and orchestra, which was not premiered until 1963, after his death.

A cycle of songs composed in 1960, to texts by children's writer Maurice Careme, proved disastrous, and the soprano for whom he wrote the cycle refused to perform them. Poulenc's final vocal works were again in collaboration with Cocteau; his last completed instrumental works were an oboe and a clarinet sonata, dedicated to the memories of Honneger and Prokofiev respectively.

Francis Poulenc died suddenly of a heart attack at home in his Paris apartment on the Rue des Medicis, on January 30th, 1963. An opera remained unfinished, ***La Machine Infernale***, based on a text by Cocteau from 1934. Cocteau, too, died in 1963.

Poulenc pursued his art with single-minded devotion throughout his life. Other than 130 songs for solo voice and piano, he left behind an enormous corpus of work, some of which are outlined above, and some of which are listed elsewhere.

Chapter 2.

Historical context and overview of *Chansons Gaillardes*

2.1 Historical context of this song cycle

Chansons Gaillardes appears within the sequence of Poulenc's life and major works as follows in this synopsis of his life and career, starting in 1917 when he produced his first major composition.

1917 went to live with his sister, aged 18, both parents having died. Composed ***Rapsodie Negre***. Refused admission to Paris Conservatoire.

1918-1919 composed ***Sonata for piano duet***, ***Toreador,*** conscripted into the army, met poet Guillaume Apollinaire several times while on leave in Paris, composed ***Le Bestiaire***, ***Cocardes***.

1920-1924 *Les Six* were named for publicity purposes. Demobilised from army. Composed ballet ***Les Biches*** for Diaghilev, also ***Quatre poemes de Max Jacob***, ***Cinq poemes de Ronsard***, ***Sonata for clarinet and bassoon***.

1925-1930 Enjoyed public acclaim due success of ***Les Biches***. Composed ***Chansons Gaillardes*** (performed by Poulenc and baritone Pierre Bernac), ***Concert Champetre for harpsichord and orchestra***, ***Trois Pieces for piano***, another ballet ***Aubade***, a secular cantata ***Le Bal Masque***.

1931-1935 composed ***Concerto for two pianos*** for Princesse de Polignac, also ***Quatre Chansons pour enfants***, ***Cinq poemes de Max Jacob*** and ***Quatre poemes de Guillaume Apollinaire***.

1936-1939 spent much time in his country home at Noizay. Composed his first religious work, ***Litanies a la Vierge noire*** for female choir, strings and organ, ***Sept Chansons*** to poems by Paul Eluard, ***Concerto for organ, strings and timpani***, ***Quatre motets pour un temps de Penitence***, ***Tel Jour telle nuit***, ***Mass in G***, became reacquainted with Pierre Bernac, with whom he continued to collaborate for the next 25 years.

1940-1945 briefly conscripted into the army, returned to safety of Noizay. Collaborated with neither the Resistance Movement nor with the occupying Nazis. Fathered his only child, a daughter. Composed first film score for ***La Duchesse de Langeais***, also song cycle ***Banalities***, two cantatas ***Figure humaine*** and ***Un soir de neige***, **Sonata for violin and piano**, a further ballet ***Les Animaux modeles***, an opera ***Les Mamelles de Tiresias*** based on the play of that name by Apollinaire, also ***L'Histoire de Babar***, a drama for children performed by narrator and orchestra.

1946-1950 awarded Legion d'Honneur, became genuinely religious, and espoused Roman Catholicism. Made first tour of U.S.A. with Pierre Bernac. Composed ***Trois Chansons de Garcia Lorca***, unusual in context of Poulenc's work as Lorca was not a French poet. Also composed song cycles ***Calligrammes***, ***La Fraichure et le Feu***, choral works ***Chansons francais*** and ***Quatre Petits Prieres de Saint Francois d'Assise*** (suggested by his great-nephew who was a monk), and ***Piano Concerto***.

1951-1955 attended a reunion of *Les Six*. Composed no song cycles during this period, concentrating on larger-scale works including ***Stabat Mater***, ***Quatre Motets pour un temps de Noel***, ***Ave Verum Corpus***.

1956-1960 experienced nervous breakdown. Completed opera ***Dialogue des Carmelites***, which was a major international success. Also composed one-act opera ***La Voix***

humaine, religious choral work ***Gloria***, songs/cycles ***Le Travail de peintre***, ***Deux Melodies***, ***Une Chanson de Porcelaine*** and ***Fancy*** to a text by William Shakespeare. **1961-1963** composed song ***La Dame de Monte Carlo*** for soprano and orchestra, incidental music for Cocteau's play ***Renaud et Armide***, religious work ***Sept Repons des tenebres***, ***Sonata for oboe and piano***, ***Sonata for clarinet and piano***. Poulenc died in 1963.

2.2 Overview of *Chansons Gaillardes*

Chansons Gaillardes is a song-cycle consisting of eight musical settings of anonymous French seventeenth-century texts, for baritone and piano. Composed between 1925 and 1926, after Poulenc's success with the ballet ***Les Biches***, the genre of this work is somewhat distinct from five out of the six song-cycles which precede it. This is due to Poulenc's adoption of Baroque forms, such as the sarabande, sicilienne and toccata for his settings, a technique which he also employed in ***Cinq Poemes de Ronsard***, composed the previous year to texts by the sixteenth-century poet Pierre de Ronsard.

Poulenc's first solo vocal work, **Rapsodie Negre**, written in 1917, is a three-movement work for piano, string quartet, flute and clarinet. Only the middle movement features a nonsense text consisting of a faux-African dialect devised by the composer and sung by a baritone; the outer movements are purely instrumental. Its "charming naivety" was feted at its premiere the same year, but it was cited as "inept" when presented with Poulenc's application to study at the Paris Conservatoire during the same year. His second vocal work, written in 1918, is a single song entitled ***Toreador*** for voice and piano, to another joke text, this time by Jean Cocteau, and which features elements of French, Italian and Spanish. ***Le Bestiaire***, completed in 1919, is his first song cycle, to poems from a collection of the same name by Guillaume Apollinaire. Each of the six songs is based on the image of an animal or fish (dromedary, Tibetan goat, grasshopper, dolphin, crayfish and carp). Overall, the nature if this cycle is serious, and no attempt is made to depict the physical attributes of any of these creatures musically. The poems themselves are deeply philosophical, the settings brief and reflective. Poulenc's fourth vocal work, ***Cocardes***, is a setting of three of Cocteau's poems about a fairground, written in 1920. The

instrumental ensemble accompanying the voice consists of cornet, trombone, violin, triangle and bass drum, a combination which he called "fete foraine" (funfair). He was to use a variation of this ensemble in his next vocal composition, ***Quatre Poemes de Max Jacob***, in 1922. In the ***Quatre Poemes***, Poulenc made a foray into greater complexity of writing, influenced by Schoenberg. He was displeased with the result, and destroyed the manuscript after its premiere (Milhaud retained a copy of this manuscript, and the work was published almost seventy years later). The two cycles ***Cinq Poemes de Ronsard*** (1925) and ***Chansons Gaillardes*** resemble each other in their use of archaic texts and forms, and their settings for baritone and piano. Most subsequent works involve a more neo-Classical style, Poulenc being consciously influenced by the works of Stravinsky.

The subject matter of the poems used in ***Chansons Gaillardes*** deals principally with the joint pursuits of drink, physical love, and the joy of living, with an execution ranging from ribaldry to tenderness throughout the eight songs (the title translates as "Ribald Songs"). With one notable exception, Poulenc strongly interprets and communicates the meaning of each text through the medium of his settings.

The first in the cycle, entitled *La Maitresse Volage* (the fickle mistress) deals with a man bemoaning the infidelity and lust of his mistress, whom, he avers, is possessed of multiple virginities in the way that a cat is possessed of multiple lives. The second, *Chanson a Boire*, or Drinking Song, remarks on the folly of the Pharoahs, who wished for their corpses to be embalmed in order that they might endure for longer, when it is far sweeter to embalm oneself in alcohol before death. The third, *Madrigal*, is extremely short, and begins with a list of compliments paid to a girl (Jeanneton), including tributes to her beauty of face and of disposition. However, it ends by implying that her good qualities are wasted, as she has not the womanly figure with which to accompany them. The

fourth, entitled *Invocations aux Parques* (Invocation to the Fates), is the only truly serious text, unconcerned with vulgarity or double-meaning, and is placed almost centrally within the cycle, surrounded on each side by the boisterous celebration of earthly pleasures. In it, a man swears his love to a woman (Sylvie) for as long as he lives, and invokes Fate to extend his life as long as possible. The fifth, *Couplets Bachiques* (Bacchic couplets, or couplets of Bacchus), is an account given by a man of how his mood varies between seriousness and merriment, as a consequence of circumstances. He describes how the sight of an empty wine-bottle brings about gravity, whereas the sight of a full one causes merriment, and then how his behaviour varies depending on whether he is in bed with his wife or his mistress. The piece ends with his urging the barmaid to pour more wine in order to make him happy.

The sixth, *L'Offrande*, or The Offering, is based on the one poem within this set which was most likely to cause offence to polite society in the 1920s. Poulenc's process of setting this particular text is curious in context of the rest of the cycle, as the mood which his setting creates is at total variance with the meaning of the text. This concerns a virgin who offers up a candle to the God of Love in order to obtain a lover, to be told by the God of Love to use her candle as an interim measure while she waits for her lover to materialise. On hearing this song without benefit of the words, with its stillness and tenderness, and with a sigh at the very end, it is arguable that *Invocations aux Parques* would be more easily suggested than the actual content therein. This may be construed in two ways; it is either Poulenc's technique of minimising its crudity, thereby making it more acceptable to his audience, or else it is an ironic exercise in corrupting a piece of music characterised by gentleness and serenity by pairing it with an unpalatable literary subject, thus endowing the meaning with even more shock-value when it is finally registered by the listener.

The seventh of the cycle, entitled *La Belle Jeunesse* (The beauty of youth) is an affirmation that it is a better state of affairs for men to remain unmarried, as this makes them more attractive to the wives of others, who will fall in love with them. The final song of the cycle, *Serenade*, features a text to which many have attributed a double meaning, and which concerns a hand so beautiful that it drives Cupid's darts, and wipes his tears.

The song cycle ***Chansons Gaillardes*** was begun in 1925, after a course of instruction in harmony with Charles Koechlin, and after Poulenc's success with the ballet ***Les Biches***. Despite a lifelong preference for using contemporary poetry for his many musical settings, this was his second attempt at setting more archaic verse (***Cinq Poemes de Ronsard*** were written earlier in 1925).

Chansons Gaillardes are reminiscent of the French *chanson* genre of popular music, in vogue from the 1890s to the present day. This is apparent for several reasons:

(a) The use of an introduction in the piano part, lasting between four and eight bars, is almost ubiquitous, the only exception being the sixth song in the cycle, *L'Offrande*.

(b) The piano is almost always in a supporting role, and rarely has solo passages apart from introductions to songs.

(c) Rhythmic patterns of the spoken word usually dictate rhythmic patterns within the setting of the text.

(d) The actual setting of lines of poetry is mainly syllabic, but there is frequent repetition of entire sections within a song.

(e) The subject matter is earthy and easily understood.

(f) There is frequent use of non-verbal syllables, such as *la-la-la*, in order to extend or repeat musical phrases.

(g) The underlying harmony of each song is predominantly tonal in nature, despite the frequent use of chromatic dissonances.

Other characteristics of this cycle include the *fast-slow-fast-slow* alternation of the songs, inherent in every work by Poulenc. Also salient is the fact that while the piano part explores every register of the instrument, the vocal range never exceeds the interval of a twelfth, and that only in two of the songs, the sixth, *L'Offrande*, and the eighth, *Serenade*. The use of word-painting is not in evidence within these songs, although the mood of each song is usually sympathetic to the text (again, the exception being *L'Offrande*). Poulenc does not allow the metre and length of line in each poem to dictate phrase structure and length within the music, and frequently elides two or more lines of poetry together. As mentioned above, Poulenc's harmonic language is tonal, but with occasional conflict between major and minor implications, and with many dissonant chords and melodic intervals (tritones and ninths are often used).

Many years after the completion of this cycle, Poulenc wrote an isolated song on equally licentious themes (***Allons plus vite*** in 1938, text by Apollinaire), and produced another song cycle on the same themes (***Calligrammes*** in 1948, also to texts by Apollinaire). Both of these works, while maintaining Poulenc's use of harmony which varied very little throughout his career, are somewhat different in character to the earlier cycle, and are similar to each other in some respects. In these works, there is more use made of the spoken word in performance, and the vocal range is more adventurous. The piano part is given more prominence, and there is greater melodic support for the vocal line. While

Poulenc remains faithful to his *fast-slow* principle of alternation between songs in ***Calligrammes***, there is more contrast in speed and dynamics within individual songs, including ***Allons plus vite***. Finally, there is more descriptive writing within the musical setting, an example being the piano part of *Il pleut* (the fourth of ***Calligrammes***), whose staccato introduction is suggestive of the rain. Poulenc never thoroughly embraced the technique of word-painting; even in *Il pleut* the raindrop motif is not maintained throughout. This is one more aspect of his autonomous style; across the Channel, Benjamin Britten allowed his musical settings to be much more evocative of the environment described within his chosen texts. This is particularly well illustrated in ***Winter Words***, Britten's 1953 song cycle for tenor and piano, to poems by Thomas Hardy, examples being the Church-Hymnal style opening of *The Choirmaster's Burial*, and the frequent strumming of the note-sequence G-D-A-E in *At the Railway Station, Upway*, whose main protagonist offers to play his violin for his diverse companions.

Chapter 3.

Detailed discussion of the style and content of the *Chansons Gaillardes* cycle

3.1 *La Maitresse Volage*

Treatment of text

The text deals with the infidelity of at least two people, narrated by a male protagonist (in the first person). This main character describes the behaviour of his partner; as he names her his mistress, the implication is that he is being unfaithful to his wife. She, in turn, is being unfaithful to him with another man. The language used suggests that he is more philosophical than annoyed at this, declaring that his rival is just lucky. Poulenc also has this character singing a simple, cheerful refrain to "*la, la, la,*" suggesting that he is not unhappy. He is, however, sardonic concerning the protestations of his mistress that she is faithful to him, casting aspersions on this by conjecturing that if the third party has retained his virginity, then surely the woman in the triangle must possess more than one virginity. This is expressed in the first four lines of the six-line stanza which comprises the text of this song:

"Ma maitresse est volage,

Mon rival est heureux;

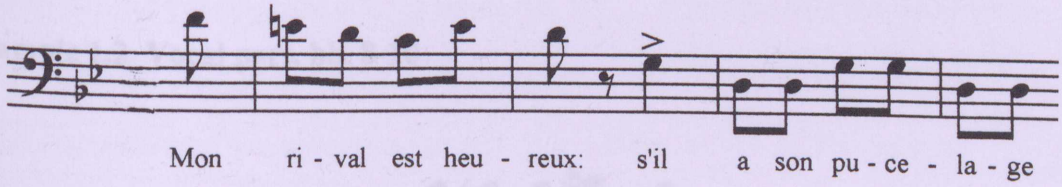
S'il a son pucellage,

C'est qu'elle en avait deux."

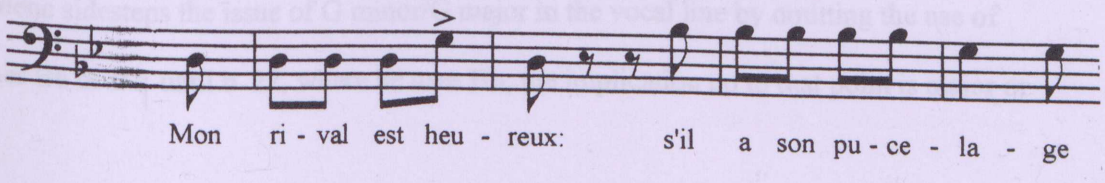
The final syllable of each line ends on either G or D throughout the piece, and Poulenc various his treatment of the stanza in its two iterations, not only melodically, but by changing the placement of accents in the second half of the song, thereby creating different emphases. For instance, in the first half of the song, the word "*s'il*" is accented, heightening the sense of disbelief by emphasising "if." In the same line in the second half, "*heureux*" is accented, underlining the good fortune of his rival.

See Examples 1.1(a) and 1.1(b)

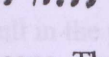
Example 1.1(a) Vocal part, bb. 10-14



Example 1.1(b) Vocal part, bb. 28-32



Musical Language

This first song contains the exposition of many of Poulenc's various compositional techniques within this cycle. Fast, light and jocose, set in G minor, it opens with an eight-bar introduction in the piano part, in $\frac{2}{4}$ time. The use of chromaticism is set up in bar 1, with the introduction of Ab against G; also the interval of a ninth between G and A♮ in the left hand. At bar 5, there is the first suggestion of minor/major conflict, with the scale of G major articulated in tenths in the left hand, while the right hand retains Bb. The second four-bar phrase starts with the first four notes of a chromatic scale starting on G, leaps from Bb to Db, and then up to G, forming a tritone. At b.6 a new rhythmic pattern is heard,  ; this rhythm is not utilised again or developed throughout the remainder of the song. The initial vocal entry begins on the anachrusis of b.8, leaping up a fifth from G to D, moving up E, and back down to D; this motif is significant as it provides many links throughout the entire cycle.

See Example 1.2

Example 1.2 Vocal part, bb. 8-10

Poulenc sidesteps the issue of G minor/G major in the vocal line by omitting the use of either Bb or B♮ until b. 22, where he uses Bb; the implication up to that point is major or

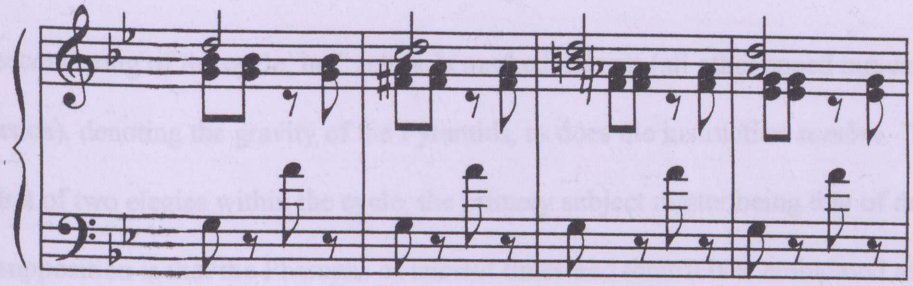
else modal due to the omission of F#, which would reflect the mediaeval nature of the verse. The second phrase of the vocal line begins on the second crotchet beat of b.12.

At b.15, the metre changes from $\frac{2}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ for one bar. The third vocal phrase starts on the last quaver of b.15, and extends for four bars. This is accompanied by C major chords (some with added sixths), and those of G minor, covering a larger range of the keyboard than before. This sequence continues into b.20, but is interrupted by the gesture which finishes the first half of the piece. This starts on the last quaver of b.21, in which the left hand of the piano part plays in sevenths against the top line of the right hand, which plays thirds (the left hand plays major and minor seconds against the vocal line, reducing its supporting role). At b.23, there is a short five-note figure in the right hand based on the scale of G major, repeated up an octave, while the voice rests, providing a brief lull in the piece.

The second half of the piece begins on the last quaver of b.26, and opens with a pattern similar to that of b.9 but an octave higher in the piano part, the right hand chords developing differently over four bars. The first bar of this phrase consists of the tonic triad of G minor, followed in the next bar by the chord of D major 7, approached by the stepwise descent from the triad in the previous bar, with D suspended over the top of the chord. The next chord in the sequence is diminished, also formed from the system of descent from the triad in the previous bar, with D suspended, as is b.30, the changing harmony in these four bars taking place over the unchanging G-A ninth in the left hand.

See Example 1.3

Example 1.3 Piano part, bb. 27-30



The vocal part, while repeating the same text as the opening, has a more static line. At b.33, there is another brief change of metre into $\frac{3}{4}$. The melody at bb.34-37 is sung to the syllable "*la*," the first use of this device within the cycle. Poulenc expands the two-note rhythmic cell at b.33, while the simplicity of this motif, sung to "*la*," is suggestive of the carefree nature of the protagonist. The passage from the last quaver of b.37 to the end is as before, but for the closing bars. The penultimate bar consists of a more closed version of the chord at b.23, and the final bar contains an open perfect fifth in the high register of the piano, on G and D, as at the start, while the vocal line holds G over these two bars. With neither Bb nor B♮ articulated, the minor/major conflict remains unresolved.

3.2 *Chanson a boire*

Treatment of text

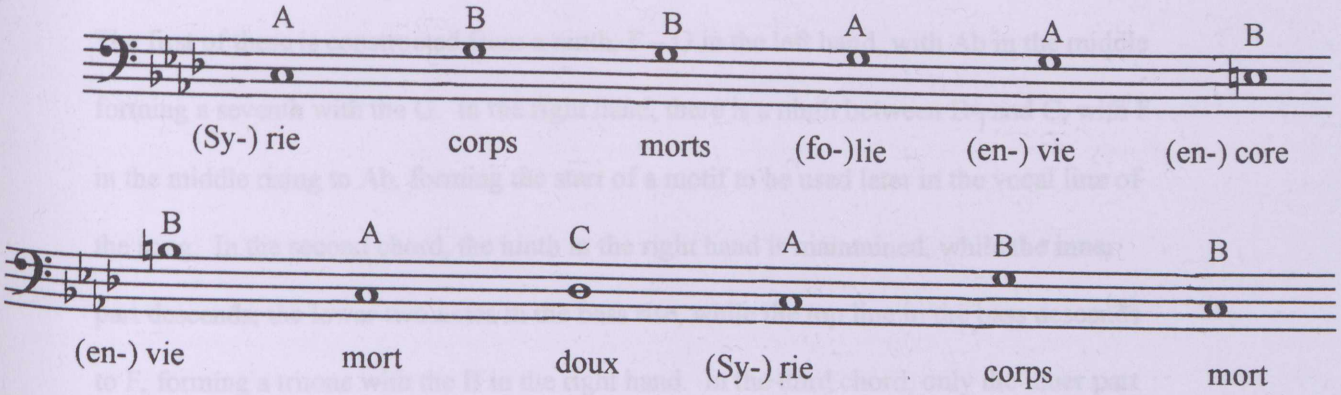
The second song of the cycle, in C minor is marked *Adagio* (all other speed indications are in French), denoting the gravity of the Pyramids, as does the instruction *sombre*. This is the first of two elegies within the cycle, the primary subject matter being that of death. The supposition is that the Pharoahs of ancient times had themselves embalmed after death, so that their corporeal forms would endure for as long as possible. The author of the text takes the view that the greater his alcohol consumption, the more chance he has of being embalmed during his own lifetime, with the added benefit that this process is more pleasant than the post-mortem treatment favoured by his predecessors. The unrelenting slow repetitious chords create a funereal mood associated with the theme of mortality. The slow speed also allows much time between each chord change, as time is a preoccupation within the text, e.g.

"*Pour durer, plus longtemps.*"

The rhyming scheme of the text comprises A-B-B-A, A-B-A-B, C-A-B-B. I would suggest that the original poem ended at C, the final A-B-B, consisting of a reiteration of the first three lines, being added by Poulenc to create symmetry within his composition. As it has not proved possible to source the poem in its original form, this cannot be verified. Each A and B ending is pitched on a note of the chord of C major with a raised 7^{th}; the exception to this rhyming scheme (the C ending) is pitched on D.

See Example 2.1

Example 2.1 How pitches correspond with the rhyming scheme throughout.



The word "*morts*" (death) which occurs three times, always has the greatest duration of any note within the vocal part. Poulenc is mathematically precise in spacing each statement of the word ten bars apart. The first two times it appears, at bb. 14 and 24, it endures for a dotted minim; the final time, at b. 34, it too endures for a dotted minim, but the piano continues the note into the following bar, which ends the piece.

Musical Language

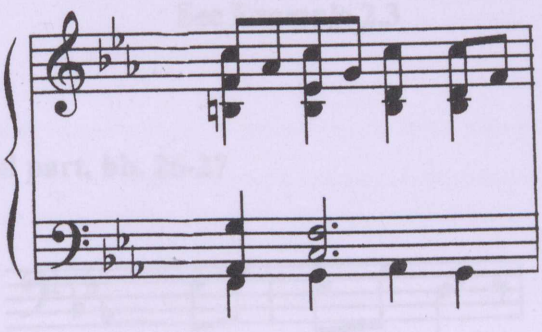
There is a seven-bar introduction, the first five of which alternate in metre between $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ The texture of the piano part is cumbersome and heavy, with parallel thirds and octaves doubled in both hands, the movement being predominantly stepwise until b.4, when there is the downward leap of a seventh, and back up again. Between bb.5 and 7, the metre stays in $\frac{4}{4}$, after which it changes back to $\frac{3}{4}$, and remains so until the end. Thus far, the tonality is uncompromisingly C minor, with a brief use of chromaticism within the

texture, Ab and A♭ being juxtaposed close to each other in the sequence starting at b.4. The first truly dissonant bar is b.7, where the chords are no longer doubled in each hand, but are instead built up of intervals other than thirds and octaves.

The first of these is constructed from a ninth, F – G in the left hand, with Ab in the middle forming a seventh with the G. In the right hand, there is a ninth between B♭ and C, with F in the middle rising to Ab, forming the start of a motif to be used later in the vocal line of the song. In the second chord, the ninth in the right hand is maintained, while the inner part descends; the lower two notes in the bass rise, while the top line in the bass descends to F, forming a tritone with the B in the right hand. In the third chord, only the inner part in the right hand and the lowest note in the bass are allowed to move, while the final note of this bar is the chord of G major 7, with C suspended over it, forming a perfect cadence in C minor in the next bar.

See Example 2.2

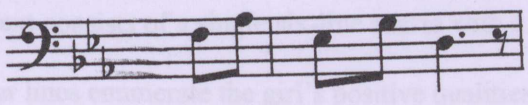
Example 2.2 Piano part, bb. 7-8



The first vocal entry is at b.8, starting on C, rising a fifth to G, up another step to Ab, and back to G, reminiscent of the profile of the initial entry in the previous song. [3] Unlike the stepwise movement in the piano part, the initial entry contains several leaps, including that of a tritone, but the first phrase ends where it started, on C. The phrases in this song tend to be rather shorter than those in the previous one, those in the vocal part end on a note within the chord of C, with one exception, at b.27. At bb.12 and 13, further chordal dissonances are explored, with Ab added to a G major chord, and the first chord in b.13 constructed from B♭, C, D, Eb and F. This is followed by a bar containing only G major, and another whose chords largely feature tritones, while the vocal line contains within it an augmented second between Ab and B♭, an oblique reference to the Middle Eastern modes used in the homeland of the Pharoahs. B.16 resolves to G major, forming a perfect cadence into C major in b.17. For the next three bars, the vocal line contains fewer leaps, while an attempt at counterpoint is made between the voice and the top line in the left hand of the piano part. From the third crotchet beat b.20, the voice sustains a C and accompanies while the piano repeats the vocal melody from the end of b.16 onward. At b.25, the motif from b.15, in which the singer cries "*Quelle folie*," is inverted for the words "*Embaumons nous*," followed by the motif introduced in b.7 in the piano part.

See Example 2.3

Example 2.3 Vocal part, bb. 26-27



[3] This was a motif of which Poulenc was very fond; he used it in works other than this cycle, including *Les Biches.*

At b.28, the key of C minor is re-established, and the initial vocal entry is recapitulated in a shortened form. The song ends with the largest leap yet heard in the vocal part (a descending ninth from C to B , and the closing chords are in C major, with B♮ suspended throughout.

3.3 *Madrigal*

The third song in the cycle is fast, with a light, staccato texture compared to the previous song. It opens with a sixteen-bar introduction, a relatively long piano solo in the context of a forty-bar piece, suggesting that the piece falls into two distinct halves, an instrumental one and a vocal one. Scored in F# minor, there is no real conflict concerning minor/major tonality; the piece remains in F# minor throughout. Poulenc adds dissonant intervals such as tritones and ninths to a fairly straightforward harmonisation to a simple melody structured in four-bar phrases. The whimsical nature of this song is an attempt to capture the elegantly offensive tag-line at the end of the song, in which the physique of a kind, charming girl is denigrated by a potential suitor.

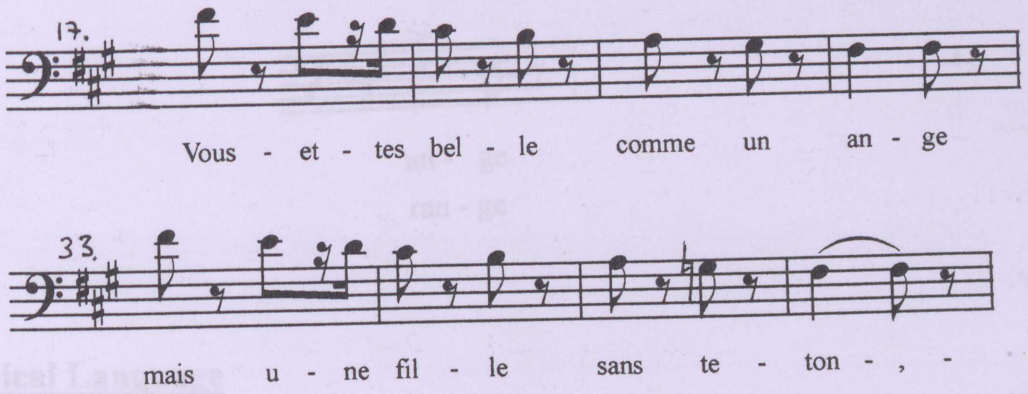
Treatment of text

In poetic terms, the text consists of a single six-line stanza with a rhyming scheme A-B-B-A-B-A. The first four lines enumerate the girl's positive qualities (pertaining to her good looks and placid nature), with a caveat in the final couplet implying that all of these are wasted without a sufficiently womanly figure to go with them. Musically, Poulenc underscores the first four lines with a light, delicate opening statement punctuated with

rests, followed by three more lyrical phrases. Performance directions up to this point include "very light" and "with charm." The fifth phrase is a parody of the first, with a texturally heavier piano accompaniment than before, and with the same melodic line apart from G♭ instead of G#.

See Example 3.1

Example 3.1 Vocal part, bb. 17-20, 33-36



It also has an outrageous reference to the girl's lack of curves instead of the mollifying earlier comparison with the face of an angel. The line of text in the fifth phrase ends with the B syllable of the rhyming scheme, as opposed to the A syllable in the opening phrase. The final phrase does not continue the pattern of the second phrase, but contains another distinct pattern, with the performance instruction "very marked," in contrast with those which precede it.

Poulenc reflects the formal rhyming scheme of the text by ensuring that each B syllable (*ange*, *range*, *o-range*) resolves on the same pitch (the tonic F#). Another feature of Poulenc's setting of this poem, is that he often requests syllables to be articulated which would normally be silent in common speech. This is a technique which he uses elsewhere in the cycle.

See Example 3.2

Example 3.2 Vocal part, bb. 20, 32

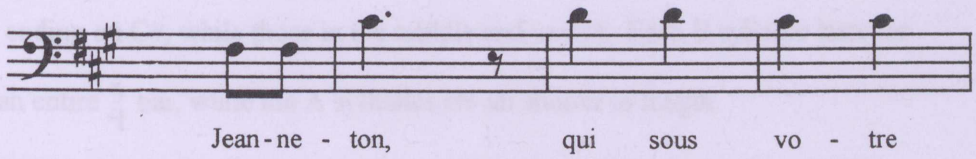
Musical Language

During the instrumental introduction, each four-bar phrase differs from the others, and with the exception of the opening phrase, is based on a single-line melody in the right hand accompanied by chords in the left hand (the chords are played as well as the melody in the opening phrase). The first phrase is simply a descending scale of F# melodic minor, ending with a perfect cadence; the second phrase allows the scale to travel upwards again, but in a different, dotted rhythm, and in a more legato style, without rests punctuating the notes. The third phrase begins a gradual chromatic descent, and the final phrase of this section hastens the chromatic descent, ending on a perfect cadence in F#, decorated with tritones (G♭ preceding C# in the bass, and C♭ preceding F#). The voice enters at b.17,

repeating the melodic line stated at the beginning of the piece, with similar harmonies. This is followed by a more interesting phrase with C# minor implications modulating briefly to G# major. The third phrase is even more simple than before, consisting of a repeated F# leaping up a fifth to a repeated C#, returning to a more stepwise approach in the next phrase. This fourth phrase is accompanied by a florid passage of double-thirds descending in the melodic minor scale in the right hand of the piano part. It is notable that the four bars between bb.27 and 30, straddling two phrases, quote the motif starting with an ascending fifth as heard in the previous two songs.

See Example 3.3

Example 3.3 Vocal part, bb. 27-30



A new phrase starting at b.33 again quotes bb. 1 – 4, this time with G at the bottom the scale, and the final phrase is based on two pairs of perfect fifths, one ascending G – D, the other descending C# - F#, accompanied by an ascending passage of double-thirds, and finishing on a perfect cadence in F# minor. The vocal part is generally based in a high register, reflecting the voice of the woman who is the subject of this song.

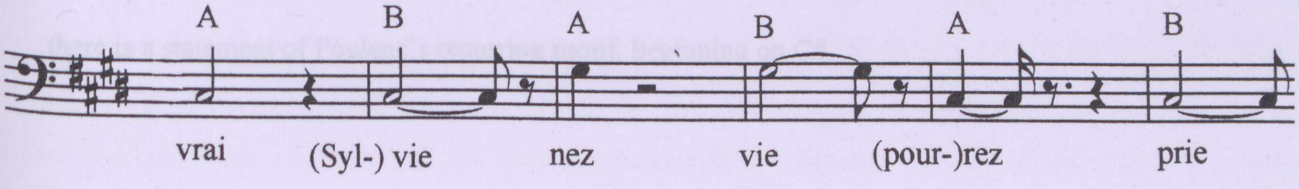
3.4 *Invocation aux Parques*

Treatment of text

The fourth song in the cycle is the second elegy within the cycle. It is slow, the only one devoid of humour, declaring the tragedy that one's natural lifespan cannot equal the duration of everlasting love, and contains a prayer that life might be extended. The simplicity of this request is suggested by a very slow harmonic rhythm (for example, the first four bars feature only the tonic chord of C# minor, repeated like a death knell), and by the frequent iteration of C# in the vocal part. The rhyming scheme of the poem takes the form of three couplets A-B, A-B, A-B, with the final syllable of the first and third couplet ending on C#, while those in the middle end on G#. Each B syllable lasts for almost an entire $\frac{3}{4}$ bar, while the A syllables are all shorter in length.

See Example 4.1

Example 4.1 How note duration corresponds with rhyming scheme.



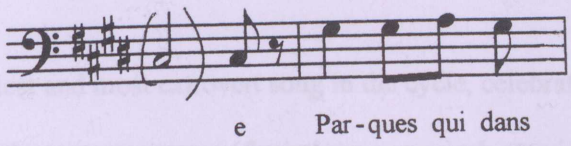
Poulenc adheres closely to the patterns of the spoken word within this song, and avoids the temptation to exaggerate the meaning of the word "*allongez*" (lengthen, in the context of his supplication for life to be lengthened) by extending its note values further than the rhythm into which the word naturally falls.

Musical Language

There are no changing time signatures, and no conflict between minor/major tonalities; the piece remains in C# minor. Performance directions include the words *Grave* and *Sombre*, indicating the mood which Poulenc is trying to communicate. The eight-bar introduction opens with the chord of C# minor stated four times, with the range of a tenth between C# and E in each hand. This is followed by a further statement of the same chord in a much higher register, decorated with C♮ and G♮ acciacaturas. After this comes the introduction of the chord of F# major, forming a plagal cadence in C# minor at b.5, with further statements of the tonic key decorated with the leading note in the next two bars. The vocal part enters on the anachrusis of b.9 with an ascending perfect fifth starting on C#. The melody stated at b.9 is repeated in b.10 in the piano part, while the accompanying harmonies often feature A#, transforming the supertonic chord from a diminished chord into D# major. Within the vocal line, starting on the last crotchet of b.12 leading into b.13, there is a statement of Poulenc's recurring motif, beginning on C#.

See Example 4.2

Example 4.2 Vocal part, bb. 12-13



C# is repeated frequently during the first four bars of the vocal melody, after which there is a shift away from the tonic both harmonically and melodically, culminating in a modulation to G# major between bb. 15 and 16. [4]

The vocal line ends with a melody based on leaps of a fifth, a tritone and a fourth, all leading to C#, while the piano harmonises with a brief statement of C# major at the start of bb.17 and 18 (including E# within these chords), followed by more dissonant chords with diminished intervals. The closing four-bar phrase is a truncated version of the tolling introduction.

3.5 *Couplets Bachiques*

Treatment of text

This is the liveliest and most extrovert song in the cycle, celebrating the joys of infidelity and alcohol. In the text, two states of mind are expressed; merriment engendered by a full flagon of wine or the proximity of a mistress, and gravity caused by the sight of an empty flagon of wine or the presence of the wife. As in *La Maitresse Volage*, the narrative is sung in the first person by a male protagonist, in this case sitting in a tavern adjuring the barmaid to keep filling his glass, in order to prolong his merriment.

The keyword in this song is "*badin,*" interpreted as happy, merry and bawdy throughout the piece. Poulenc constantly emphasises the word by frequent repetition, and by transforming it into a non-verbal tool to extend musical phrases (when the word is quickly repeated several times, it sounds "*ba-da, ba-da,*" an alternative to "*la,la,*" which is also used in this song). The word "*badin,*" although it does not appear elsewhere, informs the entire cycle, with its almost perpetual themes of drink and lust, excepting *Invocation aux Parques*. Thus, *Invocation aux Parques* and *Couplets Bachiques* are ideally placed in close proximity to each other, in a central position within the cycle. The first of this pairing, with its prayer for love and life, acts as a contrast in subject matter with the rest of the cycle, while the second is the antithesis of the first, radiating its twin themes of drink and lust, consolidating these in the ubiquitous "*badin, badin.*"

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[4] In the 1958 Poulenc/Bernac recording of this cycle, the vocal line at b.15 is sung as printed in the 1926 Heugel edition: D#, B# C#, Fx; in all other available recordings, this bar is interpreted as D#, A#, B#, Fx.

This song is the only one within the cycle in which the metre of each line of verse dictates the length and metre of each phrase, barring those which are extended with the repetition of "*badin.*"

The text consists of three verses, the first containing five lines, the second six, the final one four. The rhyming scheme reads:

Verse 1 A-A, B-C-B (on the subject of wine)

Verse 2 A-A, D-E, D-E (on the subject of his wife)

Verse 3 B-B, B-B (on the subjects of his mistress and wine)

Many lines are similar, reflected in the repetitious nature of the music, and Poulenc reiterates Verse 2 in its entirety, after Verse 3.

Musical Language

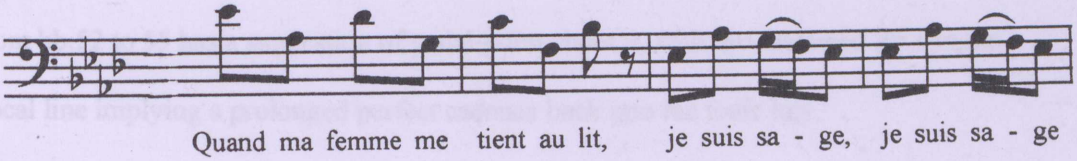
Ninety-one bars in length make the fifth song the longest in the cycle; it is also the most repetitive. The introduction with its rapid semiquavers in the right hand, asserts the tonic key of Ab major, and includes chords such as that of Db minor with an added sixth. Most of the accompaniment of this song is enlivened by semiquaver movement, often in scales or sequences of thirds.[5] The initial vocal entry at b.5, ascending by a minor sixth, covers a larger range within the first four bars, than the opening statements in any of the other songs. The major/minor conflict starts at b.7 with the flattening of the sixth and also the

[5] Such rapidity was probably idiosyncratic of Poulenc's own pianistic style; in the 1958 Poulenc/Bernac recording of this cycle, Poulenc plays this particular song considerably faster and more accurately than any other artist in subsequent recordings.

third notes in the scale of Ab. A perfect cadence in Ab minor at b.9 leads to further tonal ambiguity which remains unresolved until b.17, in which there is a perfect cadence in Ab major, preceded by repetition of the word "*badin*. There is further repetition until b.24, when the first four bars of the vocal line are recapitulated with an even more florid piano accompaniment. At b.28, a new melody line is developed with the onset of a new lyric, beginning "*quand ma femme, etc.*", based on a sequence of descending fifths starting form Eb in the vocal part.

See Example 5.1

Example 5.1 Vocal part, bb. 28-31



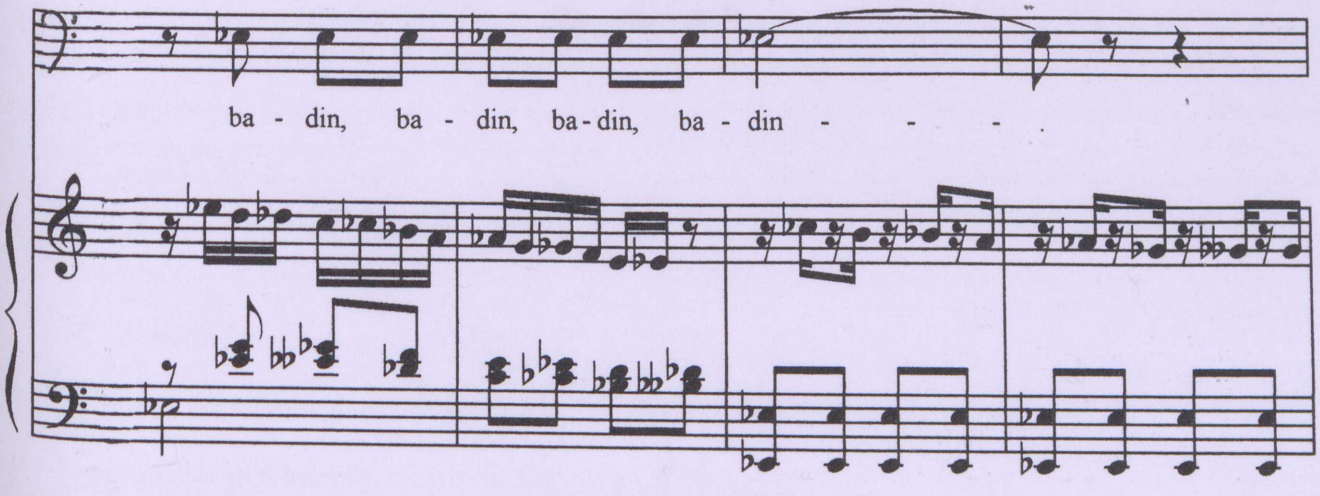
Two four-bar phrases repeating this sequence end at b.35 with a perfect cadence in Ab, which without the use of C or Cb, fails to resolve the major/minor conflict at this stage.

At b.36, the key signature changes abruptly to C major, with a new melodic line whose profile largely ascends, adding tension with the addition of a new character in the text (his mistress). There is a change in texture in the piano part, with more triad based chords and less semiquaver passages. The opening chord in this section is one of C minor; there is in

fact no statement of C major whatsoever within this section; there is, however, plentiful use of the pitch of Ab. The vocal line is underscored in the piano part at this time, and there begins a shift away from the new key at b.42, with a more stepwise melody starting on A and rising chromatically in the vocal part, with the addition of brief semiquaver interjections in the piano. At b.49 there is a statement of the chord of C major with an augmented fifth (G#) within the texture, while the voice sings an enharmonic Ab; this abruptly leads to a resounding double-octave Eb in the piano part in b.50, with a sustained Eb in the vocal part. Between bb.51 and 53, there are two chromatic descents, at different speeds, happening simultaneously between the two hands, while the voice repeats the word "*badin*" further on a lower Eb than before. At bb.54 and 55, the left hand repeats Eb, while the right hand continues its chromatic descent, now slower, resting on Bbb at the end of b.55, leading into the key-change back to Ab major at b. 56. The section lasting from bb.52 to 55 has a suggestion of pedal-point about it, with the sustained Eb's in the vocal line implying a prolonged perfect cadence back into the tonic key.

See Example 5.2

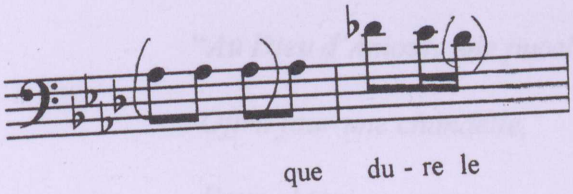
Example 5.2 Pedal-point in the vocal part, bb. 52-55



Upon returning to the original tonic key, bb.56 to 85 recapitulate the first section of the song. From b.86 to the end, there is a short coda sung to the syllable "*la*," starting on Ab, ascending to C, descending in a scale to Db, leaping a tritone to G, leading to Ab in b.89, when there is a leap of a fifth to Eb, and a mainly stepwise descent until the final bar, ending on Ab. The final perfect cadence of the piece, between bb.90 and 91, ends on an uncompromising chord of Ab major. While this song contains intervals, harmonies and conflicts set up previously in the cycle, there is no direct quote of the recurring motif. It is possible that the opening statement in the vocal part in b.6, is an adapted version of this, ascending by a sixth instead of a fifth from the first note, and then descending by a step back to the fifth above the first note.

See Example 5.3

Example 5.3 Possible variation of recurring theme, bb. 6-7



3.6 *L'Offrande*

Treatment of text

This song features a young girl seeking help from the gods in her quest for love, who, upon offering up a sacrificial candle, is given somewhat unexpected advice regarding the use to which she should put the candle in order to tide herself over the wait for a lover. Poulenc's musical treatment of this is exceptional within the cycle, as the ethereal piano accompaniment and high-pitched, sustained melodic lines in no way suggest the vulgarity of the subject matter. Elsewhere in the cycle, the mood is either boisterous or sombre, directly reflecting the mood expressed in the text.

The lines within this poem are very short, and this song is a particular example of where Poulenc does not allow the metre or length of line in the poetry to dictate similar properties in his phrase structure. For example, when read, the opening four lines fall into distinct rhyming and metric patterns:

"Au Dieu d'Amour, une pucelle

Offrit jour une chandelle,

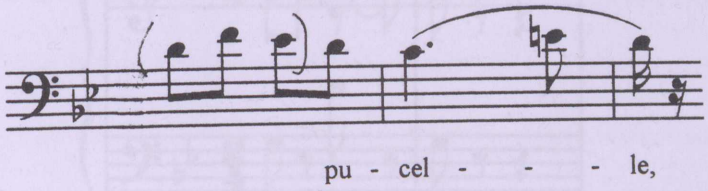
Pour obtenir un amant.

Le Dieu sourit sa demande,"

Poulenc's setting allows no break between lines until the end of the third. His phrases are all of different lengths, and his treatment of the word "*pucelle*" is somewhat eccentric, as he breaks the word into "*pucel-le*," emphasising the third syllable (which is usually silent) by placing it on the strong beat of the bar succeeding "*pucel*."

See Example 6.1

Example 6.1 Vocal part, bb. 2-4



This is unlike his treatment of the word "*Belle*" which occurs later on, and which is a single syllable placed on a strong beat.

The rhyming scheme of the poem reads A-A-B-B-B-B, and Poulenc masks the predictability by alternating the length of each corresponding musical phrase, and ensuring that the end of each phrase differs from all others.

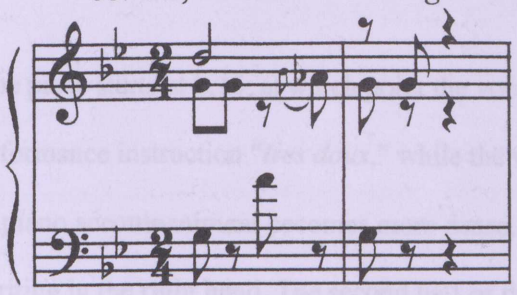
Musical Language

This is the only song to dispense with a piano introduction, beginning straight in on the fifth note of the tonic triad in the vocal part (the piece is scored in G minor). The piano accompaniment throughout this piece is based on the patterns in *La maitresse volage*.

See Examples 6.2(a) and 6.2(b)

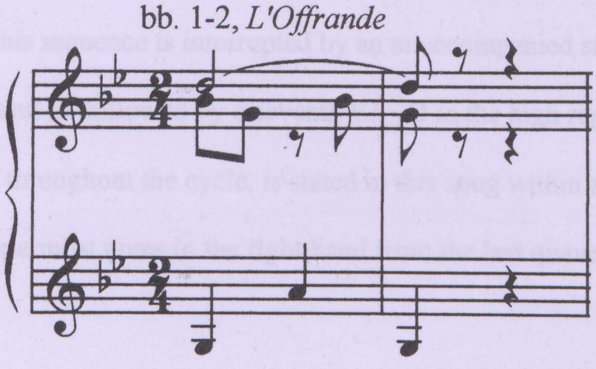
Example 6.2(a) Piano accompaniment derived from that of *La Maitresse Volage*

bb. 1-2, *La Maitresse Volage*



Example 6.2(b) Piano accompaniment derived from that of *L'Offrande*

bb. 1-2, *L'Offrande*



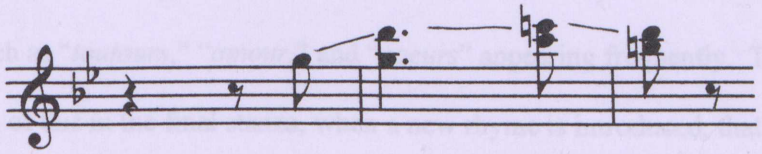
The vocal melody moves in steps and leaps of a third until b.3, in which there is a leap of a fifth from D down to G. The vocal line is doubled in the piano part for the entire piece, with the exception of b.13. As in *La maitresse volage*, there is some alternation between $\frac{2}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ metre, but this only extends to one bar, b.5, the rest of the piece being in $\frac{2}{4}$. Harmonically, the first six bars are clearly in G minor, shifting away from this with the addition of Ab at b.7, until the key of Eb major is reached at b.11. The vocal line alternates stepwise movement with leaps of sixths, sevenths and octaves, until bb.13 and 14, when the notes of the chord of G minor are articulated on the repetition of the words

"*et lui dit,*" while at b.12, the tonic key of G minor is reinstated. Poulenc's statement of "*et lui dit*" creates suspense, as it prolongs the wait until the listener hears a response from the deity.

The second half of the piece starts at b.16, at which point the vocal part soars into a higher register, with the performance instruction "*tres doux,*" while the words of the god of Love are being sung. The piano accompaniment becomes more dense, with chords in the left hand and two-part writing in the right hand. The second half of the piece favours G major over G minor, with the loss of Bb within the texture. The main vocal line ends at b.20 with a leap from G to the D on which it started, after which the piano part, now divided into three staves for the only time in the cycle, echoes the vocal line over the same harmonic accompaniment. At b.24, this repetition is reduced to a two-bar phrase, played twice, and at b.28, this sequence is interrupted by an unaccompanied sigh in the vocal part, notated on E♮ and D, followed by a seventh E♮ - D in the high register of the piano. The recurring motif throughout the cycle, is stated in this song within the texture of the piano part, in the uppermost notes in the right hand from the last quaver of b.23 to the first quaver of 25.

See Example 6.3

Example 6.3 Piano part, bb. 23-25



The piece ends with three D's struck simultaneously in the lower register, an enigmatic finish for the song to which is attributed a most vulgar meaning, given the use to which the god of Love suggests the offered candle is put. What is also enigmatic within the language of the poem, is that the deity does not directly say whether or not he will grant her request. Poulenc's setting of this text is sufficiently precious that the meaning is not immediately apparent to the listener, thus heightening its impact when it is finally comprehended.

3.7 *La Belle Jeunesse*

Treatment of text

The issue of infidelity arises again in this advocacy of free love. The institution of marriage is denigrated, it is claimed that unmarried men are the object of fascination from married women, and a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure is said to be the only way to live. There is much repetition within the text, which consists of three stanzas of varying lengths; the most frequently stated line within the song urges men to sublimate the inclination to wed:

"*Cessez, messieurs, d'etre epouseurs.*"

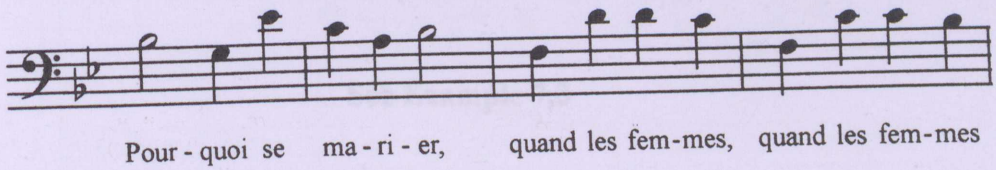
The rhyming scheme of the poem which contains a total of twenty lines, is mainly A-B, with words such as "*toujours*," "*amour*," and "*coeurs*" appearing frequently. There is some variation of this in the final stanza, when a new rhyme is introduced, that of

"*marie*," "*pas prier*," and "*autres*," "notre," in the context: "Why marry, when the wives of others need no persuasion to become ours?"

Poulenc's setting of this song is the second-longest in the cycle, (the longest being *Couplets Bacchiques*), while the poem used in by far the longest, seven lines longer than its nearest contender (*Couplets Bacchiques* contains thirteen). The song falls into three distinct sections which do not correspond strictly with the division of verses within the poem. Instead, he consolidates the first and second verses into the first section, the second section is a setting of the third verse, and the final section is an abbreviated form of the first. Phrase length in the opening and closing sections, is mostly determined by the length of line in each poem. This pattern is interrupted in the middle section, when Poulenc repeats clauses within lines in order to extend phrases over more than two bars.

See Example 7.1

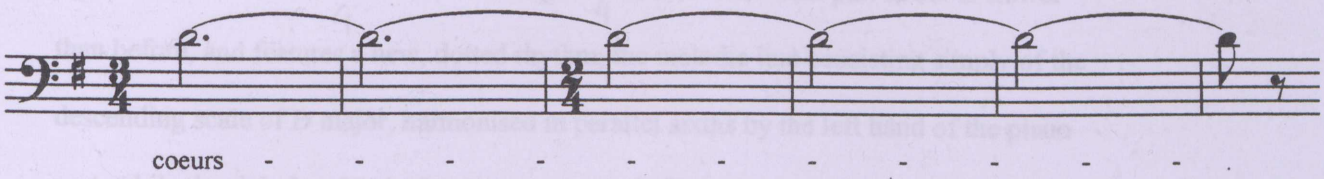
Example 7.1 Vocal part, bb. 28-31



The setting of this text is rapid and unrelentingly syllabic, with no note held for longer than a minim (with few of these throughout the piece), until the final note is reached and tied over almost six bars, giving lasting emphasis to the word "*coeurs*" (hearts).

See Example 7.2

Example 7.2 Vocal part, bb. 70-75

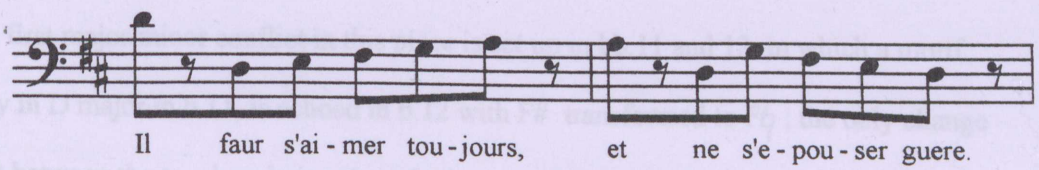


Musical Language

This is the last fast piece in the cycle, displaying many of the compositional techniques used in the preceding pieces. There is a four-bar piano introduction, the metre changing from $\frac{2}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ at b.4. The opening material features chromatic movement and leaps of fourths, tritones and fifths, spanning two octaves by the time the first vocal entry takes place at b.5. Notated in D major to start with, the voice begins on D, leaping down an octave and ascending the scale of D as far as A; this ascending/descending pattern is mirrored in b.6, with leap of a fifth from A down to D, up a fourth to G, returning to D by way of four descending notes of the scale.

See Example 7.3

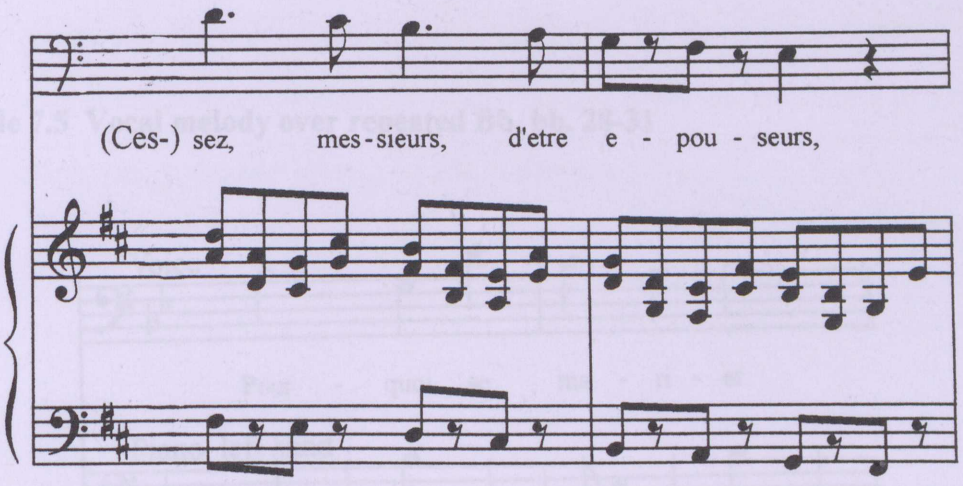
Example 7.3 Vocal part, bb. 5-6



This process is repeated using the tonality of A major in the next two bars, and at b.8 there is a brief excursion into $\frac{5}{4}$ metre, returning to $\frac{4}{4}$ in b.9. The vocal part in b.9 is slower than before, and features a new, dotted rhythm, the melodic line consisting simply of the descending scale of D major, harmonised in parallel sixths by the left hand of the piano part, while the right hand articulates a sequence of quavers built from chords descending in steps from D to A.

See Example 7.4

Example 7.4 Slower melody with quaver accompaniment, bb. 9-10



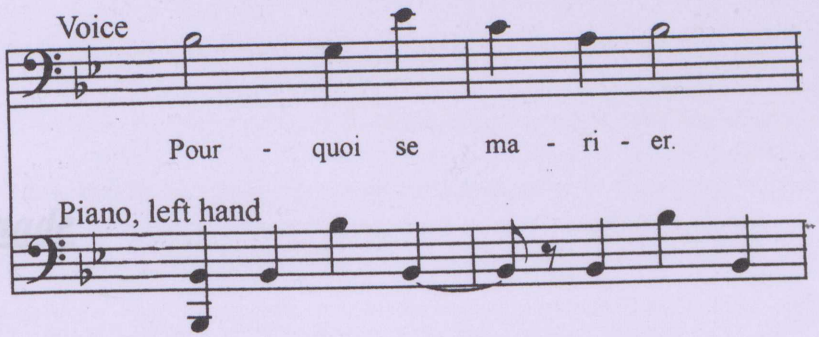
The first major/minor conflict in this piece is set up in bb.11 and 12, in which a motif clearly in D major in b.11, is echoed in b.12 with F# transformed to F♮ ; the only change in text between the two bars being the substitution of "*toureloures*" in b.12, for "*tirelires*" in b.11 At b.17, a new and more simple melody appears in the vocal part, in D minor,

sung to "*la*, over chords of Bb, A and D, decorated with sevenths and ninths. At b.20, the melody descends to A, over a continuation of the same harmonic sequence. There is further repetition of the same text as before to a new thematic motif at b.21, consisting of three repeated C's descending to Bb, with this process repeated starting on Bb on the next bar, over a more florid piano part featuring semiquaver runs as in *Couplets Bachiques*. This section ends at b.25 in D major, approached in the previous bars by a scale of D minor in both piano and vocal parts. There is a three-bar bridge passage in the piano part featuring a sequence of double-thirds in the right hand, as heard before in *Couplets Bachiques*, leading into a new section and a change of key at b.28, to Bb major.

The new melody is slower, featuring crotchets and minims to begin with, over a repeated Bb in the left hand.

See Example 7.5

Example 7.5 Vocal melody over repeated Bb, bb. 28-31



There is a shift from this at b.34 with the addition of F# in the piano part, while the vocal melody develops from the dotted rhythm at b.9. This sequence descends to Ab major, firmly stated in the first chord of b.38, after which G minor is reached at b.40. The

melodic line at b.41 begins with a descending fifth, continuing down chromatically by two steps and doubled in the piano part. This sequence is repeated until b.45, at which a gradual ascent begins. At b.48, the chord of D major is reached, followed by an adapted version of the opening piano solo, finishing on a chord of D, forming a perfect cadence in G major, which is the new key signature at b.52.

From b.52 onwards, there is a recapitulation of the first section, in the key of G. At b.62, there is a statement of the material from b.17, again to the syllable "la," on the original pitches, despite the different key signature. Poulenc ends the piece in D major, although he does not technically modulate back into this key. The resolution of D major is postponed until the chord in the final bar, due to the juxtaposition of D, F# and F♮ within the last four bars.

This song is most similar in character to *Couplets Bachiques*, not only for the reason stated above, but also due to its length; its rumbustious nature stemming from the subject matter relating to infidelity within marriage; finally, the lack of any direct reference to the motif which recurred throughout most of the rest of the work.

3.8 *Serenade*

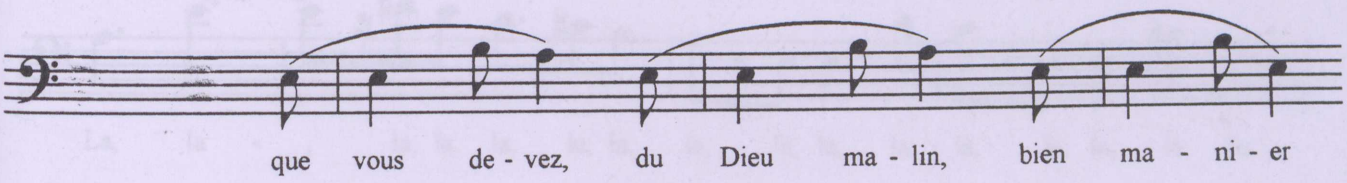
Treatment of text

The subject matter of this song related to the abstract notion of a hand endowed with such beauty and sensitivity that it is surely the same hand which directs Cupid's arrows, and

which soothes away his tears. The overall mood of the song is gentle and flowing, like the other song in this cycle which features the God of Love, *L'Offrande*. While lacking the direct coarseness of *L'Offrande*, an erotic double-meaning has been attributed to the reference to Cupid's tears, but this is not substantiated in Poulenc's own writings about the song. There is a stillness throughout the piece suggested by the repetition of pitches within both melody and accompaniment. The repetition of short melodic phrases obviates much in the way of melodic development, particularly in the earlier sections of the song.

See Example 8.1

Example 8.1 Vocal part, bb. 9-12



Performance directions also emphasise the calm nature of the work, with "*doux*" appearing in both vocal and piano parts, and drama is discouraged with the instruction "*sans arpeger*" attached to the larger chords in the piano part.

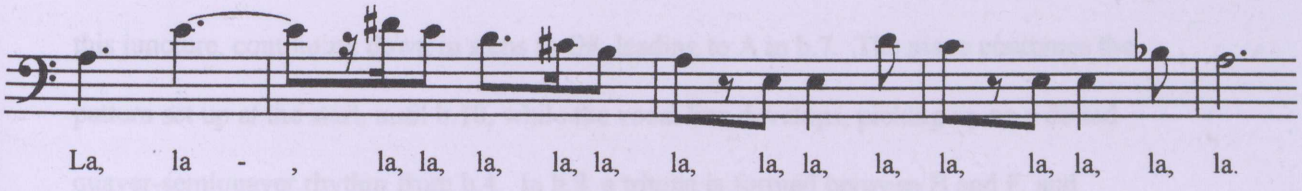
The text of this song consists of three couplets with the rhyming scheme A-B, A-B, A-B. At the point in the piece at which the key signature changes, Poulenc repeats the entire poem verbatim; this is a link with the structure of the first song in the cycle, whose entire text is also repeated. Much significance is given to the concept of Cupid's tears, described in the last line of the poem:

"Bien essuyer ses larmes."

The end of each iteration of the poem is characterised by a non-verbal extension of the vocal line. The first time, this is achieved by a development of the theme which recurs throughout the cycle, sung to the syllable "*la.*" (Poulenc chooses the final song in the cycle to develop a melodic phrase from this motif).

See Example 8.2

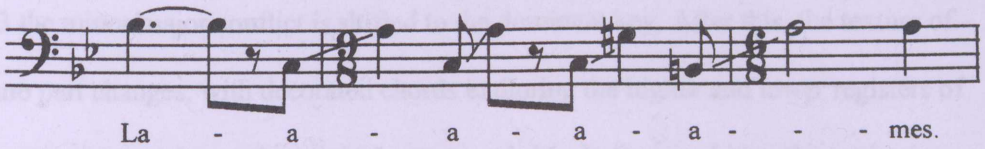
Example 8.2 Development of recurrent theme in vocal part, bb. 18-21



The second time, the entire line is repeated, once as melody and once as counterpoint to the piano. The "*la*" part of the last word of the poem, "*larmes*," is drawn out across the three final bars in the vocal part, to a succession of wide leaps terminating on the local tonic.

See Example 8.3

Example 8.3 Vocal part, bb. 41-43

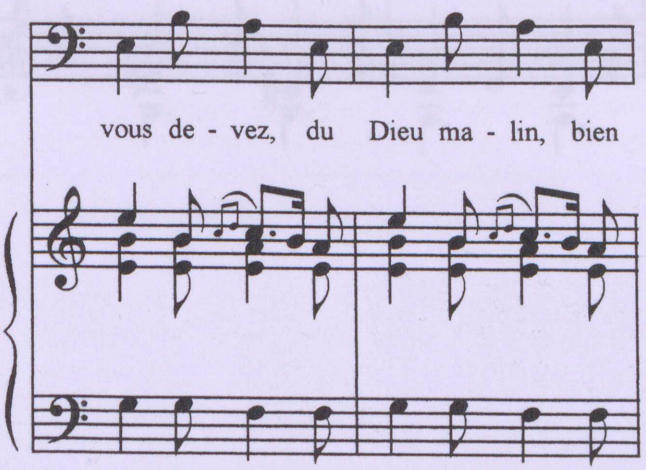


Musical Language

Set in A minor, minor/major conflict starts in the first bar with the use of both C♮ and C# in the right hand. There is much use of the interval of a ninth within the piano introduction in the first four bars, between A and B. The vocal entry begins at b.5, starting on A, leaping up a fifth to E, back down to A, up to C, consolidating A minor at this juncture, continuing down in steps to G#, leading to A in b.7. The piano continues the pattern set up at the start, until b.10, while the vocal line develops, picking up on a dotted quaver-semiquaver rhythm from b.4. In b.8, a tritone is formed between B and F, and ninth between B and A. At b.10, new harmonies occur, those of E minor and F major, while some counterpoint takes place between the right hand and the voice, capitalising on the dotted rhythm.

See Example 8.4

Example 8.4 Interplay between piano and vocal part, bb. 10-11

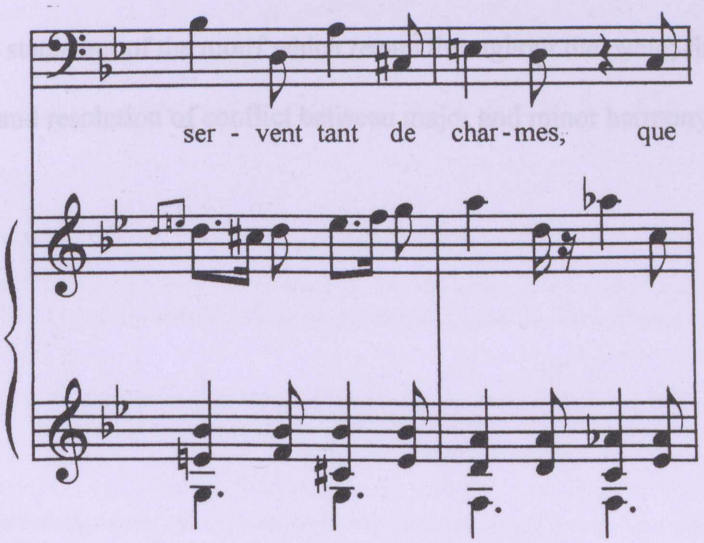


At b.13 the minor/major conflict is shifted to the dominant key. After this, the texture of the piano part changes, with decorated chords exploring the higher and lower registers of the instrument, returning to the original pattern at b.16. In the vocal line, the intervals extend from leaps of fifths to those of sevenths, for the words "*quand cet enfant est chagrin.*"

A brief piano interlude leads to a change of key into G minor, at b.24. This begins with a reiteration of the material at b.5, transposed down a whole tone, with a variation in the counterpoint between the vocal and piano parts at b.27.

See Example 8.5

Example 8.5 Interplay between piano and vocal part, bb. 27-28



The metre changes into $\frac{9}{8}$ for one bar at b.29. At b.32, the chords alternate between Ab and D major, forming an harmonic relationship of a tritone. Following this, the G minor tonality is maintained, until the melodic sequence starting on the last quaver of b.39 leads down to A through a series of large leaps including intervals of a tritone, minor sixth, major sixth and minor seventh. The harmonic centre of A minor is re-established in the last three bars of the song, and the final chord is that of A minor. As in *La Belle Jeunesse*, there is a return to the original tonic key at the conclusion of the piece, but the actual key signature is not reinstated. This retention of the G minor key signature is a reference to the first song of the cycle, and allows the closure of the cycle to be written in the same key as the start, even if does not sound similar.

This piece contains all of Poulenc's devices which typify this cycle; the use of tonal harmony decorated with dissonant intervals such as ninths and tritones; melodic lines which contain stepwise movement and also larger, more dissonant intervals such as tritones and sevenths: a close relationship between the mood of the musical setting and the subject matter of the text; the inclusion of a piano introduction, and the piano largely being in a supporting role to that of the voice, with occasional use of counterpoint to vary the texture; a statement of the motif which recurs throughout the cycle; finally, the introduction and resolution of conflict between major and minor harmony.

Conclusion

Poulenc's familiarity with poetry as a form of expression is evident within his realisation of these eight seventeenth century texts. This is apparent for three reasons:

1. The syllabic nature of the vocal settings, in which natural patterns of speech are incorporated into the phrasing, rather than the imposition of artificial accents and metres inherent in the verses, upon the melodic structure.

2. With the deliberate exception of "*L'Offrande*," the mood expressed in each poem is accurately reflected in each musical setting.

3. Poulenc is sufficiently confident in his handling of each text, that that he is able to judge where the structure of each song is best served in repeating larger or smaller sections of text.

Uniformity of style is achieved throughout ***Chansons Gaillardes***. This is demonstrated in a number of ways:

1. Eight diverse poems have been brought together due to their shared themes of alcohol and love.

2. Notwithstanding the musical settings, the texts themselves have strong structural links with each other, relating to form and rhyming schemes.

3. Poulenc's harmonic language remains consistent during the eight songs, combining the use of diatonic harmony with the addition of dissonances such as seconds, tritones, sevenths and ninths.

4. There is frequent conflict between major and minor tonalities throughout the cycle, with the third of a chord either omitted, or else with major and minor thirds juxtaposed upon each other.

5. Strong thematic links exist between each song, culminating in the expansion of a four-note motif introduced in the first song, into a five-bar melodic phrase in the final song.

As a consequence, it is possible to conclude that Poulenc has brought eight disparate songs together to form the single homogeneous cycle that is ***Chansons Gaillardes***.

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Appendix

The eight poems of *Chansons Gaillardes*

Ma Maitresse Volage

Ma maitresse est volage,
Mon rival est heureux:
S'il a son pucellage,
C'est qu'elle en avait deux.
Et vogue la galere,
Tant qu'elle pourra voguer.

Chanson a boire

Les rois d'Egypte et de Syrie,
Voulaient qu'on embaumat leurs corps,
Pour durer, plus longtemps, morts.
Quelle folie!
Buvons donc selon notre envie,
Il faut boire et reboire encore.
Buvons donc toute notre vie,
Embaumons-nous avant la mort.
Embaumons-nous; que ce baume est doux.

Madrigal

Vous etes belle comme un ange,
Douce comme un petit mouton:
Il n'est point de coeur, Jeanneton,
Qui sous votre loi ne se range;
Mais une fille sans teton,
Est une perdrix sans orange.

Invocation aux Parques

Je jure, tant que je vivrai,
De vous aimer Sylvie:
Parques, qui dans vos mains tenez
Le fil de notre vie,
Allongez, tant que vous pourrez,
Le mien, je vous en prie.

Couplets Bacchiques

Je suis tant que dure le jour,
Et grave et badin tour a tour.
Quand je vois un flacon sans vin,
Je suis grave,
Est il tout plein,
Je suis badin.
Quand me femme me tient au lit,
Je suis sage toute la nuit.
Si catin au lit me tient;
Alors je suis badin,
Ah, belle hotesse, versez-moi du vin,
Je suis badin.

L'Offrande

Au Dieu d'Amour, une pucelle
Offrit jour une chandelle,
Pour obtenir un amant.
Le Dieu sourit de sa demande,
Et lui dit: Belle, en attendante,
Servez-vous toujours de l'offrande.

La Belle Jeunesse

Il faut s'aimer toujours,
Et ne s'epouser guere.
Il faut faire l'amour
Sans cure ni notaire.

Cessez, messieurs, d'etre epouseurs,
Ne visez qu'aux tirelires,
Ne visez qu'aux tourelours,
Ne visez qu'aux coeurs.
Cessez, messieurs, d'etre epouseurs,
Hola, messieurs, ne visez plus qu'aux coeurs.

Pourquoi se marier,
Quand les femmes des autres
Ne se fond pas prier
Pour devenir les notres.
Quand leurs ardeurs,
Quand leurs faveurs,
Cherchent nos tirelires,
Cherchent nos tourelours,
Cherchent nos coeurs.

Serenade

Avec une si belle main,
Que servent tant de charmes,
Que vous devez du Dieu malin,
Bien manier les armes!
Et quand cet Enfant est chagrin,
Bien essuyer ses larmes.