

Unraveling Voices of Fear:
Hysteria in Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Colette Patricia Simonot

Schulich School of Music

McGill University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

November 2010

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
PhD in Musicology

© Colette Patricia Simonot 2010 All rights reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first read about Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* while completing research on Poulenc's *Gloria* for a set of program notes. As fate would have it, I attended a production of the opera a few short months later at the Faculté de musique at the Université de Montréal. The rest, as they say, is history.

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks first to my parents, Joseph and Gloria Simonot, without whose unflagging support I would not have been able to undertake graduate studies. My supervisor Steven Huebner and my second reader Lloyd Whitesell provided guidance and inspiration throughout this challenging process. Several fellow graduate students contributed directly to this project by editing text and citations, formatting musical examples, translating, discussing ideas, and providing moral support. I especially want to thank Jon Godin, Heather White Luckow, Erin Helyard, Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, Remi Chiu, Adalyat Issiyeva, and Michael Ethen. I am grateful for many McGill music graduate students not named here, past and present, who provided me with friendship and encouragement. Thank you also to my friends Cathleen Gingrich, Michael Ryneveld, and Manuel Cardoso, who have all helped me to maintain a healthy perspective.

My research was made possible by financial support from the J.W. McConnell Foundation and the Schulich Scholarship Fund, assistance from Cynthia Leive and the staff of the Marvin Duchow Music Library, and guidance from graduate program director Eleanor Stublely and her assistant Hélène Drouin.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. James V. Maiello who, with his love, support, and occasional prodding, saw me through to the end of this dissertation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	v
ABSTRACT	vi
ABRÉGÉ	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
<i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i> : The Opera Plot	4
The Nuns' Story: A Historical Viewpoint.....	5
Review of Literature	9
Chapter Outline	11
Significance.....	14
CHAPTER ONE: BERNANOS AND POULENC: POLITICS AND FAITH	17
1.1 Georges Bernanos (1888-1948).....	18
Political Stance: <i>L'Action française</i>	20
Literary Output.....	26
Bernanos's <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	32
1.2 Francis Poulenc (1899-1963).....	43
Faith	53
Politics.....	61
The Genesis of Poulenc's <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	66
CHAPTER TWO: THE PRIORESS'S MAD SCENE	69
2.1 Introduction	69
2.2 Defining Operatic Madness in the Musicological Literature	71
2.3 The Prioress's Mad Scene	80
Act I, Scene iv: Dramatic Summary	80
Overview of Poulenc's Mad Scene	83
2.4 Hysteria Revisited.....	106
Medical Illness or Artistic Metaphor?: Critiquing the Feminist Reading of Hysteria.....	106
Paradigms of Illness	111
Charcot's Theatre of Hysteria	116
2.5 Hysteria and Poulenc's Prioress	119
CHAPTER THREE: BLANCHE AS HYSTERIC OR MYSTIC?	133
3.1 Introduction	133
3.2 Hysteric or Mystic: The Mystic Conundrum	134
3.3 Mysticism in <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i> as a Response to Hysteria in <i>La Religieuse</i>	141
Hysteria in Diderot's <i>La Religieuse</i>	142
Comparing <i>La Religieuse</i> with <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	146
Mysticism in <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	149
3.4 Thérèse of Lisieux: Literary Model for Bernanos	156
Thérèse's Early Life and Blanche	159
Thérèse's Conversion.....	164
Spirituality of Childhood.....	166
Post-Conversion Thérèse and Constance	168
3.5 Poulenc's Motives: The Musical Language of Mystical Conversion	172
Musical Motives Associated with Blanche	174
Musical Motives Associated with Constance.....	176
A Musical Reading of Conversion	179
The Fear Motive.....	180
The Transcendence Motive	189

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROGRAM AND INTERIORITY	199
4.1 Introduction	199
4.2 Is a Counterrevolutionary Reading of Hysteria Tenable in Act III, Scene iv?	201
4.3 Overview of Act III, Scene iv	207
The Disintegration of the Nuns' Chorus	217
4.4 Focusing on Interior Space	224
Comparison of Bernanos and Poulenc's <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	225
Defining Space	231
Gendered Space: The Male Public Sphere and the Female Private Sphere	232
Designating Space Secular or Sacred	235
A Reading of Space in <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	239
4.5 A Biographical Reading of <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	246
Poulenc as Hysteric?	247
"Blanche, c'était moi": Poulenc's Identification with Blanche	257
"Split in two": A Struggle for Consolidation	261
CONCLUSION	269
APPENDIX A: Opera Synopsis	275
APPENDIX B: Relationship Between Bernanos and Poulenc Text	278
APPENDIX C: Act I, Scene iv Dialogue	282
BIBLIOGRAPHY	287

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. Cloche theme.....	86
Figure 2.2. Death motive.....	87
Figure 2.3. Mère Marie motive.....	89
Figure 2.4. Fear motive.....	89
Figure 2.5. Solicitude theme.....	90
Figure 2.6. Blanche's motive.....	90
Figure 2.7. Variant of Blanche's motive.....	90
Figure 2.8. Act III/iv, rehearsal numbers 109 to 111.....	94
Figure 2.9. Act III/iv, rehearsal number 112.....	96
Figure 2.10. Act III/iv, rehearsal number 113 to 115.....	98
Figure 2.11. Act III/iv, rehearsal number 116.....	100
Figure 2.12. Act III/iv, rehearsal number 117 to 118.....	102
Figure 2.13. Act III/iv, rehearsal number 119 to 122.....	104-5
Figure 2.14. Fear motive (same as 2.4).....	130
Figure 2.15. Blanche motive (same as 2.6).....	130
Figure 3.1. Blanche motive (Rauhut).....	175
Figure 3.2. Blanche motive (de Solliers).....	176
Figure 3.3. Constance enjouée motive (Rauhut).....	177
Figure 3.4. Constance danse motive (Rauhut and de Solliers).....	178
Figure 3.5. Fear motive.....	181
Figure 3.5a. Fear motive (first appearance in Act I/i).....	184
Figure 3.5b. Fear motive (second appearance in Act I/i).....	185
Figure 3.5c. Fear motive (third appearance in Act I/i).....	186
Figure 3.5d. Fear motive (fourth appearance in Act I/i).....	187
Figure 3.5e. Fear motive (fifth appearance in Act I/i).....	188
Figure 3.5f. Fear motive (sixth appearance in Act I/i).....	188
Figure 3.6a. Transcendence motive (Act I/i).....	192
Figure 3.6b. Transcendence motive (Act I/ii).....	193
Figure 3.6c. Transcendence motive (Act I/iii).....	194
Figure 3.6d. Transcendence motive (Act II, Interlude i).....	195
Figure 3.6e. Transcendence motive (Act III/iv).....	196
Figure 4.1. Death motive (from Act I/iv).....	209
Figure 4.2. Act III/iv at rehearsal number 63.....	214
Figure 4.3a. Act III/iv at rehearsal number 63 to five measures after 69.....	220
Figure 4.3b. Act III/iv at three measures before rehearsal number 70 to eleven after 74.....	223

ABSTRACT

Francis Poulenc's 1957 opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* recounts the events leading up to the execution of a group of Carmelite nuns during the French Revolution. The opera traces the spiritual growth of a young novice named Blanche from pathologically fearful teenager to willing martyr. *Dialogues* is an adaptation of a stage play by French Catholic writer Georges Bernanos (1888-1948) who based his work on the novella *Die Letzte am Schafott* (1931) by German author Gertrud von Le Fort.

This study focuses critically on hysteria, a theme that underpins Poulenc's opera and serves as a master metaphor in French cultural history, in which it is often indicative of social instability or degeneration. After a biographical overview to set the groundwork for subsequent investigation, I examine different facets of the hysteria theme via three major analyses. First, I focus on the Act I mad scene, interpreting the Prioress's hysteria according to the social degeneration model. My argument marks a critical reorientation that unseats the popular feminist interpretation of the operatic mad scene. Second, I examine the relationship between hysteria and mysticism, analogous phenomena over which religion and science have struggled for generations. While the Carmelites may be read simultaneously as both hysterics and mystics, I offer the following alternative: Poulenc highlights Blanche's quest for mystical transcendence via musical motives, making it preferable to view the novice not as a hysteric, but rather as a mystic. Finally, I turn to a biographical reading, in which Poulenc's identification with Blanche and the hysteria trope becomes clear in his correspondence.

Ultimately, I conclude that Poulenc's sensitive setting of Bernanos's stage play suggests a political and spiritual alliance with the ardent Catholic royalist and serves as a useful gauge of the composer's stance vis à vis religion and politics in the latter part of his career.

ABRÉGÉ

L'opéra *Dialogue des Carmélites* (1957) de Francis Poulenc relate les événements menant au supplice d'un groupe de sœurs Carmélites pendant la Révolution française. L'opéra retrace le développement spirituel d'une novice, Blanche, d'adolescente craintive à martyr volontaire. *Dialogues* est adapté d'une pièce de théâtre du dramaturge catholique Français Georges Bernanos (1888-1948), qui avait lui-même basé son œuvre sur la nouvelle *Die Letzte am Schafott* (1931) de l'auteur Allemande Gertrud von Le Fort.

Cette thèse s'oriente de façon critique sur l'hystérie, un thème qui sous-tend l'opéra de Poulenc et sert de métaphore dominante dans l'histoire culturelle française, dans laquelle elle dénote souvent une instabilité ou une dégénérescence sociale. Après un survol biographique qui jette les bases de l'investigation subséquente, nous examinons les différentes facettes du thème de l'hystérie par l'entremise de trois analyses.

Premièrement, nous concentrons notre attention sur la scène de folie de l'acte I, en interprétant l'hystérie de la prieure à l'aide du modèle de dégénérescence sociale. Notre argument marque une réorientation critique qui ébranle l'interprétation féministe populaire de la scène de folie dans l'opéra. Ensuite, nous examinons le lien entre hystérie et mysticisme, phénomènes analogues sur lesquels la religion et la science s'acharnent depuis des siècles. Bien que les Carmélites peuvent être comprises à la fois comme hystériques et comme mystiques, nous offrons l'alternative suivante : Poulenc souligne la quête de Blanche vers la transcendance mystique par le truchement de motifs musicaux, rendant préférable une vision de la novice non comme hystérique, mais comme mystique. Enfin, nous tournons vers une interprétation biographique dans laquelle une lecture de sa correspondance précise que Poulenc s'identifie au personnage de Blanche et au trope de l'hystérie.

Somme toute, nous concluons que la délicate mise en musique de la pièce de Bernanos suggère chez Poulenc une affinité politique et religieuse avec l'ardent royaliste catholique et sert de barème utile pour juger de la position du compositeur face à la religion et à la politique dans la seconde partie de sa carrière.

INTRODUCTION

Of Francis Poulenc's three operas, *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1957) best demonstrates his spiritual side. Penned by a composer with an early reputation as an irreverent *bon vivant*, this work might appear out of place. It is important to remember, however, that by the 1950s, the religious element had become an expected part of Poulenc's repertoire. His 1936 conversion is usually put forward as an explanation for the spiritual aspect in the works of his mature period.¹ Poulenc's shift toward spirituality could also be interpreted as part of a larger trend in French music initiated in the mid-1930s.

La Spirale, *La Jeune France*, and *Zodiaque* were ideologically nonconformist composer collectives that aimed to bring spirituality into their music. The most prominent of these groups, *La Jeune France*, was active from 1936 to the mid-1940s. Their members, with the exception of Olivier Messiaen, did not specifically reference Catholicism but instead, embraced a broader mysticism.² Jane Fulcher has suggested that

¹ See, for example: Francis Poulenc, *Francis Poulenc: 'Echo and Source', Selected Correspondence 1915-1963*, trans. Sidney Buckland (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), 12; M. Owen Lee, "It Is Your Turn to Speak: Dialogues des Carmélites," in *A Season of Opera: From Orpheus to Ariadne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 173; Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 41; Wilfrid Mellers, *Francis Poulenc* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 75; Henri Hell, *Francis Poulenc: Musicien français*, trans. Edward Lockspeiser (London: John Calder, 1959), xix, 45-46 (Hell incorrectly cites the date of Poulenc's conversion as 1935 instead of 1936).

² The members of the short-lived *La Spirale* (1935-37) were associated with the Schola Cantorum. They included Olivier Messiaen, Georges Migot, Paul Le Flem, André Jolivet, Edouard Sciortino, Claire Delbos, Daniel-Lesur, and Jules Lefebvre. The group had an overlapping membership with *La Jeune France*: Messiaen, Jolivet, Yves Baudrier, and Daniel-Lesur. For more information on these two groups, see: Deborah Mawer, "'Dancing on the Edge of the Volcano': French Music in the 1930s," in *French Music Since Berlioz*, ed. Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 249-51; Guy de Lioncourt, *Un témoignage sur la musique et sur la vie au Xxe siècle* (Paris, 1956), 179-98; Nigel Simeone, "La Spirale and La Jeune France: Group Identities," *Musical Times* 143, no. 1880 (2002): 35, n. 1; Michel Duchesneau, *L'avant-garde musicale à Paris de 1871 à 1939* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 1997), 147-48, n. 73; and Claude Rostand, *French Music Today*, trans. Henry Marx (New York: Merlin Press, 1952), 34. *Zodiaque* included Maurice Ohana, Alain Bermat, Pierre de la Forest-Divonne, Sergio de Castro, and Stanislaw Skrowaczewski. See: Caroline Potter, "French Musical Style and the Post-War Generation," in

Poulenc's interest in religion could have similar oppositional roots: it might be read as an ideological resistance to secular republican aesthetic values, especially as proposed by the Popular Front government.³ I argue that Poulenc's extensive correspondence referencing his spiritual and emotional affinity with the Carmelite order also deserves consideration. Ultimately, his sensitive setting of Georges Bernanos's stage play, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, suggests a political and spiritual alliance with the ardent Catholic royalist and serves as a useful gauge of the composer's stance vis à vis religion and politics in the latter part of his career.

Dialogues des Carmélites depicts the execution of sixteen Carmelite nuns during the French Revolution. Over the course of the opera, the young protagonist Blanche overcomes her pathological fear and anxiety and courageously offers herself as a martyr. It is also through the character of Blanche, as well as through the First Prioress's mad scene, that a sense of underlying hysteria emerges in the work. Hysteria is an important critical window for my interpretation of the opera as a reflection of France's post-revolutionary ideological tug-of-war and of the different ways in which Bernanos and Poulenc negotiated that ideological instability. By examining different facets of its hysteria theme, I aim to give *Dialogues* a fresh critical interpretation.

Defining hysteria is difficult. Medical and cultural historian Mark S. Micale suggests that, because medical observers have characterized hysteria in various and contradictory ways over the years, the history of hysteria should be conceptualized as an

French Music Since Berlioz, 337; Caroline Rae, *The Music of Maurice Ohana* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 16-17.

³ Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16-18.

evolving textual tradition of behaviours designated hysterical by physicians.⁴ Linda and Michael Hutcheon agree, emphasizing the important relationship between medical knowledge and the social and cultural meanings of diseases.⁵ In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag argues that any disease “whose causality is murky, and for which treatment is ineffectual, tends to be awash in significance [...] The disease itself becomes a metaphor.”⁶ Sontag explains that, while the nineteenth-century tubercular patient was ennobled by his or her disease, the cancer patient was “robbed of all capacities of self-transcendence, humiliated by fear and agony.”⁷ By the twentieth century, mental illness had become the index of superior sensitivity and the vehicle of both spiritual feelings and critical discontent.⁸

According to Micale, mental illness became a major public health concern in France during the Revolution. As a result, journalists, early psychoanalysts, and cultural writers adopted hysteria as a master metaphor in French cultural history, interpreting it as a response to the loss of stability provided by the monarchy and the Catholic Church in the *ancien régime*. In French culture, hysteria came to represent instability generally, and all manner of erratic, disturbing, or unsettling aspects of modern life, such as socialism, foreign nationalism, urban life, feminism, and collective political violence. Underlying the trope of hysteria was the charge of social degeneration.⁹ In this dissertation, I investigate how hysteria acts as a metaphor in Poulenc’s opera with three major analyses

⁴ Mark S. Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), xiv.

⁵ Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 227 and 18.

⁶ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16. Also see 20 and 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹ See Mark S. Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). See chapter two for a more extensive discussion on hysteria as cultural metaphor and a list of sources.

of different aspects of hysteria in the work. I demonstrate that the opera conveys Bernanos and Poulenc's responses to France's ideologically shifting landscape, and on a more intimate level, that it is a personal statement of their own intense spiritual anxiety and fear of death.

Dialogues des Carmélites: The Opera Plot

Although it masquerades as historical fact, Francis Poulenc's opera is actually "the result of a series of accretions, different glosses of the truth, applied by a series of creative artists, each with a slightly different story to tell."¹⁰ Adapted from a stage play by Georges Bernanos, *Dialogues* is typical of his work in that it is an interior drama shot through with metaphysical issues, with little action and even less romantic intrigue.

As the opera begins, the audience is introduced to the teenage protagonist, Blanche. She is a member of an aristocratic family in a France troubled by discontent and rising revolutionary forces in 1789. Despite her affiliation with the advantaged elite, the young woman is overwhelmingly fearful and indefinably anxious. Having heard that her carriage was stopped by a mob of protesting peasants, Blanche's family, especially her brother, the Chevalier, is understandably worried about her since she is such a fearful girl. Her father, the Marquis, recalls a similar, horrifying situation in which he and his pregnant wife had been caught up in a mob. His wife went into labour from shock and died while giving birth to Blanche. When Blanche returns, nervous but relatively unscathed, she tells her father she would like to become a Carmelite nun. Several weeks later, Blanche asks permission to enter the order and the sickly Prioress, sensing her naïveté, warns Blanche that the convent is not a refuge but a place of prayer. Next, the

¹⁰ Jeremy Sams, "From the Scaffold to La Scala," *Opera* 50, no. 5 (1999): 512.

audience sees Blanche as a young novice in the company of her happy-go-lucky novice mate, Constance. The Prioress, who had since become Blanche's spiritual advisor, becomes very ill, and in one of the most dramatic scenes of the opera, she suffers a painful death accompanied by a heartbreaking loss of faith.

Following the Prioress's death, the events of the opera quickly unfold toward the final scene at the guillotine. In Act II, the Second Prioress warns her sisters of adversity ahead. Then the priest who acts as the convent's confessor celebrates his last Mass with the nuns and promptly goes into hiding. The Chevalier arrives at the convent to try to convince Blanche to escape with him. The nuns are expelled from their convent, prompting Mère Marie, the novice mistress, to propose a communal act of martyrdom against the wishes of the new Prioress.

In the third act, fearful Blanche runs away from the group after the Carmelites take a vow of martyrdom. She is reduced to working as a maid at her father's house, which was taken over by revolutionaries after the Marquis' execution. Mère Marie finds the young woman and tries to convince her to return to the community (now in hiding), to no avail. The nuns are jailed and sentenced to death. In the final scene, the Carmelites sing *Salve regina* as they march, one by one, up the scaffold. Blanche, having heard of the nun's incarceration and death sentence, joins the group in death as the last nun, Constance, climbs to the guillotine to accept her fate as a martyr.

The Nuns' Story: A Historical Viewpoint

The plot of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* essentially outlines the historical events that lead to the martyrdom of sixteen nuns from a Carmelite convent in

Compiègne on July 17, 1794.¹¹ On October 28, 1789, scarcely three months after the fall of the Bastille, a law was passed temporarily suspending all religious vows, meaning that no new novices could enter religious communities. On November 2, all church property was confiscated for the benefit of the state. Revolutionary forces dealt a more severe blow to religious orders on February 13, 1790, when the temporary suspension of religious vows was made permanent, thus hastening the death of religious life in France. The Compiègne Carmelites were interrogated and an inventory of their convent holdings was taken on August 4, 1790. Religious costume was officially prohibited in August of 1791. The Compiègne Carmelites were expelled from their convent in September of 1792, after which they were no longer allowed to live or commune together. All convent property was then confiscated.¹²

The Compiègne nuns separated into small groups and went into hiding, practicing their faith in secret. They upheld a communal pact of martyrdom (actually proposed by the prioress, Mme. Lidoine), hoping to give their lives for a revival of Catholicism in France. On June 22, 1794, they were arrested and taken to La Conciergerie Prison in Paris. Shortly after, they were tried, charged with conspiring against the Revolution, and sentenced to death at the guillotine. The accusations against them included:

...[nourishing] in their hearts the criminal desire and hope to see the French people returned to the irons of their tyrants and in the slavery of priests as bloodthirsty as they are imposters, and to see liberty swallowed in the tides of blood that their vile schemings have caused to spill in the name of heaven.¹³

¹¹ The most comprehensive article on the nuns' history and all subsequent literary projects is Claude Gendre's "Dialogues des Carmélites: The Historical Background, Literary Destiny, and Genesis of the Opera," in *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Myriam Chimènes and Sidney Buckland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 274-319.

¹² Charles M. Herrold, Jr., "Francis Poulenc's 'Dialogues des Carmélites': An Historical, Literary, Textual, and Musical Analysis" (master's thesis, University of Rochester-Eastman School of Music, 1975), 29-30.

¹³ S. Meredith Murray, *La genèse de "Dialogues des Carmélites"* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1963), 64. "...[nourissant] dans leurs coeurs le désir et l'espoir criminel de voir le peuple français remis aux fers de

The sixteen nuns were beheaded on July 17, 1794 at the Place du Thrône in Paris, with Sr. Constance, the youngest, executed first, and the prioress, last.

The musical details associated with the nuns' imprisonment until their day at the scaffold can be pieced together according to eyewitness accounts from the memoirs of one of the surviving Carmelites, who is represented in the opera by the character of Mère Marie.¹⁴ There is little information beyond the names of the pieces the nuns sang on the day of the execution, which included the Office of the Dead and *Miserere*, *Salve regina*, and *Te Deum*. They closed with *Veni creator*, and then each nun renewed her religious vows before ascending the scaffold.¹⁵ In May of 1906, these sixteen martyrs were beatified by the Roman Catholic Church, largely because of the testimony written in the memoirs of Marie de l'Incarnation.

The nuns' story was subsequently used as the basis for a number of artistic projects, those of Bernanos and Poulenc included, and with each new version of the story, the author appropriated aspects of history to suit his or her religious or political agenda.¹⁶ Although the events of Poulenc's opera were essentially true to history, Blanche de la Force, the protagonist, originated as part of a work of fiction by a German author, Gertrud von Le Fort. Le Fort used the story of the Carmelites in her 1931 novella, *Die Letzte am Schafott* (translated into English as *The Song at the Scaffold*), as a framework within which to express her deep personal fears about the increasing strength of the Nazi Party in Germany during the Weimar Republic. The author inserted herself into the

ses tyrans et dans l'esclavage des prêtres sanguinaires autant qu'imposteurs, et de voir la liberté engloutie dans des flots de sang que leurs infâmes machinations ont fait répandre au nom du ciel." (translation mine)

¹⁴ See Marie de l'Incarnation, *La Relation du martyre des seize Carmélites de Compiègne. Aux sources de Bernanos et de Gertrud von le Fort. Manuscrits inédits*, coll. and ann., William Bush (Paris: Cerf, 1993).

¹⁵ Murray, *La genèse de "Dialogues des Carmélites"*, 72.

¹⁶ Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites: The Historical Background," 274.

narrative as the character of Blanche, through whom she expressed her own fears about living as a devout Catholic in a political climate unsympathetic to organized religion.¹⁷ *Die Letzte am Schafott* traces Blanche's spiritual growth from fear to martyrdom in a narrative that begins with the story of Blanche's birth (which coincided with her mother's death, cited as the origin of Blanche's fearful nature) through her entrance into the Carmelite convent and her ultimate martyrdom. Le Fort borrowed some events from Carmelite history, but she took liberties with the facts. For example, Madame de Croissy, the First Prioress, died on the scaffold with the other nuns, not in her sickbed near the beginning of the story, as told by Le Fort.¹⁸

In the 1940s, the story inspired a film scenario by Father Raymond Brückberger and Philippe Agostini with dialogue by French Catholic novelist and essayist, Georges Bernanos. Bernanos's greatest passions were his Catholic faith and traditional French values. In his novels and non-fiction works, including *Dialogues des Carmélites*, the writer remained faithful to both his own Christian past and France's past in his allegiance to the monarchist ideal.¹⁹ Bernanos's dialogues, which were ultimately published as a stage play, were loosely based on Le Fort's novella, but emphasized the theological theme of the transference of grace, partly by highlighting the First Prioress's death and connecting it with Blanche's death at the scaffold at the end of the work. Concurrent with

¹⁷ Le Fort indicated this by giving Blanche a Francicized version of her own name. Significantly, Blanche's first name and surname could be interpreted as carrying opposing meanings, since "la Force" indicates strength, while "Blanche" designates fear, as "the heroine who bears this name is congenitally weak, blanching so at every suggestion of the unknown." Lee, "It Is Your Turn to Speak," 174.

¹⁸ Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*: The Historical Background," 278-84. In Le Fort's version, the First Prioress, de Croissy, dies near the beginning of the story but does not play a key role in the plot. In Bernanos's version, by contrast, the First Prioress's death is crucial to the establishment of the theological themes of the work.

¹⁹ Joseph Kestner, "Scaffold of Honor: The Strength to Conquer Fear Figures as a Central Theme in the Carmelite Dialogues of Bernanos and Poulenc," *Opera News*, 45, no. 9 (1981): 12-27; Lee, "It Is Your Turn to Speak," 170-81; William Bush, *Georges Bernanos* (New York: Twayne, 1969), 19-24.

Bernanos's work, Le Fort's novella had also inspired a stage production by Hollywood screenwriter and Catholic playwright Emmet Lavery. Shortly after his play, *Song at the Scaffold*, was staged in Munich in 1952, Lavery discovered that a theatre in Paris was preparing to mount Bernanos's play and consequently he initiated an investigation into the rights for adaptation of the Le Fort novella. The unfortunate result was that Poulenc unwittingly found himself entangled in copyright problems while he was composing his opera based on Bernanos's work.²⁰

Review of Literature

Existing academic studies of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* address the opera's genesis and discuss the work from various historical, theological, literary, and musical viewpoints.²¹

In the largest published study given over the opera, an article entitled, "Rencontres spirituelles autour des Carmélites de Compiègne et Blanche de la Force," Claude Gendre presents the story of the original Carmelites, detailing their arrest, trial, and subsequent beheading as well as the nuns' complex destiny in literature, with some indications as to how each new version of the narrative was altered. In his study entitled "The Scaffold of Honor: The Strength to Conquer Fear Figures as a Central Theme in the Carmelite Dialogues of Bernanos and Poulenc," Joseph Kestner situates the work within French literary history and outlines the political context for Bernanos's strong nationalist and royalist roots, subsequently indicating how this is apparent in Bernanos's characterization of the nuns and his focus on the concept of honour. Kestner also points

²⁰ Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*: The Historical Background," 274, 289.

²¹ Please consult the bibliography for complete citations of these works.

out places in the opera where he believes Poulenc conveys a viewpoint distinct from Bernanos. He claims, for example, that Poulenc muted or eliminated many references to class distinctions among the sisters to subdue Bernanos's monarchist tone. But because Kestner does not address the music in any significant way, he misses how Poulenc may have emphasized class distinctions musically. Jeremy Sams takes a similar approach to Gendre in his brief article, "From the Scaffold to La Scala." Although Sams does not distinguish between Bernanos's and Poulenc's views in the opera, he does indicate how Poulenc's personal life may have made its way into the work via a short discussion of his homosexuality.

Both M. Owen Lee and Donald Spoto explore the significance of *Dialogues des Carmélites* from the perspective of the modern Catholic. In "It Is Your Turn to Speak: *Dialogues des Carmélites*," Lee interprets the "dialogues" of the work's title as exchanges of grace among the nuns. In a similar vein, in his "Dialogue on *Carmélites* II: A Roman Catholic's Perspective," Spoto describes the opera as a meditation on matters central to the journey of Christian faith, affirming that at its most profound level, this work explores the theme of transference of grace within the communion of saints. Lee also suggests an alternate reading of the opera—that the Carmelites died to compensate for the weaknesses of France. Here the author cites the memoirs of Marie de l'Incarnation, who describes her sisters' parody of *La Marseillaise*, in which they sing of mounting joyfully to heaven, where, as martyrs, they will pray for France.

One of the earliest academic studies on the music of *Dialogues des Carmélites* is Franz Rauhut's 1973 article, "Les motifs musicaux de l'opéra *Dialogues des Carmélites* de Francis Poulenc," in which the author postulates that Poulenc created a musical

expression of Bernanos's text through his development of a set of melodic motives. Jean de Solliers' commentary in *L'Avant-scène opéra* is a dense description of the music aligned with the libretto, pointing out melodic motives, musical quotations from other Poulenc works, and the music's connection to the dramatic activity. Sams takes a different approach, claiming that the music can be divided into three distinct textures: an atmospheric background provided by the orchestra, recitative-like solo singing for the dialogue, and choral singing. Keith Daniel, in his study of Poulenc's musical style across his entire repertoire, entitled *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style*, characterizes *Dialogues* as stylistically typical of many neoclassical composers with the exception of the choral scenes, which betray a Renaissance influence.

As is apparent from this brief literature review, Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* has not been explored in any large-scale and comprehensive study with the exception of the multi-authored *L'Avant-scène opéra* volume, which addresses the opera from several different viewpoints. But, since this is a collection of short articles, it does not effectively present a cohesive picture of the work.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one sets the scene for an in-depth study of Poulenc's opera by outlining Bernanos and Poulenc's political and religious stances and examining the context from which the work emerged. This discussion serves as a groundwork for subsequent analysis, and the various themes discussed, such as vicarious suffering, will return as interpretive angles in my examination of the opera. Despite the official redefinition of the relationship between Church and State in 1905 in France, the role of politics and religion

in French society was subject to negotiation and renegotiation for decades afterward, and Bernanos and Poulenc each had to navigate his own way through this changing ideological environment. Via an overview of Bernanos's political involvement and his writings, I demonstrate that he was a reactionary who considered Catholicism an essential part of France's identity as a nation. Poulenc, on the other hand, was not intrinsically interested in politics. He was concerned with religion on a primarily personal level, and this interest emerged in his sacred choral works. Coming full circle, I bring the biographical overview of Bernanos and Poulenc in this chapter to bear on a psychological reading of the opera that takes into account the author's and the composer's identification with *Dialogues'* themes and characters.

In chapter two, I focus on one of the most dramatic scenes of the opera, Act I, scene iv, in which the First Prioress suffers a painful death accompanied by a heartbreaking loss of faith. This scene instigates one of the opera's main themes, the transference of grace, as the Prioress's suffering is most compellingly interpreted as grace that is transferred to Blanche, giving her courage to bear her fate as a martyr. In much of his writing, Bernanos focused on spiritual crisis, with its accompanying psychological distress. The First Prioress's mad scene is no exception. The author's compassion for this figure may indicate a working out of his own spiritual crisis and fear of death. After examining Poulenc's musical representation of madness, I suggest a critical reorientation that problematizes the popular feminist interpretation of the operatic mad scene. Feminist readings of hysteria have added much-needed depth to literature on operatic madness; however, I argue that by consistently emphasizing an interpretation of hysteria related to female sexuality, feminist historiographers do not provide the nuanced critical treatment

that *Dialogues des Carmélites* deserves. I provide an alternative reading of the Prioress's madness that interprets hysteria as a metaphor for social degeneration. As an outgrowth of this analysis, I define the religious hysteric, or the mystical madwoman, as a category for further study.

Hysteria and mysticism represent analogous phenomena over which religion and science have struggled for generations. In *Dialogues*, my dual interpretation of Poulenc's nuns as mystics and/or hysterics specifically references the *fin-de-siècle* struggle between the medical establishment and the Catholic Church. This conflict was purveyed most publicly through Jean-Martin Charcot, who worked to redefine female mysticism as hysteria in order to claim it for the newly-emerged science of psychiatry. In chapter three, I suggest that Blanche's hysterical fear and anxiety can be interpreted as the spiritual anxiety of a neophyte mystic. I argue that Bernanos's stage play is, in part, a refutation of Denis Diderot's novella, *La Religieuse*, in which the author claims that madness is an inevitable result of cloistered life. I also link Blanche to Bernanos's favourite literary model, Thérèse of Lisieux, who has been described as both a youthful saint and a mentally-unbalanced young woman. Via a study of Poulenc's musical motives, I demonstrate how Poulenc conveys Blanche's quest for mystical transcendence, ultimately arguing for an interpretation of Blanche as a mystic, not an hysteric.

In chapter four, I focus on Act III, scene iv. This scene is key to the opera because, together with the First Prioress's mad scene, it depicts the transference of grace. In the finale, the Prioress's sacrifice becomes clear as timid Blanche boldly mounts the scaffold to face her martyrdom. In addition, with its double chorus (the nuns and the crowd), *Dialogues des Carmélites* could be interpreted as a commentary on the power

struggle between pro-Catholic royalists and anticlerical republicans that exploded in 1789 and has generated tension ever since, but the two choruses do not intersect musically until this final scene. While I open the chapter by suggesting that this scene offers a counterrevolutionary view of hysteria (in which violent political activity is considered a manifestation of collective hysteria instead of its cause), I conclude that this interpretation does not work because Poulenc funnels the violence of the scene through the guillotine instead of the crowd chorus. Rather than portraying the clash between representatives of opposing ideologies, Poulenc chooses to focus on interiority and the psychological program of the work. Finally, this leads me into a biographical reading of *Dialogues*, in which I demonstrate Poulenc's identification with Blanche as evidenced by his correspondence. Unlike chapters two and three, in chapter four, I identify a divergence between Bernanos and Poulenc's interpretations of *Dialogues* that can be connected to their views on the place of religion in society.

Significance

The small current body of literature concerning Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* treats the writings of Georges Bernanos in a peripheral fashion and often neglects any examination of the music itself. In response, this dissertation integrates Bernanos's work and an investigation of the music via three analyses that examine Poulenc's musical representation of madness, his use of motives, and how the guillotine functions as a musical instrument of destruction in the final scene.

Considered individually, my analyses on the theme of hysteria make a significant contribution. My examination of Act I, scene iv in chapter two unseats the popular

feminist reading of the mad scene and articulates religious hysteria as a distinct phenomenon that warrants further study. My analysis in chapter three illustrates how the spiritual quest, or religious conversion, can be depicted in music. Finally, my analysis in chapter four makes extensive use of Poulenc's correspondence to create a more nuanced view of the psychological program of *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

In the literature on *Dialogues des Carmélites*, there has been little analysis of the music as a text bearing its own layer of meaning and the extent to which Francis Poulenc wove himself into its intertextual web. I address this by reflecting on what Poulenc's musical and dramaturgical choices reveal about his beliefs and how this compares with Bernanos. One of Bernanos's trademarks and primary contributions to *Dialogues* is his emphasis on psychological and religious themes. Poulenc's effective operatic adaptation and his negotiation of the tension between *Dialogues* as a literary work and as an opera give some clues about how it might also act as a personal testament for the composer, reflecting his spiritual beliefs and portraying his own psychological struggles. Poulenc gives a voice to his struggle with faith in the opera, informing or deepening the expressive dialogue of the text in the back and forth movement between states of exaltation and despondency, particularly through gender cross-identification with Blanche.

After exploring Poulenc's alliance with Bernanos through his adaptation of the author's text, extracting threads of discussion from three analyses, and interpreting *Dialogues des Carmélites* as a personal statement of both Bernanos and Poulenc, I will have built a distinct interpretation of the opera as an articulation of Poulenc's ideological

stance that represents far more than just a personal spiritual viewpoint, but produces a complex political and cultural statement.

CHAPTER ONE

BERNANOS AND POULENC: POLITICS AND FAITH

While France's official separation of church and state in 1905 might seem like a defining moment in the nation's history, or the culmination of years of creeping secularisation instigated by the French Revolution and completed by the Third Republic, in reality, it was just one step in a long process of societal change. Nevertheless, it can act as a point of departure here. The declaration of 1905 may have been an official redefinition of the relationship between church and state, but the role of politics and religion in French society was subject to individual negotiation and renegotiation for decades after. Some citizens envisioned a return of the monarchy and the *ancien régime*, and with it, a Christian honour befitting the "eldest daughter of the Church." Some people saw in the Catholic Church a ready-made hierarchy that could impose structure on a degenerate society. Others wanted Catholicism bleached out of French society completely. And yet others embraced the separation of church and state as an opportunity for the Catholic Church to redefine itself.

In this chapter, I provide a biographical and oeuvre overview of Georges Bernanos and Francis Poulenc. I demonstrate that, although each man was a devout Catholic, each had a unique conception of faith and politics. Bernanos was essentially a reactionary who saw Catholicism as an essential ingredient to France's past and future as a nation. He was a social critic and polemicist who lived abroad in the last fifteen years of his life, aiming to sell his vision for France to the very countrymen he had deserted. Poulenc, by contrast, was disinterested in politics and concerned with faith on a primarily personal level. Although the Catholic Church is famously resistant to change, in the

1940s and 1950s, when Bernanos and Poulenc were each writing their *Dialogues*, it was in a period of upheaval. The Catholic Church had fought tirelessly against the so-called dangers of modernism in the early part of the century, but by the post-war period, many Catholics were beginning to embrace modernism. This chapter functions to define Bernanos and Poulenc's political and religious stance in this unstable environment in order to set the stage for a more in-depth discussion of *Dialogues des Carmélites* in the following chapters.

In this dissertation, the terms Church or Catholic Church refer to the whole of the institution, both clergy and laity. When referring to the clerical hierarchy, I will use the terms clergy or clerical. In most instances, I refer to the Catholic Church in France specifically, but I also use the terms papal or the Vatican to indicate the Church hierarchy beyond national boundaries.

1.1 Georges Bernanos (1888-1948)

Although he was raised in a bourgeois household, Georges Bernanos's roots lay in old peasant values dominated by Catholicism and the concept of honour. According to Peter Hebblethwaite, Bernanos did not claim to be a theologian, philosopher, or a mystic, rather, he knew only the traditional French piety he had learned at his mother's knee. Bernanos immersed himself in the world of literature, reading Honoré de Balzac, Ernest Hello, Emile Zola, Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, Sir Walter Scott, and Édouard Drumont. Bernanos was also exposed to right wing influences through Drumont's *La Libre Parole*, to which his father subscribed.¹

¹ Peter Hebblethwaite, *Bernanos: An Introduction* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1965), 15. Also see Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 23-24.

Zeal for the rising royalist movement inspired Bernanos to publish fiction in a small royalist paper during his law studies in Paris in 1906. Two years later, he was recruited by the right-wing militant royalist group, *L'Action française*, to sell their newly-launched daily paper along with other youth, collectively known as the *Camelots du roi*. The writer was briefly imprisoned as a result of his involvement in this group's violent demonstrations. Bernanos held the official line of opposition to both Jews and Freemasons, but he ultimately aimed to soften the hard doctrine of the group.²

In 1914, after completing his studies, Bernanos became the editor of a small royalist weekly in Rouen, *L'Avant-Garde de Normandie*, where he published three early short stories. However, his newspaper career was interrupted by military service in the First World War, transforming Bernanos "from a royalist journalist with a liking for rambunctious controversy into a writer with an urge to understand."³ By 1918, after marrying and starting a family, Bernanos worked as an insurance inspector, writing his first novel, *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1926), in trains and cafés.⁴ This first novel was so successful that Bernanos quit his job to write full time, but, as Molnar attests, in the following years, he struggled to make a living as a writer. For many years, he worked in intellectual solitude, revising earlier beliefs and loyalties.⁵

² Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 32.

³ Hebblethwaite, *Bernanos: An Introduction*, 32.

⁴ Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 29. In 1917, Bernanos married Jeanne Talbert d'Arc, and in 1918, the first of their six children was born. Bernanos's wife was reputedly a descendant of the brother of Joan of Arc, the patroness of the young royalists and the symbol of all that was thought to be most purely and nobly Christian and French.

⁵ Thomas Molnar, *Bernanos: His Political Thought and Prophecy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), xv-xvi.

Political Stance: *L'Action française*

René Rémond postulates that the group *L'Action française* emerged directly from the Dreyfus Affair, acting as a focal point for anti-Dreyfusard intellectuals.⁶ Inspired by revisionist nationalism, this influential right-wing group was officially created in 1899 by Henri Vaugois and Maurice Pujo.⁷ The founders of *L'Action française* aimed for a more ambitious and dynamic version of *La Ligue de la Patrie française*, which, although it was doctrinally weak, defended the nation and the army.

It would be an over-simplification to equate Georges Bernanos's political ideology with that of *L'Action française*. While he was motivated by the group as a young man and his thinking often intersected with the movement's theoretical stance, he found himself less and less in alignment as his own beliefs evolved. Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar interprets Bernanos's involvement with the group as "a flight into an exaggerated form of order, measure, and constraint," which the young man intensified to the point of "pretentiousness and even dandyism." Balthasar contends that Bernanos complained to his friends that he had been fashioned into a "rebel and anarchist" and he left *L'Action française* once he understood that their principles "were not rooted deeply enough in the divine order."⁸ Molnar states that Bernanos's "political experience shows

⁶ The Dreyfus Affair began in December 1894 when Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army staff officer, was convicted of selling French military secrets to the Germans based on papers found in his wastebasket. Dreyfus maintained his innocence from the outset, but was found guilty of high treason and sent to prison on Devil's Island in January 1895. In the spring of 1896, Colonel Picquart, chief of the intelligence section of the French Army, called into question the evidence on which Dreyfus was convicted. The Army chose to ignore Picquart and to ultimately silence him with a dismissal.

⁷ René Rémond, *Right Wing in France from 1815 to De Gaulle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 234. Nationalism was an idea at the forefront of politics at the end of the 1800s in Europe. In particular, the concept of *nationalisme* became important in France after the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71).

⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), 47, 36.

an extraordinary transformation under the pressure of his religious faith.”⁹ In his recent study examining the considerable contradictions in Bernanos’s writings, Michael Tobin agrees, concluding that Bernanos’s “penchant for credal variance” can be explained by particulars of his theological point of view.¹⁰

A consideration of Bernanos’s association with *L’Action française* necessitates a brief examination of the subtle ideological shifts that the movement itself experienced, especially in its early formative years and particularly under the influence of Charles Maurras. Although *L’Action française* never betrayed the nationalist principle of its origin, it initially accommodated itself to the republican form of government and was somewhat vacuous in dogma. In 1900, Charles Maurras, an agnostic poet, publicist, and political intellectual, joined the group, eventually emerging as its theorist and leader.¹¹ By 1900, Maurras was known throughout France for his *Enquête sur la monarchie*, published in *La Gazette de France*. The writer interviewed leading French personalities, many of whom reputedly claimed that the monarchical principle was the only one capable of assuring national grandeur. Subsequently, Maurras developed the idea of a hereditary, antiparliamentary, and decentralized monarchy, and his position was soon adopted by *L’Action française*. He preached a return to stable institutions that could unify French society, namely the monarchy and the Church, resulting in a monarchist nationalism. On March 21, 1908, the group printed an announcement defining their position in their daily newspaper, *Action française*. They denounced the republic as evil

⁹ Molnar, *Bernanos: His Political Thought*, xvii-xviii.

¹⁰ Michael R. Tobin, *Georges Bernanos: The Theological Source of His Art* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 5.

¹¹ Rémond, *Right Wing in France*, 233-35.

itself and connected to the “four alien nations” (Jews, French Protestants, Freemasons, and foreigners) who had purportedly dominated since 1789.¹²

By adopting monarchism as its primary goal, *L’Action française* rejuvenated royalist thinking. In formulating their neo-royalist stance, *L’Action française* no longer claimed to have a quasi-religious attachment to the person of the king, but instead had a completely rational allegiance to the institution of the monarchy. Nevertheless, since the monarchy and Catholicism had long been entangled, republican ideas maintained an anti-clerical tinge, while the Right was still associated with the Church, if only unofficially. So, too, was *L’Action française* connected with the Catholic Church, at least until 1926.

According to Tobin, Bernanos revered those, such as Maurras, who championed royalism in France for the same reason he venerated the monarchy itself: “they incarnated genuine politics and the essential poetry and philosophy of ‘Eternal France’.”¹³ However, it was in the difference between traditional royalist beliefs and neo-royalists that I see some clash in thinking between Georges Bernanos and *L’Action française*. The royalists of old had been born into their beliefs. Conversely, although the new royalists inherited parts of their belief system (such as their anti-Semitism) from the older generation, they *discovered* their ideology, coming to it from nationalism by way of reflection and empiricism. In Rémond’s words, neo-royalism “came from the mentality of mathematicians, not of mystics.”¹⁴ While Bernanos emphasized the importance of Christian honour to his vision of the French national identity, the neo-royalists stripped the monarchy of that sacred dignity with which centuries of union with the national religion had clothed it.

¹² Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 30 and Rémond, *Right Wing in France*, 235-37.

¹³ Tobin, *Georges Bernanos: The Theological Source*, 19.

¹⁴ Rémond, *Right Wing in France*, 237-39, quoted portion is 238.

Molnar contends that nationalism during the Maurassian period began to detach itself from Catholicism as a religion while a political Catholicism developed in its place. For Maurras, the Catholic Church was not principally the depository of Christ's message, a faith unquestioned and accepted without reticence; it was, rather, the only institution surviving in the modern world based on hierarchy and order and, because of its structure, served as a symbol and guarantee for a similarly-built structure, hierarchy, and order in Catholic communities and nations.¹⁵ For Bernanos, however, monarchism was that of the *ancien régime*, "which honoured the king as he who protected the people from the powerful and the greedy."¹⁶ Like Bernanos, the majority of the Catholic population maintained this intransigent position, inherited from pre-revolutionary times, while liberal Catholics believed that the Church should separate from the monarchist position.¹⁷

Although the political spectrum within the Catholic Church began to widen during the Third Republic, most Catholics still fell to the right of centre. It was no surprise, then, that a rightist movement like *L'Action française* was plump with Catholic members. Both Catholicism and *L'Action française* emphasized tradition, order, authority, and hierarchy. The relationship between *L'Action française* and the Catholic Church was mutually beneficial: some clergy were happy with the aid provided by *L'Action française* in the struggle against modern "errors," while *L'Action française* found active sympathies, useful friendships, and powerful protectors in the Church. However, the casual identification of French Catholicism with neo-royalism had always been an underlying problem.¹⁸

¹⁵ Molnar, *Bernanos: His Political Thought*, 29.

¹⁶ Tobin, *Georges Bernanos: The Theological Source*, 40.

¹⁷ Molnar, *Bernanos: His Political Thought*, 12.

¹⁸ Rémond, *Right Wing in France*, 250.

In 1926, Pope Pius XI officially condemned *L'Action française*, asking whether a movement whose top priority was nationalism could possibly represent and be tied to a universalist faith like Catholicism.¹⁹ According to Molnar, “the Vatican decision, besides being a matter of conscience, was also a step with important political consequences.”²⁰ Several of Maurras’s writings were placed on the index of prohibited works, as was the group’s newspaper. The Vatican claimed that *L'Action française* had a negative influence on French Catholic youth, in large part because of its propensity toward violent demonstrations. In March of 1927, the Church prohibited members of *L'Action française* from receiving the sacraments. This presented a moral dilemma for many members, including Georges Bernanos. Catholic intellectuals were divided and ultimately, the majority submitted to the Church and split with Maurras.

As Balthasar aptly points out, although the papal decision of 1926 intensified Bernanos’s moral dilemma in regard to his role in *L'Action française*, the writer had begun to intellectually distance himself much earlier. In 1913, Bernanos wrote, “Maurras defends our entire tradition: the lucid images of our writers, the method of our thinkers, the politics of our kings, the religion that formed our conscience.”²¹ As early as 1919, Bernanos began to withdraw, distancing himself from Charles Maurras, put off by his “un-Christian ways, by the hardness of his soul, and by his tendency to make an organized party out of an open movement.”²² Despite his reservations about *L'Action française*, the 1926 papal denunciation affected Bernanos deeply. He reacted bitterly

¹⁹ Ibid., 248-49.

²⁰ Molnar, *Bernanos: His Political Thought*, 50.

²¹ *Bulletin trimestriel de la Société des Amis de Georges Bernanos*, December 1949, 17-20, 2.

²² Balthasar, *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, 69.

toward the Vatican, which he saw as depriving the sacraments from Catholic youth who were working to restore France to her former Christian glory.

From 1928 to 1929, Bernanos acted as a spokesman for *L'Action française*, but this arrangement soon deteriorated completely. Bernanos had begun writing occasionally for *Le Figaro*, which was ideologically opposed to *L'Action française*'s newspaper, and as a result, he was drawn into a violent literary polemic with Maurras in 1932. The two finally said *adieu* to each other via their respective publications, officially breaking Bernanos's long ties to *L'Action française*.²³ It had become clear to Bernanos that Maurras was trying to exploit the Church and harness the middle class fear of revolution in the interests of "maintaining order," an expression which had already begun to gather sinister implications.²⁴ Tobin notes that at this point, Maurras, once the hero of Bernanos's youth, "now became for him the principal symbol of France's moral collapse."²⁵

In 1939, Pope Pius XII ended the condemnation against *L'Action française*. The group subsequently insisted that the original denunciation must have been non-doctrinal and for political purposes only. A few years earlier, Bernanos had published an essay on Joan of Arc entitled *Jeanne, relapse et saint* (1929) in the *Revue hebdomadaire*. Bush interprets this work as Bernanos's subtle reply to the 1926 papal condemnation of *L'Action française*, since the writer underlines how, despite the official condemnation from the Church, God ultimately avenged Joan, and the Church undertook a revision of her trial, finally canonizing her in 1920.²⁶

²³ Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 37-41, 105.

²⁴ Hebblethwaite, *Bernanos: An Introduction*, 105.

²⁵ Tobin, *Georges Bernanos: The Theological Source*, 37.

²⁶ Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 39.

Literary Output

Bernanos's desire to write was fuelled by his growing dissatisfaction with *L'Action française*, his experiences in the First World War, and a series of health problems beginning with his war injuries and followed by an abscess and perforated intestine in the early 1920s. After suffering an injury on the battlefield, Bernanos's wife sent him the works of Léon Bloy (1846-1917) to read during his convalescence. Bernanos was deeply touched by Bloy's Christian point of view and his depiction of human suffering, and was determined from then on to write novels, in addition to the articles he was already producing.²⁷

Bernard Halda agrees that in Bloy, Bernanos found a writer of the same temperament, but he also cites Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) and Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly (1808-1889) as literary models, while Ernest Hello (1828-1885) acted as his spiritual mentor and Charles Péguy (1873-1914) was for him a Christian witness. Through his writing, Bernanos wanted to speak out about his beliefs. He aimed to be prophetic in the sense of the Old Testament prophets, who bore witness to the truth of the world's affairs.²⁸ Sharing his passion for greatness and freedom, Bernanos often evoked and invoked the spiritual lineage of the poet, publicist, and polemicist Péguy, who addressed socialism in his early prose works, later moving to patriotism (expressing a longing for old French traditions and a disdain for modern society) and Catholic mysticism, after rediscovering the faith of his youth in 1908.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 33-35.

²⁸ Bernard Halda, *Bernanos, ou la foi militante et déchirée* (Paris: Téqui, 1980), 42. Also see Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 33-35.

²⁹ André Lagarde and Larent Michard, *XXe Siècle: Les Grands auteurs français, Anthologie et histoire littéraire* (Paris: Bordas, 1988), 145-49, 178.

Throughout his career, Bernanos moved between fiction and polemical pieces, which was not unusual for French writers of his generation due to the political situation in the early part of the century. Bernanos wrote eight novels and the stage play, *Dialogues des Carmélites*. However, Bernanos reasoned that giving up fiction, his first love, was necessary in order to fulfill his vocation of writing political essays. Through these works, Bernanos “assumed, consciously or unconsciously, the role of Drumont as a critic of society, the relentless prober of its rotted parts and a herald of its moral regeneration.”³⁰ By the end of his life, Bernanos was still passionate and committed to addressing the problems of contemporary times and became increasingly preoccupied with saving France from the madness of the modern world, saving the world from the excesses of mechanized civilization, and saving the individual from the pressure of the collective and from an increasingly powerful state.³¹

After the First World War, Bernanos wove his solitude and disgust of the post-war world into his first novel, *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1926), the story of a priest-saint’s struggle with the devil.³² After being catapulted to literary glory with this first novel, Bernanos devoted his life to writing full-time and soon finished *L’imposture* (1927) and its sequel, *La joie* (1929), which received the 1929 *Prix Fémina*. Although Bernanos was more well-known for his novels, he wrote articles and other non-fiction throughout his lifetime. In 1931, he published *La grand peur des bien-pensants*, a controversial work based on the life of Édouard Drumont, France’s arch anti-Semite.

Also in 1931, Bernanos began what was, in his view, to be his greatest masterpiece, *M. Ouine*, but he only worked on it sporadically and did not finish it until

³⁰ Molnar, *Bernanos: His Political Thought*, 51.

³¹ Ibid., 99, 151.

³² Known as *The Star of Satan* or *Under the Sun of Satan* in the English translation.

1943. In the early 1930s, the author was in a serious motorcycle accident that crushed his leg, leaving him with a permanent limp and hefty hospitalization expenses on top of an already tight budget for his growing family. He interrupted *M. Ouine* to complete other works that would bring in more money from his publisher, primarily the detective novel, *Un crime* (1934).

At the same time, Bernanos decided to abandon life in France for the less expensive accommodations of Majorca, where he and his family witnessed the Spanish Civil War firsthand in 1936. In his best-known political essay, *Les grands cimitières sous la lune* (1938), he wrote of soldiers loading peasants onto Franco's military trucks to be taken away and shot, and he despaired over the abuses allowed by the hierarchy of the Majorcan church.³³ In this reign of terror, Bernanos saw a prefiguration of the Second World War, which he considered a logical result of modern bourgeois democratic "order." With the exception of François Mauriac and Bernanos, most French Catholic intellectuals interpreted Franco's forces as a crusade against the enemies of Christendom. But Bernanos theorized that the crisis was provoked by the disintegration of Christianity and the resultant loss of the taste for the joy and freedom in God which Christianity gave humankind.³⁴

Bernanos completed *Un mauvais rêve* in 1935; however, like *Dialogues des Carmélites*, it was not published until after his death.³⁵ Much to Bernanos's surprise, his 1936 novel, *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, was his biggest success, winning him the *Grand Prix du Roman* of the French Academy. Before finally submitting the last chapter

³³ Known as *A Diary of My Times* in the English translation.

³⁴ Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 42, 44, 126-27.

³⁵ Known as *Night is Darkest* in the English translation.

of *M. Ouine* to his publisher in 1940, Bernanos wrote one last novel, *Nouvelle histoire de Mouchette* (1937).

In 1937, Bernanos and his family moved back to southern France from Majorca, but they soon left again, two months before the Munich Pact in September, 1938. They travelled first to Paraguay, and then finally settled in Brazil. In 1939, Bernanos finished writing *Scandale de la vérité*, in which he describes his reaction to the Munich Pact and his stance toward Maurras. From his home in South America, Bernanos expressed disgust at the 1940 armistice and sustained the Free French movement with his pen, publishing several essays in French, Brazilian, British, and Algerian newspapers which earned him the title, “Animator of the Resistance.”

In 1945, de Gaulle asked Bernanos to return to France, perhaps hoping he might get involved in politics. Bernanos returned, and for a short time, he published in Parisian newspapers and lectured at universities in France, Switzerland, and Belgium, delivering warnings of the dangers to freedom and the threat of totalitarian thought, but he refrained from getting involved directly in politics. Frustrated by the lack of response to his warnings, Bernanos left France once again in 1947, this time for Tunisia. It was here, during his last winter, that Bernanos, probably aware that he was reaching the end of his life, wrote *Dialogues des Carmélites*, the work that acted as his spiritual testament. He completed it in mid-March of 1948, just before he became bedridden.³⁶

Bernanos was a late addition to a group of writers who participated in a French Catholic literary revival that became known as the Reactionary Revolution. These writers were initially inspired by Pope Leo XIII’s liberal amendments to many of the conservative policies of his predecessor, Pope Pius IX. Ultimately, they gave currency to

³⁶ Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 45-48.

ultra-conservative interpretations of Catholicism and right-wing political views. From the start of his papacy in 1878, Pope Leo XIII wrote a series of encyclicals promoting moderation, some of which were directed specifically at France. Several French Catholic writers, many of them recent converts, adopted an intransigent attitude toward these developments, seeing them as a further weakening of the Catholic Church following the recent blows of the antireligious Paris Commune of 1871. This core of writers was most active from the 1870s to the First World War, turning toward religious subjects to oppose positivism, materialism, and naturalism.³⁷

The Reactionary Revolution writers are characterized both by an aesthetic inspired by decadent Catholicism (William Bush called it “Catholic gothic”) and a particular stance on “vicarious suffering,” a theological doctrine ultraroyalist in origin with reactionary political implications.³⁸ They aimed for a mingling of the occult and the erotic to create interesting and unusual effects, and details of Catholic belief, liturgy, and decoration were used to provide local colour. According to Griffiths, the most influential writers in this movement were Louis Veuillot, Blanc de Saint-Bonnet, and Ernest Hello, but of the early figures, Jules Barbey d’Aureville probably had the greatest impact. Not only did he inspire Saint-Bonnet, but he also played a role in the 1869 conversion of Léon Bloy and directly influenced Georges Bernanos.³⁹

Bush claimed that Bernanos’s real predecessor was Barbey d’Aureville. As a recent convert, dilettantism was especially strong in Barbey’s works, and his neophyte

³⁷ Richard Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870-1914* (London: Constable, 1966), 3-7, 19; and see Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 34. Bernanos dedicated *Dialogues des Carmélites* to Christiane Manificat, a relative of Robert Valléry-Radot, a fellow writer of the reactionary movement.

³⁸ Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 142.

³⁹ Griffiths, *Reactionary Revolution*, 10-11.

exuberance manifested itself in an exaggeration of doctrine. He was a traditionalist and a monarchist and reacted against the modern world with a spiritual dandyism. Ultimately, his conversion may have been part of the elaborate world of make-believe that surrounded him.⁴⁰ Barbey reveled in the mystery and symbolism of the Catholic faith, seeing Catholicism as a consciously Romantic trait and using it for literary effect. Griffiths points out that Barbey created a decadent Catholic aesthetic by combining sacrilegious and erotic themes, linking two taboos with a titillating result.⁴¹ After exhausting the possibilities of sexual titillation, Barbey turned to religious horror in his perpetual desire to make his readers' flesh creep. In 1865, he wrote *Un prêtre marié*, the first of his books on a religious subject. (In the novel, the daughter of a former priest suffers emotional and physical problems, including attacks of coma and sleepwalking.)

Typical of recent converts, Barbey and his literary colleagues tended toward extremism in their representation of the faith and its doctrines. Griffiths notes that their basic misunderstanding of Catholicism sprang from the errant notion of Catholicism as static.⁴² But the Reactionary writers' extremism served an aesthetic purpose—to horrify the reader—while at the same time operating as a strategy of resistance. Seeing themselves as a conservative reactionary minority against the sentimentalism and compromise they witnessed in the contemporary Church, they chose to ward off outsiders

⁴⁰ See Bush, *Georges Bernanos*, 142, and Griffiths, *Reactionary Revolution*, 97-99. Joséphin Péladan was a member of Barbey's generation of writers. He was the leader of a pseudo-Catholic movement that aimed to renew art through mysticism, the Order de la Rose-Croix du Temple et du Graal. In 1891, Erik Satie began producing works directly influenced by Gregorian chant for this group, but his collaboration was cut short when he officially broke ties with Péladan in 1892. See Robert Orledge, "Satie and Les Six," in *French Music Since Berlioz*, 223. Later, Péladan created a Rosicrucian salon (active 1892-97) with the aim of bringing art closer to Catholic ideas, legend, myth, allegory, and dreams. The first salon in 1892 was a choral concert, which featured Palestrina's *Pope Marcellus Mass* at a time when Renaissance polyphony was neglected. See "Rosicrucians," in *The Oxford Companion to Art*, ed. Harold Osborne (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 1014; and James Ross, "Music in the French Salon," in *French Music Since Berlioz*, 95.

⁴¹ Griffiths, *Reactionary Revolution*, 115, in reference to Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951).

⁴² Griffiths, *Reactionary Revolution*, 355.

and strengthen their opposition to liberal influences rather than proselytizing or working toward cooperation. In their literature, these writers stressed the most severe forms of Catholic doctrine “to the detriment of others, and in the process these doctrines were often made yet more extreme, up to the point of heresy.”⁴³ Some examples include depictions of self-mortification (especially flagellation), excessive mariolatry, and an acceptance of the doctrine of papal infallibility more extreme than that pronounced by the First Vatican Council in 1870. All of these taken together resulted in a literary depiction of Catholicism as a hard religion of intense suffering.

Bernanos’s *Dialogues des Carmélites*

As noted in the introductory chapter, the story of the martyred Carmelites was recorded in the memoirs of Marie de l’Incarnation and was first adapted as a novella by Gertrud von Le Fort. Le Fort used the story as a framework within which to express her fears about the increasing strength of the German Nazi Party during the Weimar Republic. For her 1931 novella, *Die Letzte am Schafott* (known in English as *The Song at the Scaffold*), Le Fort invented the character of Blanche de la Force to represent herself, a devout Catholic living in a political climate unsympathetic to organized religion. *Die Letzte am Schafott* traces Blanche’s spiritual growth from timid novice to martyr in a narrative that opens with the story of Blanche’s birth (coinciding with her mother’s death, cited as the origin of Blanche’s fearful nature) through her entrance into the Carmelite convent and her ultimate martyrdom.

Le Fort borrowed some of her story’s events from Carmelite history, but in addition to creating the character of Blanche, she took several liberties with the facts. For

⁴³ Ibid., 152.

example, the original Carmelite prioress, Madame de Croissy, stepped down from her position and later died on the scaffold with the other nuns. In Le Fort's version, Madame de Croissy, the First Prioress, is described as still quite young, but dying of a wasting disease. Le Fort relegates her death to a paragraph near the beginning of the novella. In *Die Letzte am Schafott*, the First Prioress's death does not play a key role in the plot. In Bernanos's version, by contrast, the First Prioress's death is crucial to the establishment of the theological theme of the work.⁴⁴

In the 1940s, the Carmelites' story inspired a film scenario by Father Raymond Brückberger and Philippe Agostini.⁴⁵ The pair asked Georges Bernanos to write the dialogues for their project. At this time, however, Bernanos was dying from a liver ailment and since the dialogues were to be his last work (he completed the text just before his death in 1948), he transformed the Carmelites' story into a personal spiritual testament. Although he used both the film scenario and Le Fort's novella as loose guidelines, Bernanos wanted his own interior life to breathe the characters into being.⁴⁶ However, the author's theologically-charged text was considered difficult and inappropriate for the medium of film and, in the end, Brückberger and Agostini decided not to use Bernanos's text at all.⁴⁷ Albert Béguin, Bernanos's literary executor, arranged for the dialogues to be published as a stage play after the author's death. He gave it the

⁴⁴ Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites: The Historical Background," 278-84.

⁴⁵ Father Raymond Leopold Brückberger (1907-1998) was a Dominican priest, member of the Resistance, writer, translator, screenwriter, and director originally of Austrian heritage. He was elected a member of the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques in 1985.

⁴⁶ Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites: The Historical Background," 285. Bernanos's secretary at the time stated that he did not consult the Le Fort text while writing his dialogues, but a friend in Brazil (where Bernanos was living during WWII) stated that Bernanos studied the novella thoroughly (Murray, *Genèse de Dialogues*, 22-23).

⁴⁷ Although Bernanos's dialogues were not considered appropriate for a film adaptation, Brückberger finally went ahead with his cinematic project on the Carmelites in 1959, as director and writer. His film, *Le dialogue des Carmélites* (1960), was adapted for television in 1984.

title *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

An examination of some of the key differences between Bernanos's and Le Fort's texts reveals Bernanos's contributions to the work, most of which were carried over into Poulenc's operatic version. First, Le Fort's work is an epistolary novella, written as a letter from a third-party Parisian to a friend outside France in the fall of 1794, while Bernanos's dialogues clearly convey a different sensibility in their form as a dramatic tragedy. Of the 39 scenes in his stage play, only 14 were directly inspired by Le Fort's novella.⁴⁸ Further, Bernanos's emphasis on or modification of certain aspects found in *Die Letzte am Schafott* reveals his own agenda in creating this work as a personal spiritual testament. Bernanos's modifications include the transformation of Blanche's character, changes in the personalities of Sr. Constance and Mère Marie, and most prominently, the emphasis on theological themes, in particular the concept of vicarious suffering.

Bernanos succeeded in intensifying the psychological dimension of his work by presenting Blanche as an active participant instead of the more passive, reactive character she plays in Le Fort. Bernanos achieved this effect in different ways. He eliminated Le Fort's domineering tutor, who also acts as Blanche's mother figure during her childhood. In her place, Bernanos supplies a brother who is protective but not overbearing and allows Blanche to make her own decisions, although somewhat reluctantly. In *Die Letzte am Schafott*, Blanche's religious name, Soeur Blanche de l'Agonie du Christ, is assigned by the local bishop, who claims that the conditions of the time require all new novices to adopt the name. Because this name is assigned to Blanche, its symbolic significance in

⁴⁸ Joseph Boly, *Dialogues des Carmélites [par] Georges Bernanos; étude et analyse* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'école, 1960), 31-33.

connection to her character is greatly reduced. Bernanos presents the adoption of this name as a deeply personal choice for Blanche and uses it to create an “otherworldly” bond between Blanche and the First Prioress, who had wanted the same name as a novice.

Unlike Le Fort, Bernanos identifies more of the secondary nuns specifically, using many of their historical names as cited in Marie de l’Incarnation’s memoirs. In some cases, as with Marie and Constance, the author indicates family background to highlight class distinctions. The personalities of both Soeur Constance and Mère Marie differ significantly in Le Fort and Bernanos’s versions. In Le Fort, Constance is simply a young novice, mentioned occasionally, who is frightened to tears when faced with the prospect of mounting the scaffold, while in Bernanos’s *Dialogues*, she is quite the opposite. Bernanos foregrounds the character of Constance as a strong foil for Blanche.

Both authors clearly identify Mère Marie as an aristocratic figure. Le Fort explains that she is the illegitimate daughter of a French prince, while Bernanos conveys her aristocratic lineage indirectly by portraying her as a nun ambitious to a fault and obsessed with obtaining and maintaining her honour. Bernanos’s Mère Marie, while not quite a villainous character, is insensitive toward Blanche and blind to God’s will because of the sheer strength of her own. Le Fort’s Marie has similar qualities, but as the author provides a character sketch of the nun both during the tragic event and some time later, we get a more balanced view of the woman and see that she eventually recognizes her earlier faults. Le Fort and Bernanos both describe a power struggle between Mère Marie and the Second Prioress, Madame Lidoine. However, in *Die Letzte am Schafott*, it is

Mère Marie (and not the First Prioress) who more clearly offers herself as a sacrifice for Blanche. She states,

I do not retract my opinion of our postulant but since she is not to be excluded, I beg God to accept me as a sacrifice for her. Permit me, Reverend Mother, by extraordinary acts of love and atonement to assist this soul entrusted to our care, so that her admission into our community may not in any way be hazardous.⁴⁹

In Bernanos's *Dialogues*, this sacrificial stance is taken up by the First Prioress, who acts as a mother figure to Blanche. In addition, while Le Fort uses the death of the First Prioress as a brief episode (among many) to emphasize Blanche's fearfulness (she is frightened by the Prioress's moans echoing throughout the convent), Bernanos uses her death to depict the concept of vicarious suffering. His most significant innovation is in making the Prioress's death the crux of the play.

One of the most important themes for the Reactionary Revolution writers was the idea of vicarious suffering, also known as transference of grace, mystical substitution, or the principle of reversibility. It is related to the doctrine of grace, which the Catholic Church defines as a supernatural gift from God to believers for their eternal salvation, and the communion of saints, which states that all members of the Church, living and dead, are bound together in a community effected by grace. Richard D.E. Burton defines vicarious suffering as follows:

all human beings, Christian and non-Christian alike, become members of each other, participants, whether they know it or not, in a vast circulation of merits and graces through the universal Body of the Church, meaning here not the institutional church but the whole of humanity, living, dead, and still to be born.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The original German reads: "Unter diesen Umständen nehme ich zwar mein Urteil über unsere Postulantin nicht zurück, aber ich biete mich Gott selbst als Opfer für sie an. Gestatten Sie mir, Ehrwürdige Mutter, daß ich durch außerordentliche Akte der Liebe und Buße dieser uns anvertrauten Seele zu Hilfe komme, damit ihre Aufnahme in unsere Kommunität keinerlei Wagnis bedeutet." See Gertrud von le Fort, *Die Letzte am Schafott* (Munich: Ehrenwirth Verlag, 1931), 39-40; and *The Song at the Scaffold*, trans. Olga Marx (Kirkwood, MO: Catholic Authors Press, 1954), 20.

⁵⁰ Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Suffering in France, 1840-1970* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), xvii.

Essentially, vicarious suffering means that one person can offer the grace earned by their suffering for the benefit of another. The scriptural authority for this doctrine is from a notoriously cryptic passage in Paul's letter to the Colossians (1:24) in which he tells his correspondents that "it makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of His body, the Church." This could be interpreted to mean that Jesus's death was not the full and final sacrifice, but that it was necessary for followers to suffer themselves to bring the final sacrifice to completion.⁵¹

In order to comprehend the Catholic culture that served as a backdrop for Bernanos's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, it is crucial to understand that interpretations of doctrinal beliefs are mutable. They change and evolve over time and the expression of those beliefs can be temporally and culturally specific. The idea of vicarious suffering was prominent in French Catholicism from the Revolution through World War I. After the 1793 execution of Louis XVI, along with the deaths of Marie Antoinette and hundreds of aristocrats, clergy, and other royalist supporters, counterrevolutionary writers like Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), Louis de Bonald (1754-1840), and Pierre-Simon Ballanche (1776-1847) formulated the idea that every such martyrdom renewed and replcted the original sacrifice of Christ. These executions had the potential to save not only the victim, but the entire French nation, which had participated in the crime of the Revolution and the murder of the *alter Christus*, the King. Consequently, every French

⁵¹ Ibid., xvii.

citizen, now and perhaps in perpetuity, was required to atone in order to redeem the nation.⁵²

Having overemphasized suffering as paramount for the Catholic, the theme of vicarious suffering was a natural and important part of the Reactionary Revolution writers' literary toolkit. This theme had reached a broad Catholic public early on through *De la douleur* (1849) by philosopher and theologian Blanc de Saint-Bonnet. Via vicarious suffering, conservative Catholics tried to right society through their prayers and personal hardships. After 1840, conservative reactionary Catholicism was also characterized by the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, extreme ultramontanist, and Marian apparitions. Pilgrimages became a national obsession. Lourdes was a popular destination, but so was La Salette, where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to two young children to deliver a message of warning against sins of blasphemy and profanation on the Sabbath.

In their enthusiasm for mystical substitution, the Reactionary writers at times went too far, even living out this "heroic" ideal in their own lives. Huysmans, for example, refused all painkillers while he was dying of cancer of the mouth, lest the salvific merit of his suffering be diminished.⁵³ The Reactionary writers influenced huge segments of the Catholic population who normally would have shied away from purely religious writing and political tracts, but who imbibed the same lessons through novels, theatre, and poetry.⁵⁴ During World War I, the doctrine sloughed off theological abstractionism and provided consolation to thousands of soldiers in the trenches. After

⁵² Ibid., xvi-xvii. Also see: Richard D. E. Burton, *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 44-53.

⁵³ Griffiths, *Reactionary Revolution*, 154.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 355-57.

the war, the Church and the Republic were closer to reconciliation, although French Catholics still favoured right-wing views, especially under pressure from *L'Action française*. The doctrine of vicarious suffering had lost currency with writers after World War I, with the exception of Graham Greene and Georges Bernanos. Nevertheless, this belief persisted with some French Catholics.⁵⁵

Vicarious suffering became a viable cultural trope in France briefly once again during Germany's Occupation of France in World War II. The Catholic population, seduced by Pétain's dictatorship, were enjoined by Vichyist-Catholic ideology to suffer for the alleged sins of the period between the wars: a declining birthrate, the abandonment of rural in favour of urban lifestyles, and the dangerous flirtation with socialism. Once liberty was restored, the doctrine of vicarious suffering receded significantly in postwar French Catholic devotion.

M. Owen Lee's interpretation of the "dialogues" of both the opera and of Bernanos's stage play is that of exchanges of grace among the nuns. In a similar vein, Donald Spoto describes the work as a meditation on matters central to the journey of Christian faith, affirming that at its most profound level, this work explores the theme of the transference of grace within the communion of saints.⁵⁶ Rosmarin states,

Bernanos, and Poulenc with him, go one step further. For them the transfer of grace can manifest itself as an exchange of destinies and deaths. This is what occurs between the old Prioress, Mme. de Croissy, and the young novice, Blanche. Mme. de Croissy dies half-crazed with fear instead of having the dignified death for which she has been preparing all her life.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, xviii.

⁵⁶ Lee, "It Is Your Turn to Speak," 171. Donald Spoto, "Dialogue on *Carmélites* II: A Roman Catholic's Perspective," *Opera News* 67, no. 7 (2003), 25-27.

⁵⁷ Léonard Rosmarin, *When Literature Becomes Opera: Study of a Transformational Process* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1999), 64.

Bernanos's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, not published until 1951, was the last literary work of the Reactionary Revolution writers to foreground the theology of vicarious suffering. It is the example *par excellence* of Bernanos's literary use of the doctrine of vicarious suffering; however, several of his early novels also share this trait. *Sous le soleil de Satan* and *Journal d'un curé de campagne* both feature suffering priests modelled on the curé d'Ars, Abbé Jean-Marie Vianney (1786-1859), a canonized saint since 1925, who was known to have carried out harsh penances on behalf of his own parishioners.

In Bernanos's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, the words of the novice, Constance, give vicarious suffering its purest formulation and Poulenc adopts this strategy as well. Throughout *Dialogues*, young Constance acts as Bernanos's mouthpiece: she articulates the primary theme of the work and explains why the Prioress's death is a key piece in this puzzling doctrine as it applies to the work.⁵⁸ Immediately following the Prioress's death, Constance and Blanche converse in the garden of the convent. The two young women

⁵⁸ The plot of *Dialogues des Carmélites* and the thematic emphasis on grace (not to mention Constance's particular interpretation of it) suggest a connection to the Jansenist controversy, although Bernanos is not normally linked to Jansenism. This movement was a branch of Gallican Catholic thought (ultimately considered a heresy) popular from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries concerning the role of grace in salvation. The Jansenist view lay closer to the Protestant view of grace and found a stronghold in two Cistercian convents of Port Royal. The main controversy surrounding Jansenism, which also played a large role in the Protestant Reformation, revolved around the relation between grace and free will: if grace gives believers the strength (or compulsion) to pursue holiness and do good works, does it override free will? Reformers (and Jansenists) postulated that free will was impaired by original sin and thus trumped by grace, while Catholics (with the exception of Jansenists) tended to preserve the idea of free will. The Archbishop of Paris suspended the Port Royal convents from receiving the sacraments in the mid-1600s. They were subsequently ordered to close their schools and forbidden to accept novices. Louis XIV dissolved one of the convents in the early eighteenth century, while the other was open until the French Revolution. Joseph Kestner suggests that the expulsion of the Carmelites is reminiscent of the history of France's Port Royal convent and, at the time of the Carmelites' execution in 1794, the spirit of Port Royal was still very much alive. See: Joseph Pohle, "Controversies on Grace," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6 (New York: Appleton, 1909) accessed August 19, 2008, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06710a.htm>; and Jacques Forget, "Jansenius and Jansenism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Appleton, 1910) accessed August 5, 2008, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08285a.htm>. Also see Kestner, "Scaffold of Honor," 26.

ponder the Prioress's death, and Blanche, having witnessed the disturbing event, is confused and offended by Constance's carefree, cavalier attitude. Constance explains,

Pensez à la mort de notre chère mère, soeur Blanche! Qui aurait pu croire qu'elle aurait tant de peine à mourir, qu'elle saurait si mal mourir! On dirait qu'au moment de la lui donner, le bon Dieu s'est trompé de mort, comme au vestiaire on vous donne un habit pour un autre. Oui, ça devait être la mort d'une autre, une mort trop petite pour elle, elle ne pouvait seulement pas réussir à enfiler les manches [...] Ça veut dire que cette autre, lorsque viendra l'heure de la mort, s'étonnera d'y entrer si facilement, et de s'y sentir confortable. On ne meurt pas chacun pour soi, mais les uns pour les autres, ou même les uns à la place des autres.⁵⁹

[Think of the death of our dear Mother, Sister Blanche! Who would have suspected that she would have such trouble in dying, that she would die so badly? You could say that in giving her this kind of death, our good Lord made an error; as in a cloakroom they give you one coat for another. Yes, I think her death belonged to someone else, a death much too small for her, so very small that the sleeves barely reached her elbows [...] someone else, when it will be his turn to die, will be surprised that he finds it so easy, and that it feels so comfortable. We do not die for ourselves alone but for one another, or sometimes even instead of each other.]

Constance, of course, is hinting that the Prioress *did* die for someone else and her suffering will alleviate another's. The final scene of the opera reveals that this "someone else" is actually Blanche, and so the Prioress's words during her farewell speech to Blanche—all she can give to avert further danger for Blanche is her "humble death"—take on a more literal meaning via the idea that grace can actually be transferred from one person to another.

Bernanos marks the connection between Blanche and the First Prioress with the religious name, Soeur Blanche de l'Agonie du Christ. As I mentioned earlier, in Act I/iv the First Prioress explains that she had originally hoped to adopt that name when she was

⁵⁹ Please note that where I use foreign language sources, I incorporate the English translation into the main text and provide the original in the accompanying footnote. However, following standard opera scholarship, I retain the original language for quotes from opera libretti in the main body of the text and supply the English translation immediately following from Joseph Machlis's piano vocal score of *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1959).

a novice, but was discouraged by her own prioress. Of course, the name's significance extends far beyond its role in connecting the two women. The Agony in the Garden was, as Hebblethwaite notes, "the key to the particular spirituality of Bernanos."⁶⁰ Bernanos saw the transference of grace as intrinsically linked to the Agony in the Garden because he considered Jesus's final suffering and death the original sacrifice that can be worked out, or re-lived, again and again in numerable other lives.

Lee postulates that an ordinary interpretation of the doctrine of vicarious suffering would suggest that fearful Blanche goes to the guillotine serenely at the end of *Dialogues des Carmélites* because other people were praying for her, not, as Bernanos suggests, because the First Prioress had exchanged deaths with her. Hebblethwaite explains that, in the communion of saints, "relationships are set up and destinies interlock in such a way which goes far beyond the routine psychological dependence of fictional characters on each other."⁶¹ As well, Rosmarin seems a bit hesitant in regard to Bernanos's interpretation of the transference of grace, indicating that the author's presentation of the doctrine might be a bit skewed.

I think the doctrine of vicarious suffering, as presented by Bernanos, is an extreme reading of Catholic doctrine that reflects the Catholic culture of post-Revolutionary France. René Girard argues that the nuns' understanding of vicarious suffering is related to the older notion of human sacrifice, whereby a designated victim dies so that others may be absolved. Girard rejects this scapegoat phenomenon, arguing that Jesus Christ "is at frequent pains to 'undo' the sacrificial mechanism" and did not

⁶⁰ Hebblethwaite, *Bernanos: An Introduction*, 35.

⁶¹ Ibid.

intend to initiate a never-ending pattern of sacrifice like the one proposed by Bernanos.⁶² Then again, as Burton points out, the example of young French women like Thérèse of Lisieux and Bernadette Soubirous (of Lourdes fame), who offered themselves as scapegoats for the Church when they contracted tuberculosis, proved too attractive to ignore. Their dying both consoled and consolidated against death, offering hope of miraculous deliverance from mortality.⁶³

The theme of the transference of grace in *Dialogues des Carmélites* extends beyond the relationship between Blanche and the First Prioress. As a group, the Carmelites died to compensate for the revival of the Catholic Church in France. Lee verifies that this interpretation was at the root of the actual nuns' martyrdom in 1794, citing evidence of a surviving Carmelite, Marie de l'Incarnation. Sr. Marie describes a parody of *La Marseillaise* (written by the sisters in prison while awaiting execution), in which they sing of mounting joyfully to heaven where, as martyrs, they will pray for France.⁶⁴

1.2 Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

By the early 1950s, Francis Poulenc had found his voice as a composer and enjoyed an international career as a pianist. In addition, he had written several short articles and music reviews and devised and presented a series of broadcasts on French national radio. Having left behind the simple and direct compositional style of his early

⁶² Camille Naish, *Death Comes to the Maiden: Sex and Education 1431-1933* (London: Routledge, 1991), 244-46. Also see René Girard, *Le bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982), 278; and *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, 1977).

⁶³ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 202.

⁶⁴ Rosmarin, *When Literature Becomes Opera*, 67; Lee, "It Is Your Turn to Speak," 179. The author also raises the point that Poulenc could hardly have used the nuns' version of *La Marseillaise* in his opera, as musically significant as it was in the events leading to the nuns' death, because of its canonical nature in the Republic in the 20th century. Also see Marie de l'Incarnation, *Relation du martyre*.

days with *Les Six* and Erik Satie, Poulenc established a reputation with critics as a master of *mélodie* and French religious music. As a composer, he was comfortable remaining within the tonal realm and had come to terms with his lack of early formal training. He was an independent artist, somewhat removed from the musical mainstream, although he was attentive to new compositional developments.⁶⁵

Poulenc's career as a composer encompassed most major genres, but by 1950, his focus had shifted more toward choral and dramatic works, all the while maintaining his strong interest in solo song. Throughout his career, he composed solo and chamber instrumental works, generally favouring winds over string instruments. Earlier in his life, he wrote a significant number of piano works, and his best orchestral pieces date from before World War II, including *Concert champêtre* (1927-28), *Concerto for two pianos* (1932), and *Concerto for organ, strings, and timpani* (1938). With the exception of *Les animaux modèles* (1940-42), his ballets are also from this earlier period. The largest segment of his repertoire is devoted to the solo song, or *mélodie*, for which he is so well-known. He set texts by several authors, including Guillaume Apollinaire (e.g., *Calligrammes*, 1948), Max Jacob (e.g., *Parisiana*, 1954), and most notably, Paul Eluard, whose texts he set in *Tel jour, telle nuit* (1937), *Figure humaine* (1943), *La fraîcheur et le feu* (1950), and *Le travail de peintre* (1956), among others.

In France, Poulenc divided his time between Paris and his house in Noizay, just southwest of Paris, but by the 1950s, when he began composing *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Poulenc was spending a good deal of his time touring abroad. In 1934, he and baritone Pierre Bernac had formed a duo and performed regularly throughout Europe and

⁶⁵ Although Poulenc was known to refer to twelve-tone music as “dodécaca,” he was willing to try his hand at it. His *Thème variée* (1951), which he called an “oeuvre sérieuse,” included a retrograde version of the theme in the coda, ostensibly to indicate that he was aware of the latest serial ideas.

the United States. A large share of Poulenc's creative production centred on this musical partnership, for which he composed ninety songs. After Bernac retired from performing in 1959, Poulenc formed a duo with cellist Pierre Fournier and also performed with another of his favourite interpreters, Denise Duval, for whom he composed his last set of songs, *La courte paille* (1960), as well as his last opera, *La Voix humaine* (1959).

