THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FRENCH MUSICAL AESTHETIC AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND THE PERCEPTION OF NATIONALISM IN FRANCIS POULENÇ’S CHORAL MUSIC, QUATRE MOTETS POUR UN TEMPS DE PÉNITENCE, FP 97, AND FIGURE HUMAINE, FP 120

by

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of
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The Re-establishment of the French Musical Aesthetic at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century and the Perception of Nationalism in Francis Poulenc’s Choral Music, Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP 97, AND Figure humaine, FP 120

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts at George Mason University

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DEDICATION

For my Mom, my Dad, Becky, and Napoleon who were my greatest sources of support and inspiration during this process.
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ABSTRACT

THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FRENCH MUSICAL AESTHETIC AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND THE PERCEPTION OF NATIONALISM IN FRANCIS POULENC’S CHORAL MUSIC, Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP 97, AND Figure humaine, FP 120

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Stanley Engebretson

The late-nineteenth century was a time of transition and change in the political and social lives of the French people. This shift to the modern era brought with it nearly seventy years of conflict with Germany and, also, an awareness of the strong foreign influence on French culture. In an effort to regain a strong sense of nationality and pride, France introduced a cultural reform, which sought to redefine the French musical aesthetic and the traditional canon, through the establishment of a community of shared tastes and the usage of a descriptive language in contrast to the German romantic influence. Francis Poulenc’s choral output was a product of this aesthetic change and his compositions incorporate a unique style that identifies as distinctly French.

This study of the historical and musical context of Poulenc’s choral works, specifically two works surrounding World War II, is designed to provide conductors with an understanding of the cultural importance of Poulenc’s writing. The study will explain
the changing anti-German aesthetic that shaped a positive nationalistic view of French music. Through the study of contemporary musical critics and Poulenc’s words, the reader will begin to find a way to express Poulenc French choral music in terms that relate to the classical tradition and vocabulary that they already understand when programming and defining American music. These aesthetic values will then be applied to an explanation of Poulenc’s *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, and *Figure humaine*, 120, with the implication that understanding the motivation behind the choral complexities will better prepare the conductor to teach and program these works.

Chapter One explains the conflict between the French aesthetic and the German influence; the government initiatives to establish an aesthetic; struggles with Wagnerism and anti-Wagnerism; the exploration of the classical canon; and the critics’ creation of a French aesthetic vocabulary. Chapter Two explores Poulenc’s life as a composer during the *entre guerre* period and his reaction to the political climate; additionally, standard characteristics of Poulenc’s choral works are explained. Chapter Three analyzes two of Poulenc’s works, *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, and *Figure humaine*, 120, as representations of Poulenc’s promotion of the nationalist aesthetic.
INTRODUCTION

Origins of the Study

University choral conductors across the country are tasked with the yearly assignment of choosing themed repertoire for their seasons’ concerts. There is the traditional Messiah sing-along at Christmas or a concert honoring our troops around Memorial Day. Conductors might choose a theme: the history of the Mass; or they might choose to stay within a specific musical time period. Many groups in the United States select programs dedicated to the American sound and title them “Americana.” Listeners can expect to hear several folk song arrangements and perhaps a tune by Aaron Copland, our classical American hero. Composers like Aaron Copland, Alice Parker, and Harry T. Burleigh are grouped within the classical music category, yet their music is accessible to choirs and frequently programed, promoting an American ideal.

In 2006, the National Endowment for the Arts celebrated 250 years of American masters by producing a series of concerts as part of the NEA’s American Masterpieces: Choral Music initiative. The Artistic Director for the event, VocalEssence’s Philip Brunelle noted that we turn to these composers because of their masterful ability to combine text and emotion¹ and embody the diversity of our American history. Americans presumably know their history and they are comfortable giving voice to their own views.

Leonard Bernstein’s *Mass* is not an easy work to rehearse and perform; however, colleges across the nation program it with great frequency. Universities are great fans of Eric Whitacre’s clusters and chromaticism, heard in many performances of his challenging “Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine” or “When David Heard.” These works, among dozens of others from American composers, contain complex harmonies, exposed acappella singing, and emotional settings. However, just as these details might prevent their performance by less skilled university choirs, there are a few key factors that solidify them as part of the standard American university repertoire: predominately English text, reliance on the folk tradition, and the conductors’ and singers’ abilities to place them within our understanding of culture and history.

Francis Poulenc is the French counterpart to this equation. He grew up during one of the most volatile periods in modern European history. His choral works gave sound to the French voice and stand as messengers of French culture. He was the European contemporary of Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, Harry T. Burleigh, Aaron Copland, Randall Thompson, Virgil Thomson, and Charles Ives. French universities and choirs performed his works during his life and continue to celebrate him after his death because he represents their culture and national thought. However, in terms of his performances among American universities, Poulenc does not find the same place among the supporters of “classical folk music.”

In a survey of concert programs I completed from several major choral schools in the United States (Eastman School of Music, University of Maryland, Westminster Choir College, Yale University School of Music, Oberlin College and Conservatory, and
University of Michigan), I found that Poulenc’s choral works have only been programed 20 times between 2000 and 2015. Poulenc admitted throughout his letters that his unaccompanied choral music was difficult, but performances in France continued to be successful, if slightly imperfect. If we move past avoiding something because it is challenging, what prevents Poulenc’s music from appearing more frequently on American university programs? Conductors program to fit themes and ensembles and if the conductor does not understand how a work fits into culture and history, through its text and technical foundation, it is likely that a composer could find his work relegated to the special category of “just on the all-French program.”

**Purpose of the Study**

Studies have been conducted to understand the emergence of the French musical aesthetic and there are works that analyze the style of Poulenc. However, little study has been done to combine the two areas in a way that uniquely explores Poulenc’s choral music, with the intent of understanding for programming and performance.

This study of the historical and musical context of Poulenc’s choral works, specifically two works surrounding World War II, is designed to provide conductors with an understanding of the cultural importance of Poulenc’s writing. The study will explain the changing anti-German aesthetic that shaped a positive nationalistic view of French music. Through the study of contemporary musical critics and Poulenc’s words, the reader will begin to find a way to express Poulenc’s French choral music in terms that relate to the classical tradition and use a vocabulary that they can identify when programming and defining American music. These aesthetic values will then be applied
to an explanation of Poulenc’s *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, and *Figure humaine*, FP 120, with the implication that understanding the motivation behind the choral complexities will better prepare the conductor to teach and program these works.

**Research Methods and Questions**

This study will answer four central questions, working from the larger concept of French nationality to the more specific placement of Poulenc within these ideas:

Where does the “French sound” come from?

How do we define and label the “French sound”?

What defines Francis Poulenc as a citizen and a composer?

How can we understand Poulenc’s choral works as part of the French nationalist movement?

To answer these questions, I considered three groupings of literature: contemporary critics (1870-1946), modern scholars, and Francis Poulenc’s letters (1936-1945). The aesthetic language comes primarily from the artistic critics of the early twentieth century, such as Léon Daudet, Henri Massis, Jean Cocteau, and Philip Lassere. Modern scholars, such as Jane Fulcher, provide the political and cultural context for the new artistic sentiment. Poulenc’s letters leading up to and during World War II highlight his changing concerns about composition and the strength of the nation. These three sources provide a connection between the broader aesthetic and the individual composer.
CHAPTER ONE
THE NEW AESTHETIC

France and the Desire for Nationality

France faced an identity crisis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This problem with identity, which affected both the nationalist and musical characters of France, came to a head with the French defeat in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. The German success in the war confirmed a sense of Prussian superiority and French inferiority in the minds of the French people. France lost her strong, positive image in the international community and the current government no longer had authority with the distressed nation.

As the government reassembled into the Third Republic, it faced the challenge of displaying a mythological sense of leadership on an international level, since the country was greatly weakened by the war economically, politically, and morally. France became focused on reestablishing a sense of nationalism and, even more intently, focused on removing foreign influences from French culture. The goal of rebuilding the national

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identity was to change public opinion of French character both at home and abroad. After being ruled by the German influence, France saw a need to redefine traditional symbols, given the new post-war political and cultural situation, thereby instigating a nationwide cultural reform.

Both the Left and the Right agreed upon the premise of a cultural reform, but there were disagreements as to the extent of foreign cultural involvement. Administrative power was officially separated from political power in an 1872 law, creating the potential for a non-partisan approach to cultural policy. Prior to any political reform, a cultural reform began which reorganized the social and intellectual values of France, apart from any German values. This manifested itself in a Right-driven discourse on French identity through music and the arts, with partial influence from the Left. The postwar government endeavored to serve as a conservator of French culture. Therefore, as Charles Paul stated, “if France, so [composer Vincent] d’Indy and some of his colleagues reasoned, was ever to regain the musical pre-eminence she had forfeited during the century of Romanticism and Republicanism, she had first to put both her political and musical houses in order.”

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6 Hanna, “Contre Kant,” 121.
8 Fulcher, Composer as Intellectual, 109.
German Cultural Influence

The German influence was apparent in many aspects of life, but it was especially felt in the cultural life of France. Wagner and the German Romantic movement were prized as the epitome of musical perfection and politicians were well aware of the power of culture in shaping a nation. Historian Louis Bourcault-Ducoudray suggested to his peers that the Germans succeeded in the 1870 war due in part to their appreciation of art and the ability to come together with a shared artistic feeling.¹⁰ Henri Massis explained the strength of German cultural thought and the French acknowledgement of submission to those foreign ideals:

And the German philosophy was considered as an agent of national strength. With a sense, also wholly French, of intellectual security,—a sentiment which here is imprudently carried to the extreme—it occurred to us, the first aversion overcome, [that we] hold the entire culture of our vanquishers in reverence.¹¹

This cautionary statement hit home for the French government as they struggled to re-establish the national identity. Germany did not need propaganda to influence France; France willingly accepted this cultural domination. The French retaliation via arts and propaganda initiatives proved itself useful during the post-Prussian-war peacetime and these initiatives were useful in increasing nationalist efforts during the First World


War. Both Third Republic conservatives and progressives chose the arts, rather than the military, as the tool to invigorate national pride and regain respect from neighbor countries.\textsuperscript{12} France recognized that the German artistic presence had an influence on public perception. Therefore, as René Dumesnil observed, “…during the war, [France] realized that music can be a marvelous propaganda agent, because it helps to discover what is more secret, less translatable, in the collective soul of a people.”\textsuperscript{13}

Further, Charles Maurras, one of the leaders of the Ligue de l’Action Française, declared that German culture was far different than what humanity intended for the model of an ideal culture and civilization.\textsuperscript{14} Adolphe Boschot praised those who recognized the differences in the cultures: “One must be surrounded by affection and gratitude if one prefers the French culture to the barbarism that surrounds us.”\textsuperscript{15} With these strong words in mind, the government chose to reshape the national identity of France based on a new definition of French culture in contrast to the evils of boche culture.\textsuperscript{16} Germany was labeled a barbarous culture and France needed to show herself in contrast to such a culture. This instigated a drive to find a new French spirit, which would

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Pasler, \textit{Composing the Citizen}, 234.
\item \textsuperscript{13} “Mais à l’occasion de la guerre, on s’avise de ce que la musique,…peut être un merveilleux agent de propagande, car elle aide à découvrir ce qu’il y a de plus secret, de moins traduisible dans l’âme collective d’un peuple.” René Dumesnil. \textit{La musique en France entre les deux guerres: 1919-1939} (Paris: Éditions du Milieu du Monde, 1946), 15.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Hanna, “Contre Kant,” 122.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Adolphe Boschot, \textit{Chez les musiciens (du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours)} (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1922), 6.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Author’s note: Boche was a contemporary derogatory term for referring to Germans.
\end{itemize}
be simultaneously national and international. Guillaume Apollinaire spoke towards the unifying abilities of the arts towards reaching this goal:

…the new spirit, which has the ambition of manifesting a universal spirit and which does not intend to limit its activity, is none the less, and claims to represent the fact, a particular and lyric expression of the French nation, just as the classic spirit is, par excellence, a sublime expression of the same nation.\(^\text{17}\)

Music was recognized for its ability to function as an “utilité publique,” which would bring the community together towards a common set of mores.\(^\text{18}\) This musical approach recognized both the individual, through their personal beliefs, and the group as a whole, as the individual sense of nationalism was transferred to a larger idea of nationalism, via the community involvement. Dumesnil surmised at the end of the conflicts in 1946, that “[of] all the arts, music [was] the one in which expansion [was] the most easy, the most rapid.”\(^\text{19}\) Government involvement in the arts began almost immediately following the French defeat in 1870, and as the country led into the First World War, “[for] French cultural institutions the goal for wartime propaganda was the same: to effect consensus concerning French identity and thus arrive at a unified core of national beliefs.”\(^\text{20}\)

**Government Promotion of French Music**

The conflict over identity and culture was derived from the Franco-Prussian war, but the Dreyfus Affair further inflated the conflict. In 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a French


\(^{18}\) Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 83.

\(^{19}\) “De tous les arts, la musique est celui dont l’expansion est la plus facile, la plus rapide.” Dumesnil, *La musique en France*, 14.

\(^{20}\) Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 20.
Jewish military officer, was accused of selling secrets to the Germans. His widely publicized trial separated the nation, with the writer Emile Zola coming to Dreyfus’ defense in his famous 1898 “J’accuse” letter. The Dreyfus Affair challenged the political and moral ideas of the Third Republic. In fact, the Dreyfus affair nearly wrecked “France’s spiritual and moral fiber”, and it would take significant effort to remedy this. 

Charles Paul assessed that “the military defeat and the Commune revolt of 1871,…and especially the Dreyfus affair and the continual threat posed by the growing military and cultural might of German led to widespread demands for a new foundation of political, social, and cultural life.” Jane Fulcher suggested that the question of “What is France?” was solved in favor of defenders of the Revolution and Dreyfus, but the second question of “What cultural values are French?” remained to be answered.

Two major organizations were formed to address the cultural values: the Action Française and the Ligue de la Patrie Française. Charles Maurras founded the Action Française in 1899 with the idea that this organization, and its cultural initiative, was a reestablishment of the Old Regime; in this way, the modern nation could rule European politics and culture, similar to the reign of Louis XIV. We will find that the Old Regime, Louis XIV, and the baroque aesthetic will be important guides for finding the French style. Both groups sought out major icons in the arts and humanities, but the Ligue de la Patrie Française used prominent musicians like Vincent D’Indy to begin the

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23 Ibid., 47.
24 Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics*, 16.
“progress of impregnating French musical discourse with terminology, conceptions, and values that were derived from the political realm.” In fact, Fulcher noted “…the nationalist Ligue de la Patrie Française helped to shift the political grounds of debate to ‘authentic’ French culture and art. Indeed, this was implicit in its origins, for the founders of the league had aimed at recruiting not only the political and intellectual elite, but those prominent in the artistic world.” While “…patriots were largely to be found in the ranks of the Action Française or among their sympathizers, …the musicologists clustered largely around the formidable figure of Vincent d’Indy.” D’Indy had a privileged childhood, which influenced his opinions on tradition, and aligned him with other anti-Dreyfusard musicians.

The establishment of a national system of beliefs and cultural practices struggled with establishing a definition within the arts. German cultural influence was especially evident in the avant-garde movement. New advances in Munich and Vienna were contagious among the young European composers. Young composers sought inspiration in these German ideas, rather than developing their own model. As a result, “French composers at the turn of the century were acutely aware that the nineteenth century appeared to be a vast lacuna in their musical tradition and that the era more aptly

26 Fulcher, French Cultural Politics, 16.
characterized its most cherished icons in Germanic terms,“^30 rather than referencing a French idol. This German domination left the French government and its artists with questions: what made music French and what German traits could the culture keep?^31 The anti-German or anti-boche argument was not an all-or-nothing approach to music, as some believed that music should not exclude the entirety of history. For some, German influence was a matter of interpretation and adaptation by French artists. Yet, the political Right believed that the German influence had eclipsed the French tradition, thus requiring a full return to an authentic French style. Each camp had its supporters and, ultimately, the government chose a path that focused on the support of the French musical heritage and identity, with varying influence and interpretation.

