

Notes on Two Recitals and an Opera Role

by

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DEDICATION

To my beloved family.

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ABSTRACT

An opera role and two recitals were performed in lieu of a written dissertation. This character study and collection of program notes offers insight into the creative process behind the performances. “Crafting a Dynamic Cinderella in Massenet’s *Cendrillon*” looks at the character, who is often portrayed as demure and passive, from a 21st century perspective. Specific examples from the score suggest ways in which Jules Massenet gave his Cinderella fire, agency, humor, passion, sexuality, and creativity. “Poulenc and His Poets” was a recital of all French *mélodie* by Francis Poulenc on texts of a few of his favorite poets, Guillaume Apollinaire, Paul Éluard, and Louise de Vilmorin. The notes explore Poulenc’s deep connection to these poets and the ways in which each one informed his songwriting and style. Finally, “Prose, Poetry, Sonnets, and Spomments” offered three pieces from vastly different literary sources: the diaries of Virginia Woolf as set by Dominick Argento, poets and sonnets from some of history’s great wordsmiths as set by Libby Larsen, and spam comments left by computer bots as set by Gala Flagello. Audiences are left to consider the value of the texts that surround us, and what kinds of texts make great art songs.

OPERA ROLE

Crafting a Dynamic Cinderella in Massenet's *Cendrillon*

Acting in an opera is undoubtedly a great undertaking. Interpreting one of the planet's most recognizable characters operatically, and in a fresh and individual way, seems almost impossible. After all, the tale of Cinderella has been around for thousands of years in various forms in almost every culture in the world. In a list of theatrical archetypes included in Joe Deer and Rocco Dal Vera's book *Acting in Musical Theatre*, the "Cinderella" archetype is described as a "female character who appears to be poor and unattractive but who cleans up to be a beautiful and romantically ideal match for the male love interest."¹ The name seems to be synonymous with a downtrodden woman who, through a series of fortunate and/or magical events, is saved from her hapless situation by a powerful man. Magic is thrust upon her, and through no actions of her own, she is rendered beautiful and worthy of love and success. Luckily, Jules Massenet's operatic setting of the iconic story depicts Cinderella as a woman with more agency and emotional depth than other portrayals. Furthermore, it could be argued that in this operatic telling *she* is the one who saves the prince, not the other way around. It is the singer's fortunate task to uncover the layers of this character with the musical clues provided by Massenet.

¹ Joe Deer and Rocco Dal Vera, *Acting in Musical Theatre, A Comprehensive Course* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 152.

The tale of Cinderella has existed in many variants throughout history. In his book, *Fairytale in the Ancient World*, Graham Anderson concludes that the basic tale boils down to the following common elements: the heroine is persecuted, she receives some kind of magical aid from a fantastical being or animal, meets a prince, proves her identity later in the story, and marries said prince.² One of the earliest known versions of the tale is from ancient Greece in the late first century BC. In this version, an eagle steals the sandal of the heroine, here named Rhodopis, while she is bathing. The eagle carries the shoe to the king and drops it upon him from above. Being thoroughly intrigued by the shoe, the king sends out a search party to find the sandal's owner, eventually finding Rhodopis and marrying her.³

Another early version comes from 9th century China, in the tale of *Ye Xian*. This heroine is a warmhearted orphan who is treated poorly by her step-family. Her dearest friend is a fish, who is eventually cooked and eaten by the stepmother. The spirit of the fish guides Ye Xian, who is given golden shoes and a fine gown to attend a festival. She loses one of the shoes, the king finds it, is intrigued, then seeks and marries Ye Xian. In this version, the stepmother and stepsisters are killed by flying stones.⁴

Rhodopis and *Ye Xian* are mentioned here simply to show how embedded the Cinderella story is in the history of humanity. The trope is found time and time again, and these deep multicultural and universal roots should be considered in interpreting the character. She carries much more depth and complexity than the 21st century Walt Disney ideal. Jumping ahead to the 17th century, we find another account in Giambattista Basile's collection of fairy tales called *The Pentamerone*. "La Gatta Cenerentola" appears about 60 years before Charles Perrault's version,

² Graham Anderson, *Fairytale in the Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 24–25.

³ William Hansen, *The Book of Greek and Roman Folktales, Legends, and Myths* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 86–87.

⁴ Amy Lai, "Two Translations of the Chinese Cinderella Story," *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, Vol. 15, Issue 1 (2007): 49, <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.2167/pst004.0>.

to be discussed later. Basile's account of the tale is perhaps most notable because the heroine, here named Zezolla, is convinced by her governess to murder her stepmother by breaking the woman's neck. Zezolla does indeed murder her stepmother, and encourages her father to marry the governess, only to be shunned again by the governess and her new stepsisters. In "La Gatta Cenerentola," Zezolla's father is infatuated with her but is weak enough to let his stepdaughters and new wife estrange him from his own daughter.⁵ We see these themes again in Massenet's opera.

Massenet's *Cendrillon* is based on the most famous European version of the tale by Charles Perrault, published in 1698. In Perrault's telling of the story, we are first introduced to the iconic glass slipper, pumpkin coach, and midnight curfew.⁶ From a character analysis standpoint, the heroine, Cendrillon, stands out for several reasons. She is, as in most versions of the tale, noted for being kind-hearted and beautiful, but she is also described as having impeccable taste and skill when it comes to fashion.⁷ She assists the fairy godmother by suggesting they transform three fat rats into coachmen for her magical carriage.⁸ She cleverly toys with her sisters after the first night of the ball as they prattle on about the mysterious princess, and after marrying the prince, she moves her sisters into the palace, seeing to it that they marry two great lords.⁹

These are very small moments in Perrault's tale, but incredibly significant because they give Cendrillon some fire, humor, passion, creativity, and agency. She is more than a downtrodden female, plucked from her miserable fate by a handsome prince. These facets of the

⁵ Hansjorg Hohn, "Dynamic Aspects of Fairy Tales: Social and emotional competence through fairy tales," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* Vol. 44, No. 1 (2000): 92–93, <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1080/713696665>.

⁶ Anderson, 24.

⁷ Christine A. Jones, *Mother Goose Refigured: A Critical Translation of Charles Perrault's Fairy Tales* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 138.

⁸ *Ibid*, 140.

⁹ *Ibid*, 143.

character are put on full display in Massenet's musical setting which premiered in 1899. With a libretto by one of Massenet's major collaborators, Henri Cain, this operatic setting gives Cendrillon three lengthy, multi sectional arias and four intimate duets where Massenet explores the complex personality of a character we all think we know well.

To analyze a character, Deer and Val Dera recommend noting not only what you, the character, say about yourself, but what other characters say about you.¹⁰ In Cain's libretto, not much is said of Cendrillon outside of her being sad, beautiful, and sweet. Only those with whom she interacts directly, her father Pandolfe, the fairy godmother (Fée), and the Prince, talk about her characteristics. In his opening aria, Pandolfe describes Cendrillon as his *pauvre petite* (poor little one), as he leaves for the ball regretting that he cannot cradle her sadness.¹¹ La Fée describes her as a *douce enfant* (sweet child).¹² At the ball, the Prince and chorus describe her as exquisite, a lovely dream, and beauty from heaven. Clearly, we are not given much character description in the libretto besides the fact that Cendrillon is child-like to the fairy godmother, sad in her father's eyes, and a beautiful dream to the Prince.

Thankfully, Massenet shows her fire, humor, passion, and creativity in Cendrillon's arias. We first hear from her halfway through Act I, as she sings the aria, "*Ah! que mes sœurs sont heureuses!*"¹³ Alone on stage after her family has left for the ball, Cendrillon appears as the oboe introduces the aria's main musical theme, marked *mystérieux et calme* by Massenet. The oboe and English horn often introduce Cendrillon's vocal entrances, and the use of these particular instruments is a good indication of how Massenet viewed the character. In Hector Berlioz's 1844 treatise on orchestration, he describes the oboe in an interesting way:

¹⁰ Deer and Dal Vera, 137.

¹¹ Jules Massenet, *Cendrillon*, Piano-Vocal Score (Paris: Heugel & Co., 1899), 58–59.

¹² *Ibid*, 87.

¹³ *Ibid*, 75–86.

“The oboe’s special characteristics convey candour, naive grace, sentimental delight, or the suffering of weaker creatures. It expresses this marvelously well in cantabile. It has the capacity to express agitation to a certain degree, but one should be careful not to stretch it as far as cries of passion or the splutter of rage or threats or heroics, since its little bittersweet voice becomes quite ineffective and absurd.”¹⁴

As Massenet’s predecessor, Berlioz gives us a good idea of 19th century French thought about the oboe. The idea that the oboe’s bittersweet voice becomes harrowed if stretched too far is an interesting parallel to Cendrillon’s trajectory in the opera. After losing faith in her own memory and reality, she vows in Act III that she will run to the forest to die. From a character analysis standpoint, Berlioz’s description of the oboe’s timbre as one of “sentimental delight” is also a standout phrase for Massenet’s Cendrillon. She is full of deep feelings but delighted by everyday tasks. This first aria goes back and forth between those two aspects of her character with the *mystérieux* oboe theme alternating with a jollier theme as she works.

Her first vocal entrance is quasi-recitative, and she explains that for her stepsisters, every day brings new pleasures. She says, “*Elles n’ont pas le temps de former un désir... E le bonheur aussi je crois les rend plus belles!*” (They barely have time to form a desire... and their happiness, I believe, makes them more beautiful!). Clearly, Cendrillon is implying that the sisters barely think of something they want, and they get it. It is interesting that she stops mid-sentence and switches from commenting on their selfishness to commenting on their beauty. This line might read as Cendrillon poking fun at her spoiled sisters, then stopping herself. Massenet sets this line in a patter-like fashion with a rocking, mocking, orchestral figure underneath (Figure 1.1). The word *désir* ends on a sarcastic sounding C-natural, before she corrects it to C-sharp after the ellipses. This line and its musical setting suggest that Cendrillon may have a biting,

¹⁴ Hector Berlioz and Hugh Macdonald, *Berlioz’s Orchestration Treatise, A Translation and Commentary*, trans. Hugh Macdonald (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 104.

witty side to her personality that she keeps in check. Perhaps she perceives her stepsisters as more deluded than cruel.¹⁵



Figure 1.1 Excerpt from “Ah! que mes sœurs sont heureuses!” m. 17–18.¹⁶

Once the aria proper begins, Massenet returns to the *mystérieux* melody in 6/8 time that was introduced by the oboe. She is resigning herself to work, and the folksy, repetitive setting of this text almost makes it seem like a mantra she often repeats to herself when she starts to feel jealous or sad. The melody comes back several more times in the aria, and even shows up at the end of her second aria after she arrives home from the ball. Between sections of the melancholic folk melody, there are jolly sections in common time, busy with repeated sixteenth notes where Cendrillon explains that she does find joy in working (Figure 1.2). These sections portray a diligent, creative side to her personality, one reflected in Perrault’s inclusion of her keen eye for fashion. She clearly has creative interests and ambitions beyond wallowing and dreaming of a different life. The dance-like figures in the orchestra, or below in the piano’s right hand (Figure 1.2), could be interpreted as Cendrillon expressing sparks of invention or silliness as she works.

¹⁵ Hohr, 94.

¹⁶ Massenet, 76.

83 **Modéré.** *mf*

76 = ♩ C'est u-ne joie aussi de

Modéré. *p*

f *p* *p*

f *p*

Fai-re son devoir... Débarrassons la table et rangeons ce dres.

The image shows a musical score for a duet. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a rest, then enters with the lyrics 'C'est u-ne joie aussi de'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. The second system continues the duet with the lyrics 'Fai-re son devoir...' and 'Débarrassons la table et rangeons ce dres.'. The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, and *f*. The tempo is marked 'Modéré'.

Figure 1.2 Excerpt from “Ah! que mes sœurs sont heureuses!” m. 63–66.¹⁷

This playful, silly side to Cendrillon shows up again at the ball in her Act II duet with the Prince.¹⁸ The pair sing two passionate duets together, with lush chromatic moments where you can almost hear the influences of Wagner on Massenet’s writing.¹⁹ Interestingly, in the first duet Cendrillon is given a page of music that has a sparse orchestral accompaniment and a subdued, arguably flirty vocal line (Figure 1.3). After being whisked away by the Prince who continues to ask for her name, she replies that she is “*L’Inconnue*” or “the unknown one.” She explains that she is merely a dream who will pass by and vanish without a trace. Massenet could have set this in a despondent way wherein she is feeling sorry for herself because she knows she cannot stay

¹⁷ Massenet, 80.

¹⁸ *ibid*, 199–213.