Georges Bernanos made no secret of his role as self-appointed critic of modern society. He warned readers of the dangers of moral degeneration, mechanized civilization, and an increasingly powerful state. He wanted to restore honour to France. Poulenc had no such agenda.⁶⁶ He did not share Bernanos's sense of mission or drive to proselytize or teach or witness. Pierre Bernac, Poulenc's close friend and musical partner for nearly thirty years, once remarked that the composer

was not at all interested in discussing philosophy or politics, but on subjects that appealed to him—music, of course, or literature, and above all, painting—he could explain his very personal views with a zest, a spontaneity and a vitality all his own.⁶⁷

Herein lies the first problem when trying to determine Poulenc's stance on politics or religion. Poulenc rarely made any direct reference to theology or politics in his correspondence, and his published writings, including his radio broadcasts, are limited to music and musicians. In particular, he wrote about Stravinsky and Chabrier, but several

⁶⁶ Trying to develop an interpretation of Poulenc's religious and political stance with very little direct evidence (as compared with Bernanos) calls to mind a caution from Herbert Lindenberger. In his comparison of two very different artists of the Romantic period, writer Percy Bysshe Shelley and composer Gioacchino Rossini, Lindenberger notes that, unlike Shelley, Rossini was not overtly political, probably because of his position as a functionary in the opera business, which left him with neither the leisure nor the opportunity to express his politics. Lindenberger concedes that music is not a direct medium through which to express a composer's views and he cautions that when we read politics in a composer's life and works, we are primarily reading ourselves and our own biases. Nevertheless, Rossini's operas have been interpreted politically. Heine, for example, stated that his operas can be understood as expressing a desire for freedom from foreign powers but Rossini was not overt about it because of censorship laws at the time. See Herbert Lindenberger, "Rossini, Shelley and Italy in 1819," chap. 3 in *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 81-106, especially page 91.

⁶⁷ Pierre Bernac, *Francis Poulenc: The Man and His Songs*, trans. Winifred Radford (New York: Norton, 1977), 34.

other contemporary composers also appeared in his articles. On occasion, Poulenc wrote about his own compositions.⁶⁸

The second challenge in exploring Poulenc's political and religious stance, especially in the 1950s when he composed *Dialogues*, is that while the majority of French Catholics probably still leaned to the right politically, the political spectrum within the Church itself had actually widened considerably. By the 1950s, it was less feasible to make assumptions about political ideology based on religious practices, or vice versa, than it had been decades earlier. A paradigm of secular republicanism vs. Catholic conservatism hangs (at least loosely) over so much writing on French music from the Revolution onward. It is my intention to problematize this binary model and suggest instead a less rigid formulation that acknowledges the 1905 separation of church and state and reflects a state of affairs in which religion and politics are more independent of each other. Bernanos himself, as a conservative Catholic royalist who nevertheless wrote scathingly against the purportedly pro-Catholic Vichy regime, is a good example. This altered paradigm opens up a space for a figure like Poulenc who, if his correspondence and music can be read as reliable witnesses, placed himself ideologically to the left even after his return to the Catholic Church in 1936.

To illustrate my point, I will briefly consider Vincent d'Indy as a foil to Poulenc. The environment that fostered the career of a composer like d'Indy was very different from that of Poulenc's mature period. In the 1890s, when d'Indy founded the Schola

⁶⁸ See for example: "A propos de *Mavra* de Igor Stravinsky," *Feuilles libres*, no. 27 (1922), 22-24; "Igor Stravinsky," *Information musicale*, January 3, 1941; "Le coeur de Maurice Ravel," *Nouvelle revue française* 4, no. 1 (1941), 237-40; "Centenaire de Chabrier," *Nouvelle revue française* 4, no. 2 (1941), 110-14; "La leçon de Claude Debussy," in *Catalogue de l'exposition Claude Debussy*, ed. A. Martin (Paris, 1942), xii; "Œuvres récentes de Darius Milhaud," *Contrepoints*, no. 1 (1946), 59-61; "Francis Poulenc on his Ballets," *Ballet* 2, no. 4 (1946), 57-58; "Mes mélodies et leurs poètes," *Conferencia*, December 15, 1947; "La musique de piano d'Erik Satie," *Revue musicale*, no. 214 (1952), 23-26; and *Emmanuel Chabrier* (Paris: La Palatine, 1961).

Cantorum, the political debacle of the Dreyfus Affair had re-entrenched the Catholic Church's conservative position within France's political framework. The Dreyfus Affair also set a precedent for composers' political involvement, polarizing artists into opposing camps. While composers like Alfred Bruneau and Charles Koechlin positioned themselves on the left in solidarity with Dreyfus, d'Indy was on the right. D'Indy's bitterness toward the Third Republic escalated at the beginning of the Affair, inspiring him to merge his political ideas with artistic reform, resulting in the founding of the Schola Cantorum, a society that soon evolved into a school of music that challenged the Conservatoire.⁶⁹ Unlike the Conservatoire, the Schola Cantorum based its curriculum on both sacred music and older, more traditional musical styles, including Gregorian chant, Renaissance polyphony, and Baroque and early Classical forms.

The d'Indy example highlights associations among the Catholic Church, conservative politics, and an older, traditional musical style. These connections were not unusual in the late nineteenth century in France, however, it would be unwise to assume the same ideological associations were as strong in 1953, when Poulenc began composing *Dialogues des Carmélites*. By this point, church and state had been officially separated for nearly fifty years in France, and in the interim, the Catholic Church had struggled to redefine her role in a modern world shaped by Enlightenment thought. The Vatican's two most significant developments in the first half of the twentieth century were its preliminary attempt to formulate a doctrine on social justice and its engagement

⁶⁹ D'Indy founded the Schola Cantorum along with Charles Bordes and Alexandre Guilmant. The Schola's curriculum based on sacred music and antiquarian traditions was a radical departure from the Conservatoire tradition, which stressed solfège, harmony, counterpoint, fugue, and composition. See Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18-21, 26; and Rollo Myers, *Modern French Music from Fauré to Boulez* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 35-39.

with liberal movements in the Church (although the Church's reaction was initially very negative). Each of these developments not only weakened older associations between political conservatism and Catholicism, but also enabled a broader spectrum of political views within the Church.

In the 1890s, the Roman Catholic Church began to formulate a new position vis à vis political, economic, and social policies. Over the next several decades, the Vatican issued a series of encyclicals that, when taken together, articulate a social justice doctrine. The underlying principles of this doctrine include dignity for all peoples, solidarity, charity, and subsidiarity. Rather than allying herself to a particular political movement, through this doctrine the Church adopted the role of critic, re-positioning herself in the centre between free market capitalism and statist socialism. The Vatican opposed extremes like communism or unrestricted *laissez-faire* policies, cautioning against the notion that a free market automatically produces justice.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ The Catholic Church's social justice doctrine encompasses matters of poverty and wealth, economics, social organization, and the role of the state. Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* ("On Capital Labour") is considered the foundation of social justice teaching. Leo XIII responds to the social instability and labour conflict resulting from industrialization's rise of extreme socialist governments. While the encyclical argues that the role of the state is to protect people's rights, he emphasizes the importance of private property rights. He also notes that the free market must be tempered by moral considerations. Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* ("On Reconstruction of the Social Order," 1931) reiterates much of *Rerum Novarum* and marks out the Church's economic position. In 1961, Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* ("Christianity and Social Progress") turned to social and economic development and international relations, spotlighting relations between rich and poor nations and outlining the rich nations' obligation to assist poorer countries, while respecting their particular cultures. Several subsequent documents added to the social justice doctrine: *Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth," 1963), in which Pope John XXIII linked the establishment of world peace to healthy relationships between states; *Gaudium et Spes* ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World," authored by the bishops of the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65), which covers a range of issues relating to social concern and Christian action, but also asserts the fundamental dignity of all persons as the basis for social justice; and *Dignitatis Humanae* (a document emerging from the Second Vatican Council, written mostly by the Jesuit John Courtney Murray). Also see: *Popularum Progressio* ("The Development of Peoples," 1967, Pope Paul VI), *Octogesima Adveniens* (apostolic letter from Pope Paul VI, 1971), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* ("Evangelization in the Modern World," 1975, Pope Paul VI), *Laborem Exercens* (1981, Pope John Paul II), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Centesimus Annus* (1991), *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), and *Caritas in Veritate* (2009).

While the Catholic Church worked to develop a doctrine of social justice, it also struggled against strengthening liberal movements from within. This liberalizing influence likely arose not only from a desire to work with modern philosophical systems, but also from the clergy's need to fit into societies that, more and more, were adopting secular frameworks and everchanging standards of morality. Initially, the Vatican reacted negatively to liberal thinkers in the Church and responded by issuing a number of documents communicating anti-modernist rhetoric. The term "modernism" was coined in this context by Pope Pius X, the most staunchly conservative pope of the twentieth century. Pius X's notion of modernism was meant to characterize a number of theologians and their views in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the so-called modernists were not a cohesive group with a unified position, many of them held the view that dogma can evolve over time. Other common threads included a rationalist approach to scripture, a preference for secularism in civic life (defined as not only a separation of church and state, but the search for an understanding of the common good for a disparate group of people), and an interest in synthesizing Catholicism with modern philosophical systems. Because liberal thinkers did not ascribe to scholasticism and did not believe that their theology could be proved rationally, they postulated also that religion resided in the realm of personal experience, belief, and emotions.⁷¹

⁷¹ The Vatican's anti-modernist reaction began with the Syllabus of Errors condemned by Pope Pius IX, accompanying the encyclical *Quanta Cura* (1864). In this document, several anathematized errors are listed, including rationalism, naturalism, socialism, communism, secret societies, and errors in reference to modern liberalism. In his 1893 encyclical, *Providentissimus Deus*, Pope Leo XIII spoke out against those who were using rationalism for scripture study, although he did affirm in principle the legitimacy of biblical criticism if pursued in a spirit of faith. Referring specifically to the theory of evolution and geological theories about the age of the earth, Leo addressed apparent contradictions between the Bible and science, indicating how such apparent contradictions might be resolved. Pope Pius X, a great supporter of Thomistic scholasticism, was the pope most vehemently opposed to modernism. His 1907 *Lamentabili Sane Exitu* was a sweeping condemnation that outlined sixty-five propositions as modernist heresies. Pius X was especially opposed to philosophical evolutionism, and many of the condemned propositions were

After Pius X's death in 1914, the Vatican's stance toward modernism softened considerably. The Church's defensive reaction against liberalism gradually evolved into an active engagement. A number of theologians (primarily French and German), loosely collected into a movement called *Nouvelle Théologie*, acquired a growing influence in the Catholic Church in the decades leading up to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The intellectuals associated with the *Nouvelle Théologie* movement reacted against the dominant scholasticism and called for theological and biblical studies to move away from the literalism that the Church had previously enforced. They did not support the Church's criticism of the modern era and defensive stance against non-Catholics. *Nouvelle Théologie* preached a return to sources of the faith (e.g., Bible study), an openness to dialogue with the contemporary world, and an interest in attending to art, literature, and mysticism in connection with Biblical exegesis. Many of these liberal theologians attended the Second Vatican Council and their theology became the basis for the official

taken from views commonly advocated in higher criticism at the time. Some of these condemned propositions included: a) if he wishes to apply himself usefully to Biblical studies, the exegete must first put aside all preconceived opinions about the supernatural origin of Sacred Scripture and interpret it the same as any other merely human document, b) in many narrations the Evangelists recorded not so much things that are true, as things which, even though false, they judged to be more profitable for their readers, c) the chief articles of the Apostles' Creed did not have the same sense for the Christians of the first ages as they have for the Christians of our time, etc. Later in 1907, Pope Pius X released the encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici gregis*, in which he addresses modernists as if they were a cohesive movement, and in his condemnation, he presents modernist theologians in near caricature. Pius subsequently instituted commissions to cleanse the clergy of theologians promoting modernism. Part of this movement was *Sacrorum Antistitum* (1910), a compulsory Oath Against Modernism for all Catholic bishops, priests, and teachers, in which they were to profess several points, including: a) the doctrine of faith is unchangeable and was handed down to us from the apostles in the same meaning, b) God can be known by reason from the visible works of creation and His existence can be demonstrated, and c) the method of interpreting scripture that embraces rationalism and textual criticism is objectionable. Pius X's hard-line conservative approach even contributed to France's separation of church and state in 1905 (his predecessor, Pope Leo XIII, had a more accommodating attitude toward secular governments). After Pope Pius X's death in 1914, the Vatican's antagonistic stance toward modernism softened considerably, until liberal views were finally invited and incorporated into the Catholic Church in the form of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Pope Paul VI abolished Pius X's Oath Against Modernism in 1967.

teachings of the Council, which sought to reform the Catholic Church and bring it more in line with the modern world.⁷²

It is clear that by the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church could no longer be viewed as a conservative monolith. But even earlier, in the 1940s, there are indications that Catholics in France embraced a number of stances along the liberal-conservative continuum, even if the bulk of the faithful fell to the right. The Vichy period (1940-44) provides an interesting case. Both France's defeat and the hardness of life under the Occupation triggered a revival of religious fervour, resulting in the reinforcement of old societal divisions at the beginning of the Vichy regime. Vichy appealed to those who were against the Republic and still had hopes of re-establishing the *ancien régime*, such as Maurras. The Resistance movement, on the other hand, was peopled primarily by pro-Republicans, who were against the reactionary Vichy government.

Vichy rhetoric was carefully formulated to appeal to the large population of traditional Catholics in France, ultimately garnering the support of several Church leaders as well. Officials towed the line that France's unfortunate fate as an occupied country was a divine punishment for its republican character and the actions of left-wing governments of the 1930s. Vichy's reactionary platform was based on a *Révolution*

⁷² The *Nouvelle Théologie* movement included the Jesuits Karl Rahner and John Courtney Murray, who wanted to integrate modern human experience with Christian dogma. Yves Congar, Joseph Ratzinger, and Henri de Lubac looked to what they saw as a more accurate understanding of scripture and the early Church Fathers as a source of renewal. Other members of the movement included Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Louis Bouyer, Etienne Gilson, Jean Daniélou, and Jean Mouroux. For more information, see: "Where is the New Theology Leading Us?," trans. Suzanne M. Rini [original French: Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?"], *Angelicum* 23 (1946): 126-45; Thomas Michael Loome, *Liberal Catholicism, Reform Catholicism, Modernism: A Contribution to a New Orientation in Modernist Research* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1979); Marvin Richard O'Connell, *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994); and Darrell Jodock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

nationale that aimed for a renewal of France, replacing the Republic's motto of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" with "Travail, Famille, Patrie." Initially, Vichy made several changes that positively affected the Church, reversing some policies that had been introduced with the 1905 separation of church and state.⁷³

While the change of tone at the beginning of the Vichy regime had encouraged support from traditional Catholics, this alliance loosened over time. Many Catholics had hoped from the beginning that Vichy would challenge the separation of church and state, but this never happened. Ultimately, Vichy was far from representing French Catholics as a whole, and several influential Catholics were notably on the side of the Resistance by the end of this period. Two intellectuals from the *Nouvelle Théologie* school, Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar, were associated with the Resistance, as were Fr. Raymond Brückberger, who had asked Bernanos to write dialogues for the Carmelites' screenplay, and Georges Bernanos himself, who wrote anti-Vichy articles from abroad.

Because the secular republicanism vs. Catholic conservatism model is so prevalent in French music scholarship of earlier periods, especially, for example, that of the Third Republic, it is tempting to apply this model to later periods and to use it to make inferences about Poulenc himself. However, as I have shown, after the separation of church and state in 1905, not only did France go through a political firestorm (the Occupation of WWII), but the Catholic Church underwent several major changes that challenged its conservative political leanings, clearing a space for more liberal-minded

⁷³ Early Vichyist policies that wooed traditional Catholics included: members of religious orders were permitted to teach (September 1940), religious instruction was restored to state schools (December 1940), church property that had been seized in 1905 was restored (February 1941), and religious orders were permitted to exist under the same terms as other organizations (April 1942). In addition to these changes, the Church requested funding from Vichy for parochial schools, but were only given a fraction of what they asked for. For more information, see Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

believers. While these changes may have been slower in coming to the French Catholic Church than, for example, North America, they still gave the less conservative-minded French Catholic a role in the Church. Measured against the conservative Catholic model, Poulenc, who maintained his irreverent, party-going persona, kept up his homosexual lifestyle, and still leaned toward Republican politics even after his return to the Church in 1936, may appear hopelessly conflicted. In the next section, I will examine his conversion experience, correspondence, and music in order to illuminate his religious and political stance more clearly.

Faith

With the death of his father in 1917, Poulenc had essentially abandoned Catholicism; however, the elder Poulenc's frequent reminiscences about the serene beauty and calm of the carved black Madonna statue at Rocamadour, an ancient pilgrimage site, ultimately had a great effect on his son.⁷⁴ In an interview with Claude Rostand, Poulenc famously explained how he was inspired to travel to Rocamadour himself after the grisly death of his colleague, composer Pierre-Octave Ferroud, in an automobile accident on August 17, 1936:

The tragic decapitation of this musician so full of vitality had stupefied me. Thinking about the frailty of the human condition, I was once again attracted to the spiritual life. Rocamadour served to lead me back to the faith of my youth.

⁷⁴ Rocamadour is located in southwestern France in the canton of Gramat. Its name is derived from a combination of the Provençal word for cliff, *ròca*, and *Sant Amador* (St. Amador). The village's reputation is due to its celebrated sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which has attracted pilgrims for centuries. Its buildings rise in stages up the side of a cliff; flights of steps ascend from the lower town to the churches half way up the cliff. The primary church is Notre Dame (1479), which contains a wooden Black Madonna, reputed to have been carved by St. Amador. The church opens to a terrace called the Plateau of St. Michel, where there is a broken sword said to be a fragment of Durandal, once wielded by the hero Roland. The most popular legend of origin names Zacheus, husband of St. Veronica (who wiped Jesus's face on his way to Calvary), as the true St. Amador (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13100a.htm>, accessed October 9, 2007).

This sanctuary, certainly the oldest in France [...] completely captivated me. Suspended in full sunlight in a vertiginous rock crevice, Rocamadour is a place of extraordinary peace [...]. Preceded by a courtyard surrounded by pink laurel trees, a very modest chapel, half constructed in the rock, shelters a miraculous statue of a black virgin, sculpted, according to tradition, from black wood by St. Amadour, little Zachée of the Gospel, who had to climb a tree in order to see Christ. The same evening of that visit to Rocamadour, I began my *Litanies à la Vierge noire* for female voices and organ. In this work I tried to depict the ‘rustic devotion’ side that struck me so strongly in this lofty place. [...] From that day onward, I returned often to Rocamadour, putting under the protection of the Black Virgin such varied works as *Figure humaine*, *Stabat Mater*, dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Christian Bérard, and the *Dialogues des Carmélites* of Bernanos. Now you know, my dear Claude, the true source of inspiration for my religious works.⁷⁵

About two decades after Poulenc’s interview with Rostand, Yvonne Gouverné, Poulenc’s friend and a fellow musician, provided a similar account of Poulenc’s conversion experience for the ten-year anniversary of his death. She and Poulenc had gotten to know Ferroud and worked with him to mount performances for his chamber music society, *Le Triton*.⁷⁶ Gouverné explained that shortly after Ferroud’s death, Poulenc insisted that she, Bernac, and the composer go to Rocamadour. She stated,

We all three entered a silent chapel in which stood the statue of the Black Virgin. Outwardly, nothing happened, yet from that moment everything in the spiritual life of Poulenc changed.⁷⁷

This 1936 visit was to be the first of many pilgrimages to Rocamadour and marks a turning point in Poulenc’s personal and professional life, after which he experienced a return of religious fervour.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ This English translation is from Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc*, *Lives in Music* 3 (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2001), 231. The original French text can be found in Francis Poulenc, *Entretiens avec Claude Rostand* (Paris: René Julliard, 1954), 108-9.

⁷⁶ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 415, n. 1 to letter 339 (original source is Yvonne Gouverné, *Poulenc et Rocamadour* [Paris: Zodiaque, 1974], 16 and 21).

⁷⁷ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 415. “Nous sommes entrés tous les trois dans une chapelle silencieuse où se trouve la statue de la Vierge noire [...]. Rien ne s’est passé en apparence et pourtant tout avait changé dans la vie spirituelle de Poulenc.” See Gouverné, *Poulenc et Rocamadour*, 21; quoted in Francis Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 2nd ed., ed. Myriam Chimènes, SACEM (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 426-27.

Prior to 1936, there are almost no references to religion in Poulenc's correspondence, but afterward, the composer often wrote to his close friends about attending Mass, repeat visits to Rocamadour, and his own spiritual state. Poulenc's correspondence paints the picture of a Catholic who had a special connection to Rocamadour, who was spiritually at home in the country rather than the city, and who expressed his faith in his music more so than any other way. Poulenc's spirituality was linked to his emotions and senses rather than to his intellect. But he struggled with his faith and was rarely at peace. He always felt like he was looking for something more. He was torn between the country faith of his father's heritage and the fun-loving, cosmopolitan irreverence of his mother's side. Poulenc's spiritual adviser, Father Carré, likened him to the main character in Massenet's opera *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (1902), the jester who enters a monastery to devote his life and skills to the Virgin Mary.⁷⁹

Poulenc's struggle with faith was evident immediately after his first trip to Rocamadour. A few days later, he wrote to his close friend and fellow composer Georges Auric, mulling over the sad state of affairs of mid-1936, referring specifically to the Spanish civil war. He told Auric that he wished he had Auric's solid faith, but he did not.⁸⁰ At other times, Poulenc refers to his faith as simple, like that of "a country

⁷⁸ Poulenc's visits to Rocamadour were frequent enough to make him well known at the site. A small museum of sacred art in the sanctuary was named after the composer in 1969: the Musée-Trésor Francis Poulenc. Among the treasures housed there are a ciborium and a chalice donated by Poulenc, signed on the base by the composer and dated respectively 1938 and 1957 (Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 395).

⁷⁹ Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 42. Note that, at the end of Massenet's opera, having been accused of blasphemy by the other monks, Jean the jester dances himself to death in front of the statue of the Virgin. The statue's arm miraculously extends to bless him as he dies. (See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 798.)

⁸⁰ The original French reads: "J'aimerais pouvoir penser comme toi, avoir ta foi car ainsi nous serions toujours exactement au même plan mais que faire quand on ne croit pas. Si j'avais au moins une foi même contraire cela serait déjà quelque chose mais je ne l'ai absolument pas. Evidemment nous sommes à une

priest.”⁸¹ He makes several references to attending Mass or taking part in other religious practices, often connecting this to his home outside of Paris. For example, in June of 1957, he wrote to Rose Dercourt-Plaut, telling her, “I am writing from Noizay where I came for the two days of Pentecost.”⁸²

Poulenc connected his spiritual struggles and his composition, linking trouble in one area to difficulty in another. This came to a head in 1954, when he had a mental breakdown while composing *Dialogues*. Not only was he having problems with copyright issues for the work, but he found himself identifying closely with Blanche’s spiritual trials. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter four of this dissertation, when I address the psychological program of the opera. While Poulenc connected his spiritual and creative struggles, he also attributed much of his success and inspiration, after 1936, to God, the Virgin Mary, or Rocamadour. In August 1950, he told Pierre Bernac,

The *Stabat* is going at such a rate that there can only be a Rocamadour miracle behind it. Out of the twelve sections, three are already done, two almost done, and one sketched in rough—and all this in ten days! I feel as if I were back in the time of the *Messe* at Anost.⁸³

In September 1953, when he had just begun composing *Dialogues*, Poulenc wrote to Bernac about how well his work on the opera was going. He said,

époque où la bonne humeur ne suffit pas pour arranger les choses.” (See Poulenc, *Correspondance*, 1910-1963, 425.)

⁸¹ The original French reads: “J’ai la foi d’un curé de campagne.” (See Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 103; and *Moi et mes amis* (Paris and Geneva: La Palatine, 1963), 15.

⁸² The original French reads: “Je vous écris de Noizay où je suis venu pour les deux jours de Pentecôte.” (See Poulenc, *Correspondance*, 1910-1963, 872; and *Echo and Source*, 282.)

⁸³ The original French reads: “Le *Stabat* va à une telle allure qu’il y a certainement miracle de Rocamadour. Sur 12 numéros 3 de faits, 2 de presque faits, 1 d’esquissé et ceci en 10 jours. Je me crois revenu à l’époque de la *Messe* à l’Anost.” (See Poulenc, *Correspondance*, 1910-1963, 694; and *Echo and Source*, 381, n. 1.)

All in all, divine summer. Rocamadour has a lot to do with this, I *know*. I have prayed so many times for a libretto that the Holy Mother sent me this one to sing her praises with.⁸⁴

Poulenc also wrote to Doda Conrad about *Dialogues* in September 1953, gushing about his progress on the opera:

Thank God (and it is truly God who must be thanked) my work is going well and when I come back to Paris on 15 October, I will definitely bring with me four scenes out of the seven that make the first act, perhaps even five. My familiarity with vocal music on the one hand, and with the mystical ambiance on the other, has so far enabled me to find the right tone.⁸⁵

I have painted a picture of Poulenc as a man whose spirituality was intrinsically connected to his emotions and his creative work; however, there is some evidence that he was also interested in theology and mysticism on a more intellectual level. In 1950, French writer Raymond Queneau conducted a survey among 200 well-known French personalities in an effort to compile a list representing the “ideal library.” Poulenc was the only musician to respond. Among his suggestions were a number of theological texts, including Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, as well as all the written works of Carmelites St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross.⁸⁶

In addition to his correspondence, Poulenc’s sacred works provide evidence, albeit indirect, of his religious stance. I will briefly consider them here, especially since, as I have shown, his compositional output and his faith became intertwined after 1936. In describing the connection between his faith and his sacred music, Poulenc stated,

⁸⁴ The original French reads: “Enfin, été divin. Rocamadour y est pour quelque chose je le *sais*. “J’avais tant de fois demandé un livret dans mes prières que la bonne mère m’a envoyé celui-ci à sa louange.” (See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 761; and *Echo and Source*, 235.)

⁸⁵ The original French reads: “Dieu merci (c’est vraiment Dieu qu’il faut remercier) mon travail marche bien et je rapporterai sûrement à Paris le 15 octobre 4 tableaux sur 7 de premier acte, peut-être 5. L’expérience que j’ai du chant, d’une part, et du climat mystique, de l’autre m’a fait jusqu’ici trouver le ton.” (See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 766; and *Echo and Source*, 238.)

⁸⁶ Francis Poulenc, “My Ideal Library,” in *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Sidney Buckland and Myriam Chimènes (Aldershot: Aldershot, 1999), 140-44.

All my religious music turns its back on the style that is inspired in me by Paris and its outskirts. When I pray it is the native of Aveyron who reawakens in me. This is evidence of heredity. Faith is strong in all the Poulencs.⁸⁷

Just as Poulenc's 1936 trip to Rocamadour was the first of many visits, the piece he composed there—*Litanies à la Vierge Noire*—is the first of many sacred choral works that comprised an important part of his compositional output in the second half of his career.

Typically, Poulenc's 1936 visit to Rocamadour is touted as a conversion experience that cleaves the composer's life into two distinct segments: his early days as an irreverent partygoing youth, and his later life as a devout, monkish composer of sacred music. In truth, this bipartite separation of the pre- and post-Rocamadour Poulenc is artificial and exaggerated; however, 1936 does mark a distinct change in his compositional output. Before 1936, Poulenc had written only one choral piece, the secular *Chanson à boire* (1922), modelled on a Renaissance drinking song. Myriam Chimènes points out that in 1936, Poulenc's friends Suzanne and André Latarjet had encouraged him to write his first "real" choral piece for the Choeurs de Lyon. Shortly after, Poulenc composed *Sept chansons* (1936) for mixed chorus. Poulenc gratefully gave the Latarjets partial credit for directing him toward the abundant vein of choral music, but Rocamadour provided him with the inspiration to compose sacred music, beginning with *Litanies à la Vierge noire*.⁸⁸

After 1936, Poulenc composed several sacred choral pieces, but he also composed a number of secular choral works. In addition to *Sept chansons*, these include *Petites voix*

⁸⁷ The original French reads: "Toute ma musique religieuse tourne le dos à mon esthétique parisienne ou banlieusarde. Quand je prie c'est l'Aveyronnais qui reparaît en moi. Evidence de l'hérédité. La foi est puissante chez tous les Poulenc." See Francis Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs (Journal de mes mélodies)*, trans. Winifred Radford (London: Gollancz, 1985), 48-49.

⁸⁸ From Chimènes' introduction to Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 29.

(1936) for female chorus, the cantatas *Sécheresses* (1937) and *Un soir de neige* (1944), and *Chansons françaises* (1945), none of which is on a sacred topic. *Figure humaine* (1943), a cantata on a text by Eluard, is not sacred in the strict sense, although its mood of supplication closely matches the lofty emotions of Poulenc's sacred works.

In 1937, Poulenc wrote his first liturgical work, the Mass in G, followed shortly after by *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence* (1938-39). Both *Exultate Deo* (1941) and *Salve regina* (1941) were written during the Occupation, while *Quatre petites prières de Saint François d'Assise* (1948) for male voices was composed shortly after. In 1950-51, Poulenc composed a setting on the thirteenth-century *Stabat Mater* text following the death of his friend Christian Bérard. Three minor sacred works followed: *Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël* (1951-52) for mixed chorus, *Ave verum corpus* (1952), and *Laudes de Saint Antoine de Padoue* (1957-59) for male voices. The *Gloria* (1960) for soprano soloist, chorus, and orchestra, was commissioned by the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation in 1959 and Poulenc, addressing its combination of the sacred and profane, explained that when composing the work, he was thinking of the sublime frescoes of Gozzoli that feature an "angel who sticks out his tongue at his neighbour" and some serious Benedictine monks he had witnessed enjoying a game of football.⁸⁹ His final sacred choral work was *Sept répons des ténèbres* (1961-62).

Following his study of J.S. Bach, Monteverdi, and Victoria after his religious reawakening in 1936, Poulenc developed a distinct style for his sacred choral works. These works were largely homophonic. Poulenc wrote clear, generally syllabic declamation of text, with the melody often emerging as the top voice. Poulenc was fond

⁸⁹ The original French reads : "... ange qui tire la langue à son voisin," Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 927, n. 8.

of using ostinato and sometimes created a false counterpoint with it, with a result that bore some resemblance to organum or psalm recitation. He eschewed principles of voice leading, creating parallel octaves and fifths and unresolved seventh and ninth chords. Poulenc's choral melodies tend to be short and motivic rather than tuneful, and more diatonic than chromatic. Plainchant exerted a strong influence on his melodic style, with its narrow range and conjunct motion. The works are strongly tonal, but passages of harsh dissonance can be found. He is fond of oscillating harmonies that momentarily remove a chord's sense of function. The meter changes are frequent and fluid, generated by Poulenc's interpretation of the flow of the text.⁹⁰

In addition to these choral works, however, there is evidence of sacred themes or models sprinkled throughout Poulenc's repertoire after 1936. For example, *Priez pour paix* (1938), on a text by Charles d'Orléans, is a solo vocal work that calls on the Virgin Mary to intercede for peace. Poulenc discovered the text in *Le Figaro* on September 28, 1938 and aimed to give it a setting of fervour and humility, appropriate for a country church.⁹¹ *Hymne* (1948) is a song for low voice on a text that Jean Racine translated from the Roman breviary. The melody shows the influence of plainchant, with mostly stepwise motion and repeated notes at the beginning; however, the range expands significantly as the piece progresses. The text is set syllabically to a rhythm dominated by eighth and quarter notes, matching that of speech or chant. Poulenc also considered his Concerto in g for organ (1938) a sacred work, and *Dialogues des Carmélites* clearly falls into this category as well.

⁹⁰ Daniel, *Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 97, 202-14.

⁹¹ Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs*, 49.

Politics

Politics was not a major preoccupation for Francis Poulenc and very few references to politics can be found in his correspondence. As Chimènes notes, Poulenc completed three years of compulsory military service from January 1918 to December 1920, an obligation he sorely resented because it hampered his musical education. Nevertheless, he composed while in the military and even escaped to help produce his pieces. In one notable letter to Comtesse Jean de Polignac, dated August 15, 1936, just two days before Ferroud's death and Poulenc's subsequent visit to Rocamadour, Poulenc clearly expresses his political leanings. He states,

I am not 'Popular Front' [...] I am an old French Republican who once believed in liberty. I loathe Monsieur de La Roque but I used to like Monsieur Loubet well enough. For me, you see, the Republic was men like Clemenceau [...] However, since yesterday I have made peace with the government and am ready to embrace (for once) Monsieur Zay for his judicious and intelligent appointment of Edouard, which makes me jump for joy [...] To believe, Marie-Blanche, that I have no leftist leanings is to know very little about me.⁹²

In this letter, Poulenc declares his antipathy toward the extremist left-wing Popular Front but claims some left-leanings, describing himself as a Republican. Poulenc vehemently disliked Colonel de la Rocque, a politician who had formed the *Croix de feu*, a para-military organization which developed into the right-wing Parti Social Français. On the other hand, he approved of Georges Clemenceau, who championed Dreyfus's cause, and Emile Loubet, who was ultimately responsible for setting Dreyfus free. Loubet (President of the French Republic from 1899 to 1906) also contributed to the break between France

⁹² The original French reads: "Je ne suis pas Front populaire... Je suis un vieux Français républicain qui croyait dans la liberté. Je hais M. de La Rocque mais j'aimais assez M. Loubet. Pour moi la République voyez-vous c'était des hommes comme Clemenceau... Depuis hier cependant je fais pouce avec le gouvernement et suis prêt à embrasser (pour une fois) Monsieur Zay car la nomination d'Edouard, si juste, si intelligente me fait sauter de joie... Marie-Blanche, comme c'est mal me connaître que de croire que je n'ai pas de penchants populaires." See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 42-43 and 420; and *Echo and Source*, 107.

and the Vatican. Poulenc's appreciation for Jean Zay is likely primarily because Zay appointed playwright Edouard Bourdet to the Comédie Française.⁹³

A few years later, with the start of World War II, Poulenc was once again called into military service. He rejoined as a reservist in June 1940 and was demobilized the following month. He was on active duty for a brief period in 1940, after which his unit retreated. In a letter dating from July 10, 1940, Poulenc stated,

I make a most charming soldier, all in khaki. My little escapade was quite incredible—I'll tell you all about it when I see you. Thanks to the Marshall we were not taken prisoner in Bordeaux like the chaps from Lyons. We were left to retreat towards the south. After days of travelling in cattle trains we have now taken root in a heavenly village in Lot, three kilometres away from Cahors, where I sleep in a barn straight out of the Fables of La Fontaine [...] I feel full of music. I have found countless themes and the whole colour of my ballet.⁹⁴

In this passage, Poulenc refers to the first of a handful of pieces intrinsically connected to the Vichy period of German-occupied France. These pieces represent his contribution to the Resistance movement. Poulenc was a member of the Front National des Musiciens, a musical Resistance organization that originally grew out of the French Communist Party, but developed along non-political lines to embrace a wide range of people. The group's clandestine journal, *Musiciens d'Aujourd'hui*, outlined some of their activities, such as organizing concerts of new and banned music, showing solidarity with prisoners and Jewish musicians in hiding, and arranging anti-German demonstrations. The members also engaged in subversive activities in their own musical performances and

⁹³ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 355, ns. 6-9.

⁹⁴ The original French reads: "Je suis un ravissant soldat vêtu d'un bourgeron kaki. Mon équipée a été bien inouïe. Je vous narrai cela de vive-voix. Grâce au Maréchal nous n'avons pas été faits prisonniers à Bourdeaux comme nos copains de Lyon. On nous a laissés nous replier sur le sud. Après des jours de wagons à bestiaux nous avons pris racine dans un idéal village du Lot à 3 kilomètres de Cahors où je couche dans une grange très La Fontaine [...] je me sens plein de musique. J'ai trouvé mille thèmes et toute la couleur de mon ballet." See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 497-98; and *Echo and Source*, 123-24.

compositions, such as playing the *Marseillaise* in front of German officers in nightclubs or inserting quotations from patriotic songs into new works.⁹⁵

The ballet referred to in the above quote is *Les animaux modèles* (1942), based on six fables by La Fontaine. By setting the fables in the era of Louis XIV, Poulenc gave the work a distinctly French flavour. He then reinforced the piece's nationalistic undertone (and thus, anti-German sentiment) by introducing the theme of the song, *Non, non vous n'aurez pas notre Alsace-Lorraine* into the seventh scene, "Les deux coqs." Significantly, the figure of the cock is a symbol of France. Poulenc inserted at least one self-quotation into *Les animaux modèles*. A two-bar direct musical quote from the passage in *Litanies à la vierge noire* where Poulenc set the words, "Dieu le père créateur, ayez pitié de nous" ("God the Creator Father, have mercy on us"), is in both the opening and closing sections. The composer's intention is clear: to covertly thumb his nose at the occupying forces.⁹⁶

Poulenc's other Resistance works include the cantata *Figure humaine* (1943), *C* (1943), and his first opera, *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (1944).⁹⁷ After considering how well the people of Noizay treated him during the Occupation, the composer stated, "I hope that *Figure humaine* and *Les Mamelles* will prove a sufficient tribute from a

⁹⁵ Nigel Simeone, "Making Music in Occupied Paris," *Musical Times* 147, no. 1894 (2006): 23-50, see especially 45-46.

⁹⁶ Simeone, "Making Music in Occupied Paris," 34-37. Although several commentators have cited Poulenc's reference to this tune, Simeone has indicated that he was unable to find a song with the matching title or melody in the repertoire, suggesting that Poulenc may have mis-remembered the title or the musical quote.

⁹⁷ In her discussion of compositions about the difficulties of war, military archetypes, and an idealized France, Caroline Potter points out two other pieces by Poulenc: *Bleuet* (1939) and *Chansons villageoises* (1942). Poulenc's setting of Apollinaire's *Bleuet* can be interpreted as an anti-war statement in its reflection of the poet's stint as a soldier during WWI. *Chansons villageoises*, a song cycle on poems by Maurice Fombeure, suggests an affinity with the rural *France profonde*. See Caroline Potter, "French Music and the Second World War," in *French Music Since Berlioz*, 290-91.

Frenchman.”⁹⁸ Describing the genesis of *Figure humaine*, Poulenc explains that after another visit to Rocamadour, he was inspired to compose a clandestine work which would be prepared and printed in secret and performed only on the long-awaited day of liberation. During the Occupation, Poulenc was among a small group of people who received typed poems in the mail bearing pseudonyms that lightly veiled the authorship of Paul Eluard. Poulenc decided to use eight of Eluard’s secret poems to create the work, composing it for unaccompanied choir so that it might be performed anywhere by the sole means of the human voice. Publisher Paul Rouart agreed to print the cantata, then sent it to London where it was finally broadcast in January 1945. *Figure humaine* is a testimony to France’s yearning for freedom, capped by a long consummatory poem with the refrain, “J’écris ton nom.” The final word at last reveals “ton nom” as “liberté.”

Poulenc also published the piece popularly known as *C* secretly, in 1943. This solo song with piano accompaniment (with its companion piece, *Fêtes galantes*) is on a poem by Louis Aragon and was meant as a direct response to the German occupation. *C* is shorthand for “Les Ponts-de-Cé,” a place where bridges cross the Loire river. *C* is a nostalgic evocation of medieval France with chivalric references to images such as a wounded knight, a meadow, and the castle of a duke. Aragon’s verse also uses the medieval or Renaissance convention of repeating the same rhyme for each line. Near the end of the text, Aragon jerks back to reality with images of war: “les voitures versées / Et les armes désamorcées / Et les larmes mal effacées.” He concludes the song with “O ma France, ô ma délaissée.”⁹⁹ In a letter dated April 27, 1945, Koechlin praised Poulenc’s

⁹⁸ The original French reads: “J’espère que *Figure humaine* et *Les Mamelles* seront un tribut de Français suffisant.” See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 574; and *Echo and Source*, 143.

⁹⁹ “...the overturned cars / And the unprimed weapons / And the tears barely wiped away” and “Oh my France, oh my forsaken one” (translation mine).

song, stating that the “very soul of our wounded Fatherland” breathes in the emotion of C.¹⁰⁰

Les mamelles de Tirésias (1944) is radically different from Poulenc’s other political works because it is so lighthearted. On a text by Apollinaire, it is a surrealist *opéra bouffe* that “masquerades as a product of *la belle époque*” with stylistic references to composers such as Offenbach and Chabrier.¹⁰¹ Feminist politics are at issue here: At the opening of the opera, we are introduced to Thérèse, who is bored as a woman and declares that she would rather be a man so that she can be a soldier, waiter, or even the president. She promptly grows a beard and “releases” her breasts (in the form of balloons filled with helium). Her husband, no doubt disturbed by these developments, decides to take over the role of reproduction.

Poulenc’s opera provides a mocking response to the natalist agenda of Marshal Pétain’s national revolution. Pétain encouraged women to selflessly devote their lives to restoring the glory of France by bearing and raising children in order to rebuild the French military. Although this attitude had been a national preoccupation in past decades, it was fervently revived by the Vichy regime and gained new currency during the Occupation. According to historian Alison M. Moore, Vichy used gender to legitimize its authority by

emphasising pro-natalism and conservative family values. Visual media featured heavily in Vichy pro-natalist campaigns, as attested to by the large number of posters to celebrate Mother’s Day and encourage French women to bear children in the service of the nation by representing happy glowing mothers, and healthy babies juxtaposed with valiant soldier-males.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 154.

¹⁰¹ Mellers, *Francis Poulenc*, 98.