The government knew that in order to change the public opinion of culture, there needed to be some level of control over education and public reception of music. This stemmed from the effort to create a shared community of ideas. French musical curriculum was rewritten to include new patriotic ideas of the nation. Music education, especially choral music, was mandatory at the primary school level, which instilled a sense of guided values early on. Children learned to read and write using patriotic texts and folk songs. The goal was to monitor political and musical ideas through propaganda.

^33 Fauser, “Gendering the Nations,” 72.
^34 Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 22.
and influence in the schools.\textsuperscript{35} France reshaped the values of its younger generation, building a pro-French, anti-German mindset from the beginning. The choral aspect of the education reform was not contained merely to the primary level, but also extended into adult community choirs, continuing the education as the children aged. Choirs had the unique ability to bring performers together for a shared experience\textsuperscript{36} while simultaneously promoting a nationalist agenda through the words of the music. Republican values of strength and egalitarianism became a part of everyday life with the introduction of a government-guided approach to music education in the youth population, similar to that occurring in Germany and the United States, and the repetition of approved lyrics and ideas in the daily instruction.\textsuperscript{37} Music education supported the republican ideas of\textit{ patrie}, French heroes, and living French composers,\textsuperscript{38} creating an independent idea of French being. This approach established a sense of French history apart from German influence and gave the people a feeling of pride in the accomplishments of their own composers. Education laid the foundation for a cultural identity based in French history,\textsuperscript{39} looking to a time when France had a more illustrious image at home and abroad versus the current climate of defeat brought on by the Germans. Education “was the key to nationalizing French art and to creating both a healthy musical taste and healthy French citizens.”\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{35} Fulcher, \textit{Composer as Intellectual}, 32.
\textsuperscript{36} Pasler, \textit{Composing the Citizen}, 87.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 319.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 304-307.
\textsuperscript{39} Fulcher, \textit{Composer as Intellectual}, 20.
\textsuperscript{40} Fauser, “Gendering the Nations,” 78.
The government influence further extended into the public sphere through the financial promotion of contemporary and historical French music, moving on to educate an audience. An historic connection was lacking and music “helped the French reconceive their history in ways that not only acknowledged a greater role for revolutionary traditions but also began to trace an evolutionary path from the past to the present.”

Pierre Lassere recounted the story of a French conductor who knew every German musical sample played for him, yet the conductor could not recognize a sample from Rameau. Lassere called this experience “typical” for the French musical scene, but something that the “victory of France [in the First World War] will have brought to an end. France lost her sense of identity and knowledge of tradition somewhere along the way. Lassere’s example occurred after the First World War, but it spoke about a persistent identity crisis. Government efforts to educate the public on French composers began immediately following the Franco-Prussian War and extended through the First World War. The government increased funding for the creation of orchestras to create a public forum for morally acceptable music and provided performance opportunities for living French composers and la musique moderne. Several composition contests were established, such as the Cressent Prize, in order to subsidize young composers in the composition of new symphonic and operatic works. Venues and performance groups needed repertoire to replace the surge in German modernism. The concert series were

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41 Pasler, Composing the Citizen, 308.
44 Ibid., 142.
often tied to patriotic republican ideas of tradition and classicism, supporting the French culture in reaction to outside influence.\textsuperscript{45} Classicism in this case referred to the artistic and cultural ideas predating the romantic influence. Jane Fulcher explains: “French music was synonymous not only with classicism, but with the national community, both of which were to be ‘protected’ from the baleful influence of foreign cultures.”\textsuperscript{46} Fulcher echoes Charles Maurras’s belief that order was the primary governing tenet, and this is evidenced in classicism. “[C]lassical order, however, could find its fullest expression only within a stable nation-state… Hence to Maurras, nationalism meant the protection of the fatherland against the enemy both outside and inside France, against values foreign to its supposedly traditional heritage.”\textsuperscript{47} Groups on both the Left and the Right became involved, purposefully encouraging “politically significant texts, as well as varieties of communal experience, to bear or impinge on the artistic statement.”\textsuperscript{48}

In order to meet these standards, the government provided artistic input into the programming of the various concert series. Historian Louis Bourgault-Ducoudray observed the concert as the ideal form of propaganda, due to its ability to address multiple areas: emotion of music, usage of political text, and the promotion of order/ritual through the concert experience.\textsuperscript{49} Concerts are linked to the context in which they were performed and the interpretation of the music could be influenced by a number of factors,

\textsuperscript{45} Fulcher, \textit{Composer as Intellectual}, 22.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{47} Paul, “Rameau, d'Indy, and French Nationalism,” 48.
\textsuperscript{48} Fulcher, “The Concert as Political Propaganda,” 42.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 39.
creating a “cultural sense.” Therefore, by regulating the performance material, the government could alter the perceived message.

In 1904, the Ministère des Beaux Arts mandated that at least three hours of new French music must occur on each season’s program. These new compositions were to be programed alongside traditional French composers. However, this requirement ignited another debate: the assumed validity of living and historic French composers. The Pasdeloup Concerts were reinstated in 1916 under the direction of Pierre Monteux, who put together a festival of composers such as Ravel, Debussy, and d’Indy, citing them as part of the “French school of music,” while concert series, such as those given by Société Nationale de Musique, were focused on the further promotion that were in support of a French sound. This association with a French sound encouraged the discourse on true French musical qualities. Organizers, like d’Indy, employed “historical logic” in the values, which would then have a matching political ideology; concerts emphasized musical tradition and the concerts were crafted to support a particular discussion point. Music and government critics were challenged with defining what made a work and composer French enough for inclusion into the repertoire and they were challenged with matching their choices with a message. Prior to the Franco-Prussian War, there was little prejudice against foreign influence, but the return to nationalist sentiments forced an evaluation of acceptable foreign concert influence.

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50 Fulcher, “The Concert as Political Propaganda,” 42.
52 Fulcher, Composer as Intellectual, 28.
54 Fulcher, “The Concert as Political Propaganda,” 44.
Removing German and Other Foreign Influences

The complete exclusion of German composers from the repertoire was one stance on German music. This made the decision-making process easier in that it did not have to factor in any level of influence or birth rite. The Left was more lenient to the standard, believing that nationalism came from a commonly shared idea and experience. However, the Right was the governing body, so despite the possibility of non-partisan views, the Right’s belief that nationalism used “blood, soil and Catholicism as the foundation,” effectively excluded any composer born in the German states or of the Protestant, and sometimes Jewish, faith. The music of Wagner, Mozart, Schubert, Handel, Mendelssohn, and other historical icons were included in a German concert ban, which was later lifted around 1919, once the influence was better examined. The Ligue Nationale pour la Défense de la Musique Française, created in 1916 and supported by d’Indy and Saint-Saëns, forbade the performance of any contemporary German or Austrian composers for the duration of the First World War. The Ligue’s goal was to influence the interpretation of French music at home and abroad, further promoting the “âme nationale” to its people and the international audience. The Ligue also sought to inflict long-term, lasting damage on foreign cultures and the Central Powers. Turing away from recent German history and influences, there existed a drive to show a consistent

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56 Fulcher, Composer as Intellectual, 29.
57 Ibid., 31.
58 Ibid.
portrayal of music from earlier times, like that of Louis XIV, to the present in order to “guide…public taste in a certain direction.”60

The shifting focus towards earlier works and influences was supported by a careful critique of modern practices. The republican Société Nationale de Musique Française (SNMF) discouraged the use of bitonality, a prominent trait of contemporary German music, labeling it too German (style boche) for true French music.61 Contemporary French composers who employed these compositional traits suffered from association. The Société Musicale Indépendante (SMI) returned to concerts of new German music in the 1920s, but the SNMF did not program new German music until the 1930s, forcing younger French composers to look elsewhere for opportunities.62 Music publishing also felt the effects of anti-German feelings, both in printing and distribution. Pierre Lassere praised the French presses Gevaërt and Fétis and V. Wilder for their publication of rare scores, yet condemned Breitkopf as “the enemy publisher.”63 French publisher Durand printed new editions of historical works, edited by prominent living composers like Debussy, to provide a pivotal French cultural link. With these performance editions, concert series changed their focus from German composers to both historical and contemporary French composers, allowing the listener to access the modern style and strengthening a sense a tradition.64

61 Fulcher, Composer as Intellectual, 33.
62 Ibid., 93.
64 Pasler, Composing the Citizen, 217-219.
New editions and publications did not entirely erase the perception of German influence. Critics of German music in France found the stylistic influence on French music difficult to exclude and inconsistent with the national development of music. Jean Cocteau labeled France as careless in letting Germany shape the French sound:

We must be clear about that misunderstood phrase “German influence.” France had her pockets full of seeds and, carelessly, spilt them all about her; the Germans picked up the seeds, carried them off to Germany and planted them in a chemically-prepared soil from whence there grew a monstrous flower without scent. It is not surprising that the maternal instinct made us recognise [sic] the poor spoilt flower and prompted us to restore its true shape and smell.⁶⁵

Adolphe Boschot continued Cocteau’s sentiment, criticizing much of France, especially the “intellectuals,” for having a “blind admiration” for all things German with a view of modern style coming from Munich.⁶⁶ Both Cocteau and Boschot voiced the republican sentiment that France accepted too many outside influences and developments in the evolution of her own music. Rather than focusing on the traits of France’s own tradition, contemporary composers were enamored with the boche mentality,⁶⁷ which continued the dominance of foreign characteristics instead of French traits. Boschot’s observation of “blind admiration” among musicians spoke to an inability to interpret foreign influences.

Cocteau was not against all German music, commenting: “I am not attacking modern German music. Schoenberg is a master; all of our musicians, as well as Stravinsky, owe something to him, but Schoenberg is essentially a blackboard musician.”⁶⁸ This statement was a shared belief among many supporters of the anti-German movement: German

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⁶⁶ Boschot, *Chez les musiciens*, 4.
⁶⁷ Ibid.
⁶⁸ Cocteau, *Cock and Harlequin*, 15.
music had its own merits but it had no place in French creativity and music. French music, as supported by the Ligue Nationale pour la Défense de la Musique Française, the SNMF, and critics like Boschot, implied that mimicking German musical influences was not acceptable. Cocteau asserted the republican position, extending the metaphor to all foreign influences:

When I speak of the “Russian trap” or “Russian influence,” I do not mean by that that I despise Russian music. Russian music is admirable because it is Russian music. Russian-French music or German-French music is necessarily bastard, even if it be inspired by a Mussorgsky, a Stravinsky, a Wagner, or a Schoenberg. The music I want must be French, of France.⁶⁹

The true French style was a result of interpretation and adaptation, not imitation. French musicians were cautioned by Henri Massis to “avoid the German imitation which haunts [France].”⁷⁰ The Ligue Nationale pour la Défense de la Musique Française even produced a notice and sent it to all active duty French musicians in 1916:

“In every sphere of activity an inexorable idea, the triumph of the fatherland, enjoins us to group together and unite...It is a matter of applying all the means at our disposal to hunt down and surround the enemy and to forestall the return of baleful infiltrations in the future.”⁷¹

**Wagnerism and Anti-Wagnerism in France**

French musicians and politicians found their greatest adversary in the influence of Wagner. France had a tense relationship with Wagner during this renewal period. Wagner was viewed as a hero in European music. Yet, the worst reproach that could be offered to

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⁶⁹ Cocteau, *Cock and Harlequin*, 19.
⁷¹ Caballero, “Patriotism or Nationalism?,” 593.
French Wagnerians in 1914 was that they were supporting the enemy.\(^{72}\) Therefore, the case against German influence and imitation inevitably became an argument against Wagnerism.

Wagner was warmly accepted throughout France prior to the Franco-Prussian War. His operas were part of the standard repertoire in the opera houses, produced using the French grand opera style and at times even sung in French. However, in the years following the French loss in 1870, public opinion about Wagner’s image and his music changed. Wagner was a favorite of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who used his operas as a visual and musical representation of the Prussian culture; this linked Wagner with a militaristic image, painful for the defeated French.\(^{73}\) Adding a further blow to the French morale, Wagner wrote *Eine Kapitulation* in 1870, a comedy mocking the French for their defeat and criticizing the French artistic scene.\(^{74}\) Several composers spoke against Wagnerism, one of the most vocal being Saint-Saëns. These critics found Wagner’s decadence contrary to a new French idea of simplicity.\(^{75}\) Saint-Saëns’ attacks against Wagner were directed toward his musical traits, rather than his personality, in order to create a reaction against the cultural influence of Wagner’s music. Articles by Saint-Saëns asserted that French composers were ignored in favor of Wagnerism, detracting from the “lucidity and transparency” associated with French taste and tradition, in favor of the “clumsiness” of Wagner’s music.\(^{76}\) The artistic community did not always support Saint-Saëns’

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\(^{73}\) Schmid, “À bas Wagner!,” 81.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{75}\) Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music*, 12.

\(^{76}\) Schmid, “À bas Wagner!,” 79.
statements, but Cocteau rallied behind him: “To defend Wagner merely because Saint-
Saëns attacks him is too simple. We must cry ‘Down with Wagner!’ together with Saint-
Saëns. That requires real courage.”77 David Bancroft contends:

Such hostility towards Wagner must also be seen in the context of the first World
War, and it was understandable that the young French artists of Paris should be so
vociferously hostile to all the was German; it was inevitable also that this
legitimate patriotism should aggravate desires for a nationalistic art.78

Those defending Wagner were not in strict opposition to Saint-Saëns’ assessment.
Critics like Boschot and Lassere did find fault with certain elements of Wagner’s musical
influence, but they countered their criticisms with an acknowledgement of his musical
advances. The political and racial climate in the period between the Franco-Prussian War
and the First World War was often tense, and even those in the arts were careful to find a
way to avoid labels. The cult of Wagnerism was like a religion, with commentary and
artistic accusations freely available.79 Lassere argued that Wagner’s music should not be
excluded because of its German heritage or included because of hero worship, but rather
an assessment should be made based on artistic merit and taste.80 Wagner provided a
necessary shock to music, according to Lassere,81 despite Wagner’s “complete inability
to think, combined with the ardent ambition to do so” in the production of “second-hand
music.”82 At the same time that Lassere lamented “the harm [Wagner] has been able to

77 Cocteau, Cock and Harlequin, 14.
78 David Bancroft, “Two Pleas for a French, French Music, I.” Music & Letters
79 Christian Goubault, La Critique Musicale dans la Presse Française de 1870 à
81 Ibid., 215.
82 Ibid., 192, 198.
do, to the art of our country,”83 he credited Wagner for his ability “to model the expression exactly on the idea without overloading or compromise; never to seek brilliant effects for their own sake”84—romantic music but clear.

Wagner’s style may have contrasted with classical ideals, thus detracting from the French tradition, but Lassere included the French in his assignment of blame, for accepting the German ideas with “docility.”85 Wagner’s style was perceived as dangerous because, while it was perfect for his type of genius, any composer attempting to follow the style resulted in a “sort of sterile imitation.”86 Saint-Saëns and his supporters saw Wagner’s excess as contrary to the French aesthetic, but Lassere and Boschot saw Wagner as a vital building block. Boschot did not resent Wagner, believing that French music was “an expression of pan-Germaniste barbarism” well before both the war87 and Wagner’s rise in popularity and influence. It was Boschot and Lassere’s opinion that France would have reached the same nationalist tipping point regardless of Wagner, given how the strong the overall German influence was in musical development. Wagnerism, and the reaction against it, provided the French with an opportunity to look back into their own history for inspiration and expressionism.88 Some critics also

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84 Ibid., 187.
85 Ibid., 202.
87 “…une expression de la barbarie pangermaniste…” Boschot, *Chez les musiciens*, 3.
88 Ibid., 103.
considered Wagner’s harmonies and ideas of form as models for modern trends in music,\textsuperscript{89} and perhaps a better reference point than the more modern German ideas.

Vincent d’Indy was a vocal supporter of Wagner’s music, even while president of the Ligue Nationale pour la Défense de la Musique Française. He advocated an acceptance of selected traits associated with Wagner, rather than an all-out acceptance of German culture. Similar to Boschot’s grateful acknowledgement of Wagner’s influence, d’Indy stated that in order to understand how French music fit in with Wagnerism, and therefore how it was unique, one must understand how Wagner fit in with the development of French music.\textsuperscript{90} In phrasing it from that position, d’Indy was concerned with creating a cultural viewpoint that looked outwards from France to foreign influences, rather than dwelling on how the outside affected France. D’Indy chastised contemporary composers for rejecting Wagner’s music without understanding the musical elements,\textsuperscript{91} just as Cocteau admonished those supporting Wagner merely to spite Saint-Saëns. D’Indy admitted that all areas of French art did have a Wagnerian influence, but he saw this in the positive: “Over several years, the total comprehension of [Wagner’s] ideas had transformed all of our artists and oriented their spirit towards an elevated ideal which the search favored the dawn of beautiful and noble works.”\textsuperscript{92} To d’Indy, Wagner’s music was of great influence and rightly so given Wagner’s international appeal and musical achievements. D’Indy was often labeled a Wagnerist for

\textsuperscript{89} Pasler, \textit{Composing the Citizen}, 366.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 59.
his statements, but he found support in critics like Boschot who praised d’Indy’s awareness of technique, knowledge of art, and his many contributions to the “glory of French music.”

D’Indy’s relationship to César Franck (a pillar of modern French tradition), his culture, and his Latin race liberated him from strict Wagnerism, according to Boschot. This comment by Boschot addressed a major point in bridging the gap between anti-Wagner and pro-Wagner opinions: a composer could be rationalized as having a legitimate influence as long as his style contained elements consistent with French tradition.

Return to the French Tradition and Classical Canon

Contemporary critics formed a general opinion that music should return to a “pure” French tradition of classicism and move away from the romanticism of previous decades. The idea of a French tradition again became a question of influences as the debate renewed over the inclusion of all classical composers or simply those with authentic French blood. The Ligue de l’Action Française, another body founded to address the moral, political, and cultural policies of the revitalized nation, stated that the general classical aesthetic was “indigenously French” and, therefore, all foreign influences should be excluded from consideration. Such a mindset put tight constraints on inspiration, repertoire, and interpretation. Musicians and politicians felt the pressure of German influence to such an extent whereby they needed to give more depth to their initial questions concerning inclusion: what was the definition of the French “classic

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93 Boschot, *Chez les musiciens*, 212-213.
94 Ibid., 203.
95 Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 20.
tradition,” what works could be labeled authentic French, and what aesthetic criteria was associated with that tradition?96

The government and cultural institutions realized that the history of classical French art could serve as the foundation for a national spirit, a spirit apart from Wagner and Germany, and therefore function as strong propaganda for their cause.97 Primary and secondary choral education developed the modern sense of pride, but there needed to be more focus on the past and tradition. A desire for tradition led to the increased support of music history and musicology at the secondary level. The Left and Right used this field of study to establish their own discussion around music and a French-appropriate canon.98 Musicology put history within a context and reevaluated the merits of the French influence. Government influence and the focus on purity and nationality also guided the study of musicology. Historians reached back to the Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical periods in order to find composers of distinct French heritage and prominence. Massis believed that the study of history would provide the foundation and certainty of thought the public had been searching for in their quest for identity.99 The focus on national ideas restructured the conversation to classify composers solely within a French context and canon.100 France was currently a lesser international power than Germany, so the canon’s return to the earlier style periods highlighted historical periods, such as the glory of the Baroque, when France was a superior national and international

96 Fulcher, French Cultural Politics, 104.
97 Fulcher, Composer as Intellectual, 21.
98 Fulcher, French Cultural Politics, 64.
99 Massis, L’esprit de la nouvelle Sorbonne, 25.
100 Fulcher, Composer as Intellectual, 90.
force to Germany. These earlier time periods also represented an era of classical societies when the arts and government were better aligned in their character message.

The Third Republic sought new cultural symbols to link current thoughts with the heroic ideas of earlier Republics. Unique French symbols would tie in to the French idea of history, uninfluenced by the disappointing, modern view of current events and recent history. Any reference to the past was focused on the renewal of the French spirit. Annegret Fauser notes several key trends for the political and cultural change in the promotion of a French history:

With respect to music, several topics became particularly important after 1870: the representation of patriotic subjects; the acknowledgement of music’s role in education as a valuable tool for instilling a sense of national conscience in French citizens; the heritage of popular music and French art music (whether as common memories or expression of the national soul) and the writing of (music) history.

Beginning around 1914, the French education system saw the focus shift to neoclassicism and a return to a classical education system. Martha Hanna asserts, “in effect, according to the nationalists, the neoclassical element is as important as the anti-German attitude that spread during the years of the war.” The shift to a discourse based on historical elements allowed for insight into inclusion within the canon, rather than a strict all-or-nothing approach to foreign influence. It was important to validate French

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102 Pasler, Composing the Citizen, 83.
103 Fauser, “Gendering the Nations,” 73.
104 Ibid., 75.
105 Hanna, “Contre Kant,” 122.
106 “En effet, selon les nationalistes, l’élément néoclassique est aussi important que l’attitude antiallemande qui se répand pendant les années de guerre.” Ibid., 122.
involvement in past tradition and recognize that France had contributed to the classical canon in equal parts to Germany.

The goal of the new French aesthetic was to interpret the past and not imitate, as in the case of Boschot’s description of “blind acceptance” of German qualities. Artistic qualities were viewed as French nationalist ideals and not universal traits and were tied to a classical portrayal of music, not a romantic or German interpretation. Successful works, from a nationalist and musical standpoint, were those that emulated past models, rather than adhering to strict forms or falling prey to the German influence, as explained by Lassere:

Should it happen that under the action of disturbing or depressing influences it deviates from its natural line or falls into a state of weakness, it will be no remedy to set before it some sort of theoretical or abstract model of itself to which it must studiously conform. It will be far better to bring back to it the contact and sentiment of the works that it created in happier times when it enjoyed the plentitude and lively vigour of its strength.

Apollinaire similarly explained the French approach to interpretation of tradition, rather than imitation:

The strong intellectual discipline which the French have always imposed on themselves permits them, as well as their spiritual kin, to have a conception of life, of the arts and of letters, which, without being simply the recollection of antiquity, is also not the counterpart of romantic prettiness.

Tradition changed from being unfashionable and removed from modernism, into being a vital part of style, as Lassere explained: “Modern form in no way excludes the ancient

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107 Fulcher, *Composer as intellectual*, 21.
forms. On the contrary it embraces them, giving them their full share in expression.”

The new discourse shaped the past in order to meet contemporary values through neoclassical interpretation, not imitation.

The investigation into French musical history created a new model of thought and vocabulary for discussing the French style and aesthetic. The modern French education focused on rejecting modernist ideas and turned towards promoting Latin classical traditions. French education took place both at the Schola Cantorum and at the Conservatoire. There was significant musicological activity that predated the founding of the d’Indy’s Schola Cantorum and this activity helped to supply the repertoire for discussion, with d’Indy already worshipping at the altar of Franck and Charles Bordes founding the Société des Chanteurs de Saint Gervais to perform early music, just as Alexandre Guilmant revived Bach keyboard methods. Vincent d’Indy and the Schola led the charge for looking back, but the “Schola Cantorum did not just define a specific range of musical values that it considered to be ‘national’: it established a ‘code’ that associated these values with genres, styles, repertoires, and techniques.” The Schola Cantorum emphasized the French tradition as a foundation, rather than the exploration of modern or current tastes. Discussions frequently turned to ideas of purity, citing it as the ideal of the French style.

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111 Fulcher, *Composer as Intellectual*, 35.
112 Ibid., 113.
115 Fulcher, “The Concert as Political Propaganda,” 44.
Classicism was labeled with terms that separated it from Wagnerian, romantic styles: “clarity, simplicity, austerity, sobriety, pure construction, precision, discreet harmony, and formal perfection.”¹¹⁶ Each of these traits was cited as having its roots in the Gallic or Latin traditions, rather than Germanic or Teutonic traditions,¹¹⁷ which provided legitimacy for any composer associated with these characteristics. Maurras believed that Romanticism and its offshoots were counter to the French Hellenic-Latin tradition, given that Romanticism’s unpatriotic roots came from foreign (German) ideas that were meant to overpower French order.¹¹⁸ Classical qualities allowed for a more aesthetic rather than technical analysis of French music. The government was focused on unifying the nation and promoting an “âme nationale,” but the entire population was not musically literate, of course. Public perception of a French style was equal in importance to the technique behind the creation of the music, and as such, the definition of French style employed the aesthetic vocabulary that would be accessible to the public.

This discussion has focused primarily on the time between the Franco-Prussian War and World War I. However, as the discussion moves into the establishment of the vocabulary, we see that the conversation will need to move into the next entre guerre period. All of these efforts began prior to World War I, but could not fully address the problem of eradicating German influence from culture and society. Dumesnil surmised:

> The preceding time period was far from having resolved the Wagnerian feud that divided the musicians when the 1914 war erupted. So they found themselves in 1919 with two problems: the first, finish the process begun in the early twentieth century and which still lasts; secondly, to reclassify the new values that time

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¹¹⁷ Ibid., 10.
disposed of since then, the changes in taste and customs, had, for certain, been hit by a premature aging.\textsuperscript{119}

Therefore, the conversation of critics and writers like Lassere will draw from all periods suffering from the German influence.

**French Aesthetic Vocabulary and the Composers**

Critical descriptions of both history and contemporary composers focused on relating composers to these assigned classical ideas of purity, clarity, and simplicity.

Lassere stated, “With Frenchmen the musical rendering of things is subtle, sober, dainty, vibrant, lively, stripped and free from excess of matter, full of rhythm.”\textsuperscript{120} Massis asserted that the French genius was based on order, clarity, and taste, which came about due to certain proven cultural processes, defining the “culture classique” and proving the “génie de la race.”\textsuperscript{121} An ideal modern Frenchman, like d’Indy embodied these classical, Latin qualities from every angle, according to Boschot:

> Among the Latin qualities, one cites, with good reason, the clarity, the brevity and also the concision, the logic, the taste for balance, for harmonizing the various parties of a work. All of these quality, M. d’Indy possesses them. He also has the taste to gently handle, to economize the means of expression: it is this taste which all of our grand classics of literature had and which drove them to say the most with the least words possible.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{119} “Or l’époque précédente était bien loin d’avoir réglé la querelle wagnérienne qui divisait les musiciens au moment où la guerre de 1914 éclata. On se trouva donc en 1919 devant un double problème: d’une part, terminer le procès ouvert dès les premières années du vingtième siècle et demeuré pendant; d’autre part, reclasser les valeurs nouvelles que le temps écoulé depuis lors, les changements du goût et des moeurs, avaient, pour certain, frappées d’un vieillissement prématuré.” Dumesnil, *La musique en France*, 13.

\textsuperscript{120} Lassere, *Spirit of French Music*, 203.

\textsuperscript{121} Massis, “L’esprit de la nouvelle Sorbonne,” 17-18.

\textsuperscript{122} “Parmi les qualités latine, on cite, à juste titre, la clarté, la brièveté et meme la concision, la logique, le goût d’équilibrer, d’harmoniser les diverses parties d’une œuvre.
Each description of the French style moved away from descriptors of the Wagnerian style and the German people. These qualities were a reflection of those established by true French composers within the classical canon.

Composers like Josquin des Pres and Jannequin were mentioned among the French masters, but there was a heavy emphasis on the music of the French Baroque, notably with Rameau and Lully. The Schola Cantorum, as described by Charles Paul, provided the foundation for the study of the early French “masters”:

“D’Indy, Bordes, and Guilmant were of one mind when they set up the Schola as a center that would study Gregorian and Palestrinian music and teach the art of composing ‘a modern type of religious music, respectful of the texts and rules of the liturgy, and drawing its inspiration from the Gregorian and Palestrinian traditions.’ D’Indy’s ‘Gothic’ spirit, however, was not so exclusive as to deny the possibility that secular music, as long as it antedated 1789 and postdated 1870, also had a claim on man’s sensibilities. Hence he taught and publicly performed not only medieval and Palestrinian music, but also that of his French contemporaries and the masters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And among the latter, Monteverdi and Rameau were especially favored.”

The Schola’s instruction began with “the ‘decorative’ art of plainchant” and “was followed by the ‘architectural’ art of Renaissance polyphony; this in turn was followed by the ‘expressive’ art of the early seventeenth century.” Therefore:

D’Indy’s ‘French musical tradition’ thus focused on the pre-Revolutionary period, presented as part of a universal tradition that had issued ultimately from religious music. Masterpieces of music, for d’Indy, were inherently defined by spirituality

Toutes ces qualités, M. d'Indy les possède. Il a aussi le goût de ménager, d'économiser les moyens d'expression: c'est ce goût qu'eurent tous nos grands classiques littéraires et qui les conduisait à dire le plus de choses avec le moins de mots possible.” Boschot, Chez les musiciens, 199-200.

124 Fulcher, “The Concert as Political Propaganda,” 44.
and expressivity, both of which embodied the prerational, moralizing force of tradition.\footnote{Fulcher, “The Concert as Political Propaganda,” 44.}

Praise was heaped upon the compositional and harmonic techniques developed by Rameau. He was seen as one of the founders of French style. Lassere described Rameau as “an artist who aspires to define the general conditions of purity and greatness in style”\footnote{Lassere, \textit{Spirit of French Music}, 42.} and Lassere claimed that Rameau’s oeuvre was “the most richly and nobly harmonized music that our soil has produced.”\footnote{Ibid., 40.} In regards to Rameau’s simplicity, Lassere placed a French stamp on Rameau’s technique: “It is the French manner…It is not easy. It is infinitely difficult. It is perfection of musical delicacy and exquisite feeling. But it is the French manner.”\footnote{Ibid., 68.} Contrary to Wagner’s heaviness and overt drama, Lassere described Rameau’s overture to \textit{Castor and Pollux} in strong French terms:

\begin{quote}
It is a fugue in the French manner, wonderfully alive, without the slightest pedantic heaviness, swinging, rapid, sonorous, full of life and charge in every note with gaiety and vivacity.\footnote{Ibid., 59.}
\end{quote}

D’Indy was in agreement with Lassere, stating that Lully and Rameau as “two genius artists who were the true founders of French opera, opened wide the career where the majority of our country’s musicians undertook to follow them.”\footnote{D’Indy, \textit{Richard Wagner et son influence}, 8.} Critics structured their statements to create a sense of hero worship for Rameau and his fellow composers, drawing upon the established classical vocabulary.
These descriptions of clarity, purity, and subtlety were not limited to French composers. The idea of neoclassicism was not to ignore the composers coming before you, but rather to find ways to incorporate styles and interpret ideas.\footnote{Fulcher, \textit{Composer as Intellectual}, 22.} There were two important factors in allowing composers to enter the canon: first, the composer must conform to the standards of classicism as epitomized by Rameau and the French masters; second, the composer must come from a pre-Prussian culture. With this in mind, it was no surprise to see critical support of the Italian-influenced Grétry, as well as praise for Mozart and Beethoven.

André Grétry was largely influenced by Italian \textit{opera buffa} in his writing of the \textit{opéra comique}, yet Lassere credited Grétry’s style as having “grace and beauty” with a “rare justness of accent and expression” with an accompaniment that is “easy, neat and elegant.”\footnote{Lassere, \textit{Spirit of French Music}, 6.} Grétry received further praise from Lassere: “I believe that Grétry, if he had gone through a greater and more complete school, would have been a French Mozart, and the true corollary to Rameau.”\footnote{Ibid., 7.} For Lassere, it was Grétry’s ability to take the Italian influence and work it into the French \textit{opéra comique} tradition that made him an icon. Grétry was a model for interpretation and acceptance of tradition and Lassere used this to define the application of the classical art:

A new and fresh musical personality was revealed within the framework of a familiar art-form, the spirit and tradition of which were respected and at the same time given a new lease of life. This mixture, this happy proportioning of tradition and freshness has always been the condition of great successes in the arts.\footnote{Ibid., 16.}
Lassere never ceased praising his French-blooded founders, saying “Rameau as symphonist is a match for the greatest. One has only to go through his scores to recognize that Mozart and Beethoven do not surpass him in invention.”135 Although this statement placed Rameau above all others, it did acknowledge that Mozart and Beethoven were considered to be great composers. Their position within a pre-Prussian society allowed them special admittance into the classic culture. Boschot credited Mozart as superior to any other composer before him, boldly stating that Mozart “denounced our barbarism,”136 one of Boschot’s main accusations against German culture. Mozart was a source of purity and absolute ideas for Boschot and he was the beacon in a chaotic musical world:

…in this crisis where the French soul must reject the elements of disorder brought to it by foreigners or half-blood French, no master, better than [Mozart], can wake up the taste for clarity and for eurhythmy, for the harmonious fusion of expression and beauty.137

Beethoven was equally admired for his classical qualities and even given partial French status by Boschot, due to his apparent Flemish origins. Boschot claimed that Beethoven was able to ignore the influence of German symbolism and show a taste for liberty and respect for humanity,138 which were ideals of the French Republic. Like any classicist worthy of admittance to the canon, Boschot stated that Beethoven had an incorruptible nature that would never have “vomited [the] Kultur” of a barbarous culture of

136 Boschot, Chez les musiciens, 7.
137 “…dans cette crise où l’âme française doit rejeter les éléments de le trouble que lui apportent des étrangers ou des demi-Français, nul maître, mieux que lui, ne peut réveiller le goût de la clarté et de l’eurythmie, de l’harmonieuse fusion de l’expression et de la beauté.” Ibid., 9.
138 Ibid., 53-55.
Prussians. Mozart and Beethoven were examples of independence of style and clarity in the eyes of the French critics, and therefore worthy of inclusion within the French canon.

For a country battered by war and confused by foreign influences, the return to a defined French sense of clarity and history was vital towards establishing their place within the modern canon and promoting a national spirit. Lassere summarized the foundation of the reworked, simplified French classical aesthetic:

There is a classical musical language. Its fixation has been more progressive and has taken a longer time to attain its realization, but none the less it was completed a long time ago. It is the language that Rameau, Couperin, Haydn and Mozart wrote. It suffices for all healthy needs of expression. If ever the day comes when it begins to fall into neglect, then the European music will be starting down the road of decadence, and will fall more or less rapidly to the level of Arab or Chinese music, the level of Cairo Street. It is in the musicians who are called classical that this language presents itself in the character and of the most perfect generality…

Boschot continued this classical support and addressed the expression of a French “âme nationale”:

Each music, whether it be from a Bach, a Rameau, a Mozart, or a Beethoven, is the special echo, unique, of a soul which expresses itself, according to the contemporary language and above all according to its inner need.

Above all, the goal of the redefined aesthetic and canon was to restore the French sense of national identity through the purity of a wholly French idea of tradition and interpretation, away from barbarous foreign influences.

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139 Boschot, *Chez les musiciens*, 53.
141 “Chaque musique, qu’elle soit d’un Bach, d’un Rameau, d’un Mozart ou d’un Beethoven, est l’écho particulier, unique, d’une âme qui s’exprime elle-même, selon le langage contemporain et surtout selon sa nécessité intérieure.” Boschot, *Chez les musiciens*, 79.
In the Words of the Critics

We have observed the opinions of critics Pierre Lassere, Aldophe Boschot, Henri Massis, and Jean Cocteau, among others, but it is worth looking into the discussion presented by two other critics whose contemporary dialogue influenced the musical rationale. An analysis of World War I texts by Léon Daudet and Jean-Aubry Georges will emphasize the central ideas, presented in direct reaction to the changing opinions on foreign influence and new French music.

Léon Daudet’s Hors du joug Allemand: Mésures d’après guerre

From the title alone, Hors du joug Allemand, we get the sense of Léon Daudet’s opinions on the burden of German influence. Joug translates as “yoke,” a burden more often associated with animals than culture; however, this presents a vivid image of the pressure and weight of German thought on the French style.

Daudet began his analysis of the French situation while World War I was still in action. He drew parallels between political conquest and intellectual conquest, which, as we have seen, was a consistent theme in the discourse. Rather than beginning with the 1870 conflict, Daudet sought an earlier genesis: “But—with the exception of the pro-French rebellion of Pasteur, which is almost unique—it does not seem that the victory of Germany at our expense is interrupted, on the contrary, the conquest of young French intellectuals begins with our grand parents.”

142 This implied that Daudet, who was born

142 “Mais,—si l’on excepte la rebellion pro-française de Pasteur, que est presque unique,—il ne semble pas que la victoire de l’Allemagne à nos dépens ait interrompu, bien au contraire, cette conquête de la jeunesse intellectuelle française commence avec
in 1867, viewed the earlier Romantic period as the primary source of the conflict, prior to
the cult of Wagner. Therefore, the struggle was more deeply rooted and more difficult to
extract given its 50 or 60 year presence.

Under the current German occupation of World War I, Daudet presented a fear
that was beyond physical well-being. He believed that one of the primary terrors of the
German occupation would be the suppression of the French language. Indeed, how could
a people, the French people, truly express their souls and hearts through a foreign
language? Daudet firmly believed that “[the] character, the genius—in the Latin
sense—of Germany, are nearly directly opposed to the genius of France.” Yet, the
German language, via musical influence and expression, was present in every aspect of
culture. The French passively accepted this influence and allowed it to continue, because,
according to Daudet: “According to the moral plan, they immediately concluded that it
would be futile to try to combat these invincible demons, that it is better to resign oneself
to admiring them.” Complacency was dangerous to Daudet. The French were
dazzled by the German confidence and the French culture would not stand a chance against the
German cultural conviction. Daudet explained the strength of German nationalism in
France by stating, “This intoxication of ethnic pride, of shared pride, comes from a
common intellectual intoxication for which we do not have an equivalent here and which

nos grand-pères.” Léon Daudet, Hors du joug Allemand: Mesures d’après-guerre (Paris:
143 Ibid., 38-39.
144 “Le caractère, le génie—au sens latin—de l’allemand, sont presque
directement opposés au génie du français.” Ibid., 43.
145 “Sur le plan moral, ils en concluent aussitôt qu’il serait bien vain d’essayer de
combattre ces démons, nécessairement invincibles, que mieux vaut se résigner à les subir
en les admirant.” Ibid., 66.
is directly related to the cult of mysterious powers of instinct,” an idea shared by Louis Bourcault-Ducoudray. As a result, the influence could only intensify as young people became engrossed in German education, science, and influence, bringing back the German ideas and exclaiming German superiority; Daudet cautioned: “Their example was contagious.”

The surrender of French intellectual ideas was disastrous and damaging, according to Daudet, and the greatest affront could be found in the music of Wagner.

The foreign intellectual influences, if they are strong and penetrating, dismantle a country in the same way that non-preparation for a war would, which moreover they contribute to. It would be absurd, and indeed impossible, to not know, to systematically ignore that which produces, in the order of the spirit, a strong neighbor. It is in the French temperament to welcome with benevolence, and even infatuation, artistic manifestations coming from outside. But it is dangerous to surrender, body and soul, to an enemy genius, especially when that genius has proved that it was the enemy, and in the most shocking way, especially when there is, in this genius, something irreducibly opposed to our national temperament. This is the case for the musical dramas of Wagner.

Daudet focused on the musical dramas of Wagner, and not necessarily all of his oeuvre, but, as we have seen, Wagner’s operas dominated French venues. Wagner did for

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146 “Cette griserie d’orgueil ethnique, d’orgueil en commun, est issue d’une ivresse intellectuelle en commun, est issue d’une ivresse intellectuelle dont nous n’avons pas chez nous l’équivalent et qui est directement reliée au culte des mystérieuses puissances de l’instinct.” Daudet, Hors du joug Allemand, 68.

147 “Leur exemple était contagieux.” Ibid., 77.

148 “Les influences intellectuelles étrangères, si elles sont fortes et pénétrantes, démantèlent un pays de la même façon que la non-préparation à la guerre, à laquelle du reste elles contribuent. Il serait absurd, et d’ailleurs impossible, de ne pas savoir, d’ignorer systématiquement ce que produit, dans l’ordre de l’esprit, un puissant voisin. Il est dans le temperament français d’accueillir avec bienveillance, et même avec engouement, les manifestations artistiques venues du dehors. Mais ils est dangereux de se livrer, cors et âme, à un génie ennemi, surtout quand ce génie a fait la preuve qu’il était ennemi, et de la façon la plus éclatante, surtout quand il y a, dans ce génie, quelque chose d’irréductiblement opposé à notre tempérament national. Ce fut le cas pour les drames musicaux de Richard Wagner.” Ibid., 74-75.
Germany that which no Frenchman had done for France: fill the artistic void. Daudet assessed:

All of this is of no importance in the presence of the fact that [Wagner] threw a sumptuous veil over the immense artistic shortage of his country between these two dates 1870-1914, and that he has in this way served Germany in all its might, with all his robust and captivating individuality.¹⁴⁹

Wagner did not merely create pleasing music that had the ability to dominate the musical scene. Wagner promoted the German cultural myth and legitimized its power. France did not champion its own history, so Daudet concluded:

Without [Wagner], the grand military and political effort of 1870-71 would not have had the same consequences, nor the same influence. His oeuvre, of which I do not discuss at all the educational power for contemporary Germany, is conscious and appropriate. Conscious, because this fierce accuser, suspicious of his compatriots, attached, like them, a considerable importance to the legendary sources, to the cultural value of the mythology and the sagas. Appropriate, because these excessive and savage adventures are bathed in the metaphysical-musical mist which suits the German temperament. They give the illusion of a great depth to the warring and mythical dream, as to the harmonic plan.¹⁵⁰

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¹⁴⁹ “Tout cela est de nulle importance en présence de ce fait qu’il a jeté un voile somptueux sur l’immense pénurie artistique de son pays entre ces deux dates 1870-1914, et qu’il a ainsi servi l’Allemagne de toutes ses forces, de toute sa robuste et captivante individualité.” Daudet, *Hors du joug Allemand*, 82.

¹⁵⁰ “Sans lui, le grand effort militaire et politique de 1870-71 n’aurait eu ni les mêmes conséquences, ni le même rayonnement. Son oeuvre, dont je ne discute nullement la puissance educative quant à l’Allemagne contemporaine, est consciente et appropriée. Consciente, car ce détracteur acharné des travers de ses compatriotes attachait, comme eux, une importance considérable aux sources légendaires, à la valeur ethnoplastique de la mythologie et des sagas. Appropriée, car ces aventures excessives et sauvages sont baignées dans la brume métaphysico-musicale qui convient au temperament germanique. Elles donnent l’illusion d’une grande profondeur sur le plan du rêve guerrier et mythique, comme sur le plan sonore.” Ibid., 84.
Daudet claimed that Wagner brought an aggressive character to national thought, which would only result in war, not the artistic enlightenment that one might think, because it was a logical fallacy to assume that Wagner’s heroism translated equally to France.

Daudet leveled several other accusations against Wagner, in the context of World War I and political turmoil. His rationale read as a political analysis of the German influence. Just as the focus on creating a French vocabulary became apparent, Daudet presented the damaging effect of the German language:

Nothing better demonstrates, more brutally, the fundamental noxiousness of Wagnerism than that intervention of the German Procrustes in our clear and noble syntax. From there to impose on us, on our opera houses, the German language itself, it is to say the boot of the victor of ’70, it was only a step and this step was taken.

Further:

These “motifs” of Wagner are military commands in the German language. They hold value only for Germans. But they are valid, in France, against the French. We do not lack, thank God, national trainers, adapted to our temperament, to our aspirations, and who will advantageously replace the Wagnerian cultural arts.

Daudet had some hope that the French could stand up to the German cultural aggression.

In fact, it was war itself that would aid in ridding France of Wagner, who was

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152 Ibid.
153 “Rien ne démontre mieux, plus brutalement, la nocivité foncière du wagnérisme que cette intervention du Procruste allemand dans notre claire et noble syntaxe. De là à nous imposer, sur nos scènes lyriques, le texte allemande lui-même, c’est-à-dire la botte du vainqueur de 70, il n’y avait qu’un pas et ce pas avait été franchi.” Ibid., 86.
154 “Ces ‘motifs’ de Wagner sont des commandements militaires en langue allemande. Ils ne valent que pour les Allemands. Mais ils valent, en France, contre les Français. / Nous ne manquons pas, Dieu merci, d’entraîneurs nationaux, adaptés à notre tempérament, à nos aspirations et qui remplaceront avantageusement l’ethnoplascique wagnérienne.” Ibid., 90.
“denationalizing and Germanizing our youths”:¹⁵⁵ “Let us congratulate ourselves that the war of 1914 should remove us from the dramatic-intellectual tyranny that weighed upon us.”¹⁵⁶ War and militarism had invaded all aspects of European culture and German methods were adopted throughout. Daudet asserted that if France did not take the necessary precautions, both political and intellectual, to take control of the situation, France’s security would be in jeopardy.¹⁵⁷

Daudet presented solutions to the political turmoil and these solutions mirrored the efforts begun in the academic in musical worlds. His first tenet stated: “A truly national State will entrust the task to its educators.”¹⁵⁸ Daudet recognized that French youth were the key factors in changing opinions; simple reduction of military forces only removed some German influence, which would return if German culture remained the predominant philosophical and cultural strength. Once they sifted through the “brumes allemandes” (German fog), the young French could return to the Latin methods of education, rather than the influence of Kant and other Germans, as the best way to find their national energy, “l’aliment ethnoplastique sans rival.”¹⁵⁹ Students could rejoice when they were no longer subjected to “barbaric” methods.¹⁶⁰ The best way, according to Daudet, to change the future was to have an understanding of the past: “There is no study more important that that of history no one which resounds more directly on the State and

¹⁵⁵ Daudet, Hors du joug Allemand, 92.
¹⁵⁶ “Félicitons-nous seulement de ce que la guerre de 1914 doive nous débarrasser cette tyrannie dramatique-intellectuelle. [sic] qui pesait sur nous.” Ibid., 93.
¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 117.
¹⁵⁸ “Un État vraiment national en confiera la tâche à ses éducateurs.” Ibid., 118.
¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 121.
¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 123.
the destiny of a people. History trumped all in providing the proper political and cultural direction for the French people.

Georges Jean-Aubry’s *French Music of Today*

Léon Daudet was in the anti-Wagner camp, but Georges Jean-Aubry, while not the complete opposite, did take a more forgiving stance towards Wagner’s genius and the ability of the French to regain their voice. Jean-Aubry was less concerned with “What is German?” and more concerned with “What is truly French?”

Jean-Aubry addressed the current situation of French music by introducing the attack on Wagner:

> Nowadays those who, a few months ago, were the least concerned with the efforts of our young composers have suddenly awakened to the possibility that France may possess a national music. We have seen M. Camille Saint-Saëns, whose age, and the quality of certain of whose works, gave him a natural right to our respect, engage in a violent attack upon Wagner and demand, in the name of French music, the restoration of compositions which have become definitely obsolete.¹⁶²

Jean-Aubry’s word choice, calling the attacks “violent” and French compositions “obsolete”, might lead a reader to assume he supported German music, and in a way, he did. Jean-Aubry thought it was somewhat ridiculous to imply that one must “belittle the genius of Richard Wagner” and claim that Beethoven is Flemish, just as people might say that César Franck had German heritage, and exclude the contributions of Haydn, Mozart or Schubert.¹⁶³ He believed: “The grandeur of German music from Bach to Wagner is a universal truth. But to-day we are concerned in the present, and truly, here we hold a

¹⁶³ Ibid., 5-6.
winning hand.” Jean-Aubry encouraged the French to recognize that exceptional music has value. However, he was not of the opinion that all German music was exceptional or that their culture had the only positive contributions in recent memory. Jean-Aubry praised the French effort: “Since 1870 two generations have succeeded by their works, by their critical labours, and by their social organisation [sic], in raising French music of today to a level higher than it has known for a century, where it is able to challenge comparison with the music of all the ages.”

History was important and Jean-Aubry felt it necessary to present his take on the German influence. There was a change in German music as the war approached:

The modern German orchestra, with Strauss and Mahler, was concerned more with the preoccupations of artillery and the siege train than with those of real music. The progress of German orchestration was always directed towards quantity and not towards the discovery of additional resources in the instruments.

This was his first assertion that the formerly grand sound of German music might be lacking something. He followed:

The modern German orchestra, with Strauss and Mahler, was concerned more with the preoccupations of artillery and the siege train than with those of real music. The progress of German orchestration was always directed towards quantity and not towards the discovery of additional resources in the instruments. It was often impossible at the first hearing of a work by Richard Strauss to resist this overpowering force, but, once the first assault had passed, the mind regained its self-possession and awakened to the emotional inanity and the absence of real musical substance.

The phrase “absence of real musical substance” highlighted Jean-Aubry’s main idea: substance comes from emotional content and not from size. Contemporaries seemed to

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165 Ibid., 7.
166 Ibid., 10-11.
ignore the quality of music being produced in France, instead choosing to follow the trends touted in newspapers.¹⁶⁷ Yet, France could stand up on its own:

…France of to-day from Saint-Saëns and Gabriel Fauré to Maurice Ravel, has produced the chamber music that is richest in emotional, picturesque, and lasting qualities, as well as the symphonic music best qualified to take up, with all the resources of French feeling and intelligence, the legacy of German classical genius in the kingdom of sound.¹⁶⁸

Indeed, for Jean-Aubry, “[the] French mind is rich enough not to fear outside influences but to assimilate them.” Rather than mimicking the German sound, Jean-Aubry encouraged the French composers to interpret these foreign characteristics and use them for their strengths.

Jean-Aubry joined many of his fellow critics in the belief that and understanding of the French past was pivotal in appreciating contemporary French music. Young composers were vital in providing the sentiment lacking on music:

In their delicate and subtle diversity these composers, sons of a period of deep and powerful sentiments, reflecting a time of misgivings that have reached the certainty of conflict, lovers of mystery and obsessed by clearness, witnesses of a feverish movement alike of ardour and of irony, had unveiled to us the harmonious, smiling yet grave, features of a race whose greatness it has needed this blood-steeped experience to reveal in its fulness [sic]. They affirmed the grounds of our belief in the lasting existence of French music.¹⁶⁹

Young artists had the ability to look back at the history of French greatness and interpret it in a new voice. The past gained a glow that was untainted by German influence:

But there comes a moment when our glance, falling upon a more distant time, reveals to us a resemblance in the past and a thousand sympathies in common. At first we experience a certain impatience. It does not please us to think that we have invented nothing and that we have merely rekindled ashes that were aglow

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 12.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 15.
but neglected. Then these links that bind us to the past acquire in our eyes great
charm, since, if the objects of our affection are not born solely of ourselves, at
least we are not without claims upon this mysterious past.  

This left France to embrace tradition—their tradition. Jean-Aubry described tradition in
terms of emotion and culture, aside from political influence:

[Tradition] is aggregate of the characteristics deeply inherent to a race, tradition
inevitably reveals itself in works in which race is expressed with conscious
ingeniousness of sincere art… In the course of centuries foreign additions may
accrue to the racial inheritance, but if the race be strong these foreign elements are
absorbed, take a new shape, and reveal more than ever the particular quality of the
national tradition… At times the race appears to become languid, and it accepts
foreign modes of expression in excessive measure; but in a race like our own such
periods are fruitful in reflection, and do not last…Then an entire people becomes
active and its activity makes short work of restoring the links with its tradition, for
the art-forms necessarily renew themselves, but the essential forms of a race are
not effaced… It is by its traditional quality that work of art lives. To link up
tradition it is necessary to go to the very roots of the thought and feeling of a
people… For all French minds desiring beauty, for every sensitive soul that is
captivated by French beauty, the present age represents a longed-for movement in
musical history: the return to the French tradition.  

If this was true, Jean-Aubry questioned why the public and musical world ignored such
quality music. His answer was simple—they were ignored because they were French:

Meanwhile these are works of charm, feeling, often deep whilst charming, which
prove that we have had in France a period of admirable musicians who were
deeply and delightfully French…During more than a century these musicians
have been forgotten. Those who knew them despised them, believing them to be
superficial and negligible minds, remote from the taste of the day. If they were
remote from the taste it was for an excellent reason: they were delicately and
really French, and for more than a century there had been no French music in
France.  

Excellent music, and true French music, should be rooted in the French tradition of the
sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century. Jean-Aubry’s assessment of Claude

171 Ibid., 22-23. [emphasis my own]
172 Ibid., 24.
Debussy provided a link between his view of the earlier centuries and the position of contemporary musicians:

Through [Debussy] there has been a return of clear, delicate, expressive, and emotional feeling, of the intellectual quality and supple spirit that is as appropriate to tenderness as to a smile: in short, all that is characteristic of the true precursors of present-day music, the old minstrels equally with our masters of the Renaissance, our clavecinists from Chambonnières to Dandrieu, and also Jean-Philippe Rameau. There is between them and Claude Debussy the difference that is inherent to the evolution of centuries, but one and all give, as do our works of literary and plastic art, the standard of that which is commonly termed the French genius.173

Jean-Aubry’s “French genius” lay in both the past and the present, in the two eras where France had a unique, emotional voice. Above all:

For those who will come later to study the movement of musical thought, the coalition of efforts directed, towards 1875, to the rejuvenation of French musical expression, or rather the liberation of a truly French form of music from the midst of foreign importations which submerged it, will be one of the most singular and engrossing spectacles.174

**Thoughts on the Aesthetic**

Our contemporary era often supports attacks on outside influences. Labeling something as “nationalist” can have a negative connotation as it is frequently used in rhetoric to emphasize superiority. Admittedly, the French effort did have a sense of ethnocentricity; the country was known to be anti-Semitic and the primary reason to establish an aesthetic code was to eliminate the German influence. However, the French nationalist power came from the arts, not weapons. The country drew strength from its past cultural achievements, not from economic and political might. The new aesthetic

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174 Ibid., 74.
would allow composers to promote their work with the support of history for validity. This aesthetic also permitted composers, like Poulenc, to incorporate a sense of spirituality and emotion into their works. French music was no less valid because it contained the order of classicism and the emotion of the modern era.

These are many ways to discuss the new aesthetic and these selected terms are only a starting point. The aesthetic terms are not specific to Francis Poulenc but are appropriate and relevant criticisms of the music of his time. They will provide a vocabulary to discuss Poulenc within this time period and establish a connection between his style and the style that critics heard and observed.
CHAPTER TWO

THE FRENCHMAN POULENC AND HIS STYLE

The musical tenets established by the French government would find their own influence in Poulenc. Poulenc’s creative output fully expressed his own sense of nationalism, and as a result, his music was so clearly in his own voice that Arthur Honneger stated: “At each instant, a melodic contour, a harmonic sequence that we must say, ‘It is very Poulenc.’”

Poulenc’s personal sense of nationalism was shaped by his identification as a musician first and a man who loved Paris second.

Poulenc’s Early Life

Poulenc, born in 1899, came from a middle class family and grew up in post-Dreyfus France. His mother and uncle instilled a love of the arts in the young Poulenc and he began his piano instruction at age five. Poulenc’s mother kept her treasured scores of Schumann at the piano, as Poulenc kept adding to his own collection of Stravinsky, Bartók, and Schoenberg. By his mid teens, Poulenc had attended numerous poetry readings at Aux Amis Livres and gained an appreciation for the words of Paul

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Valéry, André Gide, Paul Claudel, and Guillaume Apollinaire. Poulenc was fascinated by the greats of the new French musical scene, taking every opportunity to hear their music and attend public events. The star-struck Poulenc even played a prank on his idols: Poulenc wrote to Debussy, Saint-Saëns, Satie, Stravinsky, and Albert Roussel, asking their opinion on Franck, just so that he could get their autographs. Poulenc later remarked to Claude Rostand:

…it was unquestionably Debussy who awoke me to music, but it was Stravinsky who then served as my guide, as a father-figure. In fact, there’s not much Debussyism in my music, whereas you constantly feel the presence of the great Igor. From Stravinsky’s Protean output, each of us has drawn the leaven of his personality from works of the most diverse kind.

His mentor and piano teacher Ricard Viñes broadened Poulenc’s circle of influence and introduced Poulenc to his dear friends George Auric and Erik Satie, as well as Arthur Honegger, Louis Durey, and Germaine Tailleferre.

**The Approaching Second World War**

Poulenc served in the French military twice: first as a young man during World War I, a war for which France was highly regarded for its bravery, and again during the first few months of France’s unsuccessful involvement in World War II. In January 1936, the Right fell to the Left due to an alliance between the Popular Front, the socialist party, and the communist party. The Maison de la Culture supported the Popular Front and

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177 Ivry, *Francis Poulenc*, 17.
178 Ibid., 22.
Poulenc was not fully behind their policies\textsuperscript{181} or the socialist policies of Léon Blum and his party.\textsuperscript{182} In 1936, the Maison de la Culture sponsored a performance of \textit{Quatorze Juillet}, a play by Roman Rolland, with music by Milhaud, Roussel, Honneger, Auric, Ibert, and Koechlin.\textsuperscript{183} Poulenc wrote to his friend Marie-Blanche de Polignac in August 1936:

\ldots I am not the Popular Front. Am I wrong. I am an old French republican who believed in liberty. I hate M. de La Rocque (President of the ligue des Croix-de-Feu, violent opposition to Front Populaire) but I liked well enough M. Loubet (former president of the Repbulic 1899-1906). For me the Republic, do you see, was men like Clemenceau (leader of Radical Party, led France during WWI), a testament to which I often think. Stand!!!!!!\textsuperscript{184}

The political and economic climate was plagued by poor productivity, a succession of leaders, and the impending threat from the European dictatorships. Poulenc recognized the emerging difficulties and complained to George Auric: “I do not like this time where one feels so little at liberty!!”\textsuperscript{185}

Poulenc returned to Catholicism in 1936, following the death of a close friend, and the spiritual and religious nature of his writing was present during this compositional period. The Action Française and writers like Léon Bloy and Léon Daudet “aggressively promoted” a militant style of Catholicism during the 1930s, grouping it with fascism and

\textsuperscript{181} Carl B. Schmidt, \textit{Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc} (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2001), 221-222.
\textsuperscript{182} Ivry, \textit{Francis Poulenc}, 86.
\textsuperscript{183} Schmidt, \textit{Entrancing Muse}, 221-222.
\textsuperscript{185} “Je n’aime pas cette époque où on se sent si peu libre!!” Ibid., 425.
nationalism.\textsuperscript{186} However, Poulenc turned to Catholicism as a spiritual release and the best outlet for his conflicting feelings. His “religious fervor was self-imposed and sincere, and it remained with him, revealing greater depth in his character and musical style.”\textsuperscript{187} At this same time, Poulenc heard frequent concerts of early choral music and Monteverdi madrigals performed by Nadia Boulanger’s ensemble.\textsuperscript{188} These concerts, as well as others by the Chanteurs de Croix Bois, inspired Poulenc to write motets for Holy Week. He announced the motets in a letter to Paul Collaer in 1938:

I will soon send you a part of a motet, the first of a series, which I adore. If you knew how pleasant it is to feel supported by religious inspiration while we still have all its ‘meaning’. This helps me in a way to work through this horrible time. I must also admit that the Catholic position is the most humane in the time of oppression.\textsuperscript{189}

His composition of the motets on the eve of World War II reflected the rising tension.

Benjamin Ivry noted:

In these liturgical works for holy week, Poulenc set the tragedy that France and the rest of Europe were experiencing in a historical, religious context. The air of sadness and defeat in these works…approaches the gloom of some African-American spirituals, and the impression created is of the depressed, frozen horror of Frenchmen who had experiences World War I and who now saw a second war coming.\textsuperscript{190}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[186] Ivry, Francis Poulenc, 101.
\item[188] Ivry, Francis Poulenc, 97.
\item[189] “Je vous enverrai d’ici peu un motet, le premier d’une série, auquel je tiens beaucoup. Si vous saviez comme c’est doux de se sentir soutenu par un inspiration religieuse alors qu’on a encore tous ses ‘sens’. Cela m’aide autant à travailler qu’à traverser cette horrible époque. Il faut d’ailleurs avouer que la position catholique est la plus humaine par ces temps d’oppression.” Poulenc, Correspondance, 470.
\item[190] Ivry, Francis Poulenc, 112.
\end{footnotes}
Poulenc dreaded the thought of war, disagreeing with European escalation because it hindered his ability to perform and compose.\textsuperscript{191} His reaction to the war might be considered self-centered, given that his friends like Wanda Landowska and Darius Milhaud were forced into exile; however, “[this] sort of detailed obliteration of culture revolted Poulenc.\textsuperscript{192} The war would be a complicated time for Poulenc as it was a gray area in terms of collaboration. Poulenc did not actively support or pander to German occupiers like Cocteau or Honegger, but he did not necessarily speak against the aggression, given the focus on his career.\textsuperscript{193} Poulenc lamented the loss of Jewish contributions to the French art scene. Later in 1943, after Vichy racial laws sent French Jews to concentration camps,\textsuperscript{194} Poulenc wrote to André Jolivet:

> It is in thinking of the future, that with optimism I foresee without terror, that I find the taste to compose, because the mediocrity of today’s public admits that it has nothing exciting. Without being a Philo-Semite, I must admit that the Jewish yeast is indispensable for leavening the pastry of concerts…”\textsuperscript{195}

For Poulenc, France was intact as long as her culture remained strong. Strength came from the ability to freely and actively create and experience music.

The constant threat of physical and creative assaults plagued Poulenc as war approached. Poulenc frequently wrote to friends throughout the year of 1939, concerned that he was not able to create: “…I do not have the heart to plunk at the piano I say to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[191] Schmidt, \textit{Entrancing Muse}, 222.
\item[192] Ivry, \textit{Francis Poulenc}, 117.
\item[193] Ibid., 119.
\item[194] Ibid.
\item[195] “C’est en penser à l’avenir, qu’avec optimisme j’envisage sans effroi, que je trouve le goût de composer, car la médiocrité actuelle du public avouez-le n’a rien d’excitant. Sans être philosémite, il faut bien avouer que le levain juif est indispensable pour faire lever la pâte à flan des concerts…” Poulenc, \textit{Correspondance}, 543.
\end{footnotes}
even work.”\textsuperscript{196} Poulenc knew that he would eventually be recalled to the army. He was a military reservist with the Center for the Organization of Artillery in the Defense Against Airplanes (C.O.D. de D.C.A.) since 1934, first in his home of Noizay and then later in Tours.\textsuperscript{197} Again, Poulenc did not worry about the military complications of deployment. Rather, Poulenc told Simon Girard in September 1939: “Me I would gladly and voluntarily sacrifice a leg or two if I could keep my hands.”\textsuperscript{198} Poulenc received orders that he would be deployed in September 1939. He wrote to Nadia Boulanger upon his initials orders:

> What melancholy to say that we write short because we don’t have the time to write great. Obviously I think ceaselessly about music, about my music, about all the music that I love as well as that which I do not like. Since I am not in a heroic posture I can adopt another attitude. No that’s not it. Have you imagined what music will be after the war.\textsuperscript{199}

Germany invaded Paris on June 14, 1940, and it was determined that the northern part of France would be occupied territory and the southern part would remain a free-zone. Vichy, the southern zone, gave power to Maréchal Pétain on July 10\textsuperscript{th} and Poulenc feared for his home in Noizay: “I know nothing of Noizay. Maybe my house is in cinders

\textsuperscript{196} “…je n’ai pas le coeur même à pianoter je ne dis bien entendu pas travailler.” Poulenc, \textit{Correspondance}, 481.

\textsuperscript{197} Schmidt, \textit{Entrancing Muse}, 261.

\textsuperscript{198} “Moi je sacrifierais bien volontiers une jambe ou deux si je gardais mes mains.” Poulenc, \textit{Correspondance}, 481.

\textsuperscript{199} “Quelle mélancolie de se dire qu’on écrit court parce qu’on n’a pas le temps d’écrire grand. Bien entendu je pense sans cesse à la musique, à ma musique, à toutes les musiques que j’aime et même à celles que je n’aime pas. Puisque je ne suis pas en posture héroïque puis-je adopter une autre attitude. Non n’est-ce pas. Avez-vous imaginé ce que sera la musique d’après guerre.” Ibid., 482-483.
but that does not matter since Paris is intact.” Poulenc mobilized with the C.O.A. de D.C.A. on June 2nd, but he was sent home by July 18th following the treaty between the German government and the French government headed by Pétain. Poulenc’s unit had little to do but wait and this gave Poulenc the time to reflect on the beauty of the countryside, which he described as “so French”:  

In a word I am happy. Yes, “I have my hands” that which I repeat at length during the days with exhilaration. Paris is intact…I have confidence in the future, in our team and above all I feel full of music. I have found a thousand themes and all of the color of my ballet [Les Animaux modèles]. The absence of a piano has been advantageous to me. This country pleases me. The air is light. I live with countrymen who give me confidence.  

Poulenc was grateful that his short deployment was uneventful and that he emerged unharmed: “These 5 weeks of deployment have done me an enormous good. I am ready to cheerfully face my after-war production. I would like to become a grrrrrand [sic] honest musician—always very honest—and worker.” For the time being Poulenc believed that he would be free to write, contrary to his earlier fears.

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200 “Je ne sais rien de Noizay. Peut-être ma maison est-elle en cendres mais cela n’a pas d’importance puisque Paris est intact.” Poulenc, Correspondance, 496.  
201 Schmidt, Entrancing Muse, 266.  
202 Poulenc, Correspondance, 498.  
203 “En un mot je suis heureux. Oui, ‘J’ai mes mains’ voilà ce que je me répète à longueur de journées avec ivresse. Paris est intact…J’ai confiance dans l’avenir, dans notre team et de plus je me sens plein de musique. J’ai trouvé mille thèmes et toute la couleur de mon ballet. L’absence de piano m’est même salutaire. Ce pays me plaît. L’air est léger. Je vis avec des paysans qui me donnent confiance.” Ibid., 498.  
Composing During the War

Poulenc began his time during the French Occupation with a sense of energy and humor. Critics over the past several decades had tried to reorganize French concert programs and Poulenc cheerfully commented to Henri Sauguet in August 1940: “It is evident that our Franco-German programs will be less difficult to establish than our Franco-English concerts!” In the same letter, Poulenc relayed the lists of friends and colleagues currently in the army, in the occupied zone—and those who were imprisoned. Poulenc toyed with audiences in his ballet Les Animaux modèles, as he told Claude Rostand:

The ballet was produced on 8 August 1942—the German Occupation completely reorganized the theatre calendar. You can imagine an audience of German officers and secretaries in ‘dull grey’ watching a show that was so typically French. I gave myself the treat, recognized only by some members of the orchestra, of including the popular song ‘Non, non, vous n’aurez pas notre Alsace-Lorraine’ into the fight between the two cocks. Each time the trumpet started out on the tune, I couldn’t help smiling.

However, by 1943 Poulenc confessed to suffering from a lack of inspiration and difficulty writing. The political climate was worsening in France as the northern territory struggled with oppressive German occupation. Poulenc was safe in Noizay, but his friends had less comfortable surroundings. André Jolivet confided in Poulenc:

…but in Paris I do not know the calm that you enjoy in the country. In this retreat, you are able to see higher ideals and to think to the future. Here we are eroded by the present, drowned in the immediate, but an immediate fleeting feeling and who, because of actual circumstances, has a propensity to transform himsself into

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205 “Il est évident que nos programmes franco-allemands seront moins difficiles à établir que nos concerts franco-anglais!” Poulenc, Correspondance, 503.
206 Poulenc and Roland, Articles and Interviews, 207.
the mediate, leaves us only with the bitter taste of vain agitations of our lost hours.  

This was the setting for Poulenc’s decision to compose a cantata, *Figure humaine*, FP 120, for the French awaiting Liberation. Poulenc would later say of his cantata:

In 1943, when so many beings came to be imprisoned, deported, and even shot, and you imagine what it was like for me to see the *vert-de-gris* [Nazis] parade through my dear Paris…she [*Figure humaine*] was capable of moving an entire public who did not know what—fortunately for them—an “occupation” was.  

Poulenc’s goal was to create a composition that would celebrate the future, one hopeful for Liberation.

Poulenc first mentioned the cantata in a July 1943 letter to Marie-Blanche de Polignac:

I work patiently. A few measures begin to come here and there. I am writing a cantata for double choir acappella (ordered for Belgium) on some admirable poems, for the instant censured, by Éluard. This will be, in my spirit, a choral manner like *Tel jour*. I have found two or three small sections not bad. [It is] a style very pure with no affection in writing the variety coming solely from the musical expression. It is very difficult.

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207 “…mais à Paris je ne connais pas le calme que vous goûtez à la campagne. Dans cette retraite, vous pouvez voir les choses de haut et penser à l’avenir. Ici on est grignoté par le présent, noyé dans l’immédiate, mais un immédiat fuyant et qui, du fait des circonstances actuelles, a une propension à se transformer en médiat, ne nous laissant que le goût amer des agitations vaines et des heures perdues.” Poulenc, *Correspondance*, 544.


Poulenc’s first task was to find poetry that evoked the proper nationalist spirit, given his focus on expressive text. Poulenc found inspiration in his friend Paul Éluard, a poet whose work was supported by the Resistance. There were various stories of the work’s inspiration and origin. A Belgian chorus approached Poulenc in 1942 about using the poem “Liberté” by Éluard as the basis for a work that would be secretly rehearsed during the occupation and premiered directly after Liberation. Poulenc was one of a privileged few to receive a full copy of the poetry and he saw Éluard’s poetry as “…an act of national and political belief. It [was] a symbol of hope and of combat.”

Poulenc also mentioned in an interview that he was asked by M. Screpel (director of the Company of Discophiles) to set the poem Liberté from the 1942 Poésie et Vérité by Éluard. In May 1943, Poulenc came across a Swiss edition of the poetry, with the idea of performing a composition immediately after Liberation. Regardless of the story, it became very clear to Poulenc that he should compose a choral cantata based on the complete text, Poulenc identified his compositional motivation: “[Éluard], who has given me the possibility to musically express love, offers me during the occupation, the means to sing my hope.”

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211 Poulenc, Correspondance, 537.
212 Lacombe, “Puissance expressive,” 214.
213 Ibid., 214.
214 Poulenc, Correspondance, 537-538.
An August 1943 letter to Pierre Bernac outlined Poulenc’s original concept for Figure humaine:

It must have around 200 persons. This work is for Belgium. The music truly sticks to the words and they have suggested to me some curious inflections. It is truly necessary to understand Éluard’s rhythm as I would know it in order to sort it out. You see here the gymnastic modulations and the precision of inflections. Definitively I believe that I found it. There is in any case a grand unity owed to the unique sense of the poems.  

Beyond the poetry, the human voice was the other central figure behind the music. Poulenc made a conscious decision to use the human voice over instruments because of the voice’s ability to connect to the listener, which allowed the choir to represent the “breath of humanity.”  

Choral music, as a community effort, was central to the French aesthetic and Poulenc’s cantata fit into this model. Resistance poetry generally showed love and fraternity, often viewed as masculine traits better suited for a men’s chorus, but Poulenc’s goal was to bring out the ideas of hope, peace, and liberty in Éluard’s text, and he therefore added the feminine element with the mixed chorus.  

Taken as whole, Etcharry stated that “[the] choir represent[ed] then the social and political voice, the voice of engagement,” which illustrated Poulenc’s commitment to the French style.

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216 “Il faudra donc environ 200 personnes. C’est vous dire que cette œuvre est pour la Belgique. La musique colle vraiment aux mots et ceux-ci m’ont suggéré de curieuses inflexions. Il faut vraiment connaître le rythme d’Éluard comme je le connais pour s’en sortir…Vous voyez d’ici la gymnastique des modulations et la précision des inflexions. En définitive je crois que c’est trouvé. Il y a en tout cas une grand unité due au sens unique des poèmes.” Poulenc, Correspondance, 539.
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217 Lacombe, “Puissance expressive,” 217.
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219 Ibid., 192.
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Poulenc completed the cantata in late 1943 and was immensely satisfied with his effort. He shared the completed work with several of his friends, who were equally amazed by the cantata’s power. Claude Roy was one of the first to express his heartfelt reaction in April 1944:

I am not a musician, nor a technician of music. I would not know how to speak with you of your art as it was necessary. I would simply like to thank you. You sing in the dark where we are as we sing to be unafraid. And we no longer fear. We know that there is always in your music, and then elsewhere, many sources, many kindnesses (and forces), much gravity and joy. We know that there is always France.\textsuperscript{220}

Poulenc wrote to Pierre Bernac thanking him for Bernac’s assertion that “…our France will need a little bit of [Poulenc]” because “[there] is an \textit{obligation} for French song.”\textsuperscript{221} France was battered by the war and the cantata lifted Poulenc’s spirits as he saw Germans in his beloved countryside and realized the toll of the war:

After that we wonder why we write music…Happily there is a work, one that maybe proves that I was made to write music, this is my Cantata on poems of Éluard of which I have a secret copy here. I play it every day and it thwarts my worst bad humor, my most cutting critics, by its honesty and its faith…\textsuperscript{222}

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\textsuperscript{221}“…notre France aura besion un peu de moi” “C’est en plus un devoir pour le chant français.” Ibid., 557.
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\textsuperscript{222}“Après cela on se demande pourquoi on écrit la musique…Heureusement il y a une oeuvre, une seule peut-être qui me prouve que j’ai bien fait d’écrire de la musique, c’est ma Cantate sur les poèmes d’Éluard dont je possède ici un exemplaire secret. Je la joue chaque jour et elle déjoue ma pire mauvaise humeur, mes plus acerbes critiques, par sa probité et sa foi…” Ibid., 563.
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There was some remorse that Poulenc should not feel such joy while others suffered, as he told Bernac: “It is only night at home. When I dream that Noizay is so intact I am a little ashamed. I hope that *Figure humaine* and *Les Mamelles* will be enough of a tribute to France.” However, *Figure humaine* provided Poulenc with a sense of achievement in the war effort: “The day the Americans arrived I stood triumphantly under my flat, at my window, the Cantata on the desk of my studio.” *Figure humaine* would not be premiered until March 1945 during a recorded concert for the BBC, but Poulenc had achieved his goal of creating a work that would celebrate a liberated France and validate his efforts as a musician.

**The Aesthetic Influences of Poulenc’s Choral Style**

Poulenc wrote a significant portion of his choral music between 1936 and 1948, highlighting the importance of the two World Wars and the interwar period. As Honneger expressed, Poulenc had a distinctive voice and Poulenc used his voice to become a major figure in the French choral scene and a voice for the French people:

> Like his predecessors, Poulenc transforms the chanson into a miniscule sketch, with a vocal dialogue, in a subtle harmonic decoration…As the outcome of popular inspiration, his impulsive harmonizations enter immediately into the repertoire of the numerous choirs born from the activism of the occupation years.

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223 “Il n’est chez lui que la nuit. Quand je songe que Noizay est si totalement intact je me sens un peu honteux. J’espère que Figure humaine et Les Mamelles seront un tribute de Français suffisant.” Poulenc, *Correspondance*, 574.

224 “Le jour de l’arrivée des Américains j’ai posé triomphalement sous mon drapeau, à ma fenêtre, la Cantate sur le pupitre du studio.” Ibid., 574.

225 Lespinard, “L’œuvre chorale de Poulenc,” 139-140.

226 Ibid., 149.
His works were immediately considered part of the choral culture in both France and the Anglo-Saxon, English speaking, world. Poulenc drew from the artistic guidelines of his time and the new aesthetic and connected to the people during these occupation years by exploring differences in text, sound, and the preconception of the French music.

Poulenc and his contemporaries were not necessarily trying to create a new music, but rather sought to reinvent the previous styles. As previously discussed, the various musical institutions decided that the most pure music was early music, in the style of Renaissance composers such as Le Jeune or Clement. The majority of Poulenc’s vocal pieces can be seen as modern re-imaginings of sixteenth-century works, with a clear link to the Renaissance. Ivry noted:

Poulenc went against the examples of Debussy and Ravel, who wrote acappella choral works using old texts, or texts in the antique style. Poulenc chose to be resolutely modern in applying modern poetry to the ancient tradition of French polyphonic music of the Renaissance, part-songs at which composers like Janequin and Le Jeune excelled.

Poulenc also made the important link to modernity by drawing from Stravinsky and Chabrier in his vocal style. Poulenc had a deep respect for musical tradition, but he was always conscious of his own voice in the sound. He affirmed his connection to the past in an October 1942 letter to Andre Schaeffner:

I know very well that I am not one of those musicians who would have innovated harmony like Igor, Ravel or Debussy but I think there is a place for new music

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227 Lespinard, “L’œuvre chorale de Poulenc,” 150.
228 Albright, Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303-305.
229 Ibid., 289.
230 Lespinard, “L’œuvre chorale de Poulenc,” 140.
231 Ivry, Francis Poulenc, 97.
232 Albright, Untwisting the Serpent, 291-292.
which contains chords of others. Wasn’t this the case with Mozart, Schubert. The times will reinforce moreover the personality of my harmonic style. Didn’t one believe for a long time that Ravel, the little master, was a successor to Debussy and nothing else.\textsuperscript{233}

Poulenc also credited Bach’s chorales as influencing his “more harmonic than contrapuntal” approach to choral writing.\textsuperscript{234} Some critics, such as Boris de Schloezer and Koechlin, debated whether returning to the clean functionality of Bach was appropriate for modern musicians. Poulenc was on the side of André Coeuroy who insisted: “’Back to Bach’ is a guide-post at the entrance to modern music, like “Impressionism” at the entrance to Debussy’s domain. It is not a definition; it is a password. It does not explain; it directs.”\textsuperscript{235} Poulenc considered himself a “Latin” who followed traditional ideas in a modern way, but avoided the romantic extravagance of the German style. His interviews with Claude Roland explained his point of view:

Claude Rostand: To begin with, in the most general sense, it follows from everything you’ve said that you’re essentially and exclusively a Latin, even to the point of not being ashamed of certain Latin faults. On this front you are, on the contrary, fairly resistant in your music to everything that belongs, however closely or distantly, to the Germanic soul—even if there are some aspects of this for which you may feel admiration.

Francis Poulenc: My dear Claude, authenticity demands that one has the defects of one’s qualities. So I don’t disown my Latin faults, just as I don’t advise Hindemith to disown his Germanic ones. These often form the strongest element in our character. You know Picasso’s remark: “ Cultivate what people blame you

\textsuperscript{233}“Je sais très bien que je ne suis pas de ces musiciens qui auront innové harmoniquement comme Igor, Ravel ou Debussy mais je pense qu’il y a place pour la musique neuve qui se contente des accords des autres. N’était-ce pas le cas de Mozart, Schubert. La temps renforcera d’ailleurs la personnalité de mon style harmonique. N’avez-vous pas cru pendant longtemps que Ravel, petit maître, était un épigone de Debussy et rien de plus.” Poulenc, \textit{Correspondance}, 532.

\textsuperscript{234}Poulenc, \textit{Moi et mes amis}, 41.

for, that’s you.” Certainly nothing is further away from me than the German spirit, but I can admire what I don’t like and even what I detest. That’s where I differ from dear Milhaud. So I shall never exclaim like him, ‘Down with Wagner!’, but I certainly hope I’ll never in my lifetime have to listen again to Die Meistersinger...French composers, in the pursuit of elegance, disguise their structural plans that Central Europe blames us for our lack of form. When form (from beyond the Rhine) spills over into French music, it drowns it: look at the sonatas of d’Indy or Dukas, sunk without trace, while those apparently frail barks, the Debussy and Ravel piano pieces, defy the tornados of fashion.

CR: “Latin too is your way of being more versatile and fluid than the Germans: you have two faces that are opposite and apparently quite contrary to each other: the believer and the pagan...”

Poulenc’s opinions on music were rooted in the aesthetic conversation of his day.

However, whether he found inspiration from his celebrated French contemporaries or “[whether] through his chansons or Figure humaine, his writing, which [owed] itself to Monteverdi, Janequin, and Ravel, [returned] an eminently choral music which only [belonged] to him.” His contribution to the new aesthetic and French canon of music had the desired roots to tradition and the French nation.

**Text in Poulenc’s Choral Style**

Patriotic texts and the French language were central tools in promoting a nationalist sentiment and Poulenc was one of the best supporters of France’s poets and the expression of the French language. Poulenc prized the intelligibility of the text, both linguistically and in the overall sense, without any artificiality in the diction or a regulation of the poem, and he chose to use the language to its full potential in the

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236 Poulenc and Roland, *Articles and Interviews*, 245-246.

French was a different language than German, and there was an initiative to develop the technique for setting the modern French language and poetry, in order to match the new aesthetic. Poulenc desired to translate the French language, notoriously unaccented, into a musical image, movement, or idea through the poetic sense and the naturalness of the word. Choral settings stressed homophonic and syllabic declamation of the text, an attempt to match the rhythm of the poetry. Poulenc’s goal was to make the text a personal, physical experience for the performer and the listener, as evidenced by discussions about text in his letters.

Poulenc stated: “[The text] is surely that which I have done the best for choirs…The music truly sticks to the words and they have suggested some curious inflections to me…And definitively, I believe that they are well placed.” He wanted the musical experience to be intimately tied to the poetic and French voices of Guillaume Apollinaire, Paul Valéry, and Paul Éluard. Listeners connected to the thoughts, nationalist and otherwise, of the poets through Poulenc’s natural setting of the text.

Madeleine Ley wrote in a November 1936 letter to Poulenc: “One never really sees music so well suited to the text—and it is marvelous, the faithfulness with which you follow the idea, the very soul of a child (who is the poet in the most pure state, isn’t it?)” Ley continued, emphasizing the natural, physical sense of Poulenc’s ability to set text:

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238 Lespinard, “L’œuvre chorale de Poulenc,” 150.
242 “On ne voit presque jamais de musique bien adaptée à des paroles—et c’est merveilleux cette fidélité avec laquelle vos suivez la pensée, l’âme même de l’enfant (qui est le poète à l’état pur, n’est-ce pas?” Poulenc, Correspondance, 436.
When I recite poetry (while walking) I always sing it to myself, in order to be sure of the rhythm, and with you here the smallest nuances of the sentiment are exactly how I would have wished if I had been able to musically discover what I wanted. I would not have thought that another ravishing combination would be possible!  

Poulenc’s ability to find the true nature of the text was important in the nationalist view of music. Stéphan Etcharry explained:

By elevating the musical/poetic relationship to such a degree of perfection—and notably thanks to figuralisms—, the secular acappella choruses of Francis Poulenc, adapted to a French aesthetic…

France went through the process of determining the lineage of French music and it was necessary to find musical ways to get to the true nature of the French sound and voice. Éluard, Poulenc’s choice for several choral works, was a surrealist known for his “free association of unrelated words, and simultaneousness.” Éluard provided with Poulenc with the opportunity to focus his talent for text setting, as Keith Daniel determined:

“Unlike the poetry of Apollinaire, Jacob, and Cocteau, which Poulenc felt was often in need of lyric expansion, Éluard’s poetry is inherently lyrical, yet it perhaps needs some clarification by the musical phrasing and mood.” Poulenc’s primary goal was to create a French, emotional setting of the text.

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243 “Lorsque je fais des poesies (en promenade) je me les chante toujours en moi-même, pour être sûre du rythme, et par vous voilà que les moindres nuances du sentiment sont exactement ce que j’aurais souhaité si j’avais pu découvrir musicalement ce que je voulais!” Poulenc, Correspondance, 436.
244 Etcharry, “Le figuralisme dans la music profane,” 212.
245 Daniel, Artistic Development, 37.
246 Ibid., 39-40.
Structural and Harmonic Characteristics of Poulenc’s Choral Style

Poulenc’s formal and harmonic style was also based in the modern French aesthetic, at the same time that it was altered to fit his own sensibilities. Phrase structure stands out as one of the first aural components to be noticed. Daniel noted: “Poulenc’s formal structures are quite conservative, reflecting the neoclassic tendency to hark back to the conventions of the early eighteenth century.”

Poulenc’s ideas tended to be grouped into small phrases, one building upon the other. This usage of cellular writing featured “a one- or two-measure motive (melodic or harmonic) which is immediately repeated before giving way to the next idea.” As a result, the overall form becomes “additive rather than developmental,” which was decidedly anti-romantic and supported assessments of modern music, such as this by Coeuroy:

Modern music has deliberately renounced thematic development, that powerfully emphasized rhetoric of the classic and romantic eras; it likes to proceed by juxtaposition, a process that the Belgian Désiré Paque expresses by the phrase “l’adjonction constate” (reinforcement establishes), and that the Italian Malipiero terms “a continuous outgusing [sic] of ideas.”

Within this short, repeated phrase structure, we find Poulenc chose tuneful neoclassical melodic fragments. Poulenc’s choral works focused on two melodic styles: “On the one hand, we find melodic lines that are composed of fragmentary motives; on the other hand, we see simply a succession of harmonies within which a melody may or may not be discernible.”

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247 Daniel, Artistic Development, 58.
248 Ibid., 59.
249 Ibid.
251 Daniel, Artistic Development, 70.
diatonic rules. However, the voices as a unit created a melodic idea that mixed major and minor modes with chromatic inflections. “As a result, the “vast majority of Poulenc’s music is unambiguously tonal” and the phrase and melodic structures created a harmony that is “fundamentally diatonic and functional.” This harmony is functional in the vertical sense, where we can analyze the chords one at a time, and the chords match labels we might see in jazz music. However, using Roman-numeral chord analysis and thinking in terms of harmonic motion will not produce a sense of functionality.

Poulenc’s initial harmonic style was influenced by his stance as an “old French Republican.” The Popular Front faced a debate over which group held the strongest claim to “essential” French folklore and tradition: the urban working class or the rural peasant class. Poulenc sided with the belief that the peasant folklore was the dominant source and he blended this influence with his personal belief in Catholicism. Works like Poulenc’s *Litanies à la vierge noire* and *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence* distanced themselves from the Popular Front with specific qualities:

Poulenc cultivates a "rustic" or "rough-hewn" style by often ignoring the conventions of proper voice-leading and employing parallel and direct octaves and fifths. The Litanies open in this manner, and the vocal writing has a decidedly archaic sound, ranging from sections that recall chant to those that suggest primitive organum. And here, as in his other choral works that were written in this period, the declamation is largely syllabic, suggestive of the naive or ingenuous.

Poulenc understood how to properly imply voice leading, but chose to follow his ear, which led to “numerous parallel and direct fifths and octaves, unprepared and unresolved

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254 Ibid., 435.
seventh and ninth chords, and wildly disjunct inner voices.”

This style also suggested Poulenc’s interest in Renaissance music and his ability to aurally rationalize the inclusion of chromaticism and chains of dissonance. Coeuroy explained the “esthetics of color”:

The value of the tones becomes a function of their transitory combinations. Thus we have altered chords that do not require resolution, being considered (even unconsciously) as moving on a plane other than the strictly tonal... the seventh-chords and ninth-chords figure as chords of resolution—the natural evolution upon the path toward liberation of the sense of hearing as regards dissonances, when we remember that event the third and sixth were long accounted as dissonances.

Poulenc’s sense of harmonic movement came from the natural evolution of music history.

The tonality of Poulenc’s music is organized into the juxtaposition between horizontal and vertical writing. Dumesnil introduced the opposition between these two styles:

That is to say the rule of counterpoint, or the sovereignty of harmony; independence of voices, parts, as in the masters of polyphony at the time of the Renaissance or, on the contrary, the tonal terracing or the melodic line—hence the terms vertical writing or horizontal writing—; once again in the history of art, the achievements of the past marked a return to the past.

Coeuroy continued:

To-day harmony is penetrated with a consciousness of sonorous energy; where taste alone once held sway, a rude but powerful will asserts itself. This marks a new stage in the ancient feud between the ‘verticalists’ and the ‘horizontalists’

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that goes back to the sixteenth century. It has been signalized in the nineteenth by the victory of the verticalists, of harmony, to the hurt of melody or rhythm….This old practice (fallen into disuse since Bach) has been resumed of working with two melodic parts of equal importance.\textsuperscript{258}

This lent itself towards more bi-tonality and polytonality in music that emphasized the vertical approach. As previously mentioned, Poulenc did not apply traditional voice leading in his melodies. Therefore, rather than hearing music as a horizontal progression where one chord is part of a chain of events, the listener experiences the music as a pattern of vertical relationships. Short motivic ideas in the melody translated to the “oscillation of two, three, or four chords”\textsuperscript{259} that created tonal areas. Each tonal area is completed with a cadence that unifies the motivic material. These harmonic characteristics provide a distinctive aural experience in the choral music that is identifiable as both French and Poulenc.

\textsuperscript{258} Coeuroy, “The Esthetics of Contemporary Music,” 256.
\textsuperscript{259} Daniel, \textit{Artistic Development}, 81.
CHAPTER 3

FRENCH CHARACTERISTICS OF FP 97 AND FP 120

The French tradition of classicism and the primary source of the modern aesthetic, has been shown as having several characteristic that define the sound. I chose three of the main qualities to apply to Poulenc: clarity, purity, and simplicity. These three qualities are the result of a return to historical characteristics including both the architectural and expressive qualities of the Renaissance and Baroque time periods in France. Poulenc’s Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP 97 (1938-1939), and Figure humaine, FP 120 (1944), are products of this twentieth century emphasis on French history. Here I will analyze the works in terms of their technical and emotional relationship to the new aesthetic and identify them as examples of the French nationalist sound.

Clarity: Form and Phrase Structure

In considering clarity of form, we must consider the concise structure of Poulenc’s phrase structure. Works are on based on cellular motives that are more additive than developmental. The use of repeated, imitative ideas also creates an additive structure that harkens back to the compositional methods of the Renaissance and Baroque, as was popular during return to the French tradition.
The opening four measures of “Vine mea electa” (Figures 1 and 2) illustrate Poulenc’s use of repetitive motivic ideas. The voicing remains the same and the phrases are divided by the grammatical structure. The majority of phrases in Poulenc’s motets are divided into these two to four measure phrases. The opening statement of “Timor et Tremor” is divided into two main ideas, the first a grouping of two measures and the second a grouping of four measures, presents a similar idea. In “Timor et Tremor,” Poulenc adds an additional one measure phrase at m. 7 and alters some melodic repetitions in m. 5. However, like the repeated motives that occur throughout the motets, such as the “Jesum Judaei” in “Tenebrae factae sunt,” the majority or repeated phrases are direct repetitions.
Figure 1. “Vinea mea electa” from *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, mm. 1-2. 
© With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
The repeated ideas do not expand the harmonic function. Instead they tend to oscillate between a few chords and emphasize an overall sound. In this way, the concept is more vertical than horizontal. The final section of “Tristis est anima mea” (Figures 3 and 4) from the Lenten motets illustrates this effect. Again, the first motives are divided into two measure groupings, for a total of eight measures, followed by a three repetitions of the final “pro vobis.” The final measure, however, alters the rhythmic content for the final cadence. The chords are voiced at the extremes of the outer ranges, but the repetition of the harmonic pattern provides clarity. The movement between E-flat to G
and then E-flat to A does not provide a strong, traditional dominant-tonic cadence. Yet, because of the organization of the repeated pairs, the ear recognizes the third repetition of the “pro vobis” as a unique setting and the ear hears the motion from E-flat major to G minor as final.

Figure 3. “Tristis est anima mea,” from *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, mm. 33-37. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 4. “Tristis est anima mea,” from Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP, 97, mm. 38-42. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Returning to seventeenth and eighteenth century practices, Poulenc uses imitative entrances as another composition device to provide a clear track for the melody. There are three entrances in “Vinea mea electa” that transition the entrances from the upper to the lower voices. These phrases (Figures 5, 6, and 7) do not use Poulenc’s paired repetitive phrases. Instead these phrases are an odd number of measures and the repetition is achieved through the three full occurrences in the motet. Similar to a Renaissance motet, the repetition is not in the same register; the second instance occurs down the octave with the melody in the alto, rather than the soprano. The third time returns to the soprano voice. The voice leading remains the same except for the final chord in the second examples (Figure 6). Poulenc changes the tenor note to a B-sharp, rather than a D. This change affects the vertical sound rather than the harmonic, horizontal effect.

Figure 5. “Vinea mea electa,” from *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, mm. 5-7. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 6. “Vinea mea electa,” from *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, mm. 20-22.
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Figure humaine also provides many examples of imitative writing. The double choir format of the cantata makes imitative writing second nature. However, there are additional instances where the melodic content is the primary means of imitation. The seventh movement, “La menace sous le ciel rouge,” begins with a four measure melodic motive. The first motive in the alto begins on C-sharp; the second motive at m. 5 in the tenor begins on G; the third motive at m. 9 in the soprano begins on C; and the fourth motive at m. 13 in the baritone begins on D (Figures 8-10). This establishes a pattern of rising and falling fourth and fifths, which is a traditional way composers set imitative
voices. Renaissance composers wrote using species counterpoint at the fifth and fourth as early as 1400. In these early examples there was an emphasis on the cantus and tenor with a leaping, less melodic countertenor. Josquin introduced paired imitative duos and this evolved into more dense pervading imitation in the post-Josquin era.\textsuperscript{260} Figures 8-10 illustrate this imitative technique, keeping Poulenc within the influence of Renaissance tradition and the French aesthetic.

\textsuperscript{260} Patrick Macey, “The French Renaissance” (lecture, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY, March 5, 2008).
VII. La menace sous le ciel rouge... (Come the dark threat.)

Très emporté et rude.  
Very vigorous and rough

1° Chœur
ALTOS

28

29

30

Ve-nait d’en bas  
The dark threat came

La me-na-ce sous le ciel rouge
the dark threat beneath the red sky.

Venait d’en bas des mâchoires
From under mouth gaping jaws and scales, 

Des écailles des an-
and

#1

Came  the dark threat

#2

Came  the dark threat

#3

Came  the dark threat

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Figure 8. “La menace sous le ciel rouge,” from Figure humaine, FP 120, mm. 1-9.
Figure 9. “La menace sous le ciel rouge,” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 10-13. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 10. “La menace sous le ciel rouge,” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 14-17.
© With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
The melodic content of Poulenc’s lines is a challenging mix of chromatic lines and wide leaps, which is a challenge for the performer. However, the listener, Poulenc’s main audience, would hear a vertical unit and frequent repetition, making the themes more appealing and easier on the ear. Thus, the use of repetitive motives and vertical unites emphasizes classical clarity.

**Purity: Tonality and Harmony**

As previously mentioned, the majority of Poulenc’s works can be considered tonal or polytonal. Despite the use of chromaticism and expanded chords, Poulenc groups his ideas with identifiable cadences and chords. The motets represent the most obvious examples of tonality. Each motet begins and ends in either the same or a related key, providing an overall sense of unity. “Timor et tremor” can be considered to begin in A minor and end in A major. Similarly, The remaining three motets begin and end in the same keys: “Vinea mea electa” in C-sharp major, “Tenebrae factae sunt” in b minor, and “Tristis est anima mea” in G minor.

The vertical approach to harmony mentioned in the discussion of form becomes more apparent when the chords are placed in a longer chain. Individual chords are not heard as arrival points. Instead the movement between the chords provides a general sound and the arrival point at the cadence is accomplished within one or two chords. The motet or cantata movement can be considered to work within a key, but the chords do not establish a strong tonic-subdominant-dominant hierarchy. The opening section of “Timor et tremor” illustrates the establishment of a sense of a minor and the movement to related
areas, such as A to E and E to B. Figure 11 shows the opening in A minor, with the repeated motivic material. The first measures move between a tonic a minor to what could be considered a submediant F major or subdominant D minor.

The movement between “tonic” and “subdominant” continues through m. 7 (Figure 12) until a cadence from G major to E. The cadence on E in m. 7 is neither major nor minor, but the feeling of E transitions into the next phrase beginning again on a minor in m. 8 (Figure 13). As this phrase continues, Poulenc introduces an open fourth between

Figure 11. “Timor et tremor,” from Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP 97, mm. 1-3. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
E and A that functions a sort of pedal in mm. 8-10 while the inner voices move within a minor. This phrase ends on B major at m. 10, which links the three sections as relating to A, E, and B. Each of these cadences can be considered a closely related key and despite the lack of traditional cadences, the arrival points are well defined.

Figure 12. “Timor et tremor,” from *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, mm. 4-7. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
The next section in “Timor et Tremor” (Figure 14) moves from C to F, another example of a closely related key. Again, the movement does not emphasize a specific progression but moves between neighbor chords, such as C to D and A to G, before going from E minor to F7 and then to E major (Figure 15). Measures 15-16 set up the cadence into A major in a traditional manor. Measure 15 is approached by descending outer voices leading to a cross relation between F-sharp and F-natural; it then resolves outwards into E major. This E major cadences clearly into A major at m. 16. This cadence is one of the most clearly defined in the motet but it is approached in a similar
repetition of neighbor chords. The emphasis lies in the vertical relationship, rather than the horizontal relationship.

Figure 14. “Timor et tremor,” from Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP 97, mm. 11-14. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
“Vinea mea electa” (Figure 16) features another section of closely related movement from C-sharp minor to G-sharp major. The stacked fourths in m. 25 and m. 26 do not indicate a specific chord. However, the fourths provide a horizontal connection between the chords as passing tones. They also are a distinct sound, familiar to any performer of Renaissance music, and provide a vertical aural connection between the chords. The phrase contains both sevenths and ninths, seen in mm. 25-26. The ninths are unique in this passage. The first ninth in m. 25 is a G-sharp; the next ninth in m. 26 is a
D-sharp. The last ninth, another G-sharp, is from the perspective of an f-sharp minor chord, or an eleventh if thinking of a d-sharp half diminished chord. Either way, this sets up an emphasis on G-sharp and D-sharp, which emphasizes the cadence in G-sharp major. The extra tones stand out in the texture despite being part of chords that do not follow a specific progression.

Figure 16. “Vinea mea electa,” from Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP 97, mm. 23-26. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Drawing from the stacked fourths shown in the previous example, we find additional harmonic passages based on a vertical voicing. Measures 27 and 28 (Figure 17) can be viewed as descending chromatic voices, but the overall effect is a chain of descending diminished fifths over a chain of descending augmented fourths. The chain resolves into two minor thirds between the bass C-sharp and tenor E-natural and the tenor E-natural and alto G-natural. Taking the soprano into consideration at m. 29, it is easier to hear the A-sharp as a leading tone into the B-major chord at m. 30 (Figure 18).

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Figure 17. “Tenebrae factae sunt,” from *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*, FP 97, mm. 26-28. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
The same could be said for the d-sharp diminished chord at m. 31 leading in to the e minor chord at m. 32. In “Vinea mea electa,” we had the ninth of a chord signaling an upcoming cadence. We could view the ninth in m. 32, an F-sharp, as a link to the cadence in F-sharp major at m. 35 (Figure 19). The F-sharp major also provides the link to the section’s opening cadence back at m. 30. The ear hears these sections as related.
“En chantant les servantes s’élancent” from *Figure humaine* features a section that begins with a pedal point and moves into a cadence based on that pedal. The E pedal point begins at m. 35 in the alto (Figure 20) and moves to the tenor in m. 38. When the pedal moves away at m. 40 (Figure 21) it sets up a relationship to the phrase’s closing B major chord. Measure 42 opens with an E major chord and the remaining measures of the movement are an expansion of E major (Figure 22). The rests in m. 46 set apart the cadence and emphasize the B major to E major movement, reflecting a traditional
cadence. Once again, the ear hears the cadence as a contained unit and it is not deterred by the non-functional fluctuations before the cadence.
9 Le double plus lent du Tempo cédé \( \frac{3}{4} \) précéd. (Twice as slow as the preceding rallentando bars)

Très calme

PP très doux mais bien articulé

La dernière toi .
For the al - ti - mate

let - te des heures
toi - let of time .

Aux puits ta -
At those dry

PP très doux mais bien articulé

La dernière toi .
For the al - ti - mate

let - te des heures
toi - let of time .

Aux puits ta -
At those dry

Aux puits ta -
At those dry

On ne doit entendre distinctement que les paroles des Soprano et Mezzo.

Only the words sung by sopranos and mezzos need be clearly heard.

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Figure 21. “En chantant les servantes s’élancent,” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 39-42. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 22. “En chantant les servantes s’élancent,” from Figure humaine, FP 120, mm. 43-47. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
The sixth movement of *Figure humaine*, “Le jour m’étonne et la nuit me fait peur,” is a mixture of Renaissance technique and Classical relationships. The opening voices forgo a bass line (Figure 23), but the counterpoint implies a minor. The chords and melodic material repeat at mm. 5-6, with the addition of a ninth in m. 7. This ninth, an E, highlights the end of this section on E major. Additionally, there is a 4-3 resolution in the soprano II voice, a traditional cadential figure. Ultimately, the second section moves through a succession of harmonies before cadencing on E major in m. 14 (Figure 24). This passage does not feature a functional bass line—the voice is almost never the root of the chord. Instead, the bass line is part of the overall vertical structure and the inner voices indicate the harmonic structure. The original thematic and harmonic material returns at m. 15. Here, the bass line does outline more of the harmonic function, leading to the final cadence in a minor. The movement, similar to the motets, maintains a general tonality.
VI. Le jour m'étonne et la nuit me fait peur...
Surprised by day and by night made afraid

99

Figure 23. “Le jour m’étonne et la nuit me fait peur,” from Figure humaine, FP 120, mm. 1-9.
© With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 24. “Le jour m’étonne et la nuit me fait peur,” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 10-20. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
While Poulenc’s voice leading and chromaticism is not strictly classical, it does differ from the atonal, 12-tone composition practiced by many of his contemporaries. The motets and *Figure humaine* highlight Poulenc’s ability to apply selected traditional techniques, emphasizing tonality and polytonality, at the same time training the listener’s ear to make connections beyond classical progressions.

**Simplicity: Text Setting**

Poulenc was dedicated to an accurate representation of the French language in his choral music. To Poulenc, the text was one of the most important factors in communicating his compositional style. Poulenc developed a syllabic, homophonic style to clearly relay the poetic content of his works.

Works, like the motets, frequently used traditional methods of text painting to illustrate the words. “Tenebrae factae sunt” is the most colorful example of text painting. As Christ hangs on the cross, exclaiming in a loud voice (“exlamavit Jesus voce magna”), Poulenc stretches the ranges of the outer voices in mm. 9-10. The bass begin on a low G-sharp and climbs up a tenth to B via steady quarter notes. The soprano begins on a high G-natural, tumbling down a chromatic series of eighth and sixteenth notes to an E-sharp. The exclamation of “Deus meus” in m. 13 is voiced in the sopranos and altos with a *forte* dynamic. Poulenc’s choral works are covered in dramatic dynamic contrasts placed by Poulenc, not editors, to emphasize the text. “Et inclinato capite” (“And bowing his head”) at m. 19 (Figure 25) relates the pain of Christ through a descending chromatic line and a jump upwards when “head” is mentioned. Christ then exclaims in a loud voice (“Exclamans Jesus voce magna”) with a *subito ff* at m. 24 and cries to the Father with a
forte at m. 30 and a subito p moan at m. 31. The text is emphasized through repetitions and the syllabic declamation.

Figure 25. “Tenebrae factae sunt,” from Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP 97, mm. 18-19. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.

The eight movements of Figure humaine provide a clear example of Poulenc’s approach to poetry. The movements are built upon a dialogue between the two choirs, and on a second level, a dialogue between the voices within each choir. Poulenc’s propensity for harmony over counterpoint is evident throughout the cantata. Voices are generally homophonic, creating a progression of sonorities rather than an individual
musical line. The overall texture highlights the merging of multiple voices and elevates the poetry through changes in textural density. When Poulenc does overlap ideas in the choral exchange, the choirs are highlighting an important moment in the text, such as the line “Et les sages son ridicules” (“And the wise men are foolish”), in the fifth movement, “Riant du ciel et des planètes” (“With laughter for the sky and planets”). The two choirs have a rapid exchange of text with eighth note-eighth rest separation. This denotes the chuckles and laughter of the ridiculous logic.

When the rhythm of the text is natural and flowing, Poulenc chose his text accents to suit the sound rather than as an unnecessary compositional affect. Moving eighth notes rapidly move through the poetry, as in the second movement, “En chantant les servantes s’élancent” (“Singing, the servants rush ahead…”), while smooth quarter notes in the lower voices of the sixth movement, “Le jour m’étonne et la nuit me fait peur” (“Surprised by day and by night made afraid”), create a cold contrast to the moving text in the soprano voice.

Poulenc guided the sounds, clearly dictating the emotional content and the dynamics. The text brings up images of death, decay, and longing, but ends with hope and liberty. Poulenc changed tempos and meters to suit the text, making sure that each character change was in service of the image. All of these movements are guided by very specific dynamic changes and tempo indications, such as: “all voices as softly as possible,” “very lively and with strongly marked rhythm,” and “very vigorous and rough.” While some indications come across as clarification for a rhythm or tempo, the majority put the singer in the same mindset as the poetry. In “Toi ma patiente” (Thou
patient one), Poulenc calls for a “very smooth” *mezzo-forte* passage to indicate the grace of heaven and then a “brilliant” *fortissimo* to contrast with the preparation for vengeance (Figure 26). The passage has a dramatic crescendo then a *piano* after a *molto* decrescendo to prepare the return to the “very soft” idea of patience (Figure 27). Poulenc knew what each musical idea meant in relation to the text and expressed that to the singer. It is almost as if Poulenc was building upon the text, creating an even more human element to the written score.

![Figure 26. “Toi ma patiente” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 13-19. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.](image-url)
As we saw in the motets, the text moves through the extremes of dynamic expression. Poulenc will use crescendos and decrescendos in *Figure humaine*, but the majority of his dynamics are more dramatic exchanges between voices. The double-chorus format of the cantata lends itself well to this method. Poulenc used the speech between the two choirs, punctuated by rests and space, to either build upon the dynamic, as in the *pp*-*f*-ff-ff movement through the final section of the seventh movement, “La menace sous le ciel rouge,” beginning at m. 42. The dynamics are used to emphasize an idea in the eighth movement, “LIBERTÉ,” where the *piano* and *forte* balance throughout the “On my…” idea in which the choir speaks of all things in their lives, contrasted with the *forte* “I write your name” where the choir writes the name of liberty (Figures 28-32).
Figure 28. “LIBERTÉ” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 6-11.
© With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 29. “LI BERTE” from Figure humaine, FP 120, mm. 12-16.
© With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 30. “LIBERTÉ” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 46-49.
© With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 31. “LIBERTE” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 50-54.
© With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Figure 32. “LIBERTÉ” from Figure humaine, FP 120, mm. 55-58.
© With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
This final movement was the greatest expression of Poulenc’s love of country and the French spirit. Throughout the movement, the choir is unable to even utter the word “Liberté,” being forced instead to write its name secretly on every aspect of life. There is an explosion of sound as the choir regains the power of their voice and prepares to utter their sacred word, with precise tempo and articulation markings (Figure 33).
Figure 33. “LIBERTÉ” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 120-125.

© With kind authorization by Éditions Durand Salabert Eschig.
Just as the people in France were unable to have a voice and waited for Liberation, the choir waits until their final $fff$ shout of “Liberté!”, with the soprano exclaiming “Ah!” on E6, piercing through with the first and only utterance of the word (Figure 34).

Poulenc wrote this work to celebrate the Liberation, and the choir voices the struggles of Poulenc and the French nation, but presents the very necessary goal of liberty. His text setting is simple in that it clearly communicates meaning, traditional in that it uses dynamics and text painting to illustrate ideas, and patriotic in that it ties together all of the established ideas of purity, clarity, and simplicity so important to the new aesthetic.

Figure 34. “LIBERTÉ” from *Figure humaine*, FP 120, mm. 126-131, soprano, mezzo-soprano, and alto, choir II. © With kind authorization by Editions Durand Salabert Eschig.
CONCLUSION

The aesthetic changes at the beginning of the twentieth century were the result of major political changes and a cultural movement against the Germans. The government-supported reform led to an emphasis on French music history, the promotion of French artists, and the creation of a vocabulary that addressed musical and non-musical, aesthetic reactions to the music.

Poulenc was a well-known figure in the artistic scene leading up to and during the entre guerre period. The critics, like Cocteau, attended his recitals, and Poulenc interacted socially with prominent artists and patrons in the contemporary music scene. While Poulenc did not specifically write that his music was simple, clear, or pure, it is my belief that his involvement in the arts scene means that these aesthetic terms influenced his conception of choral music. Poulenc’s choral music during this time, especially Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence, FP 97, and Figure humaine, FP 120, would be further influenced by nationalist sentiments evoked by World War II.

Given the aesthetic terms of the time period, it is my opinion that we can find corresponding technical elements in Poulenc’s choral music. The combination of aesthetic and musical terminology allows us to understand Poulenc’s music beyond the complexity of the notes. The aesthetic terminology breaks down the music into terms that apply to musicians and non-musicians; the musical terminology takes the music into the
rehearsal space through approachable units. The choral works are part of the French aesthetic and therefore have a connection to the musical tradition that is frequently emphasized in our university choral curricula. By understanding the modern French aesthetic, and discussing Poulenc using these terms, we can relate to Poulenc’s cultural environment and more confidently approach his music in our programming.
WORKS CITED


**Scores**

Poulenc, Francis. *Figure humaine*, FP 120. Paris: Éditions Salabert, 1959.

Laura M. Petravage is a choral conductor and mezzo-soprano in the South Central Pennsylvania area. She is currently an adjunct faculty member at Millersville University. She has served as an adjunct faculty member at George Mason University, teaching general music appreciation, vocal music, stagecraft, and beginning keyboard skills. She was a faculty member at the Potomac Arts Academy, teaching youth vocal music classes, introductory music theory, and youth music theater. Ms. Petravage was previously Musician-in-Residence at American University from 2010 to 2013. She has appeared as a soloist in the Rochester, New York, and Washington metro areas, and she has worked as a staff chorister at Christ Church Georgetown (Washington, DC), the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle (Washington, DC), and Asbury First United Methodist Church (Rochester, NY). In March 2013, Ms. Petravage served as Assistant Conductor for a program sponsored by l’Association des Amis de Francis Poulenc, at a concert given in Paris, France. Ms. Petravage is currently pursuing her doctorate in choral conducting at George Mason University, studying conducting with Dr. Stanley Engebretson and voice with Dr. Kathryn Hearden. Her studies focus on the re-establishment of the French aesthetic at the beginning of the twentieth century and the choral music of Francis Poulenc. Ms. Petravage received her Masters of Music from the Eastman School of Music, where she studied conducting with Dr. William Weinert and Brad Lubman, and voice with Dr. Constance Haas. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in vocal performance with a Minor in French language studies from American University. Ms. Petravage is also a second-degree candidate for a Bachelor of Science degree in music education at Millersville University. She currently studies voice with Dr. Damian Savarino.