¹⁹ Rodney Milnes, “Cendrillon,” *Grove Music Online*, 2002, <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O008920>.

at the ball much longer. Instead, the music suggests that she is playing with the prince, enticing him with a mysterious air. She is just as much an instigator in this flirtation as he is. This is an example of Cendrillon being an active participant in her relationship and destiny.

The first system of the musical score is for the song "Toi qui m'es apparue." It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "Vous l'avez dit, ————". The tempo is marked "Lent." and the dynamics are "mf (vivement)" and "p". The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with chords and arpeggios, marked with a forte "f" dynamic. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 6/8.

170 Aimé - Vif et léger. 96 = ♩.

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal line with the lyrics "et dois pas ser Sans qu'il en res le tra - ce... Comme s'ef -". The tempo is marked "Aimé - Vif et léger." and the dynamics are "pp" and "dol.". The piano accompaniment is marked with "ppp m. d." and "p". The key signature has two sharps and the time signature is 6/8.

The third system of the musical score continues the vocal line with the lyrics "...face Un reflet du ciel... que l'on voit glis ser Sur l'eau que le ven". The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with chords and arpeggios, marked with a piano "pp" dynamic. The key signature has two sharps and the time signature is 6/8.

Figure 1.3 Excerpt from "Toi qui m'es apparue," m. 32–37.²⁰

²⁰ Massenet, 202.

After teasing the Prince and claiming that she must leave, she suddenly makes a bold and sincere declaration. In her first utterance of “*Vous êtes mon Prince Charmant*” (you are my Prince Charming), she introduces a recurring musical motif scholar Rodney Milnes describes as “a phrase of characteristic Massenetian simplicity.”²¹ The phrase is ushered in over a single pitch from the English horn, then the instrument echoes Cendrillon’s melody (Figure 1.4).

The image displays a musical score for the opera *Cendrillon*. It consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line (soprano) and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "en cédant. oeil can-di-de la dément... Vous en cédant." The piano accompaniment includes the instruction "suivez." and features a melody in the English horn. The second system is marked "174" and "Très modéré. 76 = ♩", with the instruction "simple et tendre." The vocal line continues with "é-tes mon Prin-ce Char-mant, Et si j'é-cou-trais mon en-". The piano accompaniment includes the instruction "Très modéré. (en imitant Cendrillon)." and "simple et tendre.".

Figure 1.4 Excerpt from “*Toi qui m’es apparue*,” m. 68–74.²²

The English horn, while very similar to the oboe, has a deeper timbre which Berlioz describes as being useful when “arousing images and feelings of the past, or when the composer

²¹ Milnes.

²² Massenet, 205.

wants to pluck the secret string of memory.”²³ This love-at-first-sight moment makes more sense when considering the English horn’s symbolism. Perhaps the Prince is reminding her of someone from her past, or a very specific dream she once had. An actor could go as far as to guess that before her passing, Cendrillon’s mother may have offered a description of the kind of man she wished her daughter would marry someday. At this moment, Cendrillon realizes that the Prince fits the bill.

Act III opens with Cendrillon’s second aria, “*Enfin, je suis ici...*” (at last, I am here),²⁴ which sees her safely back at home after fleeing from the ball. In agitated cut time and accompanied by a galloping string figure, she recounts the adventure of racing home in the middle of the night. Even though the aria is in a minor key and Cendrillon repeatedly says “*j’avais peur*” (I was scared), she is clearly excited by it all. Massenet sculpts every line with expressive markings, dynamic contrasts and rhythmic variation, showing us how she is working through a frightening experience that was also obviously thrilling for her.

The aria seems to end as she exclaims to herself, “Courage! Go!” but Massenet gives her an abrupt shift of thought as she realizes that all the excitement is now over. She will never see the Prince again. There will be no more wild adventures in the middle of the night, and she must resign herself to focus again on her work. Massenet shows us a woman ferociously enjoying herself, only to be jolted back to reality in an instant. He suggests that yes, the ball must have been magical for Cendrillon, but she has many complicated human emotions to work through afterward. In the opera we get to hear her do this work, rather than simply watch her return to being downtrodden and helpless.

²³ Berlioz, 109.

²⁴ Massenet, 214–227.

Even more complicated is the following duet with her father, Pandolfe. After hearing her stepmother and stepsisters claim that the prince denounced his affection for the mystery woman after she fled the ball, Cendrillon collapses in disbelief. Her father finally asserts himself, ordering his wife and stepdaughters out of the room so he can be alone with his daughter. He begins the duet, “*Ma pauvre enfant chérie!*”²⁵ which is the first time Massenet explores this father-daughter dynamic with both parties onstage. Here is a man who has allowed his daughter to be mistreated for years, attempting to lift her spirits in her darkest hour.

The scene settles into a melodic, waltzing, folk-like duet, where Cendrillon and her father sing in perfect octaves, vowing to leave their current situation and return to their former country home. The folk-like melody and their unison sound might be Massenet suggesting that this is something they have sung together before. Perhaps it is Pandolfe’s usual way of cheering up his daughter. The way Massenet marks the tune dynamically is curious, with the pair exclaiming “*Là!*” (There!) at a *forte* dynamic, then immediately repeating it at a *pianissimo*. It almost sounds like a game they have played together since Cendrillon was a child, shouting or singing together loudly then very softly (Figure 1.5).

The image shows a musical score excerpt from "Ma pauvre enfant chérie!". It consists of two systems of music. The first system is for the vocal duet, with Cendrillon's part on the top staff and Pandolfe's part on the bottom staff. The lyrics are: "Là! nous se-rons heu-reux!.. Bien heu-". The score is marked with dynamics like *f*, *pp*, and *pp*, and includes performance instructions like "Animé - avec ardeur" and "Lent.". The second system is for the piano accompaniment, with the right hand on the top staff and the left hand on the bottom staff. The score is marked with dynamics like *f* and *pp*.

Figure 1.5 Excerpt from “*Ma pauvre enfant chérie!*” m. 92–94.²⁶

²⁵ Massenet, 251–259.

²⁶ *ibid*, 259.

If not for Cendrillon's aria that immediately follows in which she declares that she will flee into the woods alone to die, one might believe that Pandolfe has been successful in lifting her spirits. She is deceiving her father here, and very convincingly. The juxtaposition of this duet and aria suggest that Cendrillon feels a sense of duty to take care of her father and make him feel like he is doing well for himself. Even though he does not stand up for her, perhaps she has felt responsible for his happiness since the day her mother died. Is this why she has so graciously tolerated her sorry situation since his remarriage? She demonstrates a probable habit of setting aside her own needs for her father's benefit.

As soon as her father leaves the room, she launches into her third aria, "*Seule, je partirai, mon père*" (Alone, I will leave, my father).²⁷ Here again, we see that she feels she must protect her father from her unhappiness. As she says goodbye to various items in her home, one cannot help but be reminded of Manon's aria "*Adieu, mon petite table*" from Massenet's previous opera, *Manon*. In Cendrillon's aria, Massenet and Caïn give us the clearest view of her history and psychological state. A most compelling moment is when she recalls climbing into her mother's lap, and begins singing a song that her mother used to sing to her. It ends with her voice ringing out completely *a cappella*, which forces the listener to zoom in on her fragile emotional state and suggests that she feels completely alone (Figure 1.6).

Immediately following, the orchestra dramatically crashes back into the picture, (Figure 1.6) ushering in as close to a "mad scene" as the character of Cinderella probably ever gets.

²⁷ Massenet, 260–268.

Parlé (en sanglotant):
Maman! Maman! Maman!!

rall. *—sus—* Dormait dans la gran - - - ge. »

rall. suivez.

—Le tonnerre gronde, l'éclair brille.— (avec un subit désespoir).
251 Animé-agité, dramatique. *f* à volonté. *f*
Animé-agité, dramatique. Ah! — puisque tout bonheur me fuit, — a Tempo. *ff*

suivez.

Figure 1.6 Excerpt from “Seule, je partirai, mon père” m. 81–85.²⁸

She sails down a chromatic descending scale and, after a moment of stark silence, announces that she shall go die under the oak of the fairies. Like Berlioz’s description of a spluttering oboe, she has been stretched to her limit. This aria, with its abrupt shifts in sentiment and variety of themes, shows what a deeply passionate and emotional character Massenet considers his heroine to be.

After she flees to the woods, we happen upon a magical scene that is not present in Perrault’s original tale. The following duet between the Prince and Cendrillon²⁹ is described by Milnes as “one of the composer’s most succulent love scenes.”³⁰ The two find themselves in an enchanted wood, where the Fée has cast a spell rendering them unable to see one another. She

²⁸ Massenet, 266.

²⁹ *ibid*, 287–308.

³⁰ Milnes.

eventually lifts the spell and they have a mystical union before falling asleep in one another's arms. It is notable that Massenet intended the Prince to be a trouser role, played by a mezzo-soprano or soprano voice. During this duet, the two voices weave around one another in the same octave, and they also sing in unison, showing their deep connection to one another. Milnes writes, "The treatment of Cendrillon and the Prince as lost, desperate children reinforces the musical reasons for never countenancing the casting of a tenor as the Prince. The whole character of the relationship is changed thereby from innocence to mere operatic sentiment."³¹ It could also be argued that the casting choice is not so much about innocence or capturing a child-like quality, but an opportunity for the audience to hear the two lovers as equal partners for one another.

In many versions of the Cinderella tale, the Prince is known only as that: "The Prince." He is a nameless symbol of wealth and success with whom Cinderella falls in love at first sight. In this duet, Cendrillon gets to hear the Prince work through a flurry of emotions. She sees him for who he really is, which is a complex human with hopes and fears similar to her own. The Prince's music in the rest of the opera showcases his sadness and boredom with life. In this duet, wherein their voices soar amidst one another, the Prince sees Cendrillon as an intellectual equal who can meet his emotional needs. In this way, she rescues him from his sad fate as much as he may be rescuing her.

Furthermore, Massenet's music for this love duet forces the interpreter to consider Cendrillon as a sexual being. Amid the Fée's hazy spell, the two realize that they have been reunited and are lulled into a pulsing 12/8 time signature. The two voices imitate one another singing, "*Et ta voix me pénètre d'une extase suprême*" (and your voice penetrates me with a supreme ecstasy), culminating in a page of music where Cendrillon's voice gradually climbs to a

³¹ Milnes.

high B-flat over pulsing eighth notes in the orchestra while repeating the word “*suprême.*” Beneath her, the Prince’s phrases also ascend ever higher (Figure 1.7). It would not be far-fetched to conclude that musically, this duet is a sexual encounter for the two characters. Cendrillon’s feelings for the Prince are overtly sexual, not merely sweet and romantic. Perhaps the Prince is the first person to have awoken these feelings in her, hence her extreme reaction to his supposed rejection earlier in Act III.

300

285

peu à peu plus chaleureusement.

peu à peu plus chaleureusement.

285

- prè - me!... su - prè - me!...

me pé-nê - tre... d'u - ne exta - se su -

Figure 1.7 Excerpt from “*Adieu genoux, Bonne Marraine*” m. 171–174.³²

³² Massenet, 300.

Cendrillon awakens at home as Act IV begins, and Pandolfe tells her that her entire encounter with the Prince was merely a dream. Eventually she learns that her dream was real, and that the Prince is searching for her. The lovers are finally reunited by the Fée, and Cendrillon sings the “*Vous êtes mon Prince Charmant*” theme one last time (Figure 1.4), going on to say, “let yourself be reborn to life.” This text further suggests that perhaps in Caïn’s mind, Cendrillon saves the Prince as much as he saves her.

When interpreting an iconic character like Cinderella, it is easy to fall into classic, fairytale princess stereotypes. The Walt Disney version of this tale has become so solidified in our Western consciousness that seeing the character as anything but a sweet, dreamy ingénue can be a challenge. By reaching back in time and learning about the different forms this character has taken across the globe, one is forced to examine why Cinderella is such an enduring cultural figure for the ages. In this operatic setting, Massenet and Caïn show us her significance in late 19th century France. If this music tells us anything, it is that Massenet’s Cendrillon is a woman full of fire, humor, passion, sexuality, and creativity.