¹⁰² Alison M. Moore, “History, Memory and Trauma in Photography of the *Tondues*: Visuality of the Vichy Past through the Silent Image of Women,” *Gender and History* 17, no. 3 (2005), 660. See chapter four for a more extensive discussion on gender politics in France.

Les Mamelles and *Dialogues* are miles apart aesthetically, but both address cultural expectations of women in French society. *Dialogues* depicts a group of women who act as selfless victims, offering their lives for the salvation of France, within the framework of vicarious suffering. On the other hand, *Les Mamelles* presents a response to Republican motherhood, Vichy's prescribed role for women.¹⁰³

The Genesis of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*

The origin of some of Poulenc's most important religious works provides an additional barometer of his personal religious sentiment. In many cases, he wrote sacred music not because a commission specified it, but because of his own personal and artistic prerogative. A good example is the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation commission in 1959. The Foundation originally asked for a symphony, to which Poulenc had responded that he was "not made" for symphonies. When Poulenc was then asked for an organ concerto, he refused on the grounds that he had already written one and was not interested in writing another. The Foundation finally conceded to accept whatever work Poulenc decided to write. He then composed the *Gloria*.¹⁰⁴

Ricordi's commission of *Dialogues des Carmélites* followed a similar course. During a 1953 concert tour through Italy (with cellist Pierre Fournier), Poulenc visited Ricordi director Guido Valcarengi to discuss his commission of a ballet on the life of St. Margaret of Cortona. Although Poulenc was interested in a religious subject, he was not

¹⁰³ *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* also marks the beginning of Poulenc's collaboration with Denise Duval, his favourite female interpreter, who had her start not as an opera singer but as a cabaret singer at the Folies Bergères. Poulenc considered Duval his operatic mouthpiece, and he wrote all three of his leading operatic roles for her: Thérèse, Blanche, and Elle. Poulenc's final opera, *La voix humaine*, also portrays a woman as victim, but this opera reverberates less with political concerns than his two earlier works.

¹⁰⁴ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, letter 298, n. 1.

inspired by the story of St. Margaret. Alternatively, Valcarengi suggested that he consider writing an operatic version of Bernanos's *Dialogues des Carmélites*. After some consideration, Poulenc became convinced that it was the right subject for him. He explained,

I knew the play by Bernanos—I had read it, and re-read it, and even seen it twice—but I had no idea of its *verbal rhythm*, a major consideration for me. I made up my mind to examine the work later, on my return to Paris. But the following day, right in the middle of the window of a bookshop in Rome, there was *Les Dialogues*, which seemed to be just waiting for me [...] In spite of myself, I felt I was somehow being drawn into this great adventure, which was to haunt me for the next three years. I bought the book and decided to re-read it. I sat down at a café in the Piazza Navona [*Tre Scalini*]. It was ten o'clock in the morning [...] At two o'clock in the afternoon I sent a telegram to M. Valcarengi [...] "Agreed, with enthusiasm." I can still see myself at that café in the Piazza Navona [...] devouring Bernanos's drama and saying to myself after each scene: "but obviously, it was made for me, made for me!"¹⁰⁵

Poulenc was not only inspired by the story of Blanche's journey from fear to faith, but he was impressed by its verbal rhythm. Beginning with the scene in which Blanche visits the convent to ask the First Prioress's permission to join the order, Poulenc sensed that Bernanos was similarly obsessed with the rhythm and prosody of the French language, which immediately drew him to the work. Bernanos's *Dialogues* had been successful as a stage play from its world premiere in Zurich in June 1951. Its first French performance took place the following year in Paris at the Théâtre Hébertot.¹⁰⁶ Poulenc

¹⁰⁵ "Je connaissais, bien entendu, la pièce de Bernanos que j'avais lue, relue et vue deux fois mais je n'avais aucune idée de son *rythme verbal*, détail capital pour moi. J'étais décidé à examiner la chose plus tard, à mon retour à Paris, lorsque le surlendemain, en plein milieu de la vitrine d'un libraire de Rome, je découvre les *Dialogues* qui semblaient m'attendre. [...] Et voici que, malgré moi, j'étais ramené à cette grande aventure qui devait me hanter pendant trois ans. J'achetai le livre et décidai de le relire. Pour cela je m'installai Piazza Navone, à la terrasse du café des *Tre Scallini*. Il était dix heures du matin. [...] A deux heures, je télégraphais à M. Valcarengi [...] "Entendu, avec enthousiasme." Je me revois dans un café de la Piazza Navone [...] dévorant le drame de Bernanos, et me disant à chaque scène: "Mais, évidemment, c'est fait pour moi, c'est fait pour moi!" See Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 387; notes to letter 231, n. 4.

¹⁰⁶ The premiere, in German with the title *Die Begnadete Angst*, was held as part of a Swiss theatre festival. (See Boly, *Dialogues des carmélites [par] Georges Bernanos*, 21.) Soon after, the play was performed, in translation, in Berlin, Munich, Italy, and Glasgow. Early critics discussed similarities between Le Fort's novella and Bernanos's work and debated the differences between the work as a stage drama and as a

clearly knew it well. He became obsessed with writing the opera and composed very few other works until 1956, when *Dialogues* was finally completed. Poulenc found the subject matter so upsetting that his sleep and health were adversely affected. In addition, he became entangled in a web of copyright issues which exacerbated his psychological struggles.¹⁰⁷

This chapter serves as a foundation for subsequent analysis of *Dialogues des Carmélites* by providing a biographical sketch and oeuvre overview for Bernanos and Poulenc. Both men were devout Catholics, but they diverged greatly in their interpretation of the relationship between church and state: Bernanos was a reactionary who saw Catholicism as an important part of France's national identity, while Poulenc considered faith a personal matter. Their approaches to the story of the Carmelites reflect several points of agreement, including an attraction to the decadent aesthetic and adherence to the doctrine of vicarious suffering. I will now turn to the theme of hysteria, reading it against the context of biography and oeuvre.

screenplay and production issues, particularly how cutting certain scenes affected the integrity of the work. In different productions, various scenes were eliminated for a variety of reasons: they showed hints of prejudice, appeared too politically right-leaning, or concerned theological issues completely out of sync with the culture of the audience. Some critics feared the public would be fatigued by the tension and religious discourse, while others predicted the work would rejuvenate religious drama. All addressed the theme of fear surmounted by divine grace. Critics of the German production lauded Thérèse Giehse, who played the First Prioress, stating that her death scene would act as a touchstone for successive productions. The first Italian performance was in 1952. A later version incorporated film representations of the French Revolution and both World Wars to highlight the contrast between the ambiance of the convent and the warring world outside. National theatres in Scotland were closed to the play because it was rated counter-revolutionary, but the Catholic University mounted a production in 1957. Similarly, until 1989, the work could only be presented in university theatres in Poland due to censorship issues. See Irena Slawinska, "Les *Dialogues des Carmélites* aux prises avec la scène," in *Bernanos: Création et modernité*, ed. Max Milner (Klincksieck, Paris: Presses de l'Université Marie Curie-Sklodowska, 1998), 153-57.

¹⁰⁷ Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites: The Historical Background," 287 and 301. Also see Chimènes and Buckland, *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature*, letter 250, n. 4.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRIORESS'S MAD SCENE

*Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh.*
—Ophelia, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene i

2.1 Introduction

The Prioress's mad scene in Act I, scene iv of *Dialogues des Carmélites* encapsulates much of the psychological disorder that haunts Poulenc's entire work. The scene opens in the convent infirmary at the bedside of Prioress de Croissy and as it progresses, the reality of her imminent death becomes increasingly apparent, both to those around her and to the Prioress herself. She struggles to stay lucid, but ultimately, she cannot fend off the relentless mental disintegration accompanying her physical decline. The Prioress's madness comes to a climax just before her death, in a moment that, according to Cristina Mazzoni, could be identified as a hysterical hallucination or a mystical vision.¹

Poulenc experienced one of the most mentally distressing periods of his life while composing *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Not only did Emmet Lavery challenge him over copyright issues, but his lover Lucien Roubert was struggling with a terminal illness as well. Poulenc's mental and physical health suffered due to stress, forcing him to enter a rehabilitation clinic. But this sort of trouble was not new for the composer. The death of a composer colleague, Pierre-Octave Ferroud, in the 1930s and the composer's subsequent

¹ See Cristina Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). In this book, Mazzoni aims to examine the intertwining of hysteria and mysticism, as well as the role of women in this relationship. Her primary sources are religious, literary, and scientific texts, especially from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

return to Catholicism are witness to his early spiritual anxiety. In Jeremy Sams' estimation at least, Poulenc was a hypochondriac.² The same claim could be made of Georges Bernanos, who suffered ill health his entire life, encouraging his obsession with the mystery of Christ's agony and death. And Bernanos, too, was ill when he wrote his stage play version of *Dialogues*, although unlike Poulenc, he did not live to write another work.

In order to explore the nexus between fear and faith in this dissertation, I focus on hysteria as the work's primary theme, and I will build on my arguments vis à vis hysteria in this and the two subsequent chapters. In this chapter, following a literary review on operatic mad scenes, I enter the opera at Act I/iv, the Prioress's death, which I read as a mad scene. My goal is to suggest a critical reorientation that problematizes the popular feminist interpretation of the operatic mad scene—that madness is the realm of the feminine and more so, that hysteria is related to feminine oversexualization. I will provide an in-depth overview of the First Prioress's mad scene, incorporating a discussion of formal elements of mad scenes as outlined in the musicological literature. The critical interpretive work in this area has thus far been dominated by a feminist reading of the mad scene as the operatic embodiment of female sexual excess. I give this model some consideration, but I will provide an alternative interpretation of the Prioress's madness that sees hysteria not as a metaphor for sexual dysfunction, but rather as a metaphor for social degeneration.

A word about terminology is warranted at the outset. Both “hysteria” and “madness” are problematic terms. Michel Foucault suggested that, until

² Sams, “From the Scaffold to La Scala,” 516. According to Foucauldian nosology, the hypochondriac is the male counterpart to the female hysteric.

institutionalization became popular, madness was considered continuous with reason and not necessarily a disordered state. Charles Lasègue, a nineteenth-century authority on hysteria, claimed that, due to the extreme variation in symptoms, “the definition of hysteria has never been given and never will be.”³ Elisabeth Bronfen states that hysteria is “precisely not this syndrome, not that disorder, and perhaps not even a sickness in the strict sense,” while Mark Micale waxes poetic about the “extreme, almost obscene interpretability” of hysteria.⁴ In the end, the real difference in the terms may lie more in their etymologies than in a contemporary understanding of their meanings.

Artists and writers have used hysteria metaphorically for the expressive power it infused into their works. Over the past fifteen years or so, feminist scholars, too, have adopted hysteria to construct a critical apparatus for operatic mad scenes. Throughout this dissertation, it might seem as though I use the term madness interchangeably with hysteria, and this is only because I consider hysteria a species of madness. I begin my interpretation with a feminist definition of hysteria that emerged from an understanding of the illness prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: hysteria is a condition connected to the sexual dysfunction of women. I then problematize this definition by examining the medical history of the term, in concert with its cultural representation.

2.2 Defining Operatic Madness in the Musicological Literature

Because the mechanics of operatic madness have been connected to opera’s formal structures, which in turn have changed considerably throughout the history of the

³ Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 6.

⁴ Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 102-3.

genre, operatic madness itself can be difficult to identify. It is not necessarily characterized by a fixed collection of traits. Both Ellen Rosand and Paolo Fabbri consider madness in early opera; however, while Rosand works to define musical constructions of madness, Fabbri connects the origins of this operatic convention to earlier spoken theatre, and so concentrates on how madness is depicted via text.

Fabbri cites Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* as an important influence on Italian drama, but because Ariosto's model of madness was depicted with extreme actions and abnormal gestures but almost entirely without speech, it is somewhat distanced from opera. The chief ingredient of early mad scenes in opera was a nonsensical conjunction of ideas from a variety of sources, resulting in an accumulation of small, illogical text fragments, haphazard speech, confused actions, and strange appearances.⁵ The mad character adopted a series of quickly shifting identities and moods and might have employed different languages or dialects, references to mythological characters, and formal alterations, such as changes in the rhyme scheme. Fabbri notes that texts after the mid-seventeenth century "reveal a general tendency to limit the signifying of madness to an increasingly restricted number of verbal and physical gestures," including references to musical topoi, such as citations of instruments or popular tunes.⁶

Rosand points out that one of the primary markers of Ophelia's madness in *Hamlet* is her singing, making this a particularly provocative example for opera scholars due to the implications it has for operatic madness. But in addition to her singing, which is "almost sufficient for a diagnosis of insanity" in spoken drama, Ophelia also alters the

⁵ Paolo Fabbri, "On the Origins of an Operatic Topos: The Mad-Scene," in *Con che soavità: Studies in Italian Opera, Song, and Dance, 1580-1740*, ed. Iain Fenlon and Tim Carter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 164.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 176-77.

form and content of her communication: her speech no longer conforms to Shakespearean verse and her repertoire of bawdy songs is entirely inappropriate for a girl of her social class.⁷ While Rosand admits that a good deal of the burden of signification of operatic madness falls to the text, she insists that a mad scene requires that operatic language “be shaped in an extraordinary, abnormal way, and its language is really two: music and text.”⁸ She explains that music and text are distinct modes of discourse, each with its own rules and conventions and potential for rational or irrational expression, and so operatic madness can be a combined effort of the two. From this premise, Rosand postulates that madness can rely primarily on text, by abusing the conventions of verbal logic and syntax and of rhetorical order and subordinating music’s own logic to the illogic of the text; or music can be independently mad, ignoring or subverting its own laws of structure and syntax with discontinuities or unconventional juxtapositions and, in this way, music intensifies, compounds, or even substitutes the irrationality of the text with its own; and finally, the combination of music and text can result in madness, where each element might retain its own internal order, but when combined, they make no sense and do not mesh.

To illustrate, Rosand presents Deidamia, Francesco Saccati’s madwoman from *La finta pazza* (1641), who continually expresses new ideas, actions, and moods that are in turn exaggerated by the music via text painting. The music’s imitative responses amplify the discontinuities of the text, emphasizing its madness. This localized imitation demands the sacrifice of larger structural coherence, but early operatic mad scenes employing this tactic worked because of the strong text orientation of the *stile rappresentativo*. As

⁷ Ellen Rosand, “Operatic Madness: A Challenge to Convention,” in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 241-42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 242.

operatic language moved towards a conventional recitative and aria formulation, the structure of discourse became more important than the isolation of a single word. For example, in Handel's *Orlando* (1733), rapid emotional changes associated with mental instability are no longer portrayed by obsessive attention to individual words, but rather by the unexpected and inappropriate on a larger scale. Orlando communicates his madness with formal improprieties—by exploiting the middle ground between aria and recitative, with arias of irregular form, with an inappropriate setting of a particular text, and the use of text and music unsuitable to the dramatic situation. Clearly, recognizing the contextual conventions of the operatic style in which the mad scene is located is a crucial step in determining how madness then exploits and subverts those conventions.

In a large-scale study of nineteenth-century operatic mad scenes, Sieghart Döhring uncovered a number of commonalities, creating the impression that by this point, the mad scene was actually quite formulaic.⁹ According to Döhring, nineteenth-century mad scenes tend to occur in arias which are either single-movement strophic or slow-fast double arias and typically, they show an innovative alteration of structural form, often by blurring aria and recitative. Mad scenes of this period also normally feature virtuosic singing, as well as reminiscence in the form of recalled themes. Because of the ambitious scale of his project, Döhring necessarily sacrificed depth for breadth, perhaps doing an interpretive disservice to the mad scene in encouraging the writer to establish similarities and ignore chronological, geographical, and stylistic distinctions which might, in the end, provide a much fuller interpretation of a given mad scene.

⁹ See Sieghart Döhring, "Die Wahnsinnszene," in *Die 'couleur locale' in der Opera des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Heinz Becker (Regensburg, 1976), 279-314.

Susan McClary's "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen" also focuses on the formal aspects of mad scenes, but the chapter is unique thanks to the feminist metaphor McClary outlines for the musical delineation of madness.¹⁰ According to McClary, a mad scene comprises a frame of normative musical constructions (in her interpretation, this is the masculine force of control) which surrounds and tries to contain the "madness" given body via musical excess (which McClary reads as feminine sexual excess). Musical, or sexual, excess falls generally under the rubric of repetition, ornamentation, or chromaticism. In addition to the liberatory aspect of feminine operatic madness, McClary's inspiration for this metaphor appears to be a formal convention from visual art.¹¹ In two paintings directly related to psychiatry—*Pinel Freeing the Insane* by Tony Robert-Fleury and *A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière* by André Brouillet—the madwoman is exhibited not only as the victim of a mental disorder, but also as a sexually titillating display, with her clothing in indecent disarray. Moreover, both paintings also depict male spectators and/or scientists who "represent the normal, the bars of reason that protect the spectator from the monster."¹² In an operatic context then, a composer depicting madness needs to ensure that "the musical voice of reason is ever audibly present as a reminder, so that the ravings of the

¹⁰ See Susan McClary, "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen," chap. 4 in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 80-111.

¹¹ In *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-century France*, Janet Beizer notes that "the hysteric was being rediscovered by literary and cultural critics [...] and was often recovered in feminism's name as a figure emblematic of revolt against the patriarchy," (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 2. Catherine Clément's contribution to her volume with Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), is a prominent source for the discussion on reimagining the hysteric as an empowered woman.

¹² McClary, "Excess and Frame," 85.

madwoman will remain securely marked as ‘Other’ so that the contagion will not spread.”¹³

McClary privileges Michel Foucault’s idea that insanity can be understood as continuous with reason, and further, that insane behaviour might be considered positively, as a mode of resistance to the dominant order (similar to Clément).¹⁴ Foucault argues that madness and sanity were allowed to intermingle freely until the movement to institutionalize the insane gained momentum (what Foucault terms the Great Confinement), beginning with the opening of the Hôpital Général in Paris in 1657. This new culture of institutionalization was partly the result of an obsession with societal surveillance and control, but it also led to a voyeuristic fascination with the insane and other unfortunates who were housed in asylums. McClary’s musical metaphor specifically references the culture of the madhouse—she states that music’s “mediating filter of masculinity creates something like the grilles that used to be put over the windows of asylums at the time when gentlefolk liked to witness the spectacle of insanity for entertainment.”¹⁵ A kind of “freak show,” exploitive atmosphere developed around asylums, and this voyeuristic fascination inspired artistic works that represented the spectacle of madness, which in turn embodied “the double gesture of confinement and exhibition, of frame and display, or moral lesson and titillation.”¹⁶

In his *Madmen and the Bourgeoisie*, Klaus Doerner points out that definitions of madness are intrinsically politically motivated, so it is not surprising that feminists have taken a particular interest in madness: not only do women share the role of the

¹³ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴ See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [1965], trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1988).

¹⁵ McClary, “Excess and Frame,” 89.

¹⁶ Ibid., 84.

marginalized with the insane, but women have played a predominant role as victims and symbols of madness in popular perception.¹⁷ Foucault's writing on madness, with its strong emphasis on confinement, is commonly appropriated by feminists, but Foucault does not provide a gendered reading. For this, McClary turns to Elaine Showalter, who argues in *The Female Malady* that madness came to be regarded as a peculiarly female condition during the nineteenth century, normally "as a manifestation of excess feminine sexuality."¹⁸ During this time, psychiatry differentiated radically between explanations for unreason in men (grief, guilt, or congenital defect) and the cause of madness in women (female sexual excess). Attitudes toward feminine dementia became obsessive to the point that all madness was associated with the feminine, even when it occurred in men. In turn, all women were assumed to be susceptible to mental breakdown because of their sexuality, so the surveillance and control that had always characterized the psychiatric profession became focused primarily on women. As a corollary, Showalter points out that madness depicted in bourgeois artworks was almost always represented as female. And, according to McClary, "as the frequency of operatic madwomen indicates, music likewise participated in this process."¹⁹

Like Rosand, McClary is sensitive to specific operatic conventions in her analysis of madness, noting that madwomen strain the semiotic codes from which they emerge. Although McClary examines madwomen from vastly different periods and operatic traditions, she identifies the musical frame, the metaphor of musical confinement, in each

¹⁷ Klaus Doerner, *Madmen and the Bourgeoisie: A Social History of Insanity and Psychiatry*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Jean Steinberg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 16-17. Doerner explains that classifying persons as "mad," confining them to an institution, and putting them on public display was a useful means of societal control. It persuaded the public that codes of restrictive behaviour were necessary for a well-ordered society.

¹⁸ McClary, "Excess and Frame," 81. See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

¹⁹ McClary, "Excess and Frame," 81.

of the works, albeit in radically different ways. For example, the core of the excerpt from Monteverdi's *Lamento della ninfa* (1638) is a lament (reinterpreted by McClary as a mad scene) sung by a nymph whose lover has awakened her sexually and then left her.

McClary reads the particular brand of madness generating this lament as one of obsession, musically portrayed with a *basso ostinato*. The nymph's vocal line sometimes acquiesces to and sometimes struggles against the expectations of the ostinato. She refuses to cadence when it is suggested by the ostinato, and in this way, she attempts to escape the obstinate masculine frame. Moreover, the nymph's lament (in a minor key) is bookended by sections sung by male singers in the related major key and in the inner sections, the men provide the cadences refused by the nymph.

Similarly, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) features a chorus that not only physically frames the madwoman onstage, but also reacts to the soprano's ravings with measured expressions, trying to steer her harmonically within the cavatina-cabaletta structure. But Lucia's "eruption of erotic energy" comes in the form of coloratura and chromaticism, increasingly extravagant virtuosity that distorts the musical structure, although it does not break it. Evading the chorus's frame, she does not conform to periodic phrases, diatonicism, or melodic lyricism. She adds roulades between eight-bar phrases and cadenzas between verses. She spills out upwardly into coloratura and moves in unpredictable harmonic territory. But, in accordance with Döhring's findings, although Lucia's music is extravagant, it also remains carefully framed within the opera, or at least it appears to. In the cabaletta, although Lucia seems to stop fighting against the musical structure, she may be simply expressing her madness in a different way. She sings a morose text in a carefree dance meter while she is clothed in a blood-spattered gown.

And, although McClary admits that Lucia seems to have finally submitted to the masculine frame, the opera's final scene, immediately following the mad scene, appears to have been "contaminated" by Lucia's madness because her intended lover, Edgardo, commits suicide.

So far in this review, I have operated under the assumption that operatic madness is always contained (and McClary's framed metaphor underscores this) within the convention of the "mad scene." In earlier opera, this was most often the case, but such conventions are more difficult to detect in operatic forms of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries—which often feature extensive harmonic experimentation along with a disintegration of traditional operatic formal structuring strategies—with the exception of neoclassical works. In expressionist operas, in particular, the frame seems to have collapsed altogether, allowing "madness" to seep into the entire work. Nevertheless, McClary manages to apply her framing metaphor to Richard Strauss's *Salome* (1905), a celebrated example of female sexual ambition and resistance pathologized by the threatened male order.

Musically, *Salome*'s pathology is indicated by her "slippery" chromatic deviations from normative diatonicism or, in other words, her chromatic statements are framed within a diatonic context. There is no mad scene proper. Instead, a diffused, over-sexualized hysteria is present throughout the work, and the struggle between mad sexual frenzy and bland sanity is portrayed with a struggle between chromatic and diatonic tonal environments. *Salome*'s insatiable sexual hunger is so threatening that, along with the mutilation of John the Baptist, *Salome* herself has to be forcibly eradicated. The triumphant C-sharp major conclusion of *Salome*'s "Liebestod" is greeted by Herod's

command that his guards crush the young woman to death “beneath their C-minor shields” in order to restore social and tonal order.²⁰ According to McClary, however, “that final gesture indicates that the frame itself has lost its hegemonic authority, that the treacherous chromaticism to which European composers and audiences had increasingly become addicted could no longer be rationally contained.”²¹

2.3 The Prioress’s Mad Scene

Act I, Scene iv: Dramatic Summary

Before examining the interpretive implications of operatic madness, I will begin by examining Poulenc’s expression of the Prioress’s madness in Act I, scene iv of *Dialogues des Carmélites*. On the surface, Act I/iv of *Dialogues des Carmélites* registers immediately as a death scene. A close reading, however, shows a profound change in the mental state of Madame de Croissy, the First Prioress, over the course of the scene, suggesting that it should also be understood as a conventional mad scene.²² Act I/iv is set in the convent’s infirmary, where the bedridden Prioress is attended by Mère Marie. Doctor Javelinot and Sister Anne of the Cross make brief appearances, while Blanche has a more significant presence with her two entrances. The scene is structured in four parts: a) the final command of the Prioress, b) Blanche’s farewell, c) the mad scene proper, and d) the Prioress’s death.²³

²⁰ McClary, “Excess and Frame,” 100.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Mad scenes and death scenes need not be mutually exclusive. James Parakilas claims that all operatic delirium, including that of sleepwalking, dream states, and death scenes, have similar musical characteristics. See James Parakilas, “Mozart’s Mad Scene,” *Soundings* 10 (1983): 6.

²³ Note that the full French text and English translation of this scene can be found in the Appendices. The translation is from Joseph Machlis, English translation, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Opéra de Lyon, Kent Nagano, cond., Virgin Classics compact disc, 1992.

The first section of scene iv, the final command of the Prioress, begins as the Prioress asks Mère Marie, “Ayez le bonté de relever ce coussin?” [“Would you be so kind as to raise this pillow?”] Madame de Croissy is talkative and fully lucid. (She has been given drugs in order to ease her pain.) She asks Marie how long the doctor thinks she will live, as she wants to address her sisters one last time in a community farewell before she can no longer think clearly. The older woman then reveals that, despite her many years of religious life, she is still tempted to despair in the face of death. The two nuns discuss their most recent novice’s choice of religious name, Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ. The Prioress explains that she feels a special affinity for Blanche because she also chose that name as a novice, but had been discouraged from taking it. As the last official deed of her incumbency, the Prioress entrusts Blanche to Marie’s care, remarking that Mère Marie’s firmness of character is exactly what Blanche lacks.

A knock on the door signals to the Prioress that Blanche has arrived, and she enters for her last visit with the dying nun. In this emotional segment, the First Prioress tells the young nun how dear she is, as the newest novice, and warns her that she is also the most vulnerable and must be aware of future danger. The Prioress states, “Pour détourner cette menace, j’aurais bien donné ma pauvre vie, oh! Certes, je l’eusse donnée. Je ne puis donner maintenant que ma mort, une très pauvre mort...” [“Ah, to avert that fearful danger I would gladly have given my humble life. Oh yes, willingly I would have yielded it. Now, alas, all I can give is my death, a very humble death.”] This confession encapsulates the primary theme of the story—the transference of grace between the First Prioress and Blanche. The Prioress ends her farewell to Blanche by warning her that she

will be tested horribly, but she also reminds Blanche to trust in God, as He has taken her honour into His safekeeping.

The mad scene proper (c) begins with Blanche's exit. Doctor Javelinot and Sister Anne of the Cross (mute in this scene) enter, and Mère Marie returns. The Prioress's drugs have lost effect, so, determined to present a strong front to her community, she asks, "Monsieur Javelinot, je vous prie de me donner une nouvelle dose de ce remède." ["Monsieur Javelinot, I beg you to give me another dose of this medicine."] The doctor refuses, saying that the nun cannot tolerate any more of the drug. Marie, realizing that the end is nearer than she first suspected, tries to encourage the Prioress to attend to God and the act of dying. But instead she succumbs to an even deeper despair, claiming, "Que suis-je à cette heure, moi misérable, pour m'inquiéter de Lui? Qu'Il s'inquiète donc d'abord de moi!" ["Who am I, wretched as I am at this moment, to concern myself with Him! Let Him first concern Himself with me!"] Marie reacts harshly to the older nun's near-blasphemy. She tells the Prioress she must be delirious, and then, in order to keep the other nuns from hearing the dying nun say anything that might be construed as disrespectful or sacrilegious, she commands Sister Anne to close the window. As the Prioress's hysteria intensifies, she repeatedly calls Mère Marie's name. At the climax of her madness, the nun has a hallucinatory vision of their chapel, desecrated and abandoned, the altar split in two. Horrified, Marie tries again to quiet the Prioress and tells Sister Anne to inform the nuns that the Reverend Mother will not be receiving visitors. As Sister Anne leaves the room, the Prioress makes a final desperate attempt to assert her control as superior. But, unable even to complete a sentence, she falls back, exhausted.

The mad scene proper is bookended by Blanche's appearances, and she enters again here, following the climax of the Prioress's hysteria. This time, however, the stage direction calls for Blanche to enter as though sleepwalking. The Prioress, catching sight of her, tries to call her, but Blanche remains standing as if petrified until Mère Marie tells her to go to the dying nun. However, equally distraught, the young novice is able to provide little comfort to the Prioress, who tries to talk to her, but chokes on the words, "Demande pardon... mort... peur... peur de la mort." ["Beg forgiveness... death... fear... fear of death!"] Blanche is similarly wordless and sobs over the body of the Prioress at the close of the scene.

Overview of Poulenc's Mad Scene

Unlike *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, Poulenc's first opera, *Dialogues des Carmélites* has no recitative and aria pairings or any other recognizable operatic structures, with the exception of the three nuns' choruses. These choruses, the only real ensemble pieces in the work, are in keeping with Poulenc's choral style, in that they hearken back to earlier models. Apart from the choruses, *Dialogues* is episodic; it is characterized by many sharply contrasting sections that may differ in a variety of parameters, including tonal centre, orchestral and vocal style, tempo, dynamics, musical material, or dramatic content. For the most part, the logic of a given scene is more dependent on dramatic considerations than on musical form. *Dialogues* also features several brief musical motives with distinctive profiles; however, their connection to specific people, places, things, or ideas is somewhat ambiguous and they are not used in as systematic a fashion as Wagnerian leitmotifs.

Poulenc's strategy in this work might be described as a non-traditional use of traditional materials. *Dialogues* could be labelled a tonal opera, but there is no overall harmonic coherence and the work is tonal only in local spans. Keys appear in what seems to be a haphazard manner, which is not unusual for Poulenc, who stated,

...once the music for a line of a poem has come to me, I never transpose the key in order to make my task easier at the expense of the poem. It follows that my modulations pass at times through a mouse-hole.²⁴

While an opera obviously requires more planning than a smaller work (to which this quote refers), Poulenc's tonal scheme in *Dialogues* does not follow any recognizable pattern. At the scene level, a harmonic plan is sometimes evident. For example, reflecting the reading of instability, the Prioress's mad scene does not have a stable tonal plan, with the exception of its second major episode. The second episode, Blanche's farewell, is solidly in E-flat major. This section's harmonic stability matches the dramatic stability: this is the only episode in this scene in which the Prioress manages to fully maintain her composure.

Due to the compositional style of this opera, few of the typical techniques used to portray musical madness are found here. Madness is not indicated by formal improprieties because *Dialogues* lacks traditional operatic structures. It is thoroughly lyrical in nature without displays of virtuosity or excessive ornamentation. On the other hand, the episodic character of the work lends itself to quickly shifting moods. In addition, Poulenc uses other characters as rational reference points for the Prioress, creating a frame of reason.²⁵ Moreover, the physical confinement here—the Prioress is

²⁴ The original French text reads: "...à savoir que je ne transpose jamais, pour rendre ma tâche plus aisée, le ton dans lequel j'ai trouvé la musique d'un vers, au hasard du poème. Il s'ensuit que mes modulations passent parfois par le trou d'une souris." From Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs*, 87.

²⁵ Here, the nuns, especially Mère Marie, take on the masculine role of framing.

confined to her bed (for the most part), within a cell in the infirmary, inside a cloistered convent—suggests a frame as well.²⁶

Poulenc wrote several interludes to facilitate scene changes.²⁷ Although they are optional, I will briefly mention the interlude preceding Act I/iv, which is a nostalgic English horn solo. An instrumental solo or obbligato part, such as the flute in Lucia's mad scene, may represent a ghost or an unheard voice, or it might supply a reminiscence motive. However, Poulenc's English horn solo effectively recalls the opening to the third act of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, initiating Tristan's long, drawn-out death scene, during which he fades in and out of consciousness. Franz Rauhut notes that, alternately, it may have been inspired by Berlioz's introductory motive to the third movement of the *Symphonie fantastique*.²⁸

The scene opens immediately following the interlude with a simple theme marked “comme une cloche” (see Figure 2.1). This theme's disintegration over two subsequent repetitions (B and C) foreshadows the deterioration of the Prioress, both physically and mentally. The theme is dominated by its opening repeated quarter notes on tripled B and a D. This arrangement, along with the forceful articulation indicated gives the distinctive aural impression of clanging bells throughout, in addition to Poulenc's inclusion of a number of bells in his instrumentation.

²⁶ In some performances, the Prioress spends a good deal of the scene out of her sickbed, but if this is the case, as in the 2004 La Scala production conducted by Riccardo Muti (DVD version), while the Prioress continually tries to escape her bed, Mère Marie spends much of the scene trying to return the sick woman to the confines of her bed.

²⁷ Herrold, “Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*,” 106. These interludes can be heard on some recordings, but are not available in many scores of the work. According to Herrold, Poulenc did not consider it necessary to publish the interludes since they are optional.

²⁸ Franz Rauhut, “Les motifs musicaux de l'opéra *Dialogues des Carmélites*,” *Revue des lettres modernes*, 4th ser., nos. 340-45 (1973): 223.

Modéré mais très allant ♩=100

The musical score for the Cloche theme is presented in three systems, each with a piano (upper) and bass (lower) staff.
System A: The piano staff begins with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and the instruction "comme une cloche". The melody is marked with accents and slurs. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment.
System B: The piano staff continues the melody, marked with a fortississimo (*fff*) dynamic. The time signature changes to 3/4.
System C: The piano staff continues the melody, marked with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. A section labeled "Death motive" is indicated. The time signature changes to 3/4. The bass staff continues with a steady accompaniment.

Figure 2.1: Cloche theme

With each repetition, the cloche theme becomes progressively shorter. While the initial statement (A) of the theme has a mix of 4/4 and 3/4 time, the theme is metrically altered in subsequent hearings. In statement B, the theme is immediately displaced metrically, with only three of its original four opening quarter notes. In addition, Poulenc expresses the meter of statement B with a mixture of time signatures, while statement C presents the melody solely in 3/4 time.

The cloche theme's opening might be interpreted as B phrygian, but the F-natural at the end of statement A lends a certain harmonic ambiguity to the phrase that is further clouded by another F-natural, along with a G-sharp in statement B. Foreshadowing the dramatic chaos that will ensue in this scene, the cloche theme comes completely

unhinged in statement C. The top melody is radically altered: what was previously the treble woodwind line drops an octave to the trumpet. In addition, the melodic motion is inverted in the third measure and the third last measure of the original melody is omitted completely. The horns thicken and muddy the harmonic texture with two highly chromatic lines, while the lower voices are transformed into the death motive (see Figure 2.2).²⁹ As discussed in chapter four, this motive later underlies the entire final scene of the opera, acting as an ostinato accompanying the nuns' march to their deaths at the scaffold. Its appearance here is an early hint at one of the main themes of the work: the transference of grace between Blanche and the Prioress.



Figure 2.2: Death motive

After statement C of the cloche theme, Poulenc quiets the mood with four measures of pianissimo sustained chords in the strings, cadencing on a diminished seventh chord. This short section provides a contrast to the fortissimo, wind-dominated, rhythmically active cloche theme, and these two contrasting moods are the basis for Poulenc's overall compositional strategy in this scene. Prominent strings, consonant harmonies, and regular or static rhythms signify serenity and lucidity; while prominent winds (especially brass), dissonance, and an irregular or active rhythmic profile indicate the Prioress's growing agitation.

²⁹ Note that for ease of discussion, I have labelled the motives in this chapter according to the categorization laid out by Franz Rauhut. In chapter three, I address the motives associated with Blanche and Constance. I discuss problems inherent in Rauhut and de Solliers' classifications in regard to these motives and suggest an alternate labelling for two key motives.

Section A (The Final Act of the Prioress) of Act I/iv is a dialogue between the Prioress and Mère Marie, who acts as a frame of rationality or a foil for the older nun. In her opening phrase, the Prioress's vocal line might be described as chant-like. Her melody is dominated by stepwise motion, several repeated notes, and a rhythm essentially matching that of speech. In addition, her tonal range is initially limited, which also indicates her lucidity. (As she becomes more agitated, her range extends both downward and upward.) This opening phrase is underlined by an ostinato figure on E that only changes when the nun's serene façade begins to crack at the line, "C'est une grande peine pour moi de me montrer à mes filles ainsi étendue comme une noyée qu'on vient de sortir de l'eau..." ["I find it very painful indeed to be seen by my daughters while I lie so helpless, like someone drowning who has just been pulled from the water."] With this reference to water, the suffering nun foreshadows her own madness. The connection between water and insanity extends well beyond Shakespeare's waterlogged madwoman, Ophelia. Before the Great Confinement (à la Foucault) of the insane from the 1600s onward, Europeans were known to banish their mad citizens to life on the high seas. The water was curative for some, but if not, these "ships of fools" acted as floating asylums, crisscrossing the seas and canals of Europe.³⁰

The music reflects the Prioress's spiritual crisis as she reveals her feelings of helplessness, loneliness, and fear of death. Her text is accompanied by a more angular bass line and faster harmonic rhythm, along with an increasingly angular and shrill vocal line. Marie resists the Prioress's mounting hysteria with sedate dynamics and static harmony that falls into an easily recognized tonality, which is further solidified with a repeating syncopated pattern on middle C. Mère Marie's first response to the Prioress (as

³⁰ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, from the introduction by José Barchilon, vi-vii.

well as many of her subsequent statements) is introduced with her motive, a lilting double-dotted eighth and thirty-second note rising figure (see Figure 2.3) referencing the double-dotted figures of the French overture. This figuration typically symbolizes the monarchy and in this instance, indicates Mère Marie’s aristocratic roots.



Figure 2.3: Mère Marie motive



as a reminder that Christ's Agony in the Garden can act as an anchor and a touchstone for each person's fear at the moment of death. Bernanos used the Agony in connection with mystical substitution; he believed that in taking on suffering for others, believers could imitate and, to some extent, supplement the sufferings of Christ on the cross.



Figure 2.5: Solicitude theme

This section of Act I/iv ends with the Prioress's final proclamation, a command entrusting Blanche to Mère Marie's care. This proclamation is introduced with a fortissimo diminished seventh chord and accompanied by the only melody of significant length in this scene (see Figure 2.5). This long-breathed melody (called Solicitude by Rauhut) is heard while the Prioress enumerates Marie's personality traits, saying, "Il vous faudra une grande fermeté de jugement et de caractère, mais c'est précisément ce qui lui manque, et que vous avez de surcroît." ["You will need great firmness of judgment and character, for these are precisely what she lacks, and what you possess in abundance."]



Figure 2.6: Blanche's motive



Figure 2.7: Variant of Blanche's motive

A variant of Blanche's theme (see Figures 2.6 and 2.7), a chromatic descending motive, in this case harmonized as a string of suspensions, interrupts the two nuns' discussion, and ends with a knock at the door. Thus begins Section B: Blanche's Farewell. Once Blanche enters, the Prioress takes on a motherly tone and puts aside her fear and anxiety, giving the listener a respite from her advancing hysteria. The general tone of the Prioress's final talk with Blanche is quiet and gentle, like a lullaby. The older nun's singing is slow and deliberate, sometimes lilting with lots of triplet figures. Blanche barely speaks. The accompaniment, overwhelmed by strings and treble winds, is more transparent here than in the previous section. For the most part, the tonality remains in E-flat major, with occasional hints of the upcoming tragedy in low, rumbling, vaguely menacing chords and subtle syncopation, but generally, this is kept well in check. The long-breathed Solicitude theme makes a brief appearance, as does Mère Marie's motive.

Although it does not play a central role in *Dialogues des Carmélites* like Bernanos's Agony in the Garden theme, Bernanos's idea of Christian honour (which hearkens back to the French medieval notion of honour) is referenced in the farewell between Blanche and the Prioress. Bernanos defined Christian honour as "the mysterious fusion of human honour and the charity of Christ."³¹ It is the key to the difference between Bernanos's monarchism and the neo-royalism of Maurras. For Bernanos, honour was an ethical foundation. It was "conscience in action" and "the ideal image of man always before him in his struggle."³² Bernanos maintained that the figure of Joan of Arc

³¹ Bernanos, *Essais et écrits de combat*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1971), 1:572: "la fusion mystérieuse de l'honneur humain et de la charité du Christ." Bernanos provides a similar definition in *Les Grands cimetières sous la lune* (Plon, 1938), 356-57.

³² See Mary Frances Catherine Dorschell, *Georges Bernanos' Debt to Therese of Lisieux* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen University Press, 1996), 322; Hebblethwaite, *Bernanos: An Introduction*, 107; and Balthasar, *An Ecclesial Existence*, 551. Tobin states that Bernanos defined his own monarchism according to that of the *ancien régime*, a royalism "which honoured the king as he who protected the people from the powerful and

was central to combatting the de-Christianization and de-nationalization of France (nearly one and the same for him) and perhaps Joan is invoked in this portion of the scene.³³

During their conversation, the Prioress encourages Blanche to remain pliant in the hands of God, like the saints. Poulenc applies an antique veneer to the music accompanying the text, “Dieu a pris votre honneur en charge, et il est plus en sûreté dans ses mains que dans les vôtres.” [“God has taken your honour into His safekeeping, and it is safer by far in His hands than in your own.”] The text is underscored by an old-fashioned, even quaint, setting featuring a bass line of pizzicato eighth notes in the low strings.

Once Blanche exits, the serenity of her visit gives way to chaotic hysteria and Section C: The Mad Scene Proper begins. First, Marie re-enters, this time with the doctor and Sister Anne of the Cross. Four measures of a pianissimo syncopated ostinato on D suddenly breaks out into a fortissimo dissonance with a C-sharp major chord juxtaposed

greedy,” while that of Maurras was “a guarantee of conservative interests against the forces of anarchy.” (Tobin, *Georges Bernanos: The Theological Source*, 40.) Dorschell indicates that Bernanos’s honour is associated with freedom; Bernanos believed that the French, as Christians, had the responsibility to proclaim truth and freedom to the world because freedom was a right, an obligation, and a duty for which they were accountable to God. Bernanos was furious that Christians were allowing themselves to be de-Christianized by forsaking their own honour, and by 1940, he saw this come to a head in the relationship between Vichy and the Third Reich. In the Munich Agreement of 1938, leading up to the 1940 German occupation of France, Maurras and *L’Action française* had campaigned diligently for compliance with Hitler’s demands over Czechoslovakia because of their fear of socialism and anarchy. Bernanos interpreted this as Maurras’s betrayal of his own honour. In addition, when Maurras incited the French to give up earlier treaty obligations, Bernanos interpreted Maurras’s actions as asking France to give up her honour. See Tobin, *Georges Bernanos: The Theological Source*, 38-39, 45-46, 48.

³³ Jeanne d’Arc is a pivotal and controversial emblem of female Catholic heroism in France. French Catholics campaigned for the canonization of the Maid of Orléans from the late 1800s until she was canonized in 1920. They envisioned France as a Catholic community of old, with Jeanne d’Arc as a national symbol in place of Marianne, the female incarnation of the French nation dating from the Revolution. On several occasions, Bernanos compared the beginning of the fifteenth century with the beginning of the twentieth, finding contemporary equals to “the English occupants, the treacherous Burgundians, the pompous French prelates [...] the timid Dauphin and to Joan herself.” (Molnar, *Bernanos: His Political Thought*, 135.) Though he acknowledged that society could not return to the middle ages, he insisted that pluralistic modern society was in need of witnesses to counter the modern crisis of conscience. For more information, see Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, xii; Carolyn Snipes-Hoyt, “Jeanne d’Arc Visits Paris in 1912: *Dramatis personae* and Personification,” *French Review* 73, no. 6 (May 2000): 1141-54; Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 167; for further discussion on the campaign for Jeanne d’Arc as “Saint of the Fatherland” and the role of *L’Action française*, see Rémond, *Right Wing in France*, 249-50; Hebblethwaite, *Bernanos: An Introduction*, 110.

on the D. Her drugs having worn off, the Prioress becomes strident in her pleas for more medication so that she can address her nuns. The D ostinato is interrupted by the doctor, who woodenly refuses to give in to the Prioress. In most stagings, the doctor seems strangely unsympathetic and, according to Poulenc's stage directions, remains at the bedside for the duration of the scene, "silencieux et vigilant," even though he has no lines to deliver. Like Marie, Doctor Javelinot acts as a "frame of reason," a masculine one in this case who, unlike Mère Marie and Sister Anne of the Cross, is particularly unemotional in his response to the Prioress's distress. The doctor acts as a foil for the growing female hysteria. Rather than trying to alleviate the suffering woman, he chooses to do nothing, in effect, acting as a sadistic voyeur, controlling the scene but not part of it.

In a series of quickly shifting moods, the Prioress redirects her pleas to Marie, who recognizes that the older woman is near death and tries to calm her with rocking harmonies in the strings and encourages her to think about God. But this results in a violent response from the Prioress (see Figure 2.8 at 111). Instrumental outbursts overtake Marie's string accompaniment and the Prioress shrieks in fast, biting vocal rhythms and agitated, unstable harmonies: "Que suis-je à cette heure, moi misérable, pour m'inquiéter de Lui?" ["Who am I, wretched as I am at this moment, to concern myself with Him!"] A harried version of the fear motive underlies "Qu'Il s'inquiète donc d'abord de moi!" ["Let Him first concern Himself with me!"] in the third measure after 111. This instance of the fear motive is harmonized with a chromatically descending bass (G, F-sharp, F, E, E-flat), which comprises a near-complete chromatic tetrachord, a traditional figure accompanying a lament, signifying death. By combining a musical

signifier for death and the fear motive, Poulenc effectively represents the Prioress's fear of death in music.

109 *Très calme*
La Prieure *frude*
Oh!ma Mè-re, re-gar- dez:___ vais-je dans un ins - tant mon - trer ce vi-sage à mes fil - les? *Très calme*

110 *Mère Marie p très doux*
Oh!ma Mè - re,
Très calme

ne vous met-tez plus en pei - ne de nous! Ne vous in - quié - tez plus dé - sor mais que de Dieu.---

111 *Très violent*
La Prieure *ff*
Que suis - je à cette heure, moi mi-sè-ra-ble, pour m'in - quié-ter de Lui! Qu'il s'in - quiè te donc d'a-bord de moi!

Figure 2.8: Act III/iv, rehearsal numbers 109 to 111

In the next bar, a diminished seventh chord blares from the brass section as Marie exclaims that the Prioress must be delirious. The Prioress's head drops on her pillow, she starts to lose her voice, and her death rattle begins, indicated in the measure following

112 (see Figure 2.9). Poulenc designates low moaning on middle C, which is usually performed on an approximate pitch, since timbre, not pitch, is of utmost importance here. It is significant to note that, in contrast with many other madwomen, whose soprano singing often grows more virtuosic as their madness progresses (and perhaps most so with Ophelia, who only begins to sing once she goes mad), the Prioress's contralto inversely deteriorates.³⁴ The Prioress's musical deterioration emphasizes the metaphor of hysteria as degeneration, rather than the liberation from confinement often suggested by musical excess. At this point, Mère Marie tries desperately to contain the Prioress's madness with a vocal line that, while controlled, shows increasing agitation as it slowly rises in pitch to a climax at nine measures after 112. Underscored by an ostinato figure on D and E-flat and extreme changes in dynamics, Marie tells Sister Anne of the Cross to close the window so that the other nuns will not be able to hear the Prioress's groaning and scandalous outbursts. Sister Anne is a mute role that provides another frame of rationality with which to compare the Prioress. She looks about to faint and Marie scolds her, telling her not to act like a silly girl.

³⁴ As Parakilas points out, this is also true of Vitellia's mad scene in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*, where the soprano leaps down by octaves and settles into her lowest octave for longer than any other point in the opera. Parakilas states that with this stylistic figuration, the threatening image of not only madness, but also death, is fully realized. See Parakilas, "Mozart's Mad Scene," 13.

(La tête de la Prieure retombe lourdement sur l'oreiller.
Presque aussitôt, on entend son râle.)

112

Mère Marie (à Sœur Anne de la Croix)

ff Vo-tre Ré-vé-ren-ce dé - li - re. Pous - sez tout à fait cet-te fe - né - tre. No-tre Ré-vé-ren-de Mè-re

(dans un râle)

pp Ah, Ah,

Sourdement agité $\text{♩} = 100$

f n'est plus re-spon-sa ble des pro-pos qu' elle tient, **ff** mais il est pré-fé - ra-ble qu'ils ne scan-da-li - sent per - son - ne...

Ah

(Sœur Anne défaille)

f Al-lons! Sœur Anne de la Croix, vous n'al-lez pas vous é - va-nou - ir comme un e fem-me let-te.

Ah Ah

Figure 2.9: Act III/iv, rehearsal number 112

Poulenc indicates that the Prioress tries to sit up in bed and the ostinato is cut off. (See Figure 2.10, two measures after 113.) She stares, as if in a trance, and repeatedly calls Mère Marie's name. Ellen Rosand posits that multiple repetitions are common in mad scenes, and serve to isolate a word or phrase, causing it to shed semantic meaning, turning it into an object embodied in a musical shape and increasing its psychological resonance.³⁵ I suggest that when the Prioress speaks Marie's name, she is in effect trying to exercise her authority as Prioress and therefore, her power and control, not only over the nuns in her charge, but over herself as well.

Beginning at 114, several motives rush in, piling atop one another in an effusion of meaning that highlights this point as the climax of the scene. In a harsh, raspy voice (indicated by the composer), but in even, measured tones, the Prioress describes a vision of their chapel, "vide et profanée—l'autel fendu en deux, de la paille et du sang sur les dalles" ["empty and desecrated—the altar split in two with straw and blood on the ground."]. This declaration is accompanied by the relentless march of the death motive (see Figure 2.10, starting at 114) first heard at the opening of the scene during the cloche theme. But the fear motive takes over the accompaniment at 115 (and then is repeated an octave lower two measures later) (see the opening of Figure 2.11), when the Prioress despairs that God has forsaken and abandoned the nuns. This vision, a common feature of mad scenes, is clearly a premonition of things to come, but also indicates the extent of the Prioress's spiritual agony in that she believes she has been forsaken and abandoned by God.

³⁵ Rosand, "Operatic Madness," 262-63.

(tandis que Mère Marie parle, la Prieure s'est presque soulevée sur son seant. Elle a les yeux fixes et des qu'elle cesse de parler sa mâchoire inférieure tombe.)

113

ff Met-tez-vous à ge noux, pri-ez. Ce-la vous vau-dra mieux que des sels.

ff Mè-re Ma

114

ff Ma Ré-vé-ren-de Mè re? (d'une voix rauque)

rie de l'In-car-na-tion! Mè-re Ma-ri - e! *f* Jeviens de voir no-tre cha-pel-le vide et pro-fa-

115 Presser

ff né - e, l'au-tel fen - du en deux, de la paille et du sang sur les dal- les... Oh! oh! Dieu nous dé-lais- se!

Figure 2.10: Act III/iv, rehearsal number 113 to 115

Five measures after 115, Mère Marie tries to contain and control the Prioress's rantings, saying that she is beyond being able to restrain her tongue and should try not to say anything blasphemous. A slightly altered Solicitude theme supplements this phrase; the single-dotted eighth and sixteenth note motive at the beginning and throughout the melody has been changed to a double-dotted eighth and thirty-second note so that it reads as Marie's motive mapped onto the Solicitude theme (refer to Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.11, ten measures before 116).

At 116, Mère Marie's attempts to control the situation are thwarted as a tremolo in the upper strings and syncopation in the lower voices derail the meter (see Figure 2.11). The rhythm becomes more agitated as the Prioress cries that she has no control of her tongue or her face, her vocal utterance becoming more and more strident. Finally, eleven measures after 116 (see Figure 2.11), the Prioress reaches the peak of desolation and shrieks, "L'angoisse adhère à ma peau comme un masque de cire... Oh! Que ne puis-je arracher ce masque avec mes ongles!" ["Despair clings to my skin like a waxen mask... Oh! If I could only tear away this mask with my nails!"] The image of a mask is commonly used in reference to madness; it refers to the split self of madness—the Prioress is both herself and not herself. At this point, she has difficulty sitting up in bed and tries to right herself physically. Her voice ascends, out of control, to the top of her range while the accompanying descending scales herald her falling body.

Mère Marie *mf*

Vo-tre Ré-vé ren-ce esthors d'é-tat de re-te - nir sa lan-gue, mais

céder a Tempo

Dieu nous re - non - ce!

116

je la sup-ple d'es-sa - yer de ne rien di-re qui puis - se... **Subito molto agitato** *ff* La Prieure

N rien di - re... n rien di -

ff re... Qu'im-por - te ce que je dis! Je ne com-man-de pas plus à ma lan - gue

(La Prieure essaye de se dresser sur son lit)

fff qu'à mon vi - sa - ge. L'an-goisse a-dhère à ma peau comme un mas - que de ci - re... Oh! que ne

Figure 2.11: Act III/iv, rehearsal number 116

Suddenly a variant of the cloche theme reappears at 117—this time it is without its distinctive melody, but the prominent bells create a solid pulse (see Figure 2.12). The bells’ reappearance here suggests that they are the primary frame (following McClary’s construct) for the Prioress’s madness. Not only do they appear as a force of control at the moment when the Prioress crashes completely, but they are accompanied by Mère Marie’s authoritative pronouncement commanding Sister Anne to tell the other nuns they will not be allowed to see the Prioress and instead, they will take recreation as usual. One measure before 118, a quiet diminished seventh chord, followed immediately by a fortissimo, announces the Prioress redivivus, once more willing herself up from her deathbed, desperately trying to assert her dominance as superior by calling Mère Marie, in the name of holy obedience. But she falls, exhausted, back into her death rattle before she can complete her thought.

Section D: The Prioress’s Death, beginning at 119 of Act I, scene iv, takes on an altogether different tone. The climax of the Prioress’s madness has passed, and she is about to breathe her last breath. Poulenc’s stage directions indicate that Blanche enters as if sleepwalking, or in a somnambulist state. She stands petrified until Mère Marie beckons her forward. Blanche’s trance-like appearance here is notable and hints at her own interior state. Sarah Hibberd posits that, although both entranced and more frenzied madwomen were traditionally depicted in the same way—in white shifts with dishevelled hair and a fixed gaze—and sleepwalkers or entranced heroines were even seen simply as “diluted madwomen,” it is important to distinguish between the two. In the early 1800s, the frenzied madwoman belonged to the Italian tradition, while French operagoers were

(La Prieure retombe la tête sur l'oreiller) **117**

puis-je ar-ra - cher ce mas-que a-vec mes on-gles! **Tempo exact de l'introduction du tableau ♩=100**

ff très clair

f Mère Marie

Pré-vez vos sœurs qu'el-les ne ver-ront pas la Ré-vé-ren-de Mère au-jour- d'hui... A dix heu-res, ré-crée-a-

118

tion, com-me d'ha-bi-tu-de. (La Prieure, qui à tout entendu, se redresse et d'une voix forte:)

ff

Lent Mè-re Ma-rie de l'In-car-na-tion,

pp subito

(Sœur Anne de la Croix sort) (Brisée par l'effort, elle retombe à nouveau.) (ralant)

au nom de la Sain-te o-bé-is-san-ce, je vous or-don-ne... ah ah

p

Figure 2.12: Act III/iv, rehearsal number 117 to 118

more familiar with the somnambulist model. In regard to musical characteristics, Hibberd notes that a preponderance of musical quotation was common in the trance scene and the harp generally provided an ambiance of “otherworldliness.”³⁶ (I will provide further discussion on Blanche as a madwoman in the following chapter.)

In the final moments of the First Prioress’s mad scene, Poulenc provides several musical cues to suggest that the character of the scene has shifted and taken on an unearthly air. First, the tempo slows and the dynamics drop from fortissimo to pianissimo. The harp is given a prominent place in the orchestration. Immediately at 119 (see Figure 2.13) the fear motive is slowed and developed into a lyrical figure. It is underlaid here with an ascending bassline. This is in striking contrast to the motive’s appearance near the beginning of the mad scene proper when the First Prioress’s hysteria increases (third measure after 111). At this point, the motive is harmonized with a chromatically descending tetrachord in the bass, suggesting the traditional figure of a lament, signifying that the fear motive is linked to death. At 119, this connection is broken.

In calling Blanche (six measures after 119), Marie’s tone is emotionally flat, as if she too has been entranced. But when Blanche kneels to hold the dying Prioress, the spell is broken. Suddenly fortissimo at rehearsal 120, the death motive reappears, the harp is interrupted, and Marie reverts back to her controlling character. Over an intensifying accompaniment in the orchestra, the Prioress sings out a few jagged phrases, moving to the top of her range with her last words: “Peur de la mort” [“Fear of death”] two measures before 121. A measure of silence is followed by Blanche’s quiet whimpering

³⁶ See Sarah Hibberd, “‘Dormez donc, mes chers amours’: Hérold’s *La Somnambule* (1827) and Dream Phenomena on the Parisian Lyric Stage,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16 (2004): 2, 107-32.

over a rhythmic augmentation of the fear motive, in this instance again accompanied by a descending chromatic bassline. The scene closes with a fortissimo bell-like chord that is echoed in a solitary bell chime.

Figure 2.13: Act III/iv, rehearsal number 119 to 122

119 **Bien calme** $\text{♩} = 60$ (La porte s'entrouvre et Blanche entre d'un pas de somnambule. La Prieure l'aperçoit et on comprend qu'elle l'appelle.) (Blanche rest debout, comme pétrifiée.)

très doux et expressif
Fear motive

pp

Mère Marie *p* (Blanche, hagarde, s'agenouille près du lit.)
La Ré-vé-ren-de Mè-re veut que vous ap-pro - chiez jus-qu'à son lit.

(La Prieure lui pose la main sur le front.) (dans un souffle) (On comprend que la Prieure fait une recommandation à coup elle suffoque...)

La Prieure *p* Blan- che... **Fear motive**

pp

120 $\text{♩} = 66$ Mère Marie

ff C'est u-ne chose in - sen - sé - e... on ne dev-rait pas per - met- re... La Prieure

De-man-de par

Death motive →

fff

don... mort... peur... peur de la mort. (Elle tombe morte)

121 *Très calme* $\text{♩} = 56$ (à la Mère Marie)

Blanche

p La Ré-vé-ren-de Mè-re dé-si- re... La Ré-vé-ren-de Mè-re dé-si- rait... au-rait dé-si- ré...

Fear Motive →

p *pp*

(Elle tombe à genoux, le visage enfoui dans les draps du lit, en sanglotant.) **122**

RIDEAU (cloche sur la scène)

ppp *ff sub. > pp*

Fin du 1er. Acte

2.4 Hysteria Revisited

My goal in the remainder of this chapter is to mine the layers beneath the First Prioress's mad scene in order to move towards a critical interpretation. I hope to contextualize this scene not only in view of the existing musicological literature (the highlights of which I summarized in my literature review) but also to consider other writings on hysteria, which in many ways, enhance and sometimes problematize the more prominent musicological publications. A more recent focus in the study of hysteria—and one on which I concentrate here—is the symbiotic relationship between hysteria as an illness and hysteria as an artistic metaphor. These two threads of discussion have, to some degree, become entangled in the feminist discourse on madness, and my discussion aims for more clarity. I will investigate paradigms of hysteria as illness and provide an example of how hysteria as medical illness and hysteria as artistic metaphor feed into each other with a brief examination of the practice of Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893). I will then consider a feminist reading of Poulenc's hysterical Prioress, although I ultimately reject this interpretation for what I see as a more nuanced and appropriate reading in the case of *Dialogues*' Prioress: hysteria as a metaphor for social degeneration.

Medical Illness or Artistic Metaphor?: Critiquing the Feminist Reading of Hysteria

Surrealist poets André Breton and Louis Aragon claimed that hysteria was the greatest poetic discovery of the nineteenth century, but it is commonly thought to have since died out as a psychosomatic ailment. By the fourth edition of the American psychiatrists' *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, it was no longer listed as a syndrome. Its lack of precise nosology has not hampered its metaphorical usefulness, however, and

it once again became the topic of a lively critical debate in the 1970s beginning with feminist scholars such as Hélène Cixous, Catherine Clément, and Christina von Braun, who returned to hysteria in order to discuss the exclusion of feminine subjectivity inherent in patriarchal culture. Since then, Mark Micale has argued for an inclusion of male hysteria, while other scholars, including Georges Didi-Huberman and Sander Gilman, emphasized the implications of the visualization of this ailment in medical representations. Elaine Showalter has challenged the nosology, suggesting that an array of psychosomatic illnesses, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress syndrome, might be postmodern forms of hysteria, continuing to live among us in travesty.³⁷

Hysteria hovers elusively between “the organic and the psychological, muddling the medical and the moral and discrediting its own credentials.”³⁸ Elisabeth Bronfen explores the phenomenon of hysteria as a clinical syndrome vs. hysteria as a cultural construction in *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents*. Bronfen proposes that the language of hysteria (both as an illness and as a cultural representation) is a strategy of self-representation that works to structure the subject in relation to knowledge. She challenges traditional gender-based theories that link the syndrome to dissatisfied feminine sexual desire and instead looks at its traumatic causes, showing how psychic anguish can be converted into somatic symptoms that can be interpreted as the enactment of personal and cultural discontent. Bronfen notes the existence of both observable phenomena in connection with hysteria and imaginary phenomena such as the world of the dream and the body’s interior. She states that hysteria is not just an illness of

³⁷ Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, xi, 101.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

imitation and of sympathy but more of a *maladie par representation* (a malady of or by representation), as Pierre Janet termed it in 1894. Bronfen interprets this to mean that the disorder is constructed by the cultural images and medical discourses it imitates, but also it embodies condensed and displaced reproductions of an originary psychic disorder.³⁹

Ultimately, many physicians view the hysteria syndrome as the “wastebasket of medicine,” an essentially psychosomatic state that defies definition and cure but is often easily mistaken for other pathological conditions. The abundant and versatile nosologies attributed to hysteria lead Micale to conclude that the accumulation of meanings of hysteria over more than a millenium has produced an overload of interpretation. At the *fin de siècle* in Europe, hysteria had come to mean so many things and its murky interface between medical theory and cultural aesthetic became so muddled that by the twentieth century, it ceased to mean anything at all.⁴⁰

Feminist readings of madness have added much-needed depth to literature on operatic mad scenes. However, I argue that the feminist historiography of hysteria (as it has been applied in musicological circles) has not been thorough enough in unraveling the discourses of the illness—medical-scientific and popular-cultural—to provide the nuanced critical treatment that operatic mad scenes deserve. The focus on madness as the realm of the feminine, the popular interpretation of madness as oversexualization, and the rhetoric of hysteria as a female escape mechanism from male control, while certainly compelling, are problematic and limited.

In all fairness, several scholars have long hinted at these limitations. Mary Ann Smart questions the easy dualism of female/freedom and male/repression and the

³⁹ Ibid., 40, 116-17.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 101-4.

tendency to “collapse operatic representation into the reality of political control.”⁴¹ And, although Susan McClary seems to suggest that operatic madness is always conjunct with femaleness, she does provide a caveat to her argument in the form of a footnote, in which she assures the reader that there *are* operatic madmen (but they are almost always either feminized by their madness or driven mad by guilt).⁴² Ellen Rosand makes no gender argument *per se*, but her examples display an equal number of madmen and madwomen. On the other hand, although the bulk of Smart’s case studies explore female mad scenes, she points out that if her research “undertakes any feminist recuperation, it is, strange to say, of forgotten mad scenes for men.”⁴³

According to feminist interpretations, many theories of disease “have masqueraded rhetorically as objective, empirical science while in fact serving functions of social control.”⁴⁴ Hysteria is viewed as a key medical metaphor for *la condition féminine* at the core of the feminist reinterpretation. Mark Micale contends that, throughout centuries of medical writing, “the disorder represented in the descriptive language of the clinic everything that men found irritating or irascible, mysterious or unmanageable, in the opposite sex.” He goes on to say,

The wildly shifting physical symptomatology of the disease was thought by many observers to mirror the irrational, capricious, and unpredictable nature of Woman. The exaggerated emotionality of the hysterical female was viewed as a pathological intensification of natural feminine sensibility itself, and the hysterical fit was perceived as a sort of spasm of hyper-femininity, mimicking both

⁴¹ Hibberd, “Dormez donc, mes chers amours,” 111. See Mary Ann Smart, “The Silencing of Lucia,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4 (1992), 119-41.

⁴² McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 190, n. 10. McClary also points out that the link between madness and femininity is not to be understood as universal, and she refers the reader to Rob Walser’s images of hypermasculine madness in heavy metal in this regard. In addition, jealousy could very well be added to McClary’s list. Also see Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (London: Tauris, 1997), 118-20.

⁴³ Mary Ann Smart, “*Dalla tomba uscita*: Representations of Madness in Nineteenth-century Italian Opera” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1994), iv.

⁴⁴ Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 67.

childbirth and the female orgasm [...] hysteria has represented, quite literally, an *embodiment* of female nature in the eyes and minds of male observers.⁴⁵

To a great extent, the history of hysteria is composed of a body of writing by men about women—a largely gendered, one-directional power exchange between (helpless) female patients and (vindictive) male physicians. Some feminist scholars argue that the pathology of hysteria might actually lie in this relationship. Hysteria may be both

a sign of the powerful stigmatizing potential of medical science directed toward a disempowered social group and a symbol of the limit of male knowledge about the opposite sex.⁴⁶

While Micale does not deny the validity of this interpretation, he claims that it is ideologically overdrawn. He points out that feminist scholars of hysteria rarely pay critical attention to the relationship between the actual medical history of hysteria and the cultural representation of hysteria in art. He notes, for example, that Elaine Showalter, in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*, intends to illuminate both a feminist history of madness and a cultural history of madness as a female malady, but in the process, she runs the risk of mistakenly equating the two.⁴⁷ In addition, McClary's use of Showalter's argument is misleading because, while Showalter's reading of hysteria really only applies to Britain in the Victorian and modern periods, McClary applies it to a much wider range of operatic examples. While this cross-application proves interpretively rich, a reading that accounts for variance in the operatic representation of hysteria and the scientific approaches to hysteria across time would also illuminate the relationship between hysteria's two discourses.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 68-69.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁷ See Ibid., 77. Micale's primary concern regarding Showalter is that, instead of attending to the relationship between the two histories of hysteria (medical-scientific and the artistic-cultural), she tends to equate "literary representations of female insanity with the actual lived experiences of historical women."

Some writers see hysteria as a disease with genuine pathology, while others see it as a social and cultural construct, when in fact it is really both.⁴⁸ The inherent drama of many cases of hysteria has made its metaphorical potential great, but hysteria as an icon in the visual arts or a trope in a novel or an opera can be decisively different from hysteria in medical theory and practice. Janet Beizer points out, however, that “novelists and physicians are formed in a common cultural pool, and in turn mold similar cultural products.”⁴⁹ Micale notes that when scientific knowledge about hysteria has been lacking, imagination, prejudice, and fantasy have filled in the void, while Elisabeth Bronfen points out that the hysteria syndrome itself appears to adapt its symptoms to the prevailing historical, social, and cultural context.⁵⁰

Sometimes the clear distinction between scientific and artistic texts dissolves and at these times, it may be more productive to consider these histories interactively. For the purposes of my own discussion, I wish to simply stress two points. First, there are two discourses of hysteria—medical-scientific and popular-cultural—and these discourses are entwined, interact together, and inform each other. Second, to truly appreciate this dual historiography, writers about culture need to explore the medical-scientific history of hysteria more fully.

Paradigms of Illness

Chronic imprecision is endemic to all discourses of hysteria. Although I clearly employ hysteria in this dissertation as a cultural metaphor, my emphasis on the relationship between hysteria’s two discourses (in the previous section) necessitates a

⁴⁸ Ibid., 75-77, 87.

⁴⁹ Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 94.

⁵⁰ See Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 179-81; and Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, 103.

brief look at hysteria's medical-scientific history. Not only has hysteria's symptomatology been inconsistent through the history of the illness, but it has acted as an umbrella diagnosis for any number of mysterious diseases. Micale writes,

The disorder has been viewed as a manifestation of everything from divine poetic inspiration and satanic possession to female unreason, racial degeneration and unconscious psychosexual conflict. It has inspired gynecological, humoral, neurological, psychological, and sociological formulations, and it has been situated in the womb, the abdomen, the nerves, the ovaries, the mind, the brain, the psyche, and the soul. It has been constructed as a physical disease, a mental disorder, a spiritual malady, a behavioral adjustment, a sociological communication, and as no illness at all.⁵¹

Micale goes on to describe the succession of paradigms that have been adopted throughout the history of hysteria—gynaecological, demonological, neurological, and so on—each of which implies a cause, a symptom picture, and a treatment.⁵²

Medical writers of antiquity proposed the theory of gynaecological determinism, in which hysteria was purportedly caused by either a wandering uterus or an unsatisfactory sex life, placing it in the realm of virgins, widows, and spinsters.⁵³

Although it faded into the background under the Christian hegemony of the fifth to the thirteenth centuries, this model has had a continuing influence on the interpretation of hysteria. A radically different theory was developed in the Medieval period. Medieval Christians believed that human suffering was often a manifestation of evil, therefore, hysteria was understood as demonic possession. This demonological paradigm changed the status of the sufferer from innocent victim to iniquitous reprobate and through the

⁵¹ Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 285.

⁵² Unless indicated otherwise, the information in this section on paradigms of hysteria is from Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 19-23, 26-27.

⁵³ Bronfen states that hysterical symptoms of the gynaecological determinism model of antiquity included palpitations, perspiration, epileptic convulsions, spasmodic seizures, anxiety and oppression, need to vomit, loss of voice, ashen complexion, lump on side, paralysis, strangulation, pains around the eyes and nose, and lethargy. Medical models of hysteria throughout history do not encompass the same symptom picture, although a few symptoms are common throughout the history of the "disease." This buttresses the notion of hysteria as a catch-all diagnosis. See Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, 105.

filter of this model, hysteria symptoms took on a malefic cast: strange paroxysms, sudden attacks of paralysis and body pains, numbness, trances, mutism and blindness, and shocking lascivious behaviour, such as confessing to fantasies of intercourse with the devil.⁵⁴ Within this paradigm, the suggested treatment included prayers, exorcism, incantations, and interrogations intended to extract confession. Although the demonological paradigm in itself did not seem to indicate gender preference, the afflicted were often also persecuted via practices such as the witch hunt, for which women were the prime target.⁵⁵

The neurological model of hysteria developed as a result of scientific gains during the Renaissance, marking a reversion back to medical pathology and away from supernatural causes. Dr. Thomas Sydenham (1624-89) believed that hysteria was an imbalance of animal spirits between the body and the mind, usually caused by sudden and violent emotions. He noted that because the symptoms were so numerous and diverse, mental symptoms were given precedence over physical ones in discerning a diagnosis.⁵⁶ Sydenham believed that while women were more predisposed to hysteria, men also suffered from it, although he usually defined these patients as hypochondriacs, not hysterics, suggesting that hysteria was not just a certain conflation of symptoms but those symptoms as experienced by a female. Not surprisingly, feminist scholars take particular interest in hysteria from this point forward. By the seventeenth century, the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 107. This information is from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the text of the inquisition.

⁵⁵ Klaits shows that several judges of the time of the witch hunts thought of women as more prone to this behaviour because of their feeling/sensing (as opposed to thinking) natures. One judge stated, "The Devil uses them so, because he knows that women love carnal pleasures, and he means to bind them to his allegiance by such agreeable provocations." See Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 68.

⁵⁶ Sydenham says hysteria was comprised of a "farrago of disorderly and irregular phenomena" (Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, 110).

practice of institutionalizing hysterics (along with all other mentally ill people) was becoming widespread.⁵⁷

In the late 1700s, the gynaecological paradigm was gradually reintroduced, but this time, the cause was reversed from the sexual deprivation model of antiquity to one of sexual, or sensual, overindulgence. During this era, the view of this disorder was further limited to a small part of the population: the well-born and idle. The hysteric of the nineteenth century was the product of a bourgeois family, encouraged in her genital neuroses by lascivious reading and a domestic situation of restraint and seclusion. According to the medical theory, vigorous work resulted in a firm body that resisted hysteria, but the idle person had a porous interior body in which each organ was susceptible to entering into sympathy with another. When the victim read, saw, or heard something upsetting, her entire body responded. In conjunction with the reintroduction of the gynaecological paradigm, reform (or at least the illusion of it) became a theme in the chronicle of confinement. During and after the Revolution, new French institutions were developed to house the mentally ill, and more humane methods were devised to care for them, called the “moral treatment.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ In the first chapter of his *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault points out that the institutionalization, or at least marginalization, of madmen and madwomen was common long before the 1600s. London’s Bethlem Hospital, made famous by the final image in William Hogarth’s early eighteenth-century series of paintings, *A Rake’s Progress*, began admitting patients in 1357. Bethlem is, according to Elaine Showalter, “the symbol of all madhouses, holding the imaginative place in the history of asylums that the Bastille holds in the history of prisons” (7). Unfortunately, conditions of so-called madhouses degraded considerably through the eighteenth century. Sanitation was basically non-existent and people were treated like animals because their illness was seen as a loss of humanity. Physical restraint was common. To outsiders, who could pay to ogle the residents, these institutions were visited for entertainment, like a trip to the zoo or the circus.

⁵⁸ According to Showalter, many of these reforms were credited to Dr. Philippe Pinel, who obtained permission in 1793 to release patients from the Salpêtrière and the Bicêtre hospitals in Paris, “a politically symbolic act like the freeing of the prisoners in the Bastille” (2). The 1800s was a great age of asylum building in Britain also. Showalter chronicles developments beginning with the passing of the Madhouse Act in 1828, which allowed the construction of new purpose-built asylums, many of which were designed specifically to create a more humanitarian atmosphere. John Conolly, who had delivered a scathing critique

The Victorian hysteric was “a sensitive creature, prone to dreaming, melancholic somnambulance, or febrile insomnia but also capricious, fantastic, unforeseeable, deceitful and lustful.”⁵⁹ Like the demonological model of the Middle Ages, this paradigm implied a moral judgment: hysteria was the result of idleness and an irresponsible cultivation of affections, passions, and imaginations. Not surprisingly, the gynaecological paradigm encouraged the view that femininity equals pathology. Bronfen claims that by the late 1800s in Europe, “hysteria and femininity could be called coterminus precisely because both were constructed to represent emotional volatility, exquisite sensitivity, emotional exhaustion, and a proclivity to contradiction, controversy, duplicity, and falsehood.”⁶⁰

The nineteenth century was an age of classification, of nosology, and physicians debated endlessly over the precise anatomical seat of hysteria. Although the reintroduction of uterine theories was a dominant paradigm, several schools of thought coexisted. For example, Jean-Martin Charcot studied the neurological aspects of hysteria at Paris’s Salpêtrière, while Pierre Janet, from the Nancy school, interpreted hysteria as primarily a psychological malady. Sigmund Freud, who moved to Paris in 1885 to study with Charcot, began his career in the neurological camp but radically reconceptualized his own thinking (and that of the medical establishment) with his development of psychoanalysis. Freud claimed that hysteria was a psychological disease with quasi-physical symptoms, not the reverse. He believed that hysterical symptom formation began with the repression of sexual desires and fantasies which, since they were denied psychological expression, were converted in physical symptoms. In order to treat these

of British asylums in 1847, spearheaded the elimination of restraints and coercion of all kinds. His *Treatment of the Insane Without Mechanical Restraints* (1856) outlines his methods. (Showalter, *Female Malady*, 23-50).

⁵⁹ Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, 111-14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

symptoms, Freud developed “talk therapy” to give the patient an outlet for their repressed memories, desires, and fantasies. Because of the sexual focus of Freud’s work, psychoanalysis represents a second resexualization of the hysteria diagnosis.⁶¹

The symptom picture of hysteria has remained in flux throughout its history, although Bronfen claims that a handful of symptoms have persisted, including convulsions, loss of consciousness, and *globus hystericus* (the sensation of a lump in the throat causing difficulty swallowing).⁶² Micale’s work shows that hysteria’s definition was only partially based on its symptomatology and, although many of the symptoms that signaled hysteria in the past may still appear today, the illness has since been classified out of existence. In the past, a particular synthesis of knowledge and ignorance allowed these wide-ranging behaviours to be defined as a single, unitary disease entity, but now, as evidenced by more recent editions of the *International Classification of Diseases* and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, these behaviours have been redefined into a number of different syndromes—factitious illness behaviour, dissociative disorder-conversion type, histrionic personality type, psychogenic pain disorder, and undifferentiated somatoform disorder.⁶³

Charcot’s Theatre of Hysteria: The Performance of Illness

Paris’s Salpêtrière Hospital, an important site of the study of hysteria under Jean-Martin Charcot, sparked the imagination of French citizens and tourists alike. In late

⁶¹ Freud’s early theories proposed that repressed material consisted of unconscious memories of childhood sexual trauma, but he later revised this hypothesis, saying that the repression of sexual desires and fantasies was the root of the problem. In Freud’s talk therapy, the patient verbalized thoughts, engaged in free association, and discussed her fantasies and dreams, all of which was intended to help the analyst understand the unconscious conflicts causing the patient’s symptoms and perhaps help pinpoint the main even that caused the hysterical break. See Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 27-29.

⁶² Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, 115.

⁶³ Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 292-93.

nineteenth-century travel guides to Paris, it was cited regularly as a tourist must-see, along with the Folies Bergères, the Jardin des Plantes, and the Eiffel Tower. But by this point in history, visitors to madhouses no longer expected to see the bedlam depicted in *A Rake's Progress*—the Salpêtrière was the site of a different sort of spectacle altogether. Charcot, a clinical neurologist who started working at the hospital in 1862, was the dominant French medical figure of this period. He assimilated layers of imagery into his work on hysteria: his medical lectures had an evocative theatricality, his descriptions of the structure of an hysterical fit seem to have inspired his patients to standardize and stylize their “performances,” and by applying a patina of religious iconography to his medical explanations, Charcot also managed to promote his own anticlerical political agenda. I include this discussion on Charcot not only as an excellent example of the intertwining of hysteria’s two histories, but as a prelude to my interpretation of the Prioress’s madness in *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

The novelty of Charcot’s scientific method “stems from his insisting on rendering the hysterical body as a public spectacle,” infusing the spirit of the theatre into his work. He based his nosology on observable phenomena, but was also prepared to consider vision, fantasy, and supernatural speculation.⁶⁴ He gave body to a psychosomatic disturbance, which in turn fed on the aptitude of the hysteric/actress to present her hysterical contortions, paralyses, and hallucinations for public consumption.⁶⁵ This “public consumption” came largely in the form of Charcot’s published case histories and his series of Tuesday lectures during which he brought in patients to demonstrate his theories on hysteria. The lectures were meant primarily to educate medical students and

⁶⁴ Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, 175.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

other doctors, but they were also open to the general public. Several well-known figures of the day claimed to have attended, including journalists, artists, actors, and writers such as Henri Bergson, Emile Durkheim, and Guy de Maupassant. Wishing to perfect her own upcoming performance as an hysteric, Sarah Bernhardt not only attended the lectures but also stayed in a cell at the Salpêtrière in 1884.⁶⁶

Charcot acknowledged both a hereditary and sexual dimension to hysteria. He did not discard the notion of a physical cause, nor did he think hysteria could be perceived as a purely organic illness. He believed that hysterics were genetically predisposed to their illness, which was brought on by a traumatic shock that strained the central nervous system beyond its limits.⁶⁷ With this relationship between neurology and physiology in mind, Charcot developed a somatic grammar of hysteria. He called the motor and sensory abnormalities that comprised the symptomatology “hysterical stigmata,” while the arrangement of the stigmata and the order in which they occurred was noted and organized into four distinct phases of the hysterical fit.

According to Bronfen, Charcot’s hysterics always began their “fits” with the first stage, *début*, often called epileptiform agitation. This might include lower abdominal pain that moves to the stomach, then heart palpitations, a sensation of a lump in the throat, buzzing in the ears, beating and pounding in the temples, and impairment of vision. As the patient moved into a fainting spell, followed by a fit, she might cry out, go pale, and her body would fall to the ground with rigid muscles as she lost consciousness. She might experience rigid or spastic convulsions. In the second stage, the *grands mouvements*, the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 182 and Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 198-200. In 1908, the circle of art-imitating-life-imitating-art completed another rotation with the Parisian production of a two-act play entitled *Une leçon à la Salpêtrière*.

⁶⁷ Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, 176, 178.

patient experienced great distortions and body dislocations with very strong movements. She might turn and move a lot or pose, often with her feet and head on the bed and back raised in an arc, perhaps screaming or hissing at the same time. After this stage of movement, the patient moved into the *attitudes passionelles*, a very emotional phase characterized by compelling gestures and sentence fragments. *Delirious withdrawal* was the final stage. During this phase, the patient slowly regained consciousness but remained in a melancholic state, sometimes displaying loud crying and sobbing, but her lamenting might be replaced by laughter in some cases.⁶⁸ Charcot's formalization of these four stages seems to have affected his patients' symptomatology—at least in the lecture hall, their fits appeared to be highly choreographed exhibitions, a theatricalization of hysteria.

2.5 Hysteria and Poulenc's Prioress

Although I ultimately intend to reject a traditional feminist interpretation of hysteria in the case of Poulenc's Prioress, a brief consideration of this reading proves instructive. Setting aside Benjamin Ivry's comment likening the Prioress's death to "an obscene horror, a macabre orgasm," the popular feminist reading of madness as female oversexualization and escape mechanism from male control seems untenable here.⁶⁹ However, if one reads spirituality as sexuality, this interpretation can be convincing, particularly when spirituality is viewed as a specific mystical union of Christ and the soul implied by *Brautmystik*, or affective mysticism.

Cristina Mazzoni states that *Brautmystik* is a type of mysticism in which the soul is seen as the Bride figure in a mystical union or marriage with Christ, and this

⁶⁸ Ibid., 180-82.

⁶⁹ Benjamin Ivry, *Francis Poulenc* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 182.

relationship is often described using imagery of an earthly marriage or the sexual encounter between a bride and bridegroom.⁷⁰ Mazzoni continues, explaining that this nuptial imagery “finds much of its inspiration in the Song of Songs as an allegory of Christianity (Jesus as the bridegroom of the soul),” and has been identified as a constant category of feminine mystical experience.⁷¹ In Bernanos’s Act II/v, a scene not included in Poulenc’s opera, Mère Marie references *Brautmystik* with nuptial imagery. When Doctor Javelinot tells Marie that he assumed her faith would afford the First Prioress an easy death, Marie answers, “It is not faith that reassures, but love. And when the Spouse himself comes near us to sacrifice us, like Abraham with his son Isaac, you need to be absolutely perfect or completely foolish not to feel disturbed.”⁷²

Jean-Noël Vuarnet claims that true mysticism is fundamentally female and he points not only to the femininity of the great women ecstasies, but also to the feminization of Eckhart or Ruysbroeck and even the feminization of God Him(Her)self.⁷³ Mazzoni agrees, pointing out that in many texts dating around 1900, the nexus of hysteria and mysticism is most often developed around the representation of women or of traditionally feminized men, such as Saint Sebastien. It is crucial to remember, however, that for centuries before, the Song of Songs inspired commentaries and sermons, many of which not only playfully regendered both the Bride and/or the Bridegroom, but which in the

⁷⁰ Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 6. Mazzoni also points to E. Ann Matter on the topos of mystical marriage, “Il matrimonio mistico,” in *Donne e fede: Santità e vita religiosa in Italia*, ed. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Bari: Laterza, 1994), 43-60.

⁷¹ Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 6.

⁷² Ce n’est pas la Foi qui rassure, mais l’Amour. Et lorsque l’Époux lui-même s’approche de nous pour nous sacrifier, comme Abraham son fils Isaac, il faut être bien parfaite ou bien sotte pour ne pas sentir de trouble. (Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act II/v; translation mine.)

⁷³ Jean-Noël Vuarnet, *Extases féminines* (Paris: Arthaud, 1980), 7.

process opened the text to queer interpretation, particularly during the time of Bernard of Clairvaux.⁷⁴

With the *Brautmystik* spirituality model in mind, Act I/iv can be understood to focus more on the Prioress's own personal Agony in the Garden, not so much as a death agony perhaps, but as the agony of a Bride of Christ separated from her Bridegroom. This might also refer to the spiritual anxiety of the "dark night of the soul" described by Carmelite Saint John of the Cross. Certain passages of the mad scene lend themselves to this reading, such as "Je suis seule, ma mère, absolument seule, sans aucune consolation" ["I am all alone, alone and helpless, without the slightest consolation"], indicating that the Prioress feels totally abandoned by God. The Prioress's indication that "Dieu s'est fait lui-même une ombre" ["God has become a shadow"] and her fascination with Blanche's chosen religious name, Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ, also supports this reading. According to Bronfen, the hysteric pursues "a paternal figure who might represent symbolic consistency, who could fulfill her phantasy of a love that would abolish all flaws," and in this case, the paternal figure is clearly God, who is meant to fulfill her love fantasy once her soul has entered heaven.⁷⁵

In the end, although this reading has some merit, it is limited in that it does little to address the larger themes of the opera and how the Prioress's death is connected to the martyrdom of her community and that of Blanche in particular. Moreover, the climax of the mad scene—the hallucination of the desecrated chapel—seems a poor fit in this paradigm. An informed reception, one that accounts for the particular political and

⁷⁴ This idea will become more potent when my interpretation directs itself toward Poulenc himself. See Stephen D. Moore, "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," *Church History* 69 (June 2000): 328-49.

⁷⁵ Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, 42.

theological contexts of this work, in addition to its inherent gender politics, demands a more nuanced critical reading of the Prioress's hysteria than the feminist model, at least in its most common articulation, can provide.

Mental illness became a major public health issue starting at the French Revolution. As a result, since the late 1700s, French alienists theorized that catastrophic political events were potential causes of mental disturbance. Alienists believed that people had a tendency to be swept along by revolutionary events, and while many welcome the new order, others develop signs of mental illness. Jacobs and Beveridge note that, after the initial connection between political turmoil and insanity, a new type of patient—a violent “maniac”—was seen to emerge. He was dangerous and impulsive, like the *sans culotte*.⁷⁶ Jean François Bonfils believed there were more lunatics in France than anywhere else because of the exaltation of patriotism, combined with the deep regrets of the *ancien régime*, and the anguishes of the Terror.⁷⁷

While alienists generally agreed that revolutionary violence was a cause of mental illness, an alternate hypothesis began to emerge as the nineteenth century wore on: that violent political activity was the manifestation of a latent state of individual or collective insanity. Alexander Bottex suggested that lunatics should stay away from rebellions as “it

⁷⁶ Françoise Jacob and Allan Beveridge, “Madness and Politics: French Nineteenth-century Alienists’ Response to Revolution,” *History of Psychiatry* 6 (1995): 422. Also see Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); A. Briere de Boismont, *Extrait des Annales d’Hygiène publique*, tome XXI, 2e partie, ‘De l’influence de la civilisation sur le développement de la folie’, 16, 17, 19, 23, 47; Marc-Antoine Petit, “Discours sur l’influence de la Revolution française sur la santé publique,” in *Essai sur la Medecine du Coeur* (Lyon, 1806), 116-57; Pierre Rétat, “Forme et discours d’un journal révolutionnaire: Les Révolutions de Paris en 1789,” in *L’instrument périodique: La fonction de la presse au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Claude Labrosse, Pierre Rétat, and Henri Duranton (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1986), 160-61.

⁷⁷ J.F. Bonfils, *De la folie ou aliénation mentale* (Paris: Didot Jeune, 1819), 7.

excited them and they in turn excited the people,” leading to a “madness of imitation.”⁷⁸ Belhomme hypothesized that the cerebral excitement of trying to create a new republic ignites passions that can quickly get out of control.⁷⁹ Moreau theorized that the repeated political changes in France were like convulsions undermining the country’s mental stability, resulting in a degenerate society.⁸⁰ This counter-revolutionary historiography was retroactively applied to the French Revolution, as well as the Paris Commune of 1871. Hippolyte Taine, in his monumental account of modern French history, employed vocabulary such as “collective madness,” “group hysteria,” “mass suicide,” and “political paroxysm” to describe the actions of the *sans culottes* and the Terror of the Revolution.⁸¹

According to Mark Micale, hysteria served as a master metaphor throughout French cultural history. Especially at the *fin de siècle*, it stood for a host of new and unsettling developments, including radical social reform, foreign nationalism, collective political violence, and even artistic experimentation. It was shorthand for the erratic, the convulsive, the sexual, the female, and the ‘Other’. It characterized women, socialists, alcoholics, prostitutes, crowds, city life, and even the French themselves. “On the eve of psychoanalysis,” Micale asserts, “hysteria was as likely to appear in novels, social science textbooks, and newspaper editorials as in the sickroom, the medical lecture hall, or the physician’s study, and with a spectrum of meanings that was every bit as multifarious.”⁸² Underlying the trope of hysteria was the charge of social degeneration.

⁷⁸ Alexander Bottex, *Rapport statistique sur le service des aliénés de l’hospice de l’Antiquaille et considérations générales sur le traitement de la folie* (Paris: Lyon, 1839), 26.

⁷⁹ Belhomme, *Influence des événements et des commotions politiques sur le développement de la folie* (Paris: Baillière, 1849), 4, 8, 10, 13, 24, 27.

⁸⁰ J. Moreau, *Les facultés morales considérées sous le point de vue médical, de leur influence sur les maladies nerveuses, les affections organiques* (Paris: Librairie des Sciences médicales, 1836), 71.

⁸¹ See Hippolyte Taine, *Les origines de la France contemporaine*, Vol. 2, *La révolution—l’anarchie*, book 1 (Paris: Hachette et Cie., 1877). Also see: Jacob and Beveridge, “Madness and Politics,” 421-29.

⁸² Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 218-19.

An example of the extent to which the hysteria as social degeneration paradigm reached into French society and culture in the nineteenth century is Max Simon Nordau's best-selling work, *Entartung (Degeneration)*. Although he was not born a French citizen, Nordau practiced medicine in Paris for most of his adult life and was a medical journalist and cultural critic. *Entartung* appeared in German in 1892-93 and was soon translated into French. The framework of the book is medical: the opening presents the symptoms, diagnosis, and etiology of Europe's cultural malaise, followed by a section on prognosis and therapeutics. One of Nordau's primary diagnostic categories is hysteria, which serves as the metaphor of choice for cultural innovation and experimentation, essentially marking this book as an antimodernist diatribe.⁸³

The interpretation of hysteria as degeneration provides a more finely shaded reading of the Prioress's mad scene than the feminist reading of hysteria as female oversexualization. As stated in my overview of this scene, Act I/iv begins with a simple theme marked "comme une cloche," and this theme's disintegration over two subsequent repetitions not only references the degeneration of *ancien régime* society in France at the eve of the French Revolution, but it also foreshadows the Prioress's deterioration, both physically and mentally. I would like to discuss further two aspects of this theme that lend themselves to hermeneutic examination: the use of the bell and phrygian mode, but first I want to explore the concept of the framing device for madness in the context of Poulenc's opera.

Although I have refrained from adopting the feminist reading of hysteria as female oversexualization, I am intrigued by the possibilities inherent in the notion of the frame, with which Susan McClary so effectively ties together the musical characteristics

⁸³ Max Simon Nordau, *Entartung (Degeneration)* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

of madness and her interpretive agenda. This framing metaphor is particularly apt for *Dialogues des Carmélites*, which takes place primarily in the cloistered space of the convent, which could itself be seen as a frame. And McClary's mediating filter of masculinity, which she likens to a grille put over the window of the asylum, could easily be the grille that separates the nuns from the outside secular world.

Framing can be appropriately connected to the articulation of space associated with the cloister and its accompanying distinctions between inner and outer, or public and private, spaces. As a refutation of McClary's confinement narrative, Craig Monson and Robert Kendrick both show, in their studies of early modern convents, that separate physical spaces for women served to enhance autonomy and allowed women to manipulate their constricted spheres.⁸⁴ Much of Poulenc's opera takes place inside the convent, a space already delineated as inner, private, and enclosed, but the mad scene takes place in a more closed, more private, more strictly defined space. It is not only inside the convent itself, but is encapsulated inside the convent's infirmary, in a private room the other nuns are discouraged from entering.

Just as her community was concealed within a cloister, the Prioress has to conceal her secret doubt and despair in a private space within the convent so that the nuns' confidence in her as an authority figure is not jeopardized. The Prioress's role as an authority in her community resonates with the character of Georges Bernanos. Through his writings, Bernanos acted as a moral authority for the French, pushing them to maintain traditional Catholic values. But despite his fire-and-brimstone rhetoric, like the Prioress, Bernanos had many secret fears and doubts, primarily his fear of death. Some

⁸⁴ See Craig Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995) and Robert L. Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and Their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

commentators have taken this a step further, claiming that in his development of the character of the First Prioress, Bernanos was actually inserting himself into the work, just as Blanche was created to represent Le Fort.⁸⁵ The author had a documented obsessive fear of death from childhood, when he was often ill. Citing a letter from 1934, Alma and Zock note that Bernanos wrestled with anxiety attacks in adulthood as well.⁸⁶ The great episode of the Prioress's death is the author's exploration of his own death agony. While writing *Dialogues*, Bernanos was dying of a liver ailment, so he identified strongly with the suffering nun, even giving her his own age, 59. On the day Bernanos finished the manuscript, he became bedridden and died two months later. Bernanos's identification with the First Prioress, as well as Poulenc's documented empathy with Blanche, that I will explore in detail in chapter four, further problematize the notion of madness as the realm of the feminine.

I pointed out earlier that in the Prioress's mad scene, several characters, primarily Mère Marie, act as frames of rationality for the suffering nun, and while, for the most part, I do not see them as necessarily representing an intrinsically masculine view (as in McClary's frame construct), they do represent the status quo of the *ancien régime*, of the Catholic Church, and the expectations of decorum inside the cloister. From the beginning of Act I/iv, the Prioress asks if she can see her nuns in order to say goodbye, but she is dissuaded by not only the doctor, but also by Mère Marie, who goes so far as to request that the window of the infirmary be shut tight so that the other sisters are not scandalised by the Prioress's moans and cries. The Prioress's madness threatens to burst out and

⁸⁵ Jeremy Sams notes that "as Le Fort had written herself into Blanche, so Bernanos wrote himself into the dying First Prioress." See Sams, "From the Scaffold to La Scala," 514.

⁸⁶ Hans A. Alma and T. Hetty Zock, "The Mercy of Anxiety: A Relational-psychoanalytic Study of *Dialogues des Carmélites*," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2001): 178.

ruffle up the convent's neatly ordered customs and habits, but Mère Marie tries to contain the madness so that this private sphere of the convent, which becomes the object of political struggle in the opera, is guarded from attack, either from without or from within.

In a gendered reading, the convent itself might be considered a masculinized frame exhibiting normative behaviour, while the inner chamber of the mad scene is a feminine space, squirming to escape its boundaries. The role of Doctor Javelinot, the only male figure in this scene, might be read according to Bronfen, who states that hysteric discourse is a paradigmatic example of the relationship between the subject (female patient) and so-called Master (male doctor), at which her symptoms are clearly aimed. Bronfen argues that the medical role hysteria plays is of a "screen on which to project the diagnostic fantasies of doctors faced with their own impotence and helplessness."⁸⁷

From a musical perspective, the bells act as the aural frame for this entire scene. They play a major role in the opening cloche theme, obviously, but Poulenc also uses them just before the Prioress's death (at 117, as Mère Marie instructs Sister Anne to tell the other nuns they cannot see their dying prioress), and as a closing gesture for the scene. This placement of the bells is not present in Bernanos's stageplay, although he does indicate onstage bells to be used at other points in the work. Alain Corbin notes that in pre-revolutionary France, bells were "markers of a community's spatio-temporal boundaries."⁸⁸ By ringing at the beginning, middle, and end of the day, and on feast day and Sunday offices, they marked out time aurally. Spatially, bells defined a community as those within hearing range. Bells marked rites of passage, like weddings and funerals.

⁸⁷ Bronfen, *Knotted Subject*, xi-xii.

⁸⁸ Aimée Boutin, "'Ring Out the Old, Ring in the New': The Symbolism of Bells in Nineteenth-Century French Poetry," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 30, nos. 3-4 (2002): 268. From: Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century Countryside (Les Cloches de la terre)*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

They served as a warning system for fire, storm, or attack, and observed the beginning and end of war. Taking into consideration the pre-revolutionary purpose of the bell, the cloche theme might be read simply as diegetic music, as sounds of the convent, as well as a marker of the Prioress's impending death and the beginning of the Revolution. However, changes in the practical and symbolic uses of bells during the Revolution and following suggest other meanings.

In 1791, bells were surrendered to make coins; in 1793, they were confiscated and recast as cannons; finally, the religious use of bells was banned altogether in 1795. In 1802, the right to ring bells was restored, but *ancien régime* bellringing was not; the sound of bells had by then taken on different meanings. In French literary discourse of the Romantic period, bells were more likely to inspire emotions of nostalgia or spirituality than a sense of time or place. Aimée Boutin states that by the modern period, bells had become acoustic symbols of lost identity. Church bells might reflect “the historical break between pre- and post-revolutionary culture, or between the pastoral nostalgia of Romanticism and the urban alienation of modernists like Baudelaire.”⁸⁹ Baudelaire anthropomorphized bells, endowing them with souls, comparing their peals to human sounds of distress. In his poem, “La Cloche fêlée,” bells symbolize an “existential crisis related to the lost sense of time, routine, or history,” similar to madness.⁹⁰ Poulenc's bells in *Dialogues des Carmélites* are both a nostalgic symbol and a marker of existential crisis; they prefigure the stripping away of the nuns' identities. The scene ends with the final isolating sound of a single bell, a resonance of something lost.

⁸⁹ Boutin, “Ring Out the Old,” 267.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 271, 273.

Poulenc does not use modal harmonies to a great extent in *Dialogues*, with the exception of phrygian mode, which appears in a few key places.⁹¹ Aside from its appearance during the cloche theme in Act I/iv, it can be heard at the beginning of Act I/iii, preceding Constance and Blanche's discussion of death and in Act II/iv, when revolutionaries break into the convent to evict the nuns. William Kimmel, in trying to formulate the musical aesthetic of death, has claimed that the phrygian mode and tetrachord are prominent in musical configurations and gestures which almost always appear in contexts of death. He has coined the term "phrygian inflection" to identify these configurations.⁹² With this in mind, the cloche theme opening of Act I/iv, with its use of both bells and phrygian mode, seems symbolically burdened with existential crisis and death.⁹³ Additionally, according to Kimmel's argument, in which he allows for a number of alterations and variations on descending movements generally within the phrygian mode, both the fear motive (see Figure 2.14) and the Blanche motive (see Figure 2.15) can be read as gestures within the phrygian inflection. The fear motive fits Kimmel's description of a descending spiral figure, which the author states is associated with decay,

⁹¹ I make this statement based on the sections of the work I have analyzed, as well as the complete analysis of the opera provided by Charles Herrold.

⁹² See William Kimmel, "The Phrygian Inflection and the Appearances of Death in Music," *Journal of the College Music Society* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1980): 42-76.

⁹³ Although it is a subtle connection, I think the use of phrygian mode might also be connected to the red phrygian cap, or *bonnet rouge*, borrowed from Phrygia of classical antiquity and adopted by the revolutionaries as a potent symbol of freedom from tyranny. Beginning in 1792, it was commonly worn by the Parisian *sans-culottes*, who were instantly recognizable with their hats and the tricolor cockade, along with long pants, a short jacket, and clogs, all features of working class dress. The phrygian cap also concealed aristocratic sympathies and ensured the safety of the wearer. Jennifer Harris states that, from 1792, revolutionary leaders believed that the adoption of a civil uniform for all French citizens, including the phrygian cap, would express equality in society, ensure functionality, and serve propaganda purposes. However, after the Terror of 1794, the idea of a civilian uniform was abandoned. Most people had decided that total freedom of dress was more representative of the ideals of the revolution. See Jennifer Harris, "The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans 1789-94," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (1981): 283-312.

destruction, and death, while the Blanche motive is an altered descending chromatic phrygian tetrachord, according to his system.⁹⁴



Figure 2.14: Fear motive (see 2.4)



Figure 2.15: Blanche motive (see 2.6)

My reflections on the possible meanings of Poulenc's use of the bell and phrygian mode at the beginning of Act I/iv bolsters my interpretation of the Prioress's hysteria as a manifestation of social degeneration (rather than of female oversexualization) by pointing to themes of existential crisis and death from the initial measures of the scene. Hysteria read as social degeneration clearly connects this character's madness to the larger explicit story of the work because it suggests that her hysteria is the result of the political upheaval of the French Revolution. Nevertheless, the Prioress's personal death agony and spiritual crisis is certainly important, especially as a connection to Bernanos, who held those themes dear. The climax of the mad scene—the hallucination of the desecrated chapel—specifically foreshadows events of the opera that will take place as a result of the Revolution, and so again, it seems clearer to connect the nun's hysteria to social degeneration when she pointedly refers to the unsettled political situation at the height of her madness. Finally, Poulenc's mad scene serves not only to reinforce Bernanos's conception of the First Prioress's difficult death, but also highlights the theme of transference of grace, a distinctly Bernanosian addition to the Carmelites' story.

⁹⁴ Kimmel, “Phrygian Inflection,” 60.

In this chapter, I unseated some widespread assumptions about operatic mad scenes and suggested a critical reorientation for this area of study. Primarily, I aimed to problematize the commonly-accepted operatic “type” of the oversexualized madwoman that has often been touted in past feminist operatic criticism. The example of Poulenc’s Prioress demonstrates that not all operatic madwomen easily fit this mold, and alternate readings of madness—in this case, madness as a metaphor for social degeneration—ring truer to both the dramatic and music content of the work.

Although interpretations of operatic hysteria have, like Freud’s work, typically focused on sexual discord as its origin, Clément herself pointed out that victims of madness are prey to frenzies of love *or* mysticism, and so perhaps the case of dementia brought on by faith crisis presents a fruitful point for further study.⁹⁵ Bernanos focused on the theme of spiritual crisis, with its accompanying psychological distress, throughout much of his writing, and *Dialogues des Carmélites* is no exception. However, *Dialogues* is certainly not the only operatic work to feature the so-called mystical hysteric. Puccini’s *Suor Angelica* (1918), like *Dialogues*, also displays a confluence of hysteria, religious crisis, and death in what might be defined as a mad scene. In this opera, Suor Angelica is a former princess who, after bearing an illegitimate son, is sent to a convent. Upon receiving word from a relative that her son has died, Angelica is seized by a vision in which she hears the child calling her to paradise. The nun then prepares a poison for herself and drinks it, looking forward to being reunited with her son in heaven. However, just as she begins to feel the poison’s effects, she realizes with horror that by committing the mortal sin of suicide, she has damned herself to hell. On the brink of death, Angelica becomes hysterical, and frantically begs the Virgin Mary to have pity on her, pleading,

⁹⁵ Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing*, 118.

“Madonna, salvami! Per amor di mio figlio ho smarrita la ragione! Non mi fare morire in dannazione!” [“Madonna, save me! For the love of my son, I’ve lost my mind! Don’t let me die in damnation!” (translation mine)] At this point, Angelica has a hallucination in which she hears the *Royal March of the Madonna* and sees a host of angels surrounding the Virgin Mary, who leads the nun’s son toward his dying mother.

Just as Sarah Hibberd has provided a more nuanced view of the popular notion of the frenzied madwoman by exploring the somnambulist model, in the next chapter, I will further explore the mystical madwoman as an alternate to the oversexualized madwoman. Although Blanche has no mad scene, she is paranoia personified and might be considered the true hysteric of *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

CHAPTER THREE

BLANCHE AS HYSTERIC OR MYSTIC?

*It may very well be that fear is really an illness.
(La peur est peut-être, en effet, une maladie.)*
—Blanche, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act II, scene iv

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two, I discussed hysteria in the context of the First Prioress's mad scene. But *Dialogues des Carmélites* is infused with pathological fear throughout, and this scene, culminating in the madwoman's death, comes early in the opera at the end of Act I. Moreover, although Blanche has no mad scene of her own, the paranoid novice could be interpreted as the key hysteric of the work. In this chapter, I investigate the quality of Blanche's fear by setting it against the backdrop of a discussion about the relationship between hysteria and mysticism. It has been argued that hysteria and mysticism represent analogous phenomena over which religion and science have struggled for generations. Primarily relying on literary sources, I follow this thread first by comparing Bernanos and Poulenc's depiction of spiritual anxiety in *Dialogues* with the hysteria illustrated in a similar but earlier work, *La Religieuse* by Denis Diderot. Second, I link Blanche to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a young woman whose writings have been scrutinized by those who wish to debunk her as mentally-unbalanced. Thérèse expresses a spirituality that has provided inspiration for Catholics throughout the past century. Not only was she Bernanos's favourite saint, but she was a model for many of his literary characters. Finally, I look to the music for Poulenc's characterization of Blanche and her foil, Constance. This chapter ultimately addresses conflicting dualities, not only that of mysticism and hysteria, but also the dual interpretations of the convent as

a house of prayer or a hothouse for hysterics, and St. Thérèse, and by extension, Blanche, as hysteric or as mystic.

In the previous chapter, I briefly explained that I use the term “mysticism,” like Mazzoni, in the sense of *Brautmystik*. Veiled in marriage metaphors, the soul is likened to a bride united with Christ, the bridegroom. According to F.C. Happold, this mystical union begins “in an awakening of the transcendental sense, that sense of something beyond material phenomena.”¹ It often has a supernatural element, in that the subject may display physical signs that have no known rational explanation, such as the stigmata, levitation, or automatic writing. The mystic might also claim to have an experience in which his or her senses are stimulated by a supernatural source, such as hearing voices, seeing visions, or smelling or feeling something on the skin that is not there. Finally, a mystical experience might simply entail fuller awareness, knowledge, or understanding.

3.2 Hysteric or Mystic: The Mystic Conundrum

The “dialogue” between hysteria and, as Cristina Mazzoni puts it, its repressed other, mysticism, is discernible generally in the co-mingling of hysteria and religious faith in *Dialogues des Carmélites* and in the connection between Blanche and Thérèse of Lisieux, as I will explain in this chapter. In her book, *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture*, Mazzoni examines the intertwining of hysteria and mysticism. She focuses on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientific, literary, and religious texts in Italy and France, identifying the literary traditions of naturalism and decadence as key representatives of the interdependence between neurosis and religion. She claims that

¹ F. C. Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology* (Middlesex, ENG: Penguin, 1963), 52.

the medical history of hysteria has been continuously linked to the religious history of supernatural phenomena, and the medical discourse of positivism remains dependent on the religious-feminine element it attempts to repress.²

During France's so-called culture wars of the late nineteenth-century, particularly between the defeat of 1870 and the religious revival it precipitated and the final separation of church and state in 1905, figures like Jean-Martin Charcot did everything possible to collapse the distinction between hysteric and mystic "in pursuit of an explicitly ideological and political agenda as well as in the name of scientific research."³ Leading Republican Jules Ferry declared that women "must belong to science, or else they will belong to the church."⁴ Burton notes that writers and commentators active during the Third Republic aimed to prove the religious impulse as a displacement of repressed or frustrated female sexuality, thus serving the cause of the male-dominated secular Republic, along with that of the psychiatric profession. According to Jan Ellen Goldstein and Ruth Harris, who have published on French psychiatry of the nineteenth century, the hystericization of several phenomena previously thought to be supernatural in origin (such as spiritual ecstasies, visions, extreme fasting, and stigmatization) can be viewed as part of a concerted project with political and ideological implications.⁵ Burton points out that the Republican regime's consolidation against a "clerical enemy" was echoed by the psychiatric profession. At the start of the Third Republic, the Church still dominated the care of the mentally ill, but the anticlerical regime replaced entire hospital

² Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, ix.

³ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 186.

⁴ Jan Ellen Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 374. Early in the Third Republic, Jules Ferry proposed a set of education laws that served to establish secularism in France. In 1881, these laws (known as the Jules Ferry laws) first established free education, and then mandatory and secular education in 1882. They were a crucial step towards grounding the Third Republic in the secular principles that led to the separation of church and state in 1905.

⁵ See previous note for full Goldstein reference. Ruth Harris, *Murder and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

staffs of sister-nurses with professionally-trained (and in most cases, male) nurses. In addition, obligatory church attendance by patients was suppressed, and hospital buildings were stripped of their religious designations and renamed after leading scientific or medical figures.⁶

The retrospective medicalization of mysticism was a potent anticlerical action against the Catholic Church. Jean-Martin Charcot, who aimed to create a complete medical reinterpretation of history, provided some of the most notorious examples. In *Les démoniaques dans l'art* (1886), written in collaboration with graphic artist Paul Richer, Charcot interprets a series of paintings dealing with possession and ecstasy in terms of his symptomatology of hysteria, forcing religious metaphors into scientific ones and appropriating an entire iconographical tradition into psychiatric discourse. In an article written shortly before his death, *Le foi qui guérit*, Charcot diagnoses Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Avila as hysterics.⁷ As Ruth Harris states, the elaboration of hysteria was not just a scientific project, but it was also “a demonstration of the way science would supersede religious explanation and reign triumphant as the ultimate social arbiter under the Third Republic.”⁸

Mazzoni argues that the nineteenth-century medical reinterpretation of history was an illusion relying on the assumption that religious and scientific discourses were mutually exclusive. Although this understanding may no longer have currency, the tradition of interpreting the mystical as pathological continued long after Charcot. Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) has been the most common target of the hysteria-mysticism interpretive tug-of-war, probably due to the overt sensuality permeating her writings, as

⁶ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 181-82.

⁷ Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 20-22.

⁸ Harris, *Murder and Madness*, 194.

well as her prolonged physical illness. The traditional interpretation of Teresa's sainthood, often mediated by Bernini's sculpture depicting the blissful (even orgasmic) saint awaiting penetration by an angel's burning arrow (*The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1652), hovers between hysteria and nymphomania.⁹

Conversely, Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre insists that the "hysterical Saint Teresa is an old cliché of freethinkers," noting that it is impossible to diagnose Teresa's ailment without more medical evidence. He dismisses the hysteria diagnosis, arguing that it would have prevented Teresa from the many accomplishments for which she is known. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, anticipating Freud, disagrees. He claims that sexual feeling, like that purportedly depicted in Bernini's statue, is probably the root of religion, and the disappointed or unappeased sexual instinct often finds a substitute in religion. Therefore, he believes it is likely that religious pathology springs from sexual pathology.¹⁰

The medical interpretation of mysticism as hysteria was aligned with the beliefs of the secular intelligentsia, including naturalist writers like Emile Zola. Decadent writers, with their unmistakable mixture of religion and sensuality, counterpoised the naturalists. The naturalist and decadent writers were allied with science and the church, respectively. Micale points out that the decadent writers were often criticized by secularists. For example, when Barbey d'Aurevilly published *Un prêtre marié* (1865), extolling the virtues of priestly celibacy, Emile Zola responded with a critical review entitled "Le catholique hystérique," claiming that the book was an abuse of mysticism and passion. But Mazzoni points out that superficial certainties of naturalism were

⁹ Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 29-30 and 37-41.

¹⁰ See Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre, *La stigmatisation, l'extase divine et les miracles de Lourdes: Réponse aux libres penseurs*, 2 vols. (Clermont-Ferrand: Librairie Catholique/Paris: Bellet, 1894).

smothered with doubts by the decadent-symbolist literature that immediately followed it, which [...] reveled in the neurotic's and especially the hysteric's discourse as a way of approaching the dreamy world of the unknown and the unconscious.¹¹

Hints of the hysteria-mysticism debate can be found in Bernanos's works. The epigraph for this chapter, from Act II/iv of *Dialogues*, provides an example. In this scene, the Carmelites' priest-confessor returns to the convent to say his final Mass with the nuns. Afterward, he informs the sisters that he must go into hiding because he fears for his life. Constance cannot understand why priests are being hounded in a Christian country like France. Another nun replies that it is because the people are afraid. They infect each other with fear, like you might infect others with the plague or cholera. At this moment, Blanche states, "La peur est peut-être, en effet, une maladie" ["It may very well be that fear is really an illness"]. In contrast, in *La joie*, an earlier novel by Bernanos, Abbé Chevance tells Chantal de Clergerie,

In one way fear is also God's daughter, redeemed on the night of Holy Friday. She is not beautiful to look at—oh no!—ridiculed at times, at others cursed, disowned by everyone... and yet, make no mistake about it, she is present at every deathbed—she is man's intercessor.¹²

While I hesitate to equate fear with hysteria outright, its ubiquitousness in *Dialogues* implies a pathologization of fear that can be interpreted as hysteria. In addition, the example from Act II/iv of *Dialogues* describes fear's escalation into violent political activity which, according to Micale, suggests a counterrevolutionary view of hysteria as

¹¹ See Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, 281 and Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, ix, 15 (quote is page 15). Typical to many aesthetic movements, the decadent movement in French literature is not easily defined. While the characteristics of Barbey d'Aurevilly's style connect him to this movement, he is more appropriately considered a precursor to the decadents.

¹² Georges Bernanos, *Joy [La joie, 1929]*, trans. Louise Varèse (New York: Pantheon, 1946), 224. The original French reads: "En un sens, voyez-vous, la peur est tout de même la fille de Dieu, rachetée la nuit du Vendredi saint. Elle n'est pas belle à voir—non!—tantôt raillée, tantôt maudite, renoncée par tous... Et cependant, ne vous y tompez pas: elle est chevet de chaque agonie, elle intercède pour l'homme." See Bernanos, *Joy*, 216.

social degeneration. Contrary to an earlier interpretation of hysteria in which mental illness is the result of catastrophic political events, the counterrevolutionary view suggests that violent political activity is a manifestation of hysteria. On the other hand, the example from *La joie* describes fear as spiritual anxiety, as an intercessory tool linking humanity with God.

In the nineteenth century, Charles Lasègue claimed that hysteria's symptoms were so varied that it could never be defined. Mazzoni posits that mysticism is equally complex and polysemic.¹³ A compromise of sorts was reached between the positivist and religious camps when feminist psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray suggested, with the invention of the term "mysteria," in *Speculum de l'autre femme* (1974), that this hysterical or mystical phenomenon can be *simultaneously* interpreted in totally different ways—as a physical and/or mental illness, or as a transcendent mystical experience.¹⁴ In addition, Mazzoni points out that Christianity's unique perception of sanity and insanity may allow for the simultaneity of mysticism and hysteria. For the Christian, the negative connotations of madness may give way in certain cases "to divinely positive ones: madness can be wisdom, and the fool of God a saint." Taking this concept further, the difference between human and divine "could coincide with the line that separates the sane from the mad, and the saintly from the symptomatic."¹⁵

Theologians Hans A. Alma and Hetty T. Zock bolster Mazzoni's point with their discussion of anxiety and religion in identity formation using a theoretical framework adopted from relational psychoanalysis. They argue that Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* focuses on the relationship between religion and anxiety in both neurotic and

¹³ Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 6.

¹⁴ See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Editions de Minuit, 1974), 238-52.

¹⁵ Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 11.

existential forms. The authors demonstrate that existential anxiety forms part of the process of developing a religious identity, and need not be a sign of weakness or pathology, in the same way that Erik H. Erikson argued that existential anxiety is “a lifelong companion of identity development.”¹⁶ Similar to Erikson, Schachtel theorized that anxiety is tension between two basic longings: the longing for security and protection (which he identifies as the principle of embeddedness) and the longing for freedom and discovering the unknown (the principle of transcendence). Alma and Zock explain that growth results from questioning our own perspectives. Curiosity and receptivity impel us forward, but our longing for security encourages us to cling to old perceptions of the world. An openness towards the world increases our opportunities for transformation and allows us to have religious experiences.¹⁷ In a related vein, Susan Sontag wrote of the romanticized notion that “illness exacerbates consciousness,” and while the illness in question was once tuberculosis, now insanity is “thought to bring consciousness to a state of paroxysmic enlightenment.”¹⁸

While Irigaray suggests that hysteria can be simultaneously interpreted as mysticism and vice versa, Steven Huebner points out that an *operatic* representation of the “mysteria” phenomenon complicates matters further because opera is a “genre that naturally indulges in polysemous meaning, idealised characters, and the fantastic.”¹⁹ In his article, “Naturalism and Supernaturalism in Alfred Bruneau’s *Le rêve*,” Huebner examines Bruneau’s operatic adaptation of Zola’s novel of the same name. Zola writes

¹⁶ Alma and Zock, “Mercy of Anxiety,” 175-76, quote is 180.

¹⁷ Ibid., 180-81, 184. Also see Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton), 1950; E. G. Schachtel, *Metamorphosis: On the Development of Affect, Perception, Attention and Memory*, 1959 (New York: Da Capo, 1984), 47.

¹⁸ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 35-36.

¹⁹ Steven Huebner, “Naturalism and Supernaturalism in Alfred Bruneau’s *Le rêve*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11, no. 1 (March 1999): 79.

about Angélique, a pious sixteen-year-old who claims to hear voices and dreams of one day marrying a man just like Jesus. In the novel, Zola implies that Angélique's ghostly voices "do not really exist as a physical phenomenon, that they are essentially projections of an active imagination."²⁰ His "scientific" explanation of what might be a supernatural phenomenon falls easily into the naturalist mode. However, Huebner points out that Bruneau represents Angélique's voices as audible singing from backstage, which "acts upon our senses with an immediacy difficult to reconcile with Zola's realist expectation about Angélique's silent imagination."²¹ Bruneau's audible voices suggest to the audience that they are plausible in a mystical environment and that the young Angélique might actually hear supernatural voices. Huebner posits that Bruneau's operatic representation of *Le rêve* thwarts the generic codes of realism that Zola's work tries to enforce.

3.3 Mysticism in *Dialogues des Carmélites* as a Response to Hysteria in *La Religieuse*

Based on similarities between Bernanos's *Dialogues des Carmélites* and Denis Diderot's novel *La Religieuse* (1760), literary historian Joseph Kestner suggested that Bernanos had evoked Diderot's work in order to refute it. I argue that Kestner misses more specifically how the novel and the stage play (and, in turn, Poulenc's opera) reproduce the dialectic between mysticism and hysteria. I will explore this issue further by comparing the two works.²²

²⁰ Ibid., 85.

²¹ Ibid. Huebner suggests that had Bruneau represented the voices via orchestral leitmotifs, Zola's naturalist mode might have been preserved because the voices would have been more easily read as figments of Angélique's imagination.

²² Kestner, "Scaffold of Honor," 26. Denis Diderot's writings helped pave the way for the French Revolution by emphasizing progress, liberalism, and anti-authoritarianism. He wrote *La Religieuse* nearly three decades before the French Revolution, but it was not published as a novel until 1796. As a result, the

Hysteria in Diderot's *La Religieuse*

Denis Diderot (1713-1784) was inspired to write *La Religieuse* after reading Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), an epistolary novel about a heroine whose quest for virtue is thwarted by her family.²³ *La Religieuse* transplants this premise into a convent setting and, while it was by no means the only convent memoir from this period, it was by far the most influential and long-lasting because of its scathing critique of cloistered life and its author's reputation in French intellectual circles.²⁴ In his nun's memoir, he provided "an attack on enforced vocations, an attack on the unjust collaboration of Church, state, and family, and an attack on the convent as a silencing mechanism and a means of social control."²⁵ Diderot believed that a retreat from society (appropriately represented by the cloister) was abnormal and unnatural and caused a

work was not widely known among the author's contemporaries, but became overwhelmingly popular during the early days of the First Republic.

²³ Diderot's *La Religieuse* shares the epistolary nature of early novels, with the result that it reads like a real life memoir of Suzanne Simonin. This epistolary structure, combined with details from a contemporary case concerning Marguerite Delamarre, an actual nun anxious to escape her habit, gives *La Religieuse* an air of authenticity. The origin of Diderot's novel is as follows: in 1760, Diderot and two companions concocted a plan to lure their friend, the Marquis de Croismare, back to Paris from his country home. Knowing he had intervened (though unsuccessfully) in Delamarre's case, the trio sent the Marquis a series of letters purportedly from another nun who had escaped her convent and wanted him to come to Paris to intervene on her behalf. The memoir and its accompanying correspondence appeared in installments from 1780 to 1782 in the exclusive periodical, *Correspondance littéraire*, but did not reach a wide readership until 1796 when it was published as a novel. The publication order (the prefatory letters explaining the story's origin appear *after* the memoir) produced a distinctive effect on the reader. The ruse of *La Religieuse* is only revealed once Diderot has engaged a sympathetic response from the reader who, falling for the truth claims embedded in the work, perhaps assumes that Simonin is a real person. Once the reader comes to the end of the memoir and is faced with the letters explaining the previous material, the illusion of reality is spectacularly dismantled.

²⁴ Similar works from this period include: *The Convent, or the History of Julia*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for T. Lowndes, 1767); and Anne Fuller, *The Convent, or the History of Sophia Nelson*, 2 vols. (London: Wilkins, 1786).

²⁵ Denis Diderot, *The Nun*, a new translation and introduction by Russell Goulbourne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), xvii.

distortion in the individual which might manifest itself in primitive cruelty, violence, sexual deviation, and ultimately, madness and death.²⁶

In *La Religieuse*, Diderot recounts the life of a fictionalized young woman, Suzanne Simonin, who wishes to escape the convent into which she has been forced in order to conceal her illegitimate birth. Hysteria runs like a leitmotif through the novel. As a novice in her first convent, Suzanne witnesses the spectacle of a deranged nun who has escaped her cell. She is horrified by the woman, disheveled and wild, trailing chains behind her. She states,

it is certain, Monsieur, that out of every hundred nuns who die before the age of fifty, there are exactly one hundred who are damned, and of these many in the meantime become mad, weak-minded, or delirious [...] One day one of these mad nuns escaped from the cell where she had been locked up. I saw her [...] I have never seen a sight more hideous. She was unkempt and almost naked; she was weighed down by iron chains; her eyes were wild; she tore at her hair, beat her chest with her fists, ran about, screamed, called down the most awful curses on herself and on everyone else; she looked for a window to throw herself out of.²⁷

Seeing her own fate in that of the unfortunate wretch, the novice determines not to take her vows. Ultimately, despite appeals to her family, Suzanne is forced to take them and describes how she entered a trance-like state in which the nuns compelled her to move and speak as they wished, like an automaton, throughout the service.

²⁶ The events of *La Religieuse* are not entirely fanciful; they also draw from Diderot's personal experience. In 1743, Diderot's father had the young man locked up in a monastery because he wanted his son to become a priest; the writer left shortly after to marry. His own experience was further bolstered and coloured by that of his younger sister, who entered the Ursuline convent (of her own volition) and proceeded to go mad, finally dying in 1748 at the age of 28. See Goulbourne's introduction in Diderot, *The Nun*, xii.

²⁷ The original French reads : "il est sûr, Monsieur, que sur cent religieuses qui meurent avant cinquante ans, il y en a cent tout juste de damnées, sans compter celles qui deviennent folles, stupides ou furieuses en attendant [...] Il arriva un jour qu'il s'en échappa une de ces dernières de la cellule où on la tenait renfermée. Je la vis [...] Je n'ai jamais rien vu de si hideux. Elle était échevelée et presque sans vêtement; elle traînait des chaînes de fer; ses yeux étaient égarés; elle s'arrachait les cheveux; elle se frappait la poitrine avec les poings, elle courait, elle hurlait; elle se chargeait elle-même et les autres des plus terribles imprécations; elle cherchait une fenêtre pour se précipiter." See Denis Diderot, *La Religieuse*, edited with introduction, notes, and bibliography by Heather Lloyd (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2000), 6; and Goulbourne's introduction in Diderot, *The Nun*, 8.

As a newly-professed nun, Suzanne is transferred to Longchamp convent, where life is tolerable. A change-in-command at the convent initiates a downward spiral for the young nun.²⁸ Suzanne tries to negotiate for her release, arguing that she has no religious calling, but soon discovers the new prioress is completely unsympathetic. Thus begins a period of abusive treatment, and Suzanne is turned into a pariah. She is not only shunned by all of the nuns, but she is also denied food, clean clothes, and bedding. She is barred access to the toilet facilities, encouraged towards suicide, and finally forced to endure her own exorcism and mock execution. At the height of the abuse, one of the young nuns, “forced to participate in Suzanne’s public humiliation by leading her on a rope, consequently goes out of her mind.”²⁹

Although she is not allowed to rescind her vows, Sister Suzanne is finally moved to a third convent, Saint-Eutrope. The young nun is pleased to be in a more amiable environment; however, she soon realizes that her Mother Superior’s affectionate treatment is not just an expression of kindness. Suzanne has, seemingly unaware, stumbled into a lesbian relationship. Suzanne initially projects a naïve complacency about her dealings with the Mother Superior, neither expressing emotional attachment to the woman nor revulsion at her advances, merely providing a description of the events. But after reflecting on the Mother Superior’s sexual proclivities, Sister Suzanne completely oversteps the reader’s expectations of her naïveté with her pronouncement:

Such is the effect of cutting oneself off from society. Man is born to live in society. Separate him, isolate him, and his way of thinking will become incoherent, his character will change, a thousand foolish fancies will spring up in his heart, bizarre ideas will take root in his mind like brambles in the wilderness. Put a man in a forest and he will become wild; put him in a cloister, where the

²⁸ The change of prioresses throughout the course of the story is a trait *La Religieuse* and *Dialogues des Carmélites* share.

²⁹ Lloyd’s commentary in Diderot, *La Religieuse*, xv.

idea of coercion joins forces with that of servitude, and it is even worse. You can leave a forest, but you can never leave a cloister; you are free in the forest, but you are a slave in the cloister. It perhaps takes even more strength of character to withstand solitude than it does poverty. A life of poverty is degrading; a life cut off from society is depraving. Is it better to live in humility than in madness? I would not dare decide between them, both must be avoided.³⁰

Clearly, at this point, in the words of Jack Undank, “Diderot’s hairy wrist, [with] some discourse too muscular, protrudes beyond his habit.”³¹ By way of the lesbian segment, the author implies that homosexuality is yet a further “distortion” resulting from the cloistered life. In his portrayal of the Mother Superior as a shallow and unstable person who preys on those for whom she is meant to be caring, Diderot suggests that homosexuality is a warped behaviour on par with madness and sadistic cruelty.³² The domestic situation at Sainte-Eutrope changes drastically when Sister Suzanne’s priest-confessor advises her to stay away from the Mother Superior. Soon, the older nun’s mental health begins to crumble, and she too becomes hysterical.³³

³⁰ The original French reads : “Voilà l’effet de la retraite. L’homme est né pour la société. Séparez-le, isolez-le, ses idées se désuniront, son caractère se tournera, mille affections ridicules s’élèveront dans son coeur, des pensées extravagantes germeront dans son esprit comme les ronces dans une terre sauvage. Placez un homme dans une forêt, il y deviendra féroce; dans un cloître, où l’idée de nécessité se joint à celle de servitude, c’est pis encore: on sort d’une forêt, on ne sort plus d’un cloître; on est libre dans la forêt, on est esclave dans le cloître. Il faut peut-être plus de force d’âme encore pour résister à la solitude qu’à la misère; la misère avilit, la retraite déprave. Vaut-il mieux vivre dans l’abjection que dans la folie? C’est ce que je n’oserais décider, mais il faut éviter l’une et l’autre.” Lloyd’s commentary in Diderot, *La Religieuse*, 84-85, and Goulbourne’s introduction in Diderot, *The Nun*, 104-5.

³¹ Jack Undank, “Diderot’s ‘Unnatural’ Acts: Lessons from the Convent,” *French Forum* 11 (1986), 153.

³² Probably the most straightforward reading of the lesbian activity portrayed in *La Religieuse* is as I’ve stated here: for Diderot, it provides more evidence of the depravity that can result from cloistered life. However, Goulbourne points out other possible interpretations. From a reader-centric viewpoint, the segment could be considered the product of a libertine pen for voyeuristic consumption by the male reader, or, as the novel was primarily read by women, as a lesbian erotic text. A more nuanced reading is one in which lesbianism itself is not presented as evidence of depravity or for male titillation, but rather that the Church’s handling of the situation is reflective of human distortion. See Goulbourne’s introduction in Diderot, *The Nun*, xix-xxi.

³³ Béatrice Durand suggests that the three superiors in *La Religieuse* offer three different versions of hysteria. She states, “The mystic fervor of the first, the sadism of the second, and the nymphomania and homosexuality of the third can be interpreted as the outlet of hysterical dispositions.” See Béatrice Durand, “Diderot and the Nun: Portrait of the Artist as a Transvestite,” in *Men Writing the Feminine: Literature, Theory, and the Question of Genders*, ed. Thais Morgan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 101. While Durand provides a very tidy interpretation, she does not account for the other mentally unstable nuns in Diderot’s story and she exaggerates the mystic fervour of the first prioress, if not also the

Comparing *La Religieuse* with *Dialogues des Carmélites*³⁴

Both Diderot's novel and Bernanos's stage play (as well as Poulenc's opera) follow a young woman into the convent. Bernanos's Blanche is a high-born aristocrat who enters willingly despite her family's misgivings while Suzanne, of illegitimate birth, is hidden away in the cloister against her will. Throughout *La Religieuse*, Suzanne pleads for her release, while Blanche is more concerned that her safe haven might be breached by a malevolent outside force.

Despite their opposing premises, the storylines are similar. In both, a change in command brings a change in fortune for each young nun. In Suzanne's case, her first prioress is kind and sympathetic, but once a new prioress is appointed, the convent is transformed into a nightmarishly abusive place. The First Prioress in Poulenc's opera is Blanche's supportive spiritual advisor, but her harrowing death and premonition of the convent's tragic fate—and the subsequent appointment of a new prioress—heralds the beginning of the revolutionaries' direct attack on the Carmelite convent (in the name of freedom, ironically). Further, while both young nuns have a close relationship with their respective prioresses, the affectionate relationship between the prioress and Sister Suzanne is obviously sexual but Blanche and the First Prioress enjoy a parent-child dynamic. During their periods of oppression, both Suzanne and Blanche are denied basic amenities like lodging and clothing and both are forced to endure executions—one mock and the other very real. Kestner notes that Diderot and Bernanos's works together

sadistic tendencies of the second. The third prioress is quite clearly meant to be interpreted as an hysteric, especially because of the parallels between her portrayal as a madwoman and that of the hysterical nun introduced at Suzanne's first convent posting.

³⁴ Although Kestner's original comparison was between Diderot's novel and Bernanos's stage play, I will include Poulenc's opera in the following discussion. Poulenc did not radically change Bernanos's text, apart from the cuts made in order to streamline the work for a musical setting.

represent opposing poles of eighteenth-century belief (determinism and divinity); that is, Diderot's rationality was countered by Bernanos's Christian morality. This is evident in each author's representation of the hysteria/mysticism phenomenon.

Both *Dialogues* and *La Religieuse* portray hysteria, or mysticism, in the confines of a convent. Diderot frames his convent as a prison and breeding ground for madwomen, implying that some of the nuns' unusual behaviours are pathological, not spiritual, and stem from the "unnatural" living conditions of a cloister. Conversely, Bernanos and Poulenc depict the convent as a refuge and a house of prayer whose inhabitants (especially Blanche and the First Prioress) experience what could be read as madness. However, in part by recontextualizing the story in the French Revolution, Bernanos shapes the reading of the nuns' behaviour so that it takes on a mystical aspect. The nuns' mental states are reframed as not only fear of the revolutionaries and fear of expulsion, but metaphysical anguish in the face of their own martyrdom.

The portrayal of the space of the convent is key to a reading of these works: a house of prayer or a hothouse for hysterics? Catholic convents were commonplace in eighteenth-century France, but their cloistered nature stimulated the curiosity of men and other outsiders, inspiring numerous interpretations of their hidden spaces. As the impenetrable no man's land, the convent teased with its mysterious and enigmatic character, tempting libertine writers to represent it as a place of pretended virtue, fetishizing and re-writing it as "a highly-charged site of sexual fantasy" in nunnery tale books such as Gervais de La Touche's *Le Portier des Chartreux* (1745).³⁵ Others were

³⁵ Goulbourne's introduction in Diderot, *The Nun*, xi. The sexual innuendo in the final segment of Diderot's *La Religieuse* paints a picture of the convent that seems entirely foreign to *Dialogues*. However, Thierry Santurenne, in his article "Hymen et guillotine: *Dialogues des Carmélites* de Francis Poulenc," attempts a Freudian reading of *Dialogues*, reinterpreting Blanche's fear as fear of sexual initiation, her future initiation

less concerned with antics inside the cloister, seeing it only as “a convenient dustbin for supernumerary females.”³⁶ Still others, influenced by Enlightenment rationalist thought, came to define the cloister as a form of social abuse, a prison for women. And for some women, it was so, especially for those who were forced into religious life, perhaps because their families were not wealthy enough to provide a marriage dowry. Whatever the case, the convent, a particularly feminine space, seems to have been a source of uneasiness for the outsider.³⁷

to the mysteries of the flesh. Although Santurenne points out some titillating connections between sex and death at the guillotine, overlaying *Dialogues* with a sexual interpretation seems counterproductive. Instead of providing deeper insight into *Dialogues*, his psychoanalytical reading detracts from the truly compelling material at the surface of the work. Why insist that losing one’s head symbolizes the much less potent, much more ordinary, experience of losing one’s virginity? Reading a symbolic *petite mort* into a work that offers a *grande* one seems unnecessary. See Thierry Santurenne, “Hymen et guillotine: *Dialogues des Carmélites* de Francis Poulenc,” in “Erotisme et ordre moral,” special issue, *Revue d’études culturelles* 1 (2005), 189-97.

³⁶ Lloyd’s introduction in Diderot, *La Religieuse*, xxvii.

³⁷ In 1790s France, the public demanded topical, patriotic works and flocked to see anticlerical pieces that reflected both government policies and public opinion, such as Dalryrac’s *Vert-Vert* (1790), Grétry’s *La Fête de la raison* (1793), and perhaps most notably, Berton’s *Les Rigueurs du cloître* (1790). Pendle acknowledges *Les Rigueurs* as an outgrowth of the gothic novel tradition; the plot resonates with a nested narrative from Lewis’s *The Monk*. (See Karin Pendle, “A bas les couvents! Anticlerical Sentiment in French Opera of the 1790s,” *Music Review* 42, no. 1 [1981]: 24, n. 6.) The story concerns Lucile, a young woman forced by an enemy of her family into a convent run by a tyrannical abbess. Her fiancé, previously imprisoned himself, is only released on the condition that Lucile take her final vows. He returns, with the National Guard, to free all the nuns from their “holy prison,” ending the work with a chorus to “Liberty, Goddess of France.” Along with unjust imprisonment, this concluding hymn to freedom became a cliché of revolutionary drama. The reception of Diderot’s book also provides a good barometer of the French public’s ideological stance vis à vis rationalism and religion and thus, how different sectors of French society may have viewed the convent. *La Religieuse* (1760) became popular after it was published as a novel in 1796, as it reflected the values of the new Republic. At the same time, the book was condemned as irreligious, obscene, and morally corrupting. As the politics of France flip flopped in the ensuing decades, the book generated opposing reactions. During the reactionary period of the Bourbon restoration, it was banned in 1824 and again in 1826 as obscene, but by 1880, it had found new favour with the anticlerical movement. Even in more recent times, controversy has erupted around Diderot’s story. In the mid-1960s, Jacques Rivette produced a film version, *Suzanne Simonin*, which was officially banned by de Gaulle’s Minister of Information, who considered it a blasphemous dishonour to nuns. But the act of state censorship caused an outcry that forced the lifting of the ban. See Goulbourne’s introduction in Diderot, *The Nun*, xiv-xv.

Mysticism in *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Evelyn Underhill, whose groundbreaking work on mysticism in 1911 remains a classic in the field, described five stages in the development of a mystic (which she called the “universal mystic way”). These stages, based on her research of the writings of John of the Cross, Henry Suso, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, and many others, retain currency today. The first stage, called “awakening,” is often preceded by an intense period of restlessness, uncertainty, and mental stress. The awakening of the transcendental consciousness itself is accompanied by feelings of joy and exaltation. In the second stage, “purgation,” the subject’s awareness of divine beauty provides insight into his or her own finiteness and imperfection. As a result, the mystic tries to eliminate all that stands between him or her and God by discipline and mortification. During “illumination,” the third stage, the subject again experiences joyful consciousness of transcendence and the soul awakens to the knowledge of reality. Illumination is comprised of many levels of contemplation and several mystics do not grow beyond it. Although it brings a sense of the divine presence and happiness, illumination is not true union. The fourth stage of the mystic way is “the dark night of the soul” (in the words of St. John of the Cross). It is a final and complete purification of the will, marked by confusion, helplessness, stagnation, and a sense of God’s withdrawal and abandonment. It can follow or intermittently accompany illumination. The true goal of the mystic, and the final stage, is “union with God.” It is characterized by peaceful joy, enhanced powers, and intense certitude, with permanent establishment on a transcendental level.³⁸

³⁸ See Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed. (New York: Dutton, 1961), 169-70. Underhill frankly contradicts another pioneer in the study of religion: William James. In his 1902 published series of lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he dedicates one chapter to mysticism. In this chapter, James claims that there are four marks

Bernanos and Poulenc depict the mystical equivalent of Diderot's hysteria largely through Blanche and the First Prioress. Both nuns endure metaphysical anguish in the face of impending death as they try to reconcile their fear of the unknown with their Christian belief in eternal life. Peering through a spiritual lens, this psychological turmoil could be read as "an awakening of the transcendental sense" or a struggle to sense "something beyond material phenomena" that typically accompanies the mystical experience.³⁹ In the previous chapter, I explored the First Prioress's mad scene in detail. In Underhill's paradigm of mystical development, the First Prioress is clearly experiencing the dark night of the soul. The nun feels alone and helpless, and senses that she has been abandoned by God. She states that God has forsaken her, that He is only a shadow. It is appropriate that she experiences this on her deathbed, as, according to Underhill, some contemplatives call this phase "mystic death" or "spiritual crucifixion."

Blanche, on the other hand, is in the beginnings of the awakening stage. Underhill points out that those who undergo awakening (or "mystical conversion," as she also calls it) are usually already religious, but are searching for a deeper understanding. A period of restlessness precedes awakening, during which "the deeper mind stirs uneasily in its prison" and oscillates between temporal (superficial) and eternal (spiritual) consciousness.⁴⁰ Blanche is obviously conflicted. She is a young woman of some

of the mystic state: ineffability (mysticism defies expression and must be experienced to understand it), noetic quality (mystical states are states of knowledge and insight), transiency (mystical states cannot be sustained for long, but can be recurring), and passivity (the mystic is grasped by a superior power). In contrast to Underhill, who claimed to be a mystic, James said he had no experience as a mystic and spoke as an objective observer only. (Since James insists that ineffability is the primary mark of the mystic state, it would seem impossible to be an objective observer on this topic. He puts his own authority to question here.) See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 380-82.

³⁹ Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*, 52.

⁴⁰ Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature*, 177-78. For more in-depth information on awakening, see 176-97. St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, describes years of uncertainty and struggle which prepared him

spiritual depth, but she is plagued by an intense, paralyzing anxiety. From the start, she is characterized as a timid, anxious, even mentally-unbalanced young woman. Her fear emerges every time she speaks or acts and is an intrinsic part of her character. But rather than propelling her into a traditional mad scene, Blanche's fear compels her to run away, illustrating her restlessness of spirit.⁴¹

Each act begins with an instance of Blanche fleeing. At the beginning of Act I of the opera, Blanche tells her father she is going to enter the Carmelite convent. He worries that, by becoming a nun, Blanche is running away from life. In the first scene of Act II, Blanche runs out of the chapel during the First Prioress's wake, afraid to be alone with the corpse. Finally, in the first scene of Act III, the novice flees her community to return to her father's house. Despite her fleeing, Blanche displays a significant depth of spirit. Ultimately, she returns to join the other nuns and face her fear of death in the last scene of the opera, and at this point, she finally reaches awakening, the first stage of mystical conversion. Her return to the community mirrors the opera's opening, when Blanche first decides to enter the Carmelite convent.

While I clearly argue for a mystical interpretation of Blanche's character development in *Dialogues*, her initial introduction in the opening scene leaves room for ambiguity. This ambiguity arises at least partly because Bernanos's French text can be

for his initiation into mysticism. F. C. Happold agrees that a mystic must go through a conversion experience. He states, "No one chooses to be a mystic of his own volition. He must undergo some sort of experience which is of sufficient intensity to lead to an expansion of normal consciousness and perception, so that there comes to him a new vision of reality which dominates his life and thought. He must experience some sort of 'conversion.'" (See Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*, 52.)

⁴¹ Nor is Diderot's Suzanne framed as a madwoman with a mad scene. Diderot depicts her as relatively clear-headed throughout the novel, but her description of how she was "compelled" to enter a trance-like state to take her vows is curious. Additionally, some of her coping strategies at the height of her victimization at Longchamp convent are uncannily similar to the first hysterical nun she sees near the beginning of Diderot's novel. When Suzanne is condemned to the dungeon, she is put in chains and screams and carries on and performs the expected histrionics. But the description of this scene is from Suzanne's point of view and does not provide a rational outside reference point, and thus the reader assumes that Suzanne is simply not mad, despite all appearances to the contrary.

understood in diverse ways, as evidenced by the two English translations for this opera. The English translations, both prepared by Joseph Machlis, provide slightly different interpretations of some key phrases of Act I/i.⁴² The earlier of the two (1959) tends to bend these phrases towards a medical reading, painting Blanche as an hysteric, while the 1992 translation is more literal and promotes Blanche as mystic. Bernanos introduces Blanche to the audience via a conversation between her father (the Marquis) and brother (the Chevalier). Her brother thinks there is something seriously wrong with Blanche, while her father glibly brushes off his son's concerns. When Blanche herself appears, Bernanos juxtaposes her fearful side with her profoundly spiritual nature.

Before Blanche's entrance, her father and her brother discuss Blanche's safety, as they fear she's been caught up in a peasant mob on her way home. The Chevalier insists that he is concerned not so much for her safety, but because she has a "sick" imagination ["*imagination malade*"]. He then states: "*Croyez-moi: ce qui met la santé de Blanche en péril, ou peut-être sa vie, ne saurait être seulement la crainte: c'est le gel au coeur de l'arbre.*" In the 1959 translation (slanted toward a medical reading), this section is read as: "Mark my word! More than fear endangers my sister's health, perhaps even her life! It is not fear alone that makes her suffer. Deep within she's very ill." Machlis's interpretation of the metaphorical last phrase is most at issue here. While the first translation clearly shows that the Chevalier thinks Blanche's timid character is pathological, the 1992 translation of the final phrase is less definite about a medical reading. It states: "There is something eating away at the very core of her soul..." This translation opens the text to a possible spiritual interpretation and, although Machlis has

⁴² The two English translations I refer to here are from the 1959 piano vocal score and the booklet accompanying the 1992 CD recording of the opera by Opéra de Lyon.

taken some liberties with Bernanos's metaphor, I think this translation more effectively relays the author's intended meaning. The Marquis's response to his son, "Vous parlez comme un villageois superstitieux" ["You sound like a superstitious villager"], also lends credence to the translation that emphasizes a supernatural reading.

Ambiguities in the original text are also suggested by different translations of the Chevalier's next phrase. He states: "Oh! Sans doute, il arrive qu'elle me fasse illusion à moi-même, et je croirais le sort conjuré si je n'en lisais toujours la malédiction dans son regard." The earlier of the two translations, presupposing an hysteric reading, is as follows: "Oh! I'm certain, there are times, I must admit, when she fools even me. I'd be inclined to think she was well, if I didn't see the signs of illness so deep within her eyes." The later translation uses the words "spell" and "curse": "Oh! Without a doubt, there are times when she fools even me. I would believe the spell had been broken if I did not see the sign of some curse in her eyes." Once again, the latter is a more literal translation and lends itself more easily to a supernatural or spiritual reading rather than a medical one.

After Blanche's entrance, Bernanos illustrates both her fear and her profound reflective nature. When her father and brother state that a neighbour, M. de Damas, saw her looking calm in her carriage in the midst of the mob, she says,

Oh! Monsieur de Damas n'a sans doute vu que ce qu'il voulait voir... Réellement, je faisais bonne contenance? Mon Dieu, il en est peut-être du péril comme de l'eau froide qui d'abord vous coupe le souffle et où l'on se trouve à l'aise, dès qu'on y est entré jusqu'au cou.

[Oh! Monsieur de Damas without a doubt saw what he wished to see... So you think that I looked calm and courageous? Good Lord, perhaps danger is like plunging into the cold sea, which begins by taking your breath away, yet becomes most refreshing after you have gone in up to your neck.]

This is a key line in the opera: it not only illustrates Blanche's decision to approach her fear as a spiritual challenge, but it also shows an uncanny insight into the lengths she will have to go to overcome that fear by foreshadowing her death at the guillotine.

Later in the same scene, Blanche makes another connection between her fear and her spiritual beliefs. Her brother reminds her to get candles from the servants when she goes upstairs so that she will not be afraid. He recalls when she used to say to him: "Je meurs chaque nuit pour ressusciter chaque matin." ["I die every night, only to be reborn the next morning!"] Blanche responds by comparing her intense anxiety to the Agony of Christ. She states, "C'est qu'il n'y a jamais eu qu'un seul matin, Monsieur le Chevalier: celui de Pâques. Mais chaque nuit où l'on entre est celle de la Très Sainte Agonie..." ["There has been only one morning of Resurrection, dear brother, that of Easter. But every night of one's life is like the night of the Agony of Christ..."] Blanche goes to her room and the next moment, she screams, having been frightened by shadows cast by a servant lighting a candle.

Her father tries to minimize the incident, but Blanche responds: "Mon père, il n'est pas d'incident si négligeable où ne s'inscrit la volonté de Dieu comme toute l'immensité du ciel dans une goutte d'eau." ["Dear father, there is nothing so small or unimportant that does not bear the signature of God, just as all the immensity of Heaven lies in a drop of water."] Blanche then tells her father she intends to enter the Carmelite convent, and he accuses her of wanting to run away from life. Blanche's response suggests a return to the hysteria diagnosis. She states,

Je ne méprise pas le monde, le monde est seulement pour moi comme un élément où je ne saurais vivre. Oui, mon père, c'est physiquement que je n'en puis supporter le bruit, l'agitation. Qu'on épargne cette épreuve à mes nerfs, et on verra ce dont je suis capable.

[I neither hate the world nor despise it. It is just for me the world is like an alien place in which I cannot live. Yes, dear father, I am physically unable to bear the strain, the fearful noise, the excitement. If I were only spared this daily assault on my nerves, then you would see all I could accomplish.]

If Blanche entered the convent to keep fear at bay, ironically she ended up choosing to face the terror of martyrdom as a nun. While her decision to become a nun might be interpreted as an hysteric running away from life, she could also be seen as a mystic carving out a place for her own spiritual development. Throughout the first scene of Act I, Bernanos juxtaposes Blanche's fearful side with her profoundly spiritual nature, and by the end of the scene, it is clear that Blanche could be read as an hysteric or as a mystic. However, Blanche's entry into the convent in scene ii initiates a deeper examination of spiritual matters that continues through the entire work. Bernanos intertwines Blanche's character development with her spiritual development, reading her as a mystic, not an hysteric.

Different metaphors for the convent presume radically different notions of freedom. Diderot saw the Catholic Church as an institution of oppression and the convent as a prison. He attacked the notion of enforced vocations and the convent as a silencing mechanism, arguing that this practice violated human rights and an individual's entitlement to self-determination. He considered hysteria a response to confinement and the "unnatural" living conditions of the cloister. In *La Religieuse*, Suzanne is forced into an hysterical trance-like state to take her vows. On the other hand, Blanche is prohibited from taking her vows due to a 1790 decree against religious orders. In *Dialogues*, Bernanos perceives the Church as victim. He highlights the positive aspects of religious life, showing how the cloister can be a safe haven or a refuge, and how it provides some

people with an optimal environment for personal challenge and growth. In contrast to Diderot, Bernanos illustrates how freedom can be found in the convent for those with true vocations. (This is in direct conflict with those who perceived convent expulsions during the French Revolution as freeing prisoners, and therefore a benevolent act.) The intense spiritual anguish that Bernanos's nuns experience in the face of their own martyrdom is a working out of their relationship with God, a mystical craving to see something beyond the material world.⁴³

3.4 Thérèse of Lisieux: Literary Model for Bernanos

Examining Bernanos's *Dialogues des Carmélites* in light of Diderot's *La Religieuse* highlights these two authors' contrasting viewpoints on hysteria and mysticism. The dualism of mysticism and hysteria is inherent in *Dialogues* on yet another level. Bernanos often inserted his favourite saint, Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-97), into his novels by modelling characters after her. Thérèse is an enigmatic figure. On one hand, she was a saint and a Doctor of the Church, a title the Catholic Church confers upon those from whose writings Catholics have benefitted.⁴⁴ On the other hand, despite the eminent learning and sanctity attributed to her, Thérèse of Lisieux's autobiography and spiritual

⁴³ Diderot and Bernanos perhaps represent an opposition of values not unlike the conflict in value systems described by Brian Hyer in his "Parsifal Hystérique," in which he reads Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887) as an allegory of Wagner's *Parsifal* (1881). Nietzsche's description of the movement from "autonomous self-sufficiency and overpowering strength, to weakness and asceticism, from a natural dominion over others to a violence directed inward on the self" (269) is observed in Parsifal's character development. Wagner values a "movement toward fulfillment and transcendence" and ascribes goodness and virtue to weakness, while Nietzsche sees this as a "regression into resentment and hatred, a descent into morality" (269). Additionally, the transitional moment from "strength" to "weakness" is represented in terms of sickness. Borrowing from Freud, Hyer describes the "flight into illness" as more than just a physiological phenomenon. In illness, instinct and aggression are driven inward, resulting in the creation of a conscience, or a soul. See Brian Hyer, "Parsifal Hystérique," *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 269-320.

⁴⁴ Only three women have been declared Doctors of the Church: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, and Thérèse of Lisieux.

writings have been subject to psychoanalytical revisionism, reading her not as a spiritual leader, but as a mentally unstable young woman.

Literary scholar Mary Frances Catherine Dorschell points out that Thérèse is implicit on every page of Bernanos's *Dialogues*, especially via the themes of honour, fear of death, and spiritual childhood.⁴⁵ For those familiar with Thérésian theology, Constance stands out as the saint's dramatic counterpart. However, both Luc Estang and Guy Gaucher have noted that Blanche and Constance each have characteristics of Thérèse because they represent different parts of the saint's full religious name, Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face. Although neither author elaborates on this hypothesis, presumably Constance embodies the spirit of childhood and is connected to the first part of the name while Blanche embodies fear and suffering and is linked to the Holy Face.⁴⁶

Thérèse of Lisieux is not normally identified as a mystic by the Catholic Church; no visions or ecstasies and few physical cures or other miracles are attributed to her. However, in her childhood, Thérèse endured a series of psychological and physical trials that she interpreted as mystical experiences. Later, during the early stages of tuberculosis from which she died, Thérèse suffered from spiritual dryness, or depression. Her prioress (her older sister Pauline) requested that she write the story of her life in order to cope with her spiritual difficulties.⁴⁷ The young nun's account of both her memories of events and her thoughts, prayers, trials, and consolations was published as *Histoire d'une âme* after her death. This document functions as both an autobiography and a summary of

⁴⁵ Dorschell, *Georges Bernanos' Debt to Thérèse*, xix-xx, 215.

⁴⁶ See: Guy Gaucher, "Bernanos et Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus," in "Etudes bernanosiennes," spécial issue, *La Revue des Lettres Modernes* 7, nos. 56-57 (1960): 228-68; and Luc Estang, "Les Dialogues des Carmélites," *Bulletin de la société des amis de Georges Bernanos* 1 (1949).

⁴⁷ This period might be called a dark night of the soul in Underhill's paradigm, as it followed her illumination period when she formulated her theology of the spirit of childhood.

Thérèse's theology, in which she describes a relationship between the soul and God as similar to that between a child and a loving parent. But from a psychoanalyst's perspective, *Histoire d'une âme* also served as the written equivalent of a "talking cure."

Thérèse's life story and theology were promulgated via *Histoire d'une âme* and through no small effort made by her fellow Carmelite sisters. Ultimately, she became one of the most influential Catholic women in the twentieth century. Georges Bernanos interpreted her canonization in 1925, along with that of Joan of Arc in 1920, as a sacred symbol of France's spiritual vocation to proclaim Christian values to the world.⁴⁸ As prototypes of childhood, sanctity, and heroism, both Joan and Thérèse, little more than children at their deaths, provided Bernanos with potent examples of courage, dignity, and honour in the face of enormous suffering. Each worked her way into Bernanos's literary efforts. Bernanos's continued reflection on the theology of Thérèse in particular shaped his own spirituality and his vocation as a writer, illustrating how the virtues of childhood can be transformed into a mature spiritual relationship with God.⁴⁹

The young saint entered into Bernanos's works from the very beginning, providing a model for characters such as Chantal de Clergerie in *L'imposture* and its sequel, *La joie*. *L'imposture* is an account of the torment that besets the intellectual Father Cénabre when his faith suddenly deserts him, leading him toward suicide. At the end of the novel and throughout its sequel, Chantal, the holy, radiant, adolescent daughter of a historian, secures the priest's salvation.⁵⁰ Bernanos concluded his *Journal d'un curé de campagne* with a Thérésian quote ("Tout est grâce"), while in *Les grands cimitières*

⁴⁸ Thérèse of Lisieux was subsequently proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1997.

⁴⁹ Mary Frances Dorschell, "Georges Bernanos: The Vocation of the Christian Writer," *Christianity and Literature* 55, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 323.

⁵⁰ Chantal, an unusually pious young woman, experiences mystical ecstasies that she offers up for the salvation of those around her, including Cénabre.

sous la lune (1937), Bernanos expressed with astonishing accuracy the meaning of Thérèse's message: that we should speak the spiritual language of childhood.⁵¹

Thérèse's Early Life and Blanche

As I explained in the introduction to this dissertation, Blanche de la Force originated from the pen of Gertrud von Le Fort. Le Fort created the character to represent herself and her fear of the increasing strength of the Nazi Party in Germany in *Die Letzte am Schafott* (1931). The German novella also features another novice named Constance, whose name Le Fort took from the archive records of the martyred Carmelites.⁵² In his stage play, Bernanos altered both characters, most significantly Constance. In order to illuminate more connections between Thérèse and the two novices, beginning with Blanche, I would like to examine some key points of the saint's biography.

Not unlike Blanche in Bernanos's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Thérèse of Lisieux's life may be interpreted from a mystical or hysterical viewpoint. Despite her prominent status in the Catholic Church, Thérèse has not been immune to medical reinterpretation. Both Denis Vasse and Jacques Maître have compiled psychoanalytic interpretations of her life and work. Vasse claims that her story is one of neurosis or anorexia on the one hand, and the history of sanctity on the other. He states that, without considering the transcendent quality of the saint's writings, she would seem seriously neurotic.⁵³ Maître agrees, noting that Thérèse's discourse is largely modelled after that of religious

⁵¹ Dorschell, *Georges Bernanos' Debt to Thérèse*, xix.

⁵² Le Fort states in her novella that her narrative is based largely on a memoir written by the surviving Carmelites. She is likely referring to *Relation du martyre* by Marie de l'Incarnation. Le Fort's Sr. Constance refers to Constance Meunier, a 29-year-old novice who was martyred in 1794 along with the other Carmelites. See Marie de l'Incarnation, *Relation du martyre*.

⁵³ Denis Vasse, *La Souffrance sans jouissance, ou le martyre de l'amour: Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1998), 10, 13. As both a psychoanalyst and a Jesuit priest, Denis Vasse has a unique perspective on the concept of mystéria.

institutions, attributing any neurotic or psychological disturbances (or even physical ones) to satanic or demonic forces.⁵⁴

Like Blanche, who was born prematurely after her mother was caught in a riot, Thérèse Martin was born into fear. Blanche's birth is explicitly connected to political unrest, as well as her mother's own death.⁵⁵ Thérèse's parents had nine children, but many of them died in infancy or early childhood. As a result, by the time Thérèse was born in 1873, her mother was fearful and obsessed with death, looking on each of her newborns as a future corpse. Thérèse, the youngest of the five surviving children, all girls, took on her mother's fear, feeling guilty and afraid of everything. Denis Vasse comments that Thérèse even "cried about her own crying."⁵⁶ This is similar to Le Fort's description of Blanche: "One might almost say in addition to everything else she became afraid of her own fear."⁵⁷

Mme. Martin was unable to nurse Thérèse as an infant, so not surprisingly, she and her daughter never truly bonded. Vasse states that Thérèse's mother's fear and obsession with the death of her children permeated her bodily, so that Thérèse rejected her "sein du mort" (breast of death).⁵⁸ Although the child was happy with her wetnurse,

⁵⁴ Jacques Maître, *L'Orpheline de la Bérésina: Thérèse de Lisieux (1873-1897)* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995), 27-28.

⁵⁵ Jacob and Beveridge outline the connections alienists made between political upheaval and mental illness. Specifically, they cite J. F. Bonfils (1819), who wrote that political unrest could influence a woman's pregnancy, and children born in times of revolution are mentally unstable and could go mad with only slight provocation. See Bonfils, *De la folie*, 35. For an overview of French alienists' view of revolution and mental illness, see Jacob and Beveridge, "Madness and Politics," 421-29. Jacob and Beveridge defined "alienist" as a type of physician common in France whose views on health were influenced by Enlightenment philosophy. Alienists postulated that mental illness was caused by uncontrolled passions, and they held the view that "political changes were associated with an increasing incidence of insanity" (421).

⁵⁶ Vasse, *La Souffrance sans jouissance*, 9. The original French reads: "pleurait d'avoir pleuré."

⁵⁷ The original German reads: "Man war versucht, zu sagen, sie ängstige sich nun zu allem anderen auch noch vor ihrer eigenen Angst." See Le Fort, *Letzte am Schafott*, 18; and *Song at the Scaffold*, 7 [Olga Marx translation].

⁵⁸ Vasse, *La Souffrance sans jouissance*, 48.

she developed a lifelong phobia of milk and had some problems with anorexia that originate, according to Vasse, from this early period. Thérèse's mother died a few years later in 1877 of breast cancer (breast of death indeed!), after which her youngest daughter entered the saddest period of her young life.

Thérèse's abandonment issues stemming from the loss of her mother were exacerbated in 1882 when her "second mother," her older sister Pauline, entered the Carmelite convent. The Martin household was an overwhelmingly female one and the sisters (especially Thérèse) were constantly in search of a mother figure. Filling the role of both parents, their father took on a somewhat feminized character for the girls. More so, the sisters mothered each other, creating an emotionally incestuous matriarchy. This dynamic continued throughout Thérèse's life, since the sisters entered the same Carmelite convent, enabling the older sisters to serve as mentors and even prioress for the younger ones.

Many of the personality traits that connect Blanche to Thérèse in Bernanos's work are already present in Le Fort's *Die Letzte am Schafott*, but, as I will later illustrate, Constance changes radically in Bernanos's hands. Bernanos made subtle alterations that bring Blanche closer to the young Thérèse. For example, Bernanos's Marquis is more similar to descriptions of M. Martin, Thérèse's father, than Le Fort's Marquis. In Le Fort's novella, Blanche's father is described as very anti-religious, while this is not the case in Bernanos's work. Bernanos's Marquis seems concerned about Blanche's desire to enter the convent, but he lovingly consents once he understands her determination.

Like Thérèse, Blanche is motherless, and *Dialogues des Carmélites* could be viewed as Blanche's search for a mother figure.⁵⁹ Beginning with her words of advice to Blanche in Act I/ii of the opera, the First Prioress acts as a mother to the young woman. Only two scenes later, the older nun says a special goodbye to Blanche and then dies, leaving her motherless once again. Mère Marie serves as another mother figure, although she and Blanche do not bond successfully in Bernanos's version. Bernanos's Marie, with her focus on martyrdom, is similar to Thérèse's mother, who was fixated on death. (Le Fort presents Marie in a more positive light.) Even Constance, although she is a fellow novice and more of a friend than a mother figure, acts as a mentor to Blanche, explaining the transference of grace and other spiritual concepts to her.

Like Thérèse and Blanche, Poulenc also lost his mother at a young age. Although both of his parents appreciated music, Poulenc's mother was an amateur musician who encouraged her son to pursue the arts. She had wanted him to attend the Conservatoire, but his father insisted that Poulenc get a more well-rounded education. His mother died in 1915, when Poulenc was 16, and his father, not long after, in 1917. Newly-orphaned at 18, Poulenc moved in with his older sister, Jeanne, and her husband, André Manceaux, before striking out on his own in 1919. His mother clearly had an important influence on his musical career. In addition to acknowledging his musical debt to Musorgsky, Monteverdi, Debussy, and Verdi, Poulenc's dedication to *Dialogues* reads, "To the memory of my mother, who revealed music to me."⁶⁰ Just as Poulenc's mother revealed

⁵⁹ In this respect, *Dialogues* recalls the literary subgenre of the "female gothic," loosely defined as a narrative in which a daughter searches for her absent mother, as in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*. See Gary Kelly, ed., *Varieties of Female Gothic*, Enlightenment Gothic and Terror Gothic, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002).

⁶⁰ Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, 5-6, 31, 38.

music to him, the prioress's death (and her role in the transference of grace) revealed a new depth of spirituality to Blanche.

In Le Fort's *Die Letzte am Schafott*, Blanche is assigned the name Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ, and reluctantly accepts it; however, in Bernanos's version, she is more self-possessed and chooses her own name. This might be an indication that Bernanos wanted to make Blanche more proactive and determined, like Thérèse, who travelled to Rome to ask the pope for permission to enter the convent before she reached the minimum required age of sixteen. On the other hand, it might reflect an acceptance and even expectation of suffering from a young woman who was raised to believe that Catholicism was a religion of suffering, as Thérèse was.

Thérèse Martin grew up in a morbidly pious household established on a merit-based faith. She was constantly encouraged to perform good deeds and offer up her suffering. As a result, the young girl was plagued by guilt and scruples, and after her "second mother" left for the Carmelite convent, she began to experience a number of mental and physical ailments that appeared to be psychosomatic in origin. She had incessant migraines, insomnia, bouts of uncontrolled trembling, panic attacks, fainting fits, hallucinations, and bursts of verbal delirium. She ascribed these symptoms to demonic interference, although her affliction was tentatively diagnosed as St. Vitus's dance. She was cured of this mysterious illness a few weeks later, while she and her sisters were praying to a statue of the Virgin Mary (having lost all other mother figures, Thérèse turned to Mary). The young girl claimed that the statue looked down on her with a ravishing smile and she was instantly relieved of her symptoms.⁶¹ The combination of

⁶¹ See Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 30-31; Guy Gaucher, *The Story of a Life: St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Anne Marie Brennan (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 46; Vasse, *La Souffrance sans*

Thérèse's supernatural vision of Mary along with her psychosomatic symptoms places her easily in the category of the mystic.

After the "miraculous" cure, Thérèse was still emotionally fragile. In preparation for her first communion at age eleven, she again fell victim to overscrupulousness.⁶²

About this period, she stated,

It is necessary to have gone through this martyrdom in order to understand it [...] All my thoughts and the simplest of actions became a source of anxiety for me [...] As soon as I had unburdened myself, I enjoyed a moment of peace, but this peace vanished in a flash and soon my martyrdom resumed.⁶³

At this point in her life, Thérèse seemed completely unable to function in everyday life without becoming extremely anxious. The similarity to Bernanos's Blanche is unmistakable here. In Act I, scene i of Poulenc's opera, before entering the convent, Blanche explains to her father that she wants to become a Carmelite nun because she finds the noise and the excitement of the outside world too much to bear.

Thérèse's Conversion

Fortunately, Thérèse's "complete conversion" on Christmas Eve in 1886, when she felt the Child Jesus give her unknown strength, brought an end to her recurring illness. According to Burton,

Thérèse rushed as she had from earliest childhood to open her Christmas presents hidden, according to the 'ancient custom' of the household, in a row of shoes placed in front of the fire when she overheard her father saying to [her sister] Céline, 'Fortunately this is the last year it [the hiding of the presents] will happen' [...], presumably because Thérèse would become 'grown-up' on her fourteenth

jouissance, 46; Thérèse de Lisieux, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Cerf, Desclée de Brouwer, 1992); Siglind Bruhn, *Saints in the Limelight: Representations of the Religious Quest on the Post-1945 Operatic Stage* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2003), 147-48.

⁶² Psychoanalyst Denis Vasse describes this in psychological terms as anxiety or neuroses. Vasse, *La Souffrance sans jouissance*, 56.

⁶³ Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus, *Manuscrits autobiographiques* (Office central de Lisieux, 1980), 102, as cited in Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 32.

birthday a week or so later. In tears, Thérèse ran upstairs, followed by Céline who, seeing her distress [...], urged her not to go back down and upset herself further. But, according to her own account written nine years later, 'Thérèse was no longer the same, Jesus had changed her heart', and, fighting back her tears, she went downstairs and, taking her shoes and placing them in front of her father, 'joyfully drew out all the objects, looking as happy as a queen', to the obvious delight of Monsieur Martin and the equally obvious amazement of Céline.⁶⁴

To an outsider, this might seem like a trivial incident, but the young girl interpreted it as a crucial division between the saddest period of her life, inaugurated by the death of her mother, and her happiest, most grace-filled period.

Thérèse's moment of transcendence, her conversion, her shift in identity, occurred in the moment she descended the staircase to speak with her father. Burton claims that she was suddenly strengthened, or masculinized, as he puts it. He states, "Thérèse likened her 'act of courage' in coming downstairs on her 'night of light' to that of Judith beheading Holofernes [...] she emerges like Judith from the tent of Holofernes in full possession of herself."⁶⁵ Comparing herself with Judith seems like a gross overstatement, but in her childlike way, Thérèse emphasized the importance of the Christmas incident in her life.

Earlier in this chapter, I indicated that, in Underhill's paradigm of the development of a mystic, Blanche is in the beginnings of the awakening stage, a period of restlessness, uncertainty, and mental stress. This restless period is due at least in part to the conflict between the individual's old and new worldviews. Perhaps Thérèse's emotional and physical problems before her conversion at Christmas 1886 were the result of a conflict between the spirituality of her parents and the spirituality of childhood toward which she was moving.

⁶⁴ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

Spirituality of Childhood

Because much of my argument in the rest of this chapter focuses on conversion, I will provide some clarification on this topic before continuing my discussion. Conversion is usually held to be a radical change in which a person adopts a new set of religious beliefs. Ostensibly, the convert moves from non-believer to believer; however, as I explained with Underhill's "awakening," or "mystical conversion," the change can signify a new way of seeing things and does not necessarily imply a move from non-religious to religious status. Whether from a theological or sociological perspective, the notion of radical change is at the core of conceptions of conversion, but the mechanics of this change can vary widely. Early researchers argued against standardizing the conversion experience because personal change is so multifaceted.⁶⁶ Not only are the rate and degree of change highly variable, but change can be incarnated in an individual's life in different ways: in beliefs, values, behaviours, identity, and loyalties, to give a few examples. Conversion might be a sudden change, but it can also be a gradual one or a complex of multiple and serial changes.⁶⁷ Additionally, sociologists have suggested

⁶⁶ The following article is especially informative because of its extensive literature review: David A. Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 167-90, see especially 168-70. Also see: G. Jackson, *The Fact of Conversion: The Cole Lectures for 1908* (New York: Revell, 1908), 97; J. B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness* (New York: Macmillan, 1926); W. H. Clark, *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1958); D. J. Parrucci, "Religious Conversion: A Theory of Deviant Behavior," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (1968): 144-54; F. R. Lynch, "Toward a Theory of Conversion and Commitment to the Occult," *American Behavior Science* 20 (1977): 887-908; J. T. Richardson and M. Stewart, "Conversion Process Models and the Jesus Movement," *American Behavior Science* 20 (1977): 819-38; J. T. Richardson, "Conversion Careers," *Society* 17 (1980): 47-50; W. B. Bankston, C. J. Forsyth, and H. H. Floyd, "Toward a General Model of Radical Conversion: An Interactionist Perspective on the Transformation of Self-Identity," *Qualitative Sociology* 4 (1981): 279-97.

⁶⁷ A. D. Nock made an initial delineation between degrees of personal change by suggesting that "conversion" and "adhesion" might be considered the opposite ends of a continuum. In his formulation, conversion is a dramatic reorientation of the soul, or a turning from indifference or from an earlier set of beliefs to another, while adhesion indicates participation in religious rituals without assuming a new way of life. Travisano defined conversion as a complete disruption, while he conceptualized "alternation" as reversible and less comprehensive than conversion. Alternation entails a change in role, but not in an individual's worldview. Gordon identified "consolidation" as the adoption of a belief system that combines two prior but contradictory worldviews or identities, while conversion is a radical discontinuity. (See A. D.

empirical indicators of conversion, such as membership status, demonstration events, and rhetorical patterns. An important rhetorical pattern to consider when examining Thérèse of Lisieux is biographical construction, since Thérèse's autobiography is a primary source of information on her life and spirituality.⁶⁸ It is a common practice to dismantle the past and reconstitute it in light of new experiences, discarding or redefining some aspects, or putting pieces of the past together in new ways. A convert tends to reconstruct his or her biography in accordance with a new worldview.⁶⁹

Clearly, Thérèse experienced a massive transformation in which she ultimately rejected the faith culture of her youth for her own spirituality of childhood. She rejected the merit-based faith in which God was an unmerciful judge in favour of God as a loving and merciful parent. The merit-based faith of her parents, which was typical of French Catholic culture in the late 1800s and early 1900s, was a type of faith economy in which God acted as arbiter and people were required to "earn" merits by taking part in pilgrimages, practicing devotions to the cult of the Sacred Heart, and performing

Nock, *Conversion* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1933]; R. V. Travisano, "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations," in *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*, ed. G. P. Stone and H. A. Farberman [Waltham, MA: Ginn Blaisdell, 1970], 594-606; and D. F. Gordon, "The Jesus People: An Identity Synthesis," *Urban Life Culture* 3 [1974]: 159-78.) "Regeneration" indicates the adoption of a belief system that had either not been taken seriously before or had been abandoned (see Clark, *The Psychology of Religion*; Nock, *Conversion*; K. Lang and G. E. Lang, *Collective Dynamics* [New York: Crowell, 1961]; and V. B. Gillespie, *Religious Conversion and Personal Identity: How and Why People Change* [Birmingham, AL: Religious Education, 1979].)

⁶⁸ In addition to biographical construction, other rhetorical patterns that could be empirical indicators of conversion include the adoption of a master attribution scheme, suspension of analogical reasoning, and embracement of the convert role. See Snow and Machalek, "Sociology of Conversion," 173-74.

⁶⁹ Converts' biographies need to be approached not as reliable records of past events and experiences, but rather as a documentation of the convert's mindset or worldview at the time of writing the account. Converts' accounts need to be questioned on three fronts: a) their socially constructed nature (i.e. they are often constructed in accordance with a group standard), b) their temporal variability, and c) their retrospective (as opposed to introspective) character. The temporal variability of conversion stories is not surprising, given the dynamic nature of religious life; the idea of spiritual growth is usually seen as an ongoing, development phenomenon. Instead of using conversion stories as sources of data about pre-conversion lives or about the causes of conversion, they should be used as indicators of the convert's current experience and orientation. The construction and composition of converts' accounts themselves should be the topic of analysis. See *Ibid.*, 175-78.

expiatory self-sacrifices. After her conversion, Thérèse developed her spirituality through prayer, meditation, and, once she entered the Carmelite convent in 1888, daily interaction with her fellow nuns. She modelled her spirituality of childhood loosely on the writings of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.⁷⁰

Thérèse's spirituality of childhood, or "petite voie," as she called it, was essentially comprised of trusting in the love of God as a parental figure and following Christ's injunction to "become as little children" in order to enter the kingdom of God.⁷¹ The main strands of Thérèse's spirituality include the child-parent relationship as the model of the soul's relationship with God; the primacy of love over merit; the thematics of playing, sleeping, and hiding; and the need for loving audacity in all dealings with God. Thérèse admired the child's greedy, selfish clamouring for love and its refusal to hold back or take no for an answer and she cultivated this stance in her relationship with God. For Thérèse, God was revealed as unconditional love seeking only unconditional love in return.⁷² Despite their naïve tone, Thérèse's writings contain a toughness of experience and reflection in which she emphasizes God's mercy and love.

Post-Conversion Thérèse and Constance

In the section entitled "Thérèse's Early Life and Blanche," I focused on the saint's childhood in order to demonstrate her similarity to Bernanos's Blanche. After her conversion, however, Thérèse began to work toward her own vocation as a nun and developed her theology of childhood, characterized by a lighthearted, personal faith that

⁷⁰ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 22.

⁷¹ Matthew 18:3 (NIV).

⁷² Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 38-41.

closely resembles that of Bernanos's Constance.⁷³ The spirit of childhood reverberated strongly with Bernanos. For him, the child was the ideal model of purity and accessed the highest values of martyrs and saints.⁷⁴ In addition, he perceived honour as intimately linked to the childhood spirit because with honour, one can see the simplicity of truth and respond like a child.⁷⁵

I propose that the connection between Thérèse of Lisieux and Bernanos's young novices, as well as the origin of Thérèse's bipartite name, can be more easily understood in the context of the saint's life. Specifically, I suggest that the saint's full name—Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face—represents different parts of Thérèse's life, one that was psychically cleaved by a conversion experience. Thérèse effectively memorialized her own transcendent experience of conversion when she chose her dual religious name. Her two visions of Christ, which also represent the two "sides" of her life, are expressed in this name. L'Enfant-Jésus is the Christ Child asleep in his crib, symbolizing the open vulnerability of the spirit of childhood. La Sainte-Face is the Holy Face imprinted on Veronica's cloth, the inveterate sufferer, the side of Jesus Thérèse experienced not only during her final illness, but also during her pre-conversion days, with her recurring psychosomatic illnesses.⁷⁶ It follows that Poulenc's two novices embody the two faces of Thérèse at different points of her life. Blanche represents the pre-conversion saint, with her fearfulness, extreme scrupulousness, and vocation of

⁷³ The notion of the spirit of childhood has biblical roots. See for example, Matthew 11:24-25, Luke 9:46-48, and Luke 18:15-17 (NIV).

⁷⁴ André Lagarde and Laurent Michard, *XXe Siècle: Les Grands auteurs français, Anthologie et histoire littéraire* (Paris: Bordas, 1988), 519.

⁷⁵ Fernando Cervantes, "'Great Cemeteries Under the Moon': Bernanos and the Spanish Civil War," *New Blackfriars* 79, no. 933 (1998), 499.

⁷⁶ Siglind Bruhn adds that, in his old age, Thérèse's father also represented la Sainte-Face for Thérèse. When M. Martin lost his mental faculties and was admitted to an asylum, the young nun saw him blended with Jesus, humiliated and despised, and learned to understand Jesus as a father whose love must be trusted even when he does not respond. See Bruhn, *Saints in the Limelight*, 149.

suffering.⁷⁷ She does not undergo a mystical conversion (a complete awakening) until she mounts the scaffold at the end of the opera. Constance, on the other hand, represents Thérèse after her conversion, when she developed her spirituality of childhood.⁷⁸

Earlier, I illustrated the similarities between Blanche and pre-conversion Thérèse, explaining some of the minor alterations Bernanos made to Le Fort's Blanche to bring her closer to the young saint. Bernanos radically changed Le Fort's Constance so that she is more in line with post-conversion Thérèse. Le Fort's Constance is a naïve, frightened, shallow novice, completely unlike the Constance character in *Dialogues*. Furthermore, Le Fort's novella does not include any theological discussion between Constance and Blanche. Bernanos not only infuses *Dialogues* with the theology of childhood, but he also develops Constance's understanding of the transference of grace and the communion of saints.

Dorschell claims that one of the primary differences between Bernanos's and Le Fort's versions of the story is that Bernanos illustrates a spirituality more infused with the supernatural, perhaps more of a mystic spirituality.⁷⁹ For example, in direct contrast to Bernanos's Constance, who foretells her early death with Blanche, Le Fort's Constance states, "We are young, and though it is boring to wait too long for heaven, let's hope to grow a hundred years old."⁸⁰ Both the First Prioress's deathbed vision and Constance's dream foretelling Blanche's death at the scaffold are examples of supernatural events that

⁷⁷ As I explained in the previous section, the quality of "conversion" in both Blanche and Thérèse's case, is not a religious conversion in the traditional sense of the word, in which the convert is transformed from a non-believer to a believer. It is, rather, more of a "mystical conversion" or an awakening of the transcendental sense.

⁷⁸ According to Underhill's model, I view Constance as in the illumination phase.

⁷⁹ Dorschell, *Georges Bernanos' Debt*, 216.

⁸⁰ The original German reads: "Wir sind jung, und wenn es auch schwerfällt, so spät in den Himmel zu kommen, wollen wir doch gerne hundert Jahre alt werden!" See Le Fort, *Letzte am Schafott*, 41; and *Song at the Scaffold*, 20 [Olga Marx translation].

Bernanos inserted into the story. By providing both pre- and post-conversion Thérèse figures, Bernanos highlighted conversion itself.

Act II, interlude i of Poulenc's opera serves as an example of Constance reflecting Thérèse's spirituality of childhood. Blanche and Constance are gathering flowers in the garden after the Prioress dies when Constance remarks that she has been praying that Mère Marie will be chosen as the new prioress. Blanche says, "Vous croyez toujours que Dieu fera selon votre bon plaisir!" ["You always believe that God will act according to your wishes!"] Blanche is horrified that Constance thinks God will give her what she wants just because she asks for it, but Constance approaches God as a young child to a parent, refusing to take no for an answer.

The doctrine of vicarious suffering plays a significant role in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, and Constance has the key task of explaining the doctrine to Blanche. However, its place in Thérèse's spirituality of childhood is unclear, so Bernanos's emphasis of the doctrine might be at odds with Thérèsian spirituality. Thérèse rejected the Catholic culture of her family, trading it for an idea of self-sacrifice that manifests God's love, as opposed to one that seeks to appease His anger. Unlike most French Catholics of her time, Thérèse of Lisieux did not wholeheartedly support the doctrine of vicarious suffering. She did at times pray and offer up her suffering for the conversion of souls, but she did this more as an offering of love to God, rather than as an exchange for grace. She believed that she and God exchanged love freely and that "there are no deals to be settled in the currency of pain" and "there is nothing to be purchased since everything is free."⁸¹ Despite Thérèse's personal views, there was intense pressure at the Carmel of Lisieux to mount the Calvary of vicarious suffering. Even in the final throes of

⁸¹ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 22, 37, 49.

her fight against tuberculosis, Thérèse rejected the role of immolatory victim, while her fellow nuns encouraged it. The last photo taken of the nun, in 1897, shows Thérèse in a wheelchair, dwarfed by huge pillows upon which she is propped, with rose petals scattered over the crucifix she holds in her hand. This image was distributed widely and, as a result, is how most people now picture the saint. However, the representation of Thérèse as sickly victim skews the fact that she actually enjoyed excellent physical health apart from her early problems as a young girl and her final illness.⁸²

3.5 Poulenc's Motives: The Musical Language of Mystical Conversion

In the previous section, I argued that Bernanos based the characters of both Blanche and Constance on his favourite saint, Thérèse of Lisieux. I explained that the two novices are related in that they represent the saint at different points in her life. Bernanos foregrounds spiritual growth and specifically, conversion, by presenting Blanche as pre-conversion Thérèse and Constance as the saint after her conversion. In order to determine Poulenc's interpretation of the two novices and their relationship, I will refer to the operatic score.

Poulenc's musical motives are a crucial tool in creating a musical portrayal of Blanche and Constance. The motives provide a connection between particular musical materials and characters, which make them useful for my purposes. The motives also provide a unifying element for *Dialogues des Carmélites*, although they are extremely varied, both in form and signification. They might signify a person, an object, or a state of being. They may feature a long melody or a short chord progression. They might be used to announce a character entering onstage or may be an ostinato underlying the

⁸² Ibid., 48, 54.

greater part of a scene. Some of the motives are used in several different contexts, making it difficult to identify a referent. In chapter two, I introduced a number of motives as they first appear in Act I/iv, including motives signifying Mère Marie, fear, solicitude, Blanche, and death. (I defined and named all of these motives according to Franz Rauhut's system for simplicity's sake.)

Several writers have made reference to Poulenc's motives, but Franz Rauhut and Jean de Solliers provide the most systematic studies of motives in *Dialogues*.⁸³ Wilfrid Mellers and Keith Daniel are more impressionistic than exhaustive in their discussions of the work; they simply point out some of the more prominent motives and make tentative suggestions about their referents in the context of a general discussion of the opera.⁸⁴ Rauhut and de Solliers do, however, make an effort to be comprehensive and between the two of them, they identify more than thirty musical motives.⁸⁵ Rauhut's article is the more useful of the two, and for this reason, I have, for the most part, adopted his terminology in respect to the motives' referents. He describes basic characteristics of the motives in the order in which they are introduced in the work and indicates how different motives are related to each other by classifying them into families with variants. In most instances, Rauhut defines motives by their melodic profiles. While de Solliers also considers the melody, he is more likely than Rauhut to define a short harmonic progression (sometimes just two or three chords) as a motive.

Rauhut's system is more effective than de Solliers' because de Solliers neglects to show connections between similar motives. In addition, de Solliers' attribution of

⁸³ See Rauhut, "Les motifs musicaux," 211-49 and Jean de Solliers, "Dialogues des Carmélites: Commentaire musical et littéraire," *L'Avant-scène opéra* 52 (May 1983): 43-81.

⁸⁴ See Daniel, *Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 299-306 and Mellers, *Francis Poulenc*, 102-28.

⁸⁵ Siglind Bruhn confirms this finding in her chapter on *Dialogues des Carmélites* in *Saints in the Limelight*.

referents is often problematic. For example, he gives names with similar meanings (*La Peur*, *L'Anxiété*, and *La Crainte*) to different motives without clearly differentiating between the referents. Siglind Bruhn points out that the authors' widely diverging motivic delineation is a result of the opera's psychological narrative. It is difficult not only to recognize, but also to unravel the various internal states that Poulenc may have intended the motives to signify.⁸⁶ In some cases, the motives identify people, such as Mère Marie; while in other instances, they are meant to signify psychological states, like fear or solicitude; and finally, concepts such as death, nobility, and honour may be represented by the motives. I argue that ultimately, neither Rauhut nor de Solliers successfully demonstrates how the motives communicate overarching themes of the opera or characterize the relationship between Blanche and Constance. However, the motives the two authors associate with Blanche and Constance provide a point of departure.

Musical Motives Associated with Blanche

Rauhut designates a descending melody dominated by semitone intervals as Blanche's motive (see Figure 3.1). This motive is first heard in Act I/i when the Chevalier and the Marquis discuss Blanche, shortly before her entrance. They are both worried about her safety. The motive is heard in the orchestral accompaniment to the Chevalier's phrase: "Croyez-moi: ce qui met la santé de Blanche en péril, ou peut-être sa vie, ne saurait être seulement la crainte..."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., 170.

⁸⁷ Again, the 1959 translation reads as follows: "Mark my word! More than fear endangers my sister's health, perhaps even her life! It is not fear alone that makes her suffer. Deep within she's very ill." The



Figure 3.1: Blanche motive (Rauhut)

Rauhut's Blanche motive is typical of other motives associated with Blanche (for example, those also connected to fear) in that it is a descending melody that favours the semitone interval. This motive is occasionally used as a "calling card" announcing Blanche's entrance at important moments, but this use is for the most part limited to Act I (especially in scenes i and iv). De Solliers does not delineate this figure as a motive connected to Blanche. In fact, he labels the first three notes as one of his three motives connected to fear, calling it *La Crainte*. By contrast, de Solliers identifies another motive that first appears in Act I/i as his Blanche motive (see Figure 3.2). This sweeping figure is first heard after Blanche enters the scene, describing her emotions at having been caught up in a mob. The motive features, again, an overall descending motion in both the melody and accompaniment, but the melody is jagged because of the large leaps of octaves and sixths. Rauhut does not delineate Figure 3.2 as a motive at all, perhaps because it occurs relatively few times throughout the opera. I argue that this particular motive is significant because of its connection to key moments in Blanche's spiritual development. I will return to my discussion of this motive later in the chapter.

1992 translation is as follows: "Mark my words: more than fear endangers my sister's health, perhaps even her life! There is something eating away at the very core of her soul..."

The image displays a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The top system features a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The vocal line begins with a *p* *très doux* marking and contains several triplet markings (3). The lyrics are: "Mon Dieu, il en est peut-être du pé-ril com-me de l'eau froi-de". The piano accompaniment starts with a *pp* *très doux et lié* marking and includes the instruction "mettre beaucoup de pédale". The bottom system continues the vocal line with a *(en s'efforçant de sourire)* marking and a 5-measure rest. The lyrics are: "qui d'a-bord vous cou-pe le souf-fle et où l'on se trou-ve à l'ai-se, dès qu'on y est en-tré jus-qu-au cou." The piano accompaniment continues with sustained chords and a melodic line in the right hand.

Figure 3.2: Blanche motive (de Solliers)

Musical Motives Associated with Constance

Like Thérèse, Bernanos's Constance has a lighthearted, childlike demeanour that is most clearly demonstrated in the scene in which she is introduced: Act I, scene iii. Rauhut and de Solliers each identify motives for Sr. Constance, both of which are first heard (and only found) in Act I/iii. By limiting the scene to the two novices, Bernanos clearly establishes Constance as a foil for Blanche, contrasting Blanche's fearful timidity with Constance's lighthearted gaiety. Poulenc emphasizes this contrast musically. Act I/iii provides a rare respite from the dark musical vocabulary that the composer used for scene i and much of the rest of the work. Within Act I/iii itself, as the novices dialogue, their different viewpoints are accompanied by light music for Constance and more sombre tones for Blanche. Poulenc underlays Constance's cheerful philosophy (marked

giocososo and *gaio* in the score) with off-beats and syncopated rhythms, generating a vivacious energy that partners with her light soprano voice for a thoroughly joyful effect.

Act I/iii opens with a sparkling theme in the flutes and violins that Rauhut identifies as “Constance enjouée,” or cheerful Constance (see Figure 3.3). This is one of two motives that Rauhut delineates for the novice. It appears only twice in the opera, both times in this scene. Not only does it signal Constance’s entrance, but it effectively breaks the sober mood set earlier in the opera. Constance playfully complains about having to eat lentils again, and Blanche responds that the merchants have been hoarding grain, so they have no choice. The Constance enjouée motive sounds again, bookending the opening exchange between the two young nuns.



Figure 3.3: Constance enjouée motive (Rauhut)

After more of Constance’s joking, Rauhut’s second Constance motive, “Constance danse,” is heard (see Figure 3.4). De Solliers also classifies this theme as his Constance motive. This syncopated dance-like theme is repeated several times throughout the scene and first appears when Constance recalls that a few weeks before entering the convent, her family celebrated her older brother’s wedding by feasting and dancing with the local villagers. The Constance danse motive is immediately cut off when Blanche, horrified, asks how Constance can be so gay when the Prioress is dying. The motive sounds again as Constance glibly states that she cannot do anything about the

Prioress's death and she would gladly offer her life in exchange for the older nun's if she thought it would make any difference. This response is in keeping with post-conversion Thérèse's stance on vicarious suffering.



Figure 3.4: Constance danse motive (Rauhut and de Solliers)

Constance hints at a turning point, or a conversion, in her past when Blanche asks her if she has ever feared death. The novice replies that maybe she did very long ago, when she did not know what death was. Constance explains that at one point, “la vie m’a tout de suite paru si amusante! Je me disais que la mort devait l’être aussi...” [“Life suddenly seemed to be such fun, I decided that death must be the same...”] Blanche, astounded at her friend’s irreverence, suggests that God may tire of her good humour. The Constance danse motive stops again as Constance, taking a more serious approach, explains the transference of grace to Blanche and suggests that they pray and offer their lives for that of the Prioress. Although Constance, representing post-conversion Thérèse, initially rejects the idea of offering her life in exchange for that of the Prioress, the ending of scene iii is still in keeping with Thérèse of Lisieux’s attitude toward the doctrine of vicarious suffering. While she did not believe that God required an exchange of suffering for grace, she prayed and offered her suffering for others simply as an offering of love to God.

The chromatic, descending motives associated with Blanche convey her intense anxiety and fearful character, while the lively, rhythmically-driven motives associated with Constance aptly characterize her joyful demeanour. However, I argue that neither Rauhut nor de Solliers provides any insight into the relationship between Blanche and Constance with the delineation of the aforementioned motives, nor do the two authors effectively illuminate Blanche's character development throughout the work. In short, Rauhut and de Solliers' motivic classifications both fall short in leading towards a more informed critical reading of the work.

A Musical Reading of Conversion

In the following section, I intend to suggest new connections between two of the musical motives, aiming for a deeper reading of the opera. I contend that these two motives buttress my argument that Blanche and Constance each embody different aspects of Thérèse of Lisieux and furthermore, the motives outline the progress of Blanche's awakening, or mystical conversion. As I explained earlier in this chapter, according to Underhill's paradigm, a mystical conversion is normally the conclusion of a long period of anxiety and uncertainty during which an individual oscillates between superficial and spiritual worldviews. Before her conversion, Thérèse struggled between the faith of her family and a radical new way of seeing God. Blanche's struggle in *Dialogues des Carmélites* could be articulated as a conflict between a merit-based faith and a faith of unconditional love. In both Act I/iii and the first interlude of Act II, Blanche is surprised at Constance's cavalier attitude toward God, in that she freely asks Him for whatever she wants, as an impetuous child might ask her parent for a toy. On the other hand, the young

novice's struggle might be defined as a struggle between Catholicism as a religion of suffering versus Catholicism as a religion of peaceful joy or, more simply, a struggle to go beyond fear to transcendence.

The first motive I will examine, called “fear” (after de Solliers and Rauhut), is most closely connected to Blanche and her anxious nature. Secondly, I argue that another motive (de Solliers’ Blanche motive, Figure 3.2) acts as a link between Blanche and Constance. Not only does its appearance highlight milestones in Blanche’s spiritual development, but it has a strong connection to Constance. I label this motive “transcendence,” as it points to Blanche’s own transformative experience just before her death. This conversion experience is the link that connects both the two halves of Thérèse of Lisieux’s life and the two novices in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Ultimately, my examination of the fear and transcendence motives supports a reading of Blanche’s fear as mystical, not hysterical.

The Fear Motive

In chapter two, I described the fear motive as dominated by a downward seesaw melody, first moving up by either one or two semitones, then down by three, up, then down, and so on. I initially introduced it in my discussion of the First Prioress’s mad scene as it appears in Act I/iv (see Figure 3.5). This motive is named “La Peur” by de Solliers, while Rauhut calls it “Peur-Angoisie.” Mellers, on the other hand, states that it suggests “both social instability and Blanche’s lost state.”⁸⁸ In my argument, the fear motive represents the period of anxiety and uncertainty preceding awakening; it represents Blanche’s anxious nature, resulting perhaps from her view of Catholicism as a

⁸⁸ Mellers, *Francis Poulenc*, 106.

merit-based faith in which God is an unmerciful judge. This motive is used throughout the opera with slight variations in pitch, rhythm, and harmony. It also appears in several contexts and, although Blanche is the character most associated with fear, this motive is sometimes used in connection with other characters (as I illustrated in chapter two when I first introduced this motive in conjunction with the First Prioress).



Figure 3.5: Fear motive

The fear motive is peppered liberally throughout *Dialogues des Carmélites*. It first appears in Act I/i as the Marquis and Chevalier talk about Blanche. It is also heard in the following scene when the First Prioress tells Blanche that difficult trials will await her in the cloister. In Act II, the fear motive is heard when Mère Marie chides Blanche for abandoning her vigil at the Prioress's coffin, saying, "Demain, votre faute vous inspirera plus de douleur que de honte." ["Tomorrow your failure will fill you with sorrow rather than shame."] In scene iii of Act II, the fear motive accompanies Blanche as she tells her brother (somewhat insincerely), "Où je suis, rien peut m'atteindre." ["Where I am, nothing can harm me."] In the next scene, an augmented version of the fear motive underscores Blanche's comment that fear may really be an illness. The motive appears again as the commissioners enter the convent shortly after. The fear motive is still present in Act III, although less so. It accompanies Mère Marie's proposal that the Carmelites vote on a vow of martyrdom. In scene ii, the fear motive sounds again when Marie finds Blanche, ashamed, working as a servant in her father's house.

It is tempting to claim that the fear motive is ubiquitous in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, but it is notably absent in direct connection with Sr. Constance. This is especially true for the two key scenes in which she is featured: Act I/iii and Act II, interlude i. The transcendence motive appears in each of these scenes instead. The fear motive does appear, however, in connection with the vote on martyrdom in Act III/i. The Carmelites take a secret vote to decide whether or not to take the vow of martyrdom, having previously agreed that they would only proceed if the vote is unanimous. There is one vote against and at first, the other nuns (along with the audience) assume this vote is Blanche's. However, in the next moment, Constance admits responsibility and asks permission to reverse her vote. As I explained earlier in this chapter, Constance, representing Thérèse of Lisieux post-conversion, perhaps disapproved of the vow of martyrdom because she believed in offering her suffering freely to God as a gift of love and not as an exchange of grace. Constance may have also voted against the vow because she knew how frightened Blanche was at the prospect of martyrdom and did not want her to be the only one to vote against. This reading is bolstered by an examination of scenes from Bernanos's stage play that were not incorporated into the opera, in which the nuns discuss aspects of martyrdom. Throughout these discussions, Constance notices that Blanche is visibly upset and clearly terrified by the idea of martyrdom. The fear motive associated with the single "no" vote might then refer to Blanche's fear, not Constance's.⁸⁹

Because the fear motive permeates many of the scenes throughout the entire opera, I will limit the remainder of my discussion to the most prominent instances of this

⁸⁹ Poulenc omitted or shortened several of Bernanos's scenes prior to the Carmelites' vow of martyrdom in Bernanos's Act IV/xiii, including scenes viii, ix, and x.

motive in Act I/i. We hear the fear motive for the first time beginning the fifth measure after rehearsal mark four (see Figure 3.5a). The motive appears just as the Chevalier explains to his father that he is concerned for Blanche because she may have been caught in a peasant mob. The distinctive melody (ascending one or two semitones, then descending three, up, down, and so on) is prominent here. It is played *pianissimo* by flute, bassoon, and viola, with the seesaw melody in the flute and violin and then repeated one octave lower by the clarinet, viola, cello, and bass, with the clarinet and viola taking the main melody. The lower voices move in contrary motion to the fear melody, while the bass is essentially a chromatic descent. As I pointed out in chapter two, the fear motive is most often harmonized with a chromatically descending bass that comprises a complete or near-complete chromatic tetrachord, a traditional figure accompanying a lament, signifying death. With this underlying bass movement, the fear motive might be more specifically read as fear of death. The harmony of this excerpt can be read as a tonic-dominant progression in B major, repeated (the tonic B major is on beat one of measures one and three, while the dominant F-sharp major chord falls on the second beat of measures two and four). When considered in the larger harmonic context of scene i, the B major section (between rehearsal marks four and five) is especially dissonant.⁹⁰ As in the fear motive in Figure 3.5a, each phrase in this section ends in a half cadence. The resolution and stability of an authentic cadence is nowhere to be found. The fear

⁹⁰ Keith Daniel claims that, although Musorgsky's influence on *Dialogues des Carmélites* (Poulenc dedicated the work to Debussy, Monteverdi, Verdi, Musorgsky, and his own mother) is felt more in the harmonic language, certain progressions, such as this first entrance of the fear motive, can be traced to *Boris Godunov*. Other similarities exist between the bell-like opening of the Coronation Scene and Act I/iv and the sombre Interlude between the first and second scenes of the third act of *Dialogues*. See Daniel, *Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 301.

motive—and this entire B major section—disrupts the harmony of the scene in the same way that fear disrupts Blanche.

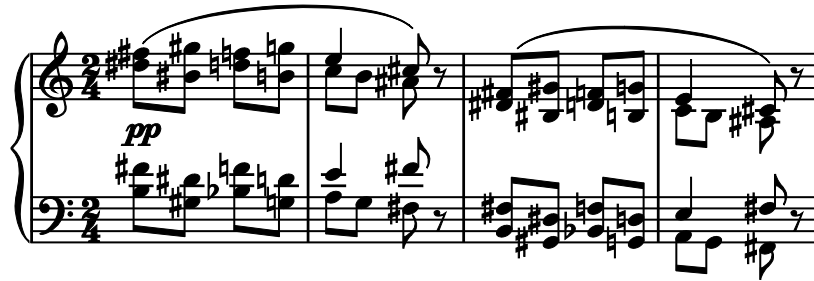


Figure 3.5a: Fear motive (first appearance in Act I/i)

The second appearance of the fear motive begins five measures before rehearsal mark ten, as the Marquis recounts when he and his wife, years earlier, had been at a fireworks display for the dauphin's wedding celebration. As the old man describes how the fireworks got out of control, igniting a frenzied mob, Poulenc's music becomes more and more frantic. At the climax of this segment, the fear motive appears, fortissimo, just as the Marquis indicates that a mob surrounded the carriage (see Figure 3.5b). In this case, the clarinets and violins separate into three voices, playing the fear motive a third apart, creating triads in parallel motion. The viola, cello, and bassoon provide the chromatically descending lower voices, also resulting in parallel triads. The fear motive signals the complete unravelling of this section, and the phrase following introduces a radically different texture. As the Marquis soberly describes the death of his wife, Poulenc's music is suddenly pianissimo, the orchestration thins out drastically, and the harmony moves away from the established key, C minor.



Figure 3.5b: Fear motive (second appearance in Act I/i)

Shortly after the frantic fear motive (Figure 3.5b), the motive is heard again, but with a completely different setting. Continuing his reminiscence at rehearsal ten, the Marquis explains that his wife went into early labour due to her fright from the mob. The orchestration is very sparse at ten, and four measures later, the Marquis sings a cappella, “Quelques heures plus tard, revenue en cet hôtel, votre mère mourut, en donnant le jour à Blanche.” [“It was later that night, in the stillness of this house, that your dear mother died, after giving birth to Blanche.”] The orchestra enters again with a very slow, pianissimo fear motive at the name “Blanche,” five measures before rehearsal mark eleven (see Figure 3.5c). The fear motive—in the oboe, bassoon, and violin—is harmonized with a series of descending diminished and seventh chords in the strings, providing a good deal of internal dissonance. The descending chromatic bass movement is more prominent in this instance because Poulenc paralleled the chromatic descent in the inner voices as well. This instance of the fear motive links Blanche’s fear (and her birth) with her mother’s death, and so the descending bass movement is appropriately interpreted as a lament figure. But in this instance, the orchestra’s entrance with the fear motive pulls the harmony from an ill-defined tonal area definitively into F-sharp minor.

The motive destabilizes the Marquis' narrative, effectively snapping him out of his reverie.

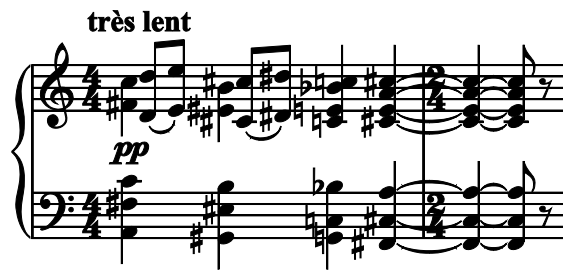


Figure 3.5c: Fear motive (third appearance in Act I/i)

A variation of the fear motive sounds again eight measures after rehearsal mark fourteen, accompanying a phrase I discussed earlier in this chapter (see Figure 3.5d). This statement of the motive is characterized by its altered rhythm: in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, it is expressed in quarter notes and half notes, instead of its usual eighth note formulation. The Chevalier is convinced that fear is destroying his sister, and he states: “Croyez-moi: ce qui met la santé de Blanche en péril, ou peut-être seulement la crainte: c’est le gel au coeur de l’arbre.”⁹¹ The fear motive accompanies the final phrase, literally translated as, “it is the frost at the heart of the tree.” By way of a metaphor, Blanche’s brother indicates that more than just fear is killing his sister from the inside. The fear motive is played pianissimo in the strings. No solid tonal centre is established; instead, the four chords that make up the fear motive in this instance are seventh chords and extended tertian sonorities. The most prominent characteristics of this motive are the seesaw melody in

⁹¹ Earlier in this chapter, I indicated that the two different English translations of this opera (both by Joseph Machlis) deal with this text differently. The 1959 translation reads: “Mark my words: more than fear endangers my sister’s health, perhaps even her life! It is not fear alone that makes her suffer. Deep within she’s very ill.” In contrast, the 1992 translation reads: “Mark my words: more than fear endangers my sister’s health, perhaps even her life! There is something eating away at the very core of her soul...”

the top voice that is paralleled in some of the inner voices, and also the chromatic descent outlined by the bass voice and most of the inner voices.⁹²

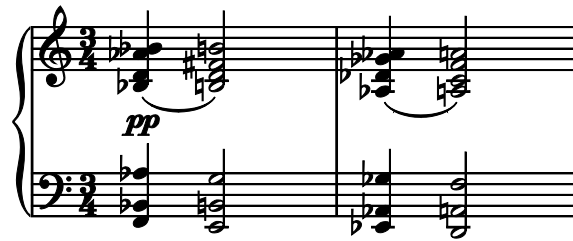


Figure 3.5d: Fear motive (fourth appearance in Act I/i)

A variation of the fear motive sounds again four measures before rehearsal mark nineteen (see Figure 3.5e). This version of the motive is similar to Figure 3.5a, in that it essentially has the same arrangement and harmony, but is sounded a tone lower. The oboe and violin play the fear melody, while the clarinet, bassoon, and other strings play the accompanying lines. The fear motive follows Blanche's account of how she felt vulnerable and afraid when the mob approached her carriage on her way home. In this instance, the fourth note of the fear melody (F) has been altered in order to accommodate an authentic V-I cadence. In most cases the fear motive cultivates dissonance, but instead the alteration here smoothes over Blanche's growing anxiety by creating a recognizable cadence. Immediately following the fear motive, the Chevalier reassures his sister, telling her that a neighbour, M. de Damas, saw her in the carriage, looking very calm and courageous.

⁹² The fear motive, in this arrangement, occurs twice more in scene i. Three measures before rehearsal twenty-one, the motive is sounded to the Marquis's words: "Je dirais volontiers qu'un orage menace" ["I really believe that a storm is approaching"]. Two measures before rehearsal mark twenty-six, we hear the motive to the butler Thierry's words, as he explains Blanche's scream. She was frightened when she saw his shadow on the wall after he lit a candle. He had just drawn all the curtains, so it was dark in her room.



Figure 3.5e: Fear motive (fifth appearance in Act I/i)

The final instance of the fear motive in Act I/i occurs after the Chevalier goes out to check on the horses and Blanche has retreated to her room to rest. The fear motive is sounded beginning in the eighth measure after rehearsal twenty-four. It heralds Blanche's scream from offstage and a dissonant cluster in the brass. (Blanche was frightened by a shadow on the wall when the butler lit a candle.) Aurally, this instance of the fear motive is distinctive because it is presented in rhythmic augmentation and played very slowly at pianissimo. Like Figure 3.5a, the lower voices (played by the bassoon and strings) move in contrary motion to the fear melody, played by the violin and flute.



Figure 3.5f: Fear motive (sixth appearance in Act I/i)

The fear motive cultivates dissonance in the larger harmonic context in which it is placed, paralleling the interior chaos plaguing Blanche. The young woman is immersed in

pathological fear. It surrounds her, like a cloak of darkness or a mob around a carriage. She was born into fear and it gnaws away at her from the inside out. She is trapped by fear throughout the entire opera, until the final scene.⁹³

The Transcendence Motive

De Solliers' Blanche motive (see Figure 3.2) is ill-defined. Instead of simply signifying Blanche (as de Solliers indicates), I argue that this motive charts Blanche's path toward conversion. It highlights milestones in her spiritual development, including acknowledging her fear as counterproductive, recognizing her call to religious life, predicting her early death, learning about the transference of grace, and her ultimate martyrdom. These are moments of clarity during which Blanche sees, often with Constance as her model, another way of being (or believing) as an alternate to her pathologically fearful approach to life. For this reason, I redefine this motive as the "transcendence" motive.

The transcendence motive is not used as liberally as the fear motive (it appears only five times in the entire opera), but it is a key musical idea. Each instance of this motive points to Blanche's own transformation at her death, supporting Bernanos's reading of Blanche as a neophyte mystic and not an hysteric. Musically, the most striking feature of this motive is its jagged melodic shape due to its large intervals of octaves and

⁹³ In her article, "Ulterior Motives: Verdi's Recurring Themes Revisited," Mary Ann Smart describes how the orchestra virtually imprisons Aida with its motives. Blanche, too, is caught in the trap of the orchestra's motivic web of fear, just as she, and her parents before her, were once caught in a peasant mob. Smart states that in *Aida*, the orchestra guides our gaze toward Aida with a specific motive each time she enters the stage. While Smart notes that the orchestra can be interpreted as a proponent of the authorial male perspective, thus acting as "an analogue for the gaze of the camera lens... forming an objectifying trap," Carolyn Abbate's counter-interpretation suggests that we might hear orchestral utterances as emanating from the characters themselves. See: Mary Ann Smart, "Ulterior Motives: Verdi's Recurring Themes Revisited," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 138-39.

sixths. This oscillating melody is akin to the oscillation between worldviews typical of the period preceding awakening. The extreme intervals of the transcendence motive mirror Blanche's alternation between fear and transcendence during the long period of anxiety and uncertainty before her final conversion (or awakening) at the scaffold. Bruhn concurs, saying that the melody paints "a musical image of her [Blanche's] fearsome and retreating nature."⁹⁴

The transcendence motive is heard for the first time in Act I/i, in the fourth measure after rehearsal nineteen, just after Blanche tells her father and brother that, despite her calm exterior, she was very frightened when she met the mob of peasants on the road. The motive accompanies the phrase: "Mon Dieu, il en est peut-être du péril comme de l'eau froide qui d'abord vous coup le souffle et où l'on se trouve à l'aise, dès qu'on y est entré jusqu'au cou." ["Good Lord, perhaps danger is like plunging into the cold sea, which begins by taking your breath away, yet becomes most refreshing after you have gone in up to your neck."] This reference to water is similar to the First Prioress's water reference in conjunction with her own crumbling mental stability in Act I/iv. In addition to her physical disintegration, the Prioress's fear of death leaves her in a helpless state, "like someone drowning who has just been pulled from the water." Just as the Prioress foreshadows her own madness with a reference to drowning, Blanche points to her own uncontrollable fear with this watery allusion. Her comment about being in water up to the neck also cleverly foreshadows the final scene of the opera, in which Blanche truly is in danger up to her neck at the scaffold. Furthermore, the choppy, jagged melody could be read as text painting, illustrating ocean waves.

⁹⁴ Bruhn, *Saints in the Limelight*, 171.

In the initial instance of the transcendence motive (see Figure 3.6a), Blanche sings an anacrusis, then jumps up an octave to a high G, back down an octave, up a major sixth to E, down an octave, up a major sixth to C-sharp, down an octave, then up another major sixth to A-sharp (Poulenc uses the enharmonic B-flat). When the strings repeat this melody beginning in the fifth measure, Blanche varies her melody. As with the fear motive, the harmony does not usually fall into a traditional progression, and the chords' unrelatedness suggests a lack of tonal centre. However, the lack of traditional harmonic direction makes sense in the context of Blanche's conversion. The transcendence motive reflects Blanche's advance toward transcendence at the melodic ascent, accompanied by a dominant-tonic progression to a local tonic, followed by her retreat into fear at the descent, accompanied by movement to an unrelated dominant chord with an altered seventh, cultivating