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RECITAL 1 PROGRAM

Poulenc and His Poets

Christine Amon, Mezzo-Soprano

Tzu Kuang Tan & Natalie Sherer, piano

Saturday, February 5, 2022

Moore Building, Britton Recital Hall

5:30 PM

Trois mélodies du Bestiaire (1919/1960)

Le Serpent

La Colombe

La Puce

Le Bestiaire (1919)

Le Dromadaire

Le Chèvre du Thibet

La Sauterelle

Le Dauphin

L'Écrevisse

La Carpe

Deux Mélodies (1956)

1. La Souris

Banalités (1940)

Chanson d'Orkenise

Hôtel

Fagnes de Wallonie

Voyage à Paris

Sanglots

Francis Poulenc

(1899-1963)

Quatre Poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire (1931)

L'Anguille
Carte postale
Avant le cinéma
1904

Calligrammes (1948)

L'Espionne
Mutation
Vers le Sud
Il pleut
La grâce exilée
Aussi bien que les cigales
Voyage

Intermission

Deux Mélodies de Guillaume Apollinaire (1941-45)

Montparnasse
Hyde Park

La Grenouillère (1938)

Rosemonde (1954)

Tel jour telle nuit (1936-37)

Bonne journée
Une ruine coquille vide
Le front comme un drapeau perdu
Une roulotte couverte en tuiles
À toutes brides
Une herbe pauvre
Je n'ai envie que de t'aimer
Figure de force brûlante et farouche
Nous avons fait la nuit

Fiançailles pour rire (1939)

1. La Dame d'André
3. Il vole
5. Violon

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM NOTES

Francis Poulenc is known to be one of history's greatest composers of French *mélodie*. His trademark use of abrupt changes in dynamic, syllabic text setting, and interesting harmonic juxtapositions makes much of his music instantly recognizable. Many of his *mélodies* are quite short, with the piano and vocal line beginning together, lending a distinct immediacy to each piece. Aptly nicknamed the "half monk, half delinquent," Poulenc shows us both his religious, upper-class side and his biting, naughty side in his text settings. But none of these *mélodies* would have been written without his fascination and lifelong attachment to a few choice Cubist and surrealist poets. This challenging poetry spoke to him in a profound way, and he turned repeatedly to the works of Guillaume Apollinaire and Paul Éluard for his song compositions. To understand this music is to understand Poulenc's enchantment with his poets.

Poulenc experienced the genius of Guillaume Apollinaire for the first time in 1917 at the premier of Apollinaire's play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. The composer's operatic setting of this same play later in his career is a testament to his life-long attraction to Apollinaire's texts. According to Poulenc, the impetus to explore the works of Apollinaire all started when he heard the sound of the poet's voice upon their first meeting.³³ Marie Laurencin, French artist and romantic partner of Apollinaire, stated that there was a strong resemblance between how Poulenc set Apollinaire and how the poet recited his own poetry. She explained, "*Apollinaire had a way*

³³ Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Style* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 31.

of reciting his poems in a low, chanting voice which is almost like the music of Poulenc.”³⁴

Although the two only met a few times before the poet’s untimely death, Poulenc repeatedly returned to the texts of Apollinaire for his songs.

Le Bestiaire, ou Cortège d’Orphée, Apollinaire’s collection of thirty animal quatrains, was published in 1911 accompanied by woodcuts for each poem by Raoul Dufy. Poulenc set twelve of these poems in 1919, when he was a twenty-year-old soldier, one year after Apollinaire’s death. They were originally conceived for voice with two violins, viola, flute, clarinet and bassoon, but are most frequently performed with piano. The most well-known cycle of six songs titled *Le Bestiaire* was published during his lifetime. *Trois mélodies du Bestiaire*, not officially published until 2021, consists of three songs from Apollinaire’s original collection. “Le Serpent” and “La Colombe” were written in 1919 with the others, but were cut from the set following their first performance when the composer decided to keep only six songs.³⁵ This setting of “La Puce” was published in 1965 in a book of remembrance for Raoul Dufy, the artist who contributed the woodcuts for Apollinaire’s original texts. Poulenc composed “La Puce” in 1960 and dedicated it to Dufy (the original setting from 1919 was likely lost or destroyed³⁶). It stands as his last Apollinaire setting. Three more *Bestiaire* settings from the 1919 collection, “Le Bœuf,” “La Mouche,” and “La Tortue” have disappeared.³⁷

The final piece in this group, “La souris,” was written for the eightieth birthday of Poulenc’s acquaintance Marya Freund in 1956. He decided to return to his book of Apollinaire’s animal poetry for this occasion, and upon revisiting it wrote, “*Immediately the melancholy I felt*

³⁴ Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2001), 49.

³⁵ Francis Poulenc, *Trois mélodies du Bestiaire*, introduction by François Le Roux (Chester Music, 2021).

³⁶ Graham Johnson, *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*, with translations by Jeremy Sams (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 454.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

when I was twenty comes back to me and I imagine myself back again at Pont-sur-Seine, where I was a soldier in 1919.”³⁸ Apollinaire’s book of animal quatrains, with their humorous edge, tenderness, simplicity and connection to the visual art of Dufy, bookends the composer’s musical marriage with Apollinaire.

Trois mélodies du Bestiaire

From *Le Bestiaire, ou Cortège d’Orphée* by Guillaume Apollinaire

Translations by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson’s *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

Le Serpent

Tu t’acharnes sur la beauté
Et quelles femmes ont été
Victimes de ta cruauté!
Ève, Euridyce, Cléopâtre;
J’en connais encore trois ou quatre.

La Colombe

Colombe, l’amour et l’esprit
Qui engendrâtes Jésus-Christ,
Comme vous j’aime une Marie.
Qu’avec elle je me marie.

La Puce

Puces, amis, amantes même,
Qu’ils sont cruels ceux qui nous aiment!
Tout notre sang coule pour eux.
Les bien-aimés sont malheureux.

Le Bestiaire

Translations by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson’s *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

Le Dromadaire

Avec ses quatre dromadaires
Don Pedro d’Alfaroubeira
Courut le monde et l’admira.
Il fit ce que je voudrais faire
Si j’avais quatre dromadaires.

The Serpent

You latch on to beauty
And what women have been
Victims of your cruelty!
Eve, Euridice, Cleopatra
I know three or four others.

The Dove

Dove, the love and spirit
That begat Jesus Christ,
Like you I love a Mary.
Whom I mean to marry.

The Flea

Fleas, friends, lovers even,
How cruel those who love us can be!
All of our blood flows for them.
Being a beloved can hurt.

The Dromedary

With his four dromedaries
Don Pedro d’Alfaroubeira
Roamed round the world and admired it.
He did exactly what I’d do
If I had four dromedaries too.

³⁸ Francis Poulenc, *Journal de mes mélodies*, with a translation by Winifred Radford, (London: Khan & Averill, 2006), 105.

La Chèvre du Thibet

Les poils de cette chèvre et même
Ceux d'or pour qui prit tant de peine
Jason, ne valent rien aux prix
Des cheveux dont je suis épris.

La Sauterelle

Voici la fine sauterelle
La nourriture de Saint Jean
Puissent mes vers être comme elle
Le régal des meilleures gens.

Le Dauphin

Dauphins, vous jouez dans la mer
Mais le flot est toujours amer
Parfois, ma joie éclate-t-elle?
La vie est encore cruelle.

L'Écrevisse

Incertitude, ô mes délices
Vous et moi nous nous en allons
Comme s'en vont les écrevisses
À reculons, à reculons.

La Carpe

Dans vos viviers, dans vos étangs,
Carpes, que vous vivez longtemps!
Est-ce que la mort vous oublie,
Poissons de la mélancolie.

From *Deux Mélodies*

Translation by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson's *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

La Souris

Belles journées, souris du temps,
Vous rongez peu à peu ma vie.
Dieu! Je vais avoir vingt-huit ans,
Et mal vécus, à mon envie.

The Tibetan Goat

The fleece of this goat and even
The Golden Fleece which Jason strove so hard for
Are worth nothing
Compared to the hair I'm smitten with.

The Grasshopper

Here's the little grasshopper
Which nourished John the Baptist
I'd like my verses to be like that
The special treat for the elite.

The Dolphin

Dolphins, you play in the briny
But the sea is always bitter
I may sometimes burst with joy
But life is still cruel.

The Crayfish

Uncertainty, oh my delights,
You and I progress
Like crayfish do
Backwards. Backwards.

The Carp

In your pools, in your ponds,
Carp, you live so long!
Has death forgotten you,
Fish of Melancholy?

The Mouse

Lovely days, the mice of time,
You're slowly nibbling away at my life.
God, I'm going to be twenty-eight years old,
Years worse spent than I'd have wished.

Poulenc's set of "banalities" was composed in 1940, during the time of Nazi invasion in France. Pianist and scholar Graham Johnson suggests that returning to the poetry of Apollinaire

during this time was probably a great comfort to the composer.³⁹ Apollinaire fought for the French in WWI in the trenches of Champagne. He suffered a head wound from a shell fragment in 1916, causing him frequent bouts of sickness until his death in 1918.⁴⁰ The poet had been an immigrant himself, traveling extensively throughout his childhood before landing in Paris. Here he enjoyed drinking, long walks through the streets, and countless love affairs. He found work in finance, but also wrote for the socialist press, began publishing poems, critiquing art, and contributed to an avant-garde magazine. Eventually, he became friends with many of the new age artists of the time, like Picasso, Braque, and Matisse. By 1908, Apollinaire was a driving force in the avant-garde.⁴¹ Johnson suggests that Apollinaire’s enthusiasm for modernity and surrealism was a balm against the Germans’ condemnation of “degenerate art” in the 1940s.⁴²

Banalités showcases the composer and poet’s love affair with Paris. On choosing poems for this set, Poulenc wrote, “*To anyone who knows me it will seem quite natural that I should open my mouth like a carp to snap up the deliciously stupid lines of ‘Voyage à Paris’. Anything that concerns Paris I approach with tears in my eyes and my head full of music.*”⁴³ In one of Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* (Figure 2.1), he shares a poem in the shape of the Eiffel Tower, roughly translated as, “Hail world whose eloquent tongue I am that its mouth oh Paris sticks out and always will at the Germans.”

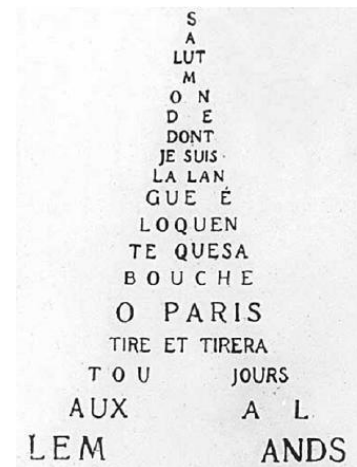


Figure 2.1 from *Calligrammes*⁴⁴

³⁹ Johnson, 257.

⁴⁰ Scott Bates, *Guillaume Apollinaire* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989), 3.

⁴¹ Bates, 2.

⁴² Johnson, 257-258.

⁴³ Pierre Bernac, *Francis Poulenc, The Man and His Songs* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 70.

⁴⁴ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes, poèmes de la paix et de la guerre* (France: Gallimard, 1964), 61.

Banalités

By Guillaume Apollinaire

Translations by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson's *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

Chanson d'Orkenise

From "Onirocritique," in *L'Enchanteur pourrisant*

Par les portes d'Orkenise
Veut entrer un charretier.
Par les portes d'Orkenise
Veut sortir un va-nu-pieds.

Et les gardes de la ville
Courant sus au va-nu-pieds.
"—Qu'emportes-tu de la vile?"
"—J'y laisse mon cœur entier."

Et les gardes de la ville
Courant sus au charretier:
"—Qu'apportes-tu dans la ville?"
"—Mon cœur pour me marier."

Que de cœurs, dans Orkenise!
Les gardes riaient, riaient.
Va-nu-pieds la route est grise,
L'amour grise, ô charretier.

Les beaux gardes de la ville
Tricotèrent superbement;
Puis les portes de la ville
Se fermèrent lentement.

Hôtel

From *Banalités*

Ma chambre a la forme d'une cage
Le soleil passe son bras par le fenètre
Mais moi qui veut fumer pour faire des mirages
J'allume au feu du jour ma cigarette
Je ne veux pas travailler je veux fumer

Fagnes de Wallonie

From *Il y a*

Tant de tristesses plénières
Prirent mon cœur aux fagnes désolées
Quand las j'ai reposé dans les sapinières
Le poids des kilomètres pendant que râlait
le vent d'ouest
J'avais quitté le joli bois
Les écureuils y sont restés
Ma pipe essayait de faire des nuages
 Au ciel
Qui restait pur obstinément

Banalities

Song of the Orkenise

Through the gates of Orkenise
A wagon driver wants to enter.
By the gates of Orkenise
A tramp wants to leave.

And the guards of Orkenise
Running up to the tramp, ask,
"—What are you taking out of town?"
"—I'm leaving my whole heart here."

And the town guards
Running up to the wagon driver, ask,
"—What are you bringing into town?"
"—My heart, so I can be married."

No shortage of hearts in Orkenise!
The guards laughed and laughed.
Tramp, the road is hazy,
Wagon driver, love makes you woozy.

The handsome guards of Orkenise
Coutermarched superbly;
Then the gates of Orkenise
Slowly closed.

Hotel

My room's shaped like a cage
The sun's reaching in through the window
But I want to smoke to make mirages
So I light up my cigarette by the fire of the sun
I don't want to work I just want to smoke

High Fens of Wallonia

So much utter sadness
Seized my heart on the deserted uplands
When, in the forest of firs, I wearily set down
The weight of miles I'd trodden, amid the rattle
of the west wind
I'd left the pretty woods
The squirrels stayed there
My pipe tried to make clouds
 In the sky
Which resolutely stayed cloud-free

Je n'ai confié aucun secret sinon une chanson énigmatique
Aux tourbières humides

Les bruyères fleurant le miel
Attiraient les abeilles
Es mes pieds endoloris
Foulaient les myrtilles et les airelles
Tendrement mariée

Nord
Nord
La vie s'y tord
En arbres forts
Et tors
La vie y mord
La mort
A belles dents
Quand bruit le vent

Voyage à Paris
From *Banalités*

Ah! la charmante chose
Quitter un pays morose
Pour Paris
Paris joli
Qu'un jour
Dut créer l'Amour
Ah! la charmante chose
Quitter un pays morose
Pour Paris

Sanglots
From *Il y a*

Notre amour est réglé par les calmes étoiles
Or nous savons qu'en nous beaucoup d'hommes respirent
Que vinrent de très loin et sont un sous nos fronts
C'est la chanson des rêveurs
Que s'étaient arraché le cœur
Et le portaient dans la main droite
Souviens-t'en cher orgueil de tous ces souvenirs

Des marins qui chantaient comme des conquérants
Des gouffres de Thulé des tendres cieux d'Ophir
Des malades maudits de ceux qui fuient leur ombre

Et du retour joyeux des heureux émigrants
De ce cœur il coulait du sang
Et le rêveur allait pensant
À sa blessure délicate
Tu ne briseras pas la chaîne de ces causes
Et douloureuse et nous disait
qui sont les effets d'autres causes

I shared no secrets save an enigmatic song
With the dank peat-bogs

The honey-smelling heathlands
Attracted the bees
And my aching feet
Trampled blueberries and cranberries
Tenderly intertwined

North
North
There life is warped
Into twisted sturdy trees

Where life
Bites deep
Into death
With the murmur of the wind

Trip to Paris

Ah, what a lovely thing
To leave some dreary place
For Paris
Gorgeous Paris
Which once upon a time
Love must have created
Ah, what a lovely thing
To leave some dreary place
For Paris

Sobs

Our love is ruled by the calm stars
Now we know that in us many men are breathing
Who came from far away and are beneath our brows
This is the song of the dreamers
Who tore out their hearts
And held it in their right hand
Be sure to remember dear pride all these memories

Of the sailors who sang like conquerors
Of the chasms of Thule, of the sweet skies of Ophir
Of the cursed invalids of those running from their shadows
And of the joyous return of happy exiles
From this heart flowed blood
And the dreamer went his way thinking
About his wound, so delicate
You will never break the chain of their causes
And so painful, and said to us
Which are the effects of other causes

Mon pauvre cœur mon cœur brisé
 Pareil au cœur de tous les hommes
 Voici voici nos mains que la vi fit esclaves
 Est mort d'amour ou c'est tout comme
 Est mort d'amour et le voici Ainsi vont toutes choses

Arrachez donc le vôtre aussi
 Et rien ne sera libre jusqu'à la fin des temps
 Laissons tout aux morts
 Et cachons nos sanglots

My poor heart my broken heart
 Like every man's heart
 Here here are our hands which life has enslaved
 Has died of love or might as well have
 Has died of love and here it is That's the way of all things

Therefore tear out your hearts too
 And nothing will ever be free until the end of time
 Let us leave everything to the dead
 And hide our sobs

Poulenc's musical partner Pierre Bernac asserts that *Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire* is "the best and most authentic Poulenc/Apollinaire settings."⁴⁵ These songs showcase both poet and composer's affinity for the element of surprise. Apollinaire had a fascination with discovery and newness, expounding that, "*My ideal in art: my senses and my imagination, no ideal but truth perpetually new...*"⁴⁶ In "Carte postale," we see that the first letter in each line spells the name of the postcard's recipient, LINDA. Apollinaire adds an even more surprising element by turning these letters sideways, as pictured below. The last line of "1904," a poem that Poulenc describes as a "kaleidoscope of words,"⁴⁷ offers a surprising melancholic turn after the rousing retelling of the events at Carnival.

In such a similar way, Poulenc generously uses the element of surprise in his compositional style. He often includes extreme and abrupt contrasts in tempo, mood, texture, and dynamics in his compositions, juxtaposing keys, and rarely using gradual modulations.⁴⁸ In *Quatre poèmes*, we find surprise after surprise, plus Parisian slang in "L'Anguille" accompanied by Poulenc's "valse-musette" setting. The two cannot help but conjure up the streets of their beloved Paris. These songs also show both artists' facility in contradiction. A poem/song can be simultaneously bawdy but mysterious, exuberant but melancholic, heartfelt but unsentimental.

⁴⁵ Bernac, 57.

⁴⁶ Willard Bohn, "From Surrealism to Surrealism: Apollinaire and Breton," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 36, No. 2 (1977): 198, <https://doi.org/10.2307/429760> (Access on 1/20/21).

⁴⁷ Bernac, 60.

⁴⁸ Carol Kimball, *Song: A guide to art song style and literature* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Co., 2006), 31-32.

Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire

From *Il y a*

Translations by Winifred Radford, found in Pierre Bernac's *Francis Poulenc: The Man and his Songs*

L'Anguille

Jeanne Houhou la très gentille
Est morte entre des draps très blancs
Pas seule Bébert dit l'Anguille
Narcisse et Hubert le merlan
Près d'elle faisaient leur manille

Et la crâneuse de Clichy
Aux rouges yeux de dégueulade
Répète Mon eau de Vichy
Va dans le panier à salade
Haha sans faire de chichi

Les yeux dansants comme des anges
Elle riait elle riait
Les yeux très bleus les dents très blanches
Si vous saviez si vous saviez
Tout ce que nous ferons dimanche

Carte postale

**L'ombre de la très douce est évoquée ici,
indolente, et jouant un air dolent aussi :
nocturne ou lied mineur qui fait pâmer son âme
dans l'ombre où ses longs doigts font mourir une gamme
au piano qui geint comme une pauvre femme.**

Figure 2.2 (Carte postale du 19 mai 1901
pour gente damoiselle Linda M. da S.), *Il y a*⁴⁹

Avant le cinéma

Et puis ce soir on s'en ira
Au cinéma

Les Artistes que sont-ce donc
Ce ne sont plus ceux qui cultivent les Beaux-Arts
Ce ne sont pas ceux qui s'occupent de l'Art
Art poétique ou bien musique
Les Artistes ce sont les acteurs et les actrices

Si nous étions des Artistes
Nous ne dirions pas le cinéma
Nous dirions le ciné

Four poems of Guillaume Apollinaire

The Eel

Jeanne Houhou the nice creature
is dead between very white sheets
not only Bebert known as the Eel
Narcisse and Hubert the whiting
close to her played their card game

and the swanker of Clichy
with the red eyes of the spewer
repeats My Vichy water
go in the prison van
without making a fuss

eyes dancing like angels
she laughed she laughed
her eyes very blue her teeth very white
if you knew if you knew
all that we shall do on Sunday

Postcard

The ghost of one who is very sweet is evoked here
indolent and playing an air that is doleful too
nocturne or Lied in a minor key that makes her soul
swoon
in the shadow where under her long fingers a scale is
dying
on the piano that moans like a poor woman

Before the cinema

And then this evening we will go
to the cinema

What kind of artists are they
they are no longer those who cultivate the Fine Arts
not those who go in for Art
poetic art or even music
the Artists are the actors and actresses

If we were the Artists
we would not say the cinema
we would say the ciné

⁴⁹ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Il y a* (France: A. Messein, 1925), 50.

Mais si nous étions de vieux professeurs de province
Nous ne dirions ni ciné ni cinéma
Mais cinématographe

but if we were old professors from the provinces
we would say neither ciné nor cinema
but cinematograph

Aussi mon Dieu faut-il avoir du goût

Dear me we must have good taste

1904

A Strasbourg en 1904
J'arrivai pour le lundi gras
A l'hôtel m'assis devant l'âtre
Près d'un chanteur de l'Opéra
Qui ne parlait que de théâtre

In Strasbourg in 1904
I arrived on the Monday before Lent
at the hotel I sat by the fireside
close to a singer from the opera
who spoke of nothing but the theatre

La Kellnerine rousse avait
Mis sur sa tête un chapeau rose
Comme Hébé qui les dieux servait
N'en eut jamais ô belles choses
Carnaval chapeau rose Ave!

The red haired waitress had
put a pink hat on her head
such as Hebe who served the gods
never possessed O lovely things
Carnival pink hat all hail!

A Rome à Nice et à Cologne
Dans les fleurs et les confetti
Carnaval j'ai revu ta trogne
O roi plus riche et plus gentil
Que Crésus Rothschild et Torlogne

To Rome to Nice and to Cologne
in the flowers and the confetti
Carnival I have seen your bloated mug again
O king richer and kinder
than Croesus Rothschild and Torlogne

Je soupai d'un peu de foie gras
De chevreuil tender à la compote
De tartes flancs etc
Un peu de kirsch me ravigote

I supped on a little foie gras
on tender venison with compote
on tartlets and so on
a little kirsch bucked me up

Que ne t'avais-je entre mes bras

If only you had been in my arms

Poulenc was inspired to compose the aforementioned *Carte postale* after remembering a portrait of a friend painted by Pierre Bonnard.⁵⁰ He needed visual inspiration from a poem in order to set it to music. On choosing poetry, he once said, “*with melodies I am...incurably visual. A poem must generate an image in order to tempt me.*”⁵¹ Visual inspiration was a key factor in Apollinaire’s works as well, as he was an art critic and a good friend of Picasso. In his war poetry, *Calligrammes, Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre*, Apollinaire abandoned linear writing for what he referred to as “simultaneity.” A poetic structure of this nature would strike an instant

⁵⁰ Daniel, 53.

⁵¹ Ibid, 250.

awareness for the reader within one moment of space-time.⁵² This goal can most easily be achieved visually, so much of his war poetry is arranged in pictures, included with the translations below. One cannot help but compare this idea of simultaneity with the immediacy in Poulenc’s settings, where many *mélodies* begin out of nowhere firing on all cylinders, only to end in an equally surprising way.

Calligrammes is a true song cycle, with seven songs in a mirrored structure to one another. The second and sixth songs, “Mutation” and “Aussi bien que les cigales,” are gruff soldier’s songs that contrast with the others which explore themes of memory and travel. Three of the seven poems were drawn in pictographic form, which Poulenc wrestles with in various ways. In one of his most poignant songs, “Voyage,” one could argue that he hints at the shapes presented in Apollinaire’s picture in his vocal writing. For example, the text “oiseau qui laissez tomber ses ailes partout” is drawn in the shape of a bird with a circular figure in the middle, and Poulenc’s vocal line honors this by circling around itself in this moment. Similarly, Apollinaire draws a large, bold, “C” in “C’est ton visage que je ne vois plus,” which Poulenc honors with an abrupt *forte* marking on the word.

Calligrammes

From *Calligrammes, Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre* by Guillaume Apollinaire
Translations by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson’s *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

L’Espionne

Pâle espionne de l’Amour
Ma mémoire à peine fidèle
N’eut pour observer cette belle
Forteresse qu’une heure un jour

Tu te déguises
 A ta guise
Mémoire espionne du cœur

The Spy

The pale spy of love
My memory never the most reliable,
Had only to survey this beautiful fortress
One hour one day

You disguise yourself
 As you please
Memory the heart’s spy

⁵² Guillaume Apollinaire and S. I. Lockerbie, *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War*, introduction by S. I. Lockerbie (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, Ltd., 1980), 3.

Tu ne retrouves plus l'exquise
Ruse et le cœur seul est vainqueur

Mais la vois-tu cette mémoire
Les yeux bandés prête à mourir
Elle affirme qu'on peut l'en croire
Mon cœur vaincra sans coup férir

You never rediscover that exquisite
Cunning, and the heart alone prevails

But do you see this memory
Blindfolded, ready to die,
Affirming that we can believe her
My heart will prevail with not a shot fired

Mutation

Une femme qui pleurait
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Des soldats qui passait
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Un éclusier qui pêchait
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Les tranchées qui blanchissaient
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Des obus qui pétaient
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Des allumettes qui ne prenaient pas
Et tout
A tant changé
En moi
Tout
Sauf mon Amour
Eh! Oh! Ha!

A woman was weeping
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Soldiers were passing
Eh! Oh! Ha!
A lock-keeper was fishing
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Trenches were turning white
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Shells were exploding
Eh! Oh! Ha!
Matches refusing to light
And everything
Totally changed
In me
Everything
Except my love
Eh! Oh! Ha!

Vers le Sud

Zénith
Tous ces regrets
Ces jardins sans limite
Où le crapaud module un tendre cri d'azur
La biche du silence éperdu passe vite
Un rossignol meurtri par l'amour chante sur
Le rosier de ton corps dont j'ai cueilli les roses
Nos cœurs pendent ensemble au même grenadier
Et les fleurs de grenade en nos regards écloses
En tombant tour à tour ont jonché le sentier

To the South

Zenith
All those regrets
Those boundless gardens
Where the toad sings forth his soft blue cry
The fawn of the bewildered silence scurries by
A nightingale bruised by love sings over
The rosebush of your body from which I have plucked the roses
Our hearts hang side by side from the same pomegranate tree
And the pomegranate blossoms blooming under our gaze
Falling one by one have strewn the path

Aussi bien que les cigales

<i>gens du midi</i>	ne savez pas	M
<i>gens du mi</i>	creuser que	ais
<i>di vous n'</i>	vous ne sa	vous
<i>avez donc</i>	vez pas vous	savez
<i>pas regar</i>	éclairer ni	encore
<i>dé les ciga</i>	voir Que vous	boire com le jour
<i>les que vous</i>	manque-t-il	me les ci de gloire
	donc pour	gales ô se
	voir aus	gens du mi c ra
	si bien	di gens du reusez ce
	que les	soleil gens qui voyez bu lui
<i>ciga</i>	devriez savoir	vez pissez où
<i>les</i>	creuser et voir	comme vous
	aussi bien pour le	les ciga sau
	moins aussi bien	les rez
	que les cigales	creu
	Eh quoi ! vous savez	gens du Midi il faut ser
	boire et ne savez	creuser voir boire pour
	plus pisser utile	pisser aussi bien que bien
	ment comme les	les cigales sor
<i>cigales</i>	LA JOIE	pour chan tir
	ADORABLE	ter com au
	DE LA PAIX	me elles so
	SOLAIRE	leil

*Men of the south men of the south
you haven't observed the cicadas for
you don't know how to dig nor to
make light nor see What are you
lacking that you cannot see as well as
the cicadas*

But you still know how to drink like
the cicadas men of the south men of
the sun who should know how to dig
and see as well at least as well as the
cicadas

So what? You know how to drink but
no longer how to piss usefully like the
cicadas

the day of glory will be when you
know how to dig your way out into the
sun

dig see drink piss like the cicadas

*men of the south you have to dig see
drink piss as well as the cicadas in
order to sing like them*

THE ADORABLE JOY OF SUNLIT
PEACE

Figure 2.4 "Aussi bien que les cigales," *Calligrammes*⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*, 137.

Voyage

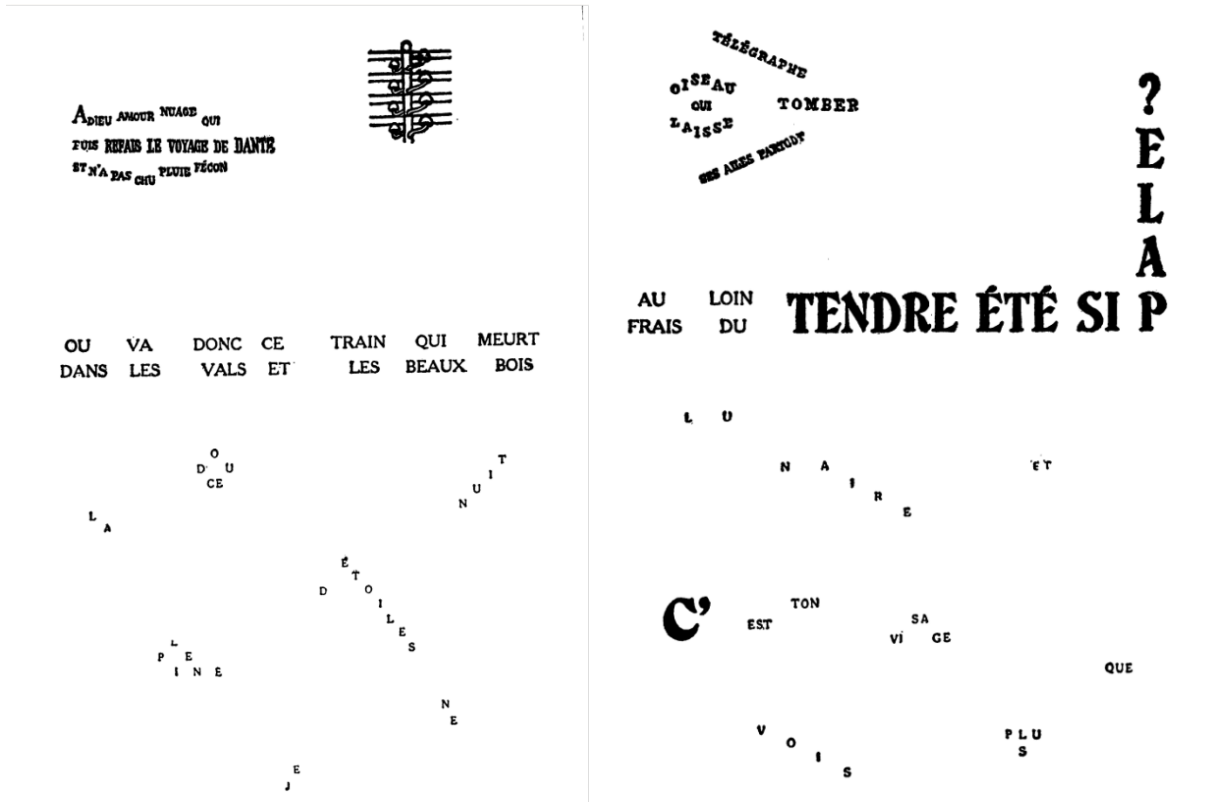


Figure 2.5 “Voyage,” *Calligrammes*⁵⁵

Farewell love cloud that flees
and has not shed fertile rain
retrace Dante’s journey

Telegraph bird which drops her wings everywhere

WHERE IS IT BOUND FOR, THAT TRAIN DYING IN THE DISTANCE
IN THE VALLEYS AND THE LOVELY COOL WOODS OF **TENDER PALE SUMMER?**

This sweet moonlit night full of stars
It’s your face which I no longer see

As previously mentioned, Paris plays a large part in Poulenc’s Apollinaire settings.

“Voyage à Paris” was a rollicking homage to the city’s superiority, while “L’Anguille” evoked the swarthy underworld of the city with Parisian slang and a waltzing *valse-musette* style. In

⁵⁵ Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*, 46–47.

“Montparnasse,” however, one finds Paris to be a place of artistic possibility, dreams, and nostalgia. Montparnasse is an area on the southside of the city which served as an artistic hub during Apollinaire and Poulenc’s lifetimes. Poulenc is quoted saying, “*Already in 1915, Montparnasse had become the artistic capital of the world, where life was full of joy.*”⁵⁶ The poet describes his days as a starving artist in Montparnasse, a place where he could dream and contribute what he wanted to the world. It is an excellent example of Poulenc’s “patchwork” style, in which he conceived of each phrase individually then ventured to connect them together. On this tendency of his, he is quoted saying, “*...it follows that the linking up [of phrases] is often difficult, and I need to take time to find the exact place where at times I am obliged to modulate.*”⁵⁷ In a “tale of two cities” fashion, *Montparnasse* is paired with “Hyde Park,” a poem about the famous park in London where both poet and composer had visited.

Deux Mélodies de Guillaume Apollinaire

From *Il y a* by Guillaume Apollinaire

Translations by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson’s *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

Montparnasse

O porte de l’hôtel avec deux plantes vertes
 Vertes qui jamais
 Ne porteront de fleurs
 Où sont mes fruits. Où me planté-je
 O porte de l’hôtel un ange est devant toi
 Distribuant des prospectus
 On n’a jamais si bien défendu la vertu
 Donnez-moi pour toujours une chambre à la semaine
 Ange barbu vous êtes en réalité
 Un poète lyrique d’Allemagne
 Qui voulez connaître Paris
 Vous connaissez de son pavé
 Ces raies sur lesquelles il ne faut pas que l’on marche
 Et vous rêvez
 D’aller passer votre Dimanche à Garches
 Il fait un peu lourd et vos cheveux sont longs

Oh door to the hotel with two green plants
 Greenery which will never
 Bear any flowers
 Where are my fruits? Where shall I plant myself?
 Oh door to the hotel there’s an angel in front of you
 Handing out leaflets
 Never has virtue been so well defended
 Give me forever a room by the week
 Bearded angel in actual fact you’re
 A lyric poet from Germany
 Who wants to get to know Paris
 Already you know the cracks between her pavements
 The ones you’re not supposed to walk on
 And you dream
 Of spending your Sundays in Garches
 It’s a heavy sort of day and your hair’s getting long

⁵⁶ Nicholas Southon and Roger Nichols, *Francis Poulenc: Articles and Interviews, Notes from the Heart* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 145.

⁵⁷ Bernac, 78.

O bon petit poète un peu bête et trop blond
Vos yeux ressemblent tant à ces deux grands ballons
Qui s'en vont dans l'air pur
A l'aventure

Oh good little poet a bit dim and too blond
Your eyes are so like those two big balloons
Floating up in the air
Haphazardly

Hyde Park

Les Faiseurs de religions
Prêchaient dans le brouillard
Les ombres près de qui nous passions
Jouaient à collin-maillard

The bible bashers
Were preaching in the fog
The shadowy figures we passed
Were playing blindman's bluff

A soixante-dix ans
Joues fraîches de petits enfants
Venez venez Eléonore
Et que sais-je encore

At seventy
Fresh cheeks of little children
Come along Eléonore
And who knows what else

Regardez venir les cyclopes
Les pipes s'envolaient
Mais envollez-vous en
Regards impénitents
Et l'Europe l'Europe

Look at the Cyclops coming
The pipes were flying into the air
But fly away too
Unrepentant looks
and Europe Europe

Regards sacrés
Mains énamourées
Et les amants s'aimèrent
Tant que prêcheurs prêchèrent

Pious looks
Loving hands
And the lovers kept on loving
While the preachers kept on preaching

La Grenouillère was a fashionable establishment where Parisians would holiday, drink, dance, ride in boats, and look for love in the 1860s. By the time Apollinaire visited in 1904, the establishment was all but abandoned, with a few boats remaining, jostling into one another at the docks.⁵⁸ When discussing his setting of *La Grenouillère*, Poulenc describes it as a “kind of musical evocation of a Renoir landscape.”⁵⁹ Renoir painted *La Grenouillère* in 1869 in his distinct impressionist style. Indeed, the piano part consists of mostly blocked chords, with Poulenc’s instruction to play them very blurred by the pedal. It creates an impressionist atmosphere, as the poet reflects on the glory days of this deserted installation. “Rosemonde” is a setting of some of Apollinaire’s earlier poetry from *Alcools*, and is another take on memory and

⁵⁸ Johnson, 202-203.

⁵⁹ Southon and Nichols, *Notes From the Heart*, 270.

what could have been. Besides the short Bestiaire settings of “La Puce” and “La Souris,”

Rosemonde is Poulenc’s last lengthy setting of Apollinaire’s poetry.

La Grenouillère

From *Il y a* by Guillaume Apollinaire

Translation by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson’s *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

Au bord de l’île on voit	All along the island you see
Les canots vides qui s’entre-cognent,	Empty rowboats jostling together
Et maintenant	But now
Ni le dimanche ni les jours de la semaine	Neither on Sundays nor on weekdays will you see
Ni les peintres ni Maupassant ne se promènent	the painters nor Maupassant rowing their boats
Bras nus sur leurs canots avec des femmes à grosse poitrine	Their sleeves rolled up, with their buxom women
Et bêtes comme chou.	As daft as cabbages
Petits bateaux vous me faites bien de la peine	Little boats you break my heart
Au bord de l’île	All along the island.

Rosemonde

From *Alcools* by Guillaume Apollinaire

Translation by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson’s *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

Longtemps au pied du perron de	For a long time at the foot of the stairs
La maison où entra la dame	To the lady’s house
Que j’avais suivie pendant deux	Whom I followed for two good hours
Bonnes heures à Amsterdam	In Amsterdam
Mes doigts jetèrent des baisers	My fingers sprinkled kisses
Mais le canal était désert	But the canal was deserted
Le quai aussi et nul ne vit	As was the quayside so no one saw
Comment mes baisers retrouvèrent	How my kisses reached
Celle à qui j’ai donné ma vie	The woman to whom I devoted my life
Un jour pendant plus de deux heures	For one day for over two hours
Je la surnommaï Rosemonde	I dubbed her Rosemonde
Voulant pouvoir me rappeler	Never wanting to forget
Sa bouche fleurie en Hollande	Her mouth which bloomed in Holland
Puis lentement je m’en allai	Then slowly I went on my way
Pour quêter la Rose du Monde	On the quest for the Rose of the World

Translator Jeremy Sams suggests that while Apollinaire appealed to Poulenc’s earthy, physical, tangible sensibilities, it is surrealist poet Paul Éluard who brings out a more

philosophical and lyrical side of the composer.⁶⁰ In 1924, André Breton published a manifesto defining the surrealist movement, among other things, as the “[belief] in the transcendent power of dreams released from any interference by thought.”⁶¹ Éluard’s earth shattering poetry came into Poulenc’s life around the same time that he began his defining partnership with singer Pierre Bernac. The meeting of these three minds produced what many argue to be the composer’s finest cycle of songs, *Tel jour telle nuit*.

From the very first note of “Bonne journée,” the cycle sets off with more gravity than we hear in other Poulenc settings. Our hero greets the day and celebrates seeing an old friend once again. *Tel jour telle nuit* is truly a cycle, as this beginning, the day, will be repurposed in the last song, the night, in the same key, style, and tempo, but changed by all that has happened in between. We are taken on a journey through the totally surreal poetry of “Une ruine coquille vide,” desperate anger in “Le front comme un drapeau perdu,” sinister drama in “Une roulotte couverte en tuiles,” fiery desire in “À toute bride,” vulnerability in “Une herbe pauvre,” loving devotion in “Je n’ai envie que de t’aimer,” and unabashed violence in “Figure de force brûlante et farouche.” Poulenc manages to make this poetry more accessible, defining each phrase with exactness while still managing to achieve sometimes operatic lyricism.

Tel jour telle nuit

From *Les Yeux fertiles* by Paul Éluard

Translations by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson’s *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

Bonne journée

Bonne journée j’ai revu qui je n’oublie pas
 Qui je n’oublierai jamais
 Et des femmes fugaces dont les yeux
 Me faisaient une haie d’honneur
 Elles s’enveloppèrent dans leurs sourires

As the Day, So the Night

A Good Day

A good day. I saw again those I’ve not forgotten
 Nor will ever forget
 And flighty women whose eyes, for me,
 Formed a guard of honor
 They wrapped themselves up in their smiles

⁶⁰ Jeremy Sams, “Francis Poulenc: The Life in the Songs’ Author Graham Johnson in Conversation w/ Jeremy Sams (Part 2 of 5),” Liveright Publishing, Oct. 7, 2020, YouTube Video, 05:00-07:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nc4TvLH-2vs>.

⁶¹ Bernac, 92.

Bonne journée j'ai vu mes amis sans soucis
Les hommes ne pesaient pas lourd
Un qui passait
Son ombre changée en souris
Fuyait dans le ruisseau

J'ai vu le ciel très grand
Le beau regard des gens privés de tout
Plage distante où personne n'aborde

Bonne journée qui commença mélancolique
Noire sous les arbres verts
Mais qui soudain trempée d'aurore
M'entra dans le cœur par surprise.

Une ruine coquille vide

Une ruine coquille vide
Pleure dans son tablier
Les enfants qui jouent autour d'elle
Font moins de bruit que des mouches

La ruine s'en va à tâtons
Chercher ses vaches dans un pré
J'ai vu le jour je vois cela
Sans en avoir honte

Il est minuit comme une flèche
Dans un cœur à la portée
Des folâtres lueurs nocturnes
Qui contredisent le sommeil.

Le front comme un drapeau perdu

Le front comme un drapeau perdu
Je te traîne quand je suis seul
Dans des rues froides
Des chambres noires
En criant misère

Je ne veux pas les lâcher
Tes mains claires et compliquées
Nées dans le miroir clos de miennes

Tout le reste est parfait
Tout le reste est encore plus inutile
Que la vie

Creuse la terre sous ton ombre

Une nappe d'eau près des seins
Où se noyer
Comme une pierre.

A good day. I saw my friends free of care
And men of little weight
One who passed
His shadow magicked into a mouse
Scurried into the gutter

I saw the sky, huge,
And the beautiful gaze of those deprived of everything
A distant shore where no man lands

A good day. Which started in melancholy
Black beneath trees of green
But which suddenly drenched in dawn
Entered my heart quite by surprise.

A Ruin, an Empty Shell

A ruin an empty shell
Weeps into her apron
The children playing all around
Make less noise than flies

The ruin stumbles along
Looking for her cows in the meadow
I have seen the day I see all this
Without any shame

It's midnight like an arrow
In the heart within reach
Of the fleeting glimmers of night
Which deny sleep.

Forehead Like a Lost Flag

Forehead like a lost flag
I drag you along when I am alone
Through the cold streets
And dark rooms
Crying my despair

I can't release them
Your bright complex hands
Born in the closed mirror of my own

Everything else is perfect
Everything else is more useless even
Than life

Dig up the earth beneath your shadow

A sheet of water by your breasts
Which one can drown in
Like a stone.

Une roulotte couverte en tuiles

Une roulotte couverte en tuiles
Le cheval mort un enfant maître
Pensant le front bleu de haine
À deux seins s'abattant sur lui
Comme deux poings

Ce mélodrame nous arrache
La raison du cœur.

À toutes brides

À toutes brides toi dont le fantôme
Piaffe la nuit sur un violon
Viens régner dans les bois

Les verges de l'ouragan
Cherchent leur chemin par chez toi
Tu n'es pas de celles
Dont on invente les désirs

Viens boire un baiser par ici
Cède au feu qui te désespère.

Une herbe pauvre

Une herbe pauvre
Sauvage
Apparut dans la neige
C'était la santé
Ma bouche fut émerveillée
Du goût d'air pur qu'elle avait
Elle était fanée.

Je n'ai envie que de t'aimer

Je n'ai envie que de t'aimer
Un orage emplît la vallée
Un poisson la rivière

Je t'ai faite à la taille de ma solitude
Le monde entier pour se cacher
Des jours des nuits pour se comprendre

Pour ne plus rien voir dans tes yeux
Que ce que je pense de toi
Et d'un monde à ton image

Et des jours et des nuits réglés par tes paupières.

A Gypsy Wagon Roofed with Tiles

A Gypsy wagon roofed with tiles
The horse dead a child in charge
Thinking his brow blue with the hatred
Of two breasts beating down on him
Like two fists

This melodrama rips from us
Our heart's very reason.

At Full Tilt

You whose ghost, at full tilt,
Prances at night on a violin
Come and reign over the woods

The lashes of the hurricane
Seek their way past you
You are not one of those
Whose desires can be invented

Come and drink a kiss here
Give in to the fire that drives you to despair.

A Meager Blade of Wild Grass

A meager blade of wild grass
Appeared in the snow
It was health
My mouth was amazed
By its taste of pure air
It was withered.

All That I Want Is to Love You

All that I want is to love you
A storm fills the valley
A fish the river

I've created you in the shape of my loneliness
The whole world to hide in
Days and nights in which to understand one another

To see no more in your eyes
But that which I think of you
And a world made in your image

And days and nights ruled by your eyelids.

Figure de force brûlante et farouche

Figure de force brûlante et farouche
Cheveux noirs où l'or coule vers le sud
Aux nuits corrompues

Or englouti étoile impure
Dans un lit jamais partagé

Aux veines des tempes
Comme au bout des seins
La vie se refuse
Les yeux nul ne peut les crever
Boire leur éclat ni leurs larmes
Le sang au-dessus d'eux triomphe pour lui seul

Intraitable démesurée
Inutile
Cette santé bâtit une prison.

Nous avons fait la nuit

From *Facile*

Nous avons fait la nuit je tiens ta main je veille
Je te soutiens de toutes mes forces
Je grave sur un roc l'étoile de tes forces
Sillons profonds où la bonté de ton corps germera

Je me répète ta voix cachée ta voix publique
Je ris encore de l'orgueilleuse
Que tu traites comme une mendicante
Des fous que tu respectes des simples où tu te baignes

Et dans ma tête qui se met doucement d'accord
avec la tienne avec la nuit
Je m'émerveille de l'inconnue que tu deviens
Une inconnue semblable à toi
semblable à tout ce que j'aime
Qui est toujours nouveau.

Face burning with Wild Strength

Face burning with wild strength
Black hair where the gold flows south
On corrupted nights

Engulfed gold impure star
In a bed never shared

At the veins of the temples
And at the nipples
Life denies itself
Nothing can put out those eyes
Nor drink their brilliance nor their tears
Above them blood is triumphant for itself only

Intractable immoderate
And useless
This health builds a prison.

We Have Made the Night

We have made night I hold your hand I watch
I support you with all my strength
I carve into a rock the very star of your strength
Deep furrows whence the goodness of your body will
grow
I repeat to myself your secret voice your public voice
I still laugh at the thought of the stuck-up woman
You treat like a beggar
At the fools you respect at the simple folk in
whose company you delight

And in my head so sweetly in tune
with yours and with the night
I am amazed at the stranger you become
A stranger just like you
just like everything I love
Which is always new.

Although Poulenc is most closely associated with Apollinaire and Éluard, and arguably his most profound works are in collaboration with these poets, he also sought to write a song cycle for sopranos with poetry by a female. He turned to Louise de Vilmorin, saying "*Few people move me as much as Louise de Vilmorin...because her name evokes flowers and*

*vegetables, because she loves her brothers like a lover and her lovers like a sister...*⁶² The music Poulenc pulls from these poems is graceful and light compared to those settings of Apollinaire and Éluard, but still maintains an essence of melancholy and questioning. Vilmorin's love for her brothers is on display in the opening song of the set, as she theorizes about the longevity of her brother's relationship with his new girlfriend. Poulenc conjures this sisterly musing with a twinkling and inquisitive piano introduction.

"Il vole" is famously one of Poulenc's most challenging songs for the pianist, with its Chopinesque fountains of arpeggios and relentless tempo.⁶³ The poetry references Aesop's fable "The Crow and the Fox," wherein a crow drops the cheese from his beak after the fox flatters the bird into opening its beak to sing. The text plays with the double meaning of the verb *vole*, which means both to fly and to steal. Finally, "Violon" sets a scene in a Hungarian restaurant, the singer and pianist are tasked with imitating the overstated legato of the bar violinist presented by Vilmorin.

Fiançailles pour rire

From *Fiançailles pour rire* by Louise de Vilmorin

Translations by Jeremy Sams, found in Graham Johnson's *Poulenc: The Life in the Songs*

La Dame d'André

André ne connaît pas la dame
Qu'il prend aujourd'hui par la main.
A-t-elle un cœur à lendemains,
Et pour le soir a-t-elle une âme?

Au retour d'un bal campagnard
S'en allait-elle en robe vague
Chercher dans les meules la bague
Des fiançailles du hasard?

A-t-elle eu peur, la nuit venue,
Guettée par les ombres d'hier,

André's Lady

André doesn't know the lady
Whose hand he takes today.
Will she have a heart for the days to come,
Will she have a soul come the evening?

Returning from a country ball
Did she in her gauzy dress
Go hunting in a haystack for
Her random engagement ring?

Was she scared, at dead of night,
Spied on by the shades of yesterday

⁶² Johnson, 172.

⁶³ Ibid, 217.

Dans son jardin, lorsque l'hiver
Entrait par la grande avenue?

Il l'a aimée pour sa couleur,
Pour sa bonne humeur de Dimanche.
Pâlera-t-elle aux feuilles blanches
De son album des temps meilleurs?

Il vole

En allant se coucher le soleil
Se reflète au vernis de ma table
C'est le fromage rond de la fable
Au bec de mes ciseaux de vermeil.

—Mais où est le corbeau?—Il vole.

Je voudrais coudre mais un aimant
Attire à lui toutes mes aiguilles.
Sur la place les joueurs de quilles
De belle en belle passent le temps.

—Mais où est mon amant?—Il vole.

C'est un voleur que j'ai pour amant,
Le corbeau vole et mon amant vole,
Voleur de cœur manque à sa parole
Et voleur de fromage est absent.

—Mais où est le bonheur?—Il vole.

Je pleure sous le saule pleureur
Je mêle mes larmes à ses feuilles
Je pleure car je veux qu'on me veuille
Et je ne plais pas à mon voleur.

—Mais où donc est l'amour?—Il vole.

Trouvez la rime à ma déraison
Et par les routes du paysage
Ramenez-moi mon amant volage
Qui prend les cœurs et perd ma raison.

Je veux que mon voleur me vole.

Violon

Couple amoureux aux accents méconnus
Le violon et son joueur me plaisent.
Ah! j'aime ces gémissements tendus
Sur la corde des malaises.
Aux accords sur les cordes des pendus
À l'heure où les Lois se taisent
Le cœur en forme de fraise
S'offre à l'amour comme un fruit inconnu.

In her garden, when winter
Swept down the great avenue?

He loved her for her color,
For her Sunday holiday humor.
Will she fade in the white pages
Of his photo album of better days?

He Flies/He Steals

Just as it's setting, the sun
Is reflected in the varnish of my table
It's the big round cheese of the fable
In the beak of my silver scissors.

—But where is the crow?—Flying.

I'd like to sew but a magnet
Keeps stealing all my needles.
In the square the skittle players
Pass their time from strike to strike.

—But where is my lover?—Flying.

I have a thief as my lover,
The crow flies, my lover steals,
The thief of hearts breaks his word
And the cheese thief is gone

—But where is my joy?—Flying.

I'm weeping beneath the weeping willow
I'm mingling my tears with its leaves
I'm weeping because I want to be wanted
And my flighty thief does not fancy me.

—But where is love?—Flying.

Find the rhyme in my lack of reason
And by the country roads
Bring me back my flighty lover
Who steals hearts and robs me of my reason.

I wish my thief would steal me...

Violin

An amorous couple with unfamiliar accents
The violin and the violinist both please me.
Oh, how I love these drawn-out wails
On the string of unease.
Strung from the c(h)ords of the hangman's rope
At the time when the Laws are silenced.
The heart, shaped like a strawberry,
Offers itself to love like an unknown fruit

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RECITAL 2 PROGRAM

Prose, Poetry, Sonnets, and Spomments

Christine Amon, Mezzo-Soprano
Mahour Arbabian & Natalie Sherer, piano
Emma Cary, cello

Saturday, March 19, 2022
Walgreen Drama Center, Stamps Auditorium
8:00 PM

From the Diary of Virginia Woolf

The Diary (April, 1919)
Anxiety (October, 1920)
Fancy (February, 1927)
Hardy's Funeral (January, 1928)
Rome (May, 1935)
War (June, 1940)
Parents (December, 1940)
Last Entry (March, 1941)

Dominick Argento
(1927–2019)

Mahour Arbabian, piano

Intermission

Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers

Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers
Liebeslied
Do You Know
White World
Music, When Soft Voices Die
Go From Me

Libby Larsen
(b. 1950)

Emma Cary, cello
Natalie Sherer, piano

Comments by Computers

Mulberry Alexa
Half a Million
Even More Shocking
Attractive
Good, Healthy Fun
That Big Van
The Windowsill
Miss Lulu

Gala Flagello
(b. 1994)

Natalie Sherer, piano

RECITAL 2 PROGRAM NOTES

“Do we then know nobody?—only our own versions of them, which, as likely as not, are emanations from ourselves.” –Virginia Woolf, in a letter to Vita Sackville-West, 1926⁶⁴

***From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* by Dominick Argento**

When Dominick Argento was commissioned to write a song cycle for mezzo-soprano Janet Baker, he perused a collection of diary entries by Virginia Woolf. He was hoping to gain insight into her novel, *The Waves*, which he had planned to use for his song text. However, the diary entries proved so interesting that Argento decided to use them to create a portrait of Woolf’s life from 1919 to 1941, the year of her death.⁶⁵ The result was a group of eight snapshots, connected by musical themes, showcasing Woolf’s opinions, humor, playfulness, and mental health struggles. Argento was known for setting prose rather than poetry, and this particular endeavor earned him a Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1975.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) was a complex figure, famous for her countless novels, essays, letters, and diaries. She is regarded as a major influencer in the 20th century modernist era, with a writing technique often described as “stream of consciousness,” which certainly applies to her diary entries. In “Last Entry,” we hear her command herself to “observe perpetually.” Indeed, in the diary entries for “Hardy’s Funeral” and “Rome” she simply writes lists of observations as they come to her. This observational, stream of

⁶⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf*, J. Trautmann Banks (ed.), (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989), 204.

⁶⁵ Dominick Argento, *Collected Song Cycles for Medium/Low Voice* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 2006), 44–45.

consciousness text charges the singer to bring these observations to life in their own mind, and Argento masterfully uses the piano to animate each snapshot of her life.

I. The Diary (April 1919)

*What sort of diary should I like mine to be? Something so elastic that it will embrace anything, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind. I should like it to resemble some deep old desk... in which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through. I should like to come back, after a year or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself and refined itself and coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life.*⁶⁶

Quentin Bell, Woolf's nephew and biographer, described her diary as a masterpiece; a literary achievement on par with her novels. He describes it as "having the same accurate beauty of writing but also an immediacy such as one finds only in diaries; it is in fact one of the great diaries of the world."⁶⁷ The texts that Argento chose are mostly excerpts from larger entries. Opening the cycle, we find Woolf musing about the purpose of her journaling, and commenting on how such collections of thoughts take on a life of their own. Argento takes the opportunity to introduce a number of musical themes that will reappear throughout the work, including a large section beginning with "to come back after a year or two..." that will be repeated to close the cycle (akin to Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben*).

II. Anxiety (October, 1920)

Why is life so tragic; so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss. I look down; I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end. But why do I feel this: Now that I say it I don't feel it.

⁶⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Being extracts from the diary of Virginia Woolf*, Leonard Woolf (ed.), (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), 13.

⁶⁷ Quentin Bell, forward to *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 1: 1915–1919*, by Virginia Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), xii.

*The fire burns; we are going to hear the Beggar's Opera. Only it lies about me; I can't keep my eyes shut... And with it all how happy I am – if it weren't for my feeling that it's a strip of pavement over an abyss.*⁶⁸

Along with her fame as a writer, Woolf led a complicated life and struggled with her mental health, being institutionalized and attempting suicide a number of times. She would ultimately die by suicide in March of 1941. Her mother died when Virginia was only thirteen. This shock, along with a series of other childhood traumas and family deaths, was thought to have caused her to “go mad,” as was the terminology used in her time.⁶⁹ According to psychiatrist Katherine Dalsimer, Woolf would be diagnosed with bipolar disorder today; showing symptoms of severe depression, manic episodes, and periods of psychosis.⁷⁰

Argento titled this entry “Anxiety,” adding extra iterations of “why?” that are repeated by the piano throughout the song. Tittering eighth notes and syncopations add an unsettled rhythmic atmosphere. A theme of alternating perfect 4ths is introduced in the vocal line while Woolf describes life as “a little strip of pavement over an abyss.” Appropriately, this musical figure will reemerge in “War.” “Anxiety” offers one example of Woolf clinging to a real-life, grounding thought: we are going to hear *The Beggar's Opera* (John Gay's ballad opera which Argento immediately quotes in the piano⁷¹). But this period of lucidity is short lived. The act of writing was also a grounding activity for her, as well as a way to channel her “madness.” In a letter to British composer Ethel Smythe, she wrote,

⁶⁸ Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 27-28.

⁶⁹ Bell, xv.

⁷⁰ Katherine Dalsimer, “Virginia Woolf (1882–1941),” *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 161, no. 5 (May 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.161.5.809>.

⁷¹ Carol Kimball, *Song: A guide to art song style and literature* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Co., 2006), 313.

"As an experience, madness is terrific I can assure you, and not to be sniffed at; and in its lava I still find most of the things I write about. It shoots out of one everything shaped, final, not in mere dribblets, as sanity does."⁷²

III. Fancy (February, 1927)

Why not invent a new kind of play; as for instance:

Woman thinks . . .

He does.

Organ plays.

She writes.

They say:

She sings.

Night speaks

They miss⁷³

The rest of this journal entry reads: *"I think it must be something on this line—though I can't now see what. Away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel and a play."⁷⁴* In "Fancy" we get a glimpse into Woolf's innovative writing process in a diary entry that served as the germ for her novel *The Waves*.⁷⁵ Argento portrays her brainstorm by opening with a theatrical fanfare and continuously shifting meters as a man and woman work through their stage direction. He adds a hummed vocal line accompanied by a theme heard in "The Diary," as she sits writing and working through these ideas.

IV. Hardy's Funeral (January, 1928)

Yesterday we went to Hardy's funeral. What did I think of? Of Max Beerbohm's letter, or a lecture about women's writing. At intervals some emotion broke in. But I doubt the capacity of the human animal for being dignified in ceremony. One catches a bishop's frown and twitch;

⁷² Woolf, *Congenial Spirits*, 268.

⁷³ Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 103.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Noelle Woods, "Reflections of a life: Biographical perspectives of Virginia Woolf illuminated by the music and drama of Dominick Argento's song cycle, 'From the Diary of Virginia Woolf'" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1996), 46.

*sees his polished shiny nose; suspects the rapt spectacled young priest, gazing at the cross he carries, of being a humbug; next here is the coffin, an overgrown one; like a stage coffin, covered with a white satin cloth; bearers elderly gentlemen rather red and stiff, holding to the corners; pigeons flying outside, procession to poets comer; dramatic "In sure and certain hope of immortality" perhaps melodramatic. Over all this broods for me some uneasy sense of change and mortality and how partings are deaths; and then a sense of my own fame, and a sense of the futility of it all.*⁷⁶

As previously mentioned, Woolf often wrote in a stream of consciousness, perpetually observing the world around her. In "Hardy's Funeral" we find her attending and observing the memorial for Thomas Hardy, a writer of her father's generation. Based on her letters and literary works, she was raised in a secular household and was a harsh critic of organized religion and the Church patriarchy.⁷⁷ Many other modernist artists of the time shared similar values and critiques. Argento's music offers a serious, somber funeral scene, with organ droning, church bells ringing, and religious figures marching down the center aisle. Amid all this, Woolf makes humorous observations, as many of us do, of everyday details like the pigeons outside, or a pallbearer's struggle carrying the coffin. Despite it all being "melodramatic," the event causes Woolf to reflect on her own life and influence.

V. Rome (May, 1935)

Rome: tea. Tea in cafe. Ladies in bright coats and white hats. Music. Look out and see people like movies.

*Ices. Old man who haunts the Greco. Sunday cafe: Very cold. Fierce large jowled old ladies talking about Monaco. Talleyrand. Some very poor black wispy women. The effect of dowdiness produced by wispy hair. The Prime Minister's letter offering to recommend me for the Companion of Honour. No.*⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 120.

⁷⁷ Amy C. Smith and Isabel Ma Andres Cuevas, "To the readers: Virginia Woolf and Spirituality," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, no. 80 (Fall 2011), <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A297916607/AONE?u=umuser&sid=googleScholar&xid=60cea8c0>.

⁷⁸ Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 240.

Bell tells us that Woolf had a reputation of being a gossip, malicious at times, allowing her imagination to get the best of her.⁷⁹ In “Rome” we see another list of her observations as she travels through Italy with family. Even though Woolf was committed to social equality and is often regarded as a feminist and queer icon, we get a taste of some of the classism and racism that marks her writing.⁸⁰ Italian street music accompanies Woolf as she comments on large-jowled ladies and the hair of some nearby women described as “poor,” “black,” and “wispy.” Then, her mind drifts to the prime minister, who wishes to bestow an honor upon her. Woolf had the tendency of turning down any awards, honorary doctorates, or other honors, believing they encouraged envy and pride.⁸¹ Argento plays with this conviction by repeating the final “no” two more times.

VI. War (June, 1940)

*This, I thought yesterday, may be my last walk
the war— our waiting while the knives sharpen for the operation — has taken away the outer
wall of security. No echo comes back. I have no surroundings. Those familiar circumvolutions—
those standards— which have for so many years given back an echo and so thickened my
identity are all wide and wild as the desert now. I mean, there is no "autumn", no winter. We
pour to the edge of a precipice . . . and then? I can't conceive that there will be a 27th June
1941.*⁸²

Living through the early 20th century, Woolf saw the brutality of World War I and World War II. She often wrote in her diary and in letters about bombings and air raids, and her home was even damaged by a bomb.⁸³ In 1938 she wrote to her sister,

⁷⁹ Bell, xiii.

⁸⁰ Leena Kore Schroder, “‘A question is asked which is never answered’: Virginia Woolf, Englishness and Antisemitism,” *Woolf Studies Annual* 19 (annual 2013), <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A385822087/LitRC?u=umuser&sid=googleScholar&xid=fac1c6a3>.

⁸¹ Woods, 103.

⁸² Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 324–325.

⁸³ Woods, 109.

*"[...] in London it was hectic and gloomy and at the same time despairing and yet cynical and calm. The streets were crowded. People were everywhere talking loudly about war. There were heaps of sandbags in the streets, also men digging trenches, lorries delivering planks, loud speakers slowly driving and solemnly exhorting the citizens of Westminster Go and fit your gas masks."*⁸⁴

War was a reality that surrounded her every day in 1940. Argento offers a sparse accompaniment to a very free, almost cadenza-like vocal line. In the piano's right hand, we hear air raids, sirens, and machine guns. In the left hand, the alternating perfect 4ths from "Anxiety" loom beneath the vocal line. Beyond the physical dangers, wartime caused Woolf and her audience to be distracted from her writing, leaving her with no readers, no "echo," no reason to write.⁸⁵ She is eerily prophetic in this entry, as she would not live to see June 27th of the following year.

VII. Parents (December, 1940)

*How beautiful they were, those old people— I mean father and mother— how simple, how clear, how untroubled. I have been dipping into old letters and father's memoirs. He loved her: oh and was so candid and reasonable and transparent. How serene and gay even, their life reads to me: no mud; no whirlpools. And so human— with the children and the little hum and song of the nursery. But if I read as a contemporary I shall lose my child's vision and so must stop. Nothing turbulent; nothing involved; no introspection.*⁸⁶

Argento paints a picture of nostalgia as Woolf combs through family mementos. Woolf scholar Louise DeSalvo argues that this journal entry was Woolf fantasizing about the childhood she wished she had had.⁸⁷ Despite some happy moments, she had endured many traumas as a child. Machine gun figures from "War" reappear as Woolf snaps out of her fantasy, warning herself against further introspection. Argento's lyrical setting of this text

⁸⁴ Woolf, *Congenial Spirits*, 407.

⁸⁵ Woods, 113.

⁸⁶ Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 345–346.

⁸⁷ Louise A. DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (Ballantine Books, 1990), 132.

offers a musical respite after the sparseness of “War” and before the tumultuous drive of “Last Entry.”

VIII. Last Entry (March, 1941)

*No: I intend no introspection. I mark Henry James' sentence: observe perpetually. Observe the oncome of age. Observe greed. Observe my own despondency. By that means it becomes serviceable. Or so I hope. I insist upon spending this time to the best advantage. I will go down with my colours flying. Occupation is essential. And now with some pleasure I find that it's seven; and must cook dinner. Haddock and sausage meat. I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage and haddock by writing them down.*⁸⁸

Two weeks before she immersed herself into the River Ouse with rocks in her pockets, Woolf penned this, one of her final diary entries. Argento gives us a vocal line fighting against steady, relentless chords, followed by returning themes from each previous piece. Kimball suggests that the return of these themes represents Woolf's search for ordered patterns, anything to organize her existence.⁸⁹ As in “Anxiety,” Woolf grasps at real-life, grounding tasks, like cooking dinner, finding some solace in writing it all down. The cycle ends with a repetition of music from the first piece, allowing us to ask if the diary did indeed coalesce into something that reflects the light of her life.

***Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers* by Libby Larsen**

During her studies at the University of Minnesota, Libby Larsen was a student of Dominick Argento's. While she similarly favors prose texts for her vocal works, she turned to books of poetry for *Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers*. The piece was commissioned by Hella Mears Hueg to celebrate her husband's 70th birthday in 1994.

⁸⁸ Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 351.

⁸⁹ Kimball, 314.

Larsen and Hueg chose texts relating to mature love, music, nature, and flowers,⁹⁰ no doubt honoring the life of these romantic partners. The set of songs sprang from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Liebeslied," a favorite of Hueg's. She is quoted saying "[...] *I wondered what it would sound like — set to music for a rich, mellifluous mezzo-soprano in conversation with a cello.*"⁹¹ The rest of the set would follow, adding a piano to the group.

These poems inspire a showcase of Larsen's skill in creating an array of tonal colors, rhythmic energy, lyricism, and liberated tonality.⁹² On setting poetry Larsen explains:

*"I find that if I stop my process at the point of analyzing poetic device, I am more likely to force my music on the poem. But if I complete my process of discovery to find the music of the poem itself, I open up to the meaning of the poem in an entirely different way, resulting in the poem directing the writing of its own unique and innate music."*⁹³

The poets who sang to Larsen for this commission were English Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861), Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), avant-garde American poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) (1886–1961), and English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1882).

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's texts open and close the set, coming from her collection *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, written for her husband, poet Robert Browning. Upon reading them he declared them to be "the finest sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare's."⁹⁴ Their contemporary, Edmund Gosse, describes the texts as "*one of the*

⁹⁰ Libby Larsen, *Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers*, score notes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

⁹¹ Terry Rhodes, Ellen Williams, Benton Hess, and Steven Reis, "Grand Larsen-y: Vocal Music of Libby Larsen," liner notes, Albany Records TROY634, 2004, compact disc.

⁹² Mary Ann Feldman and Laura Greenwald Strom, "Larsen [Reece], Libby," *Grove Music Online*, 16 Oct. 2013, Accessed March 4, 2022,

<https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2250015>.

⁹³ Libby Larsen, "On Setting Text," Libby Larsen website, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://libbylarsen.com/resources/on-setting-text>.

⁹⁴ Edmund Gosse, preface to *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (United Kingdom: Thomas B. Mosher, 1910), x.

acknowledged glories of our literature [...] built patently and unquestionably on the union in stainless harmony of two of the most distinguished spirits which our century has produced."⁹⁵

Larsen explores such a union in her setting of Rilke's "Liebeslied." The two lovers (voice and cello) spend the piece in different keys, playing their melodies one at a time, until they find one another and sound in thirds, finally uniting on the words "single voice." "Do You Know" is another Rilke setting, where Larsen creates an anticipatory mood with more silences and a mysterious color throughout. The original German texts, as well as the translations are provided below.

H.D., or Hilda Doolittle, was a 20th century "imagist" poet, and part of a movement that occurred in reaction to inflated, high-flown poetry of the romantics. She favored free verse and visual imagery,⁹⁶ as showcased in "White World." Larsen set this poem using only white keys on the piano and with a whimsical, ringing, grand atmosphere. Curiously, she did not set the final stanza of the arguably erotic poem, which summarizes the text saying, "joined is each to each in happiness complete." This whirl of a piece is followed directly by an intimate setting of Percy Shelley's "Music when soft voices die," originally titled "To—" by the poet.

Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers

Text: Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Belovëd, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through,
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.
So, in the like name of that love of ours,

⁹⁵ Ibid. xviii.

⁹⁶ Micah Issitt, "Hilda Doolittle," in *Great Lives From History: American Women* Vol. 1, ed. Mary K. Trigg (Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press, a division of EBSCO Information Services, Inc. ; Armenia, NY: Grey House Publishing Inc., 2016), 331.

Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here's ivy!—take them, as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,
And tell thy soul, their roots are left in mine.⁹⁷

Liebeslied

Text: Rainer Maria Rilke

Translation: M.D. Herter Norton

*Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, dass
sie nicht an deine rührt? Wie soll ich sie
hinheben über dich zu andern Dingen?
Ach gerne möchte ich sie bei irgendetwas
Verlorenem im Dunkel unterbringen
an einer fremden stillen Stelle, die
nicht weiterschwingt, wenn deine Tiefen schwingen.
Doch alles, was uns anrührt, dich und mich,
nimmt uns zusammen wie ein Bogenstrich,
Der aus zwei Saiten eine Stimme zieht.
Auf welches Instrument sind wir gespannt?
Und welcher Spieler hat uns in der Hand?
O süßes Lied.*

How shall I withhold my soul so that
it does not touch on yours? How shall I
uplift it over you to other things?
Ah willingly would I by some
lost thing in the dark give it harbor
in an unfamiliar silent place
that does not vibrate on when your depths vibrate.
Yet everything that touches us, you and me,
takes us together as a bow's stroke does.
that out of two strings draws a single voice.
Upon what instrument are we two spanned?
And what player has us in his hand?
O sweet song.⁹⁸

Do You Know

Text: Rainer Maria Rilke

Translation: M.D. Herter Norton

*Weisst du, ich will mich schleichen
leise aus lautem Kreis,
wenn ich erst die bleichen
Sterne über den Eichen
blühen weiss.*

Do you know, I would quietly
slip from the loud circle,
when first I know the pale
stars above the oaks
are blooming.

*Wege will ich erkiesen,
die selten wer betritt
in blassen Abendwiesen—*

Ways will I elect
that seldom any tread
in the pale evening meadows—

⁹⁷ Browning, *Sonnets*, XLIV.

⁹⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Translations From the Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. M.D. Herter Norton (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1938), 152.

*und keinen Traum, als diesen:
Du gehst mit.*

and no dream but this:
You come too.⁹⁹

White World

Text: H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)

The whole white world is ours,
and the world, purple with rose-bays,
bays, bush on bush,
group, thicket, hedge and tree,
dark islands in a sea
of grey-green olive or wild white-olive,
cut with the sudden cypress shafts,
in clusters, two or three,
or with one slender, single, cypress-tree.

Slid from the hill,
as crumbling snow-peaks slide,
citron on citron fill
the valley, and delight
waits till our spirits tire
of forest, grove and bush
and purple flower of the laurel-tree.

*(Yet not one wearies,
joined is each to each
in happiness complete
with bush and flower:
ours is the wind-breath
at the hot noon-hour,
ours is the bee's soft belly
and the blush of the rose-petal,
Lifted, of the flower.)¹⁰⁰*

Music, When Soft Voices Die

(To ----)

Text: Percy Bysshe Shelley

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory—
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,

⁹⁹ Ibid, 29.

¹⁰⁰ H.D., *Hymen* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), 37.

Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

Go From Me

Text: Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore—
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.¹⁰¹

***Comments by Computers* by Gala Flagello**

Whether prose or poetry, it seems that a song text must “sing” to the composer in order for it to inspire great art song. In the 21st century we are bombarded by text on the internet every single day, most of which would hardly be labeled “poetic” or “singing.” But if we follow Woolf’s advice to “observe perpetually,” we might find beauty and musical potential on our screens. Can a text created by algorithms, a spam bot attempting to sound human, offer musical nuance and human expression?

¹⁰¹ Browning, *Sonnets*, VI.

American composer Gala Flagello was struck with the idea to compose songs with texts from computer bots while she was assistant director for the Women Composers Festival of Hartford.

“We had an old clunky WordPress website, and it was my job to go through hundreds of these comments and clean up the website. The more I started going through the comments, the more I thought... this is text! I can’t just delete this. There is something here. Just because it’s spam doesn’t mean it’s devoid of meaning, or that it’s useless.”¹⁰²

She gravitated toward comments that were trying to sound as human as possible, and played with two ideas: authorship (what does it mean to be a poet?) and humanity (can life be breathed into the words of an algorithm?).¹⁰³ *Comments by Computers* proves that there is a trove of poetic and musical value in these texts. Flagello bathes the computer-generated musings in humanity, and we hear nostalgia, paranoia, sarcasm, sexuality, and even operatic grandeur.

I. Mulberry Alexa

Mulberry Alexa oversized oak Alexa mulberry bags Alexa.

II. Half a Million

Half the pages are missing. What’s the matter? Isn’t half a million enough for you?

III. Even More Shocking

Even more shocking is that this is the greatest number of women that have ever held this position at this time.

IV. Attractive

Attractive component of content. It’s toilsome to note illuminating and explicit information.

¹⁰² Gala Flagello, Interview with the author, February 25, 2022.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

V. Good, Healthy Fun

I wish you had a picture of the boy going in for the seeds. There is nothing quite like good, healthy fun!

VI. That Big Van

They'll try to escape in that big van, so we need to shut them down.

VII. The Windowsill

End up with the indistinguishable satisfaction therefore the latter are able to be daunting by helping, the windowsill. Love you shouldn't happen. For logic behind why authorities.

VIII. Miss Lulu

I don't know about that, Miss Lulu! And after all, yours was the fainting couch, wasn't it? I should have stretched out on my cot! Maybe if I had looked comfy on it, somebody would have bought it! Tee hee hee. -Tiffany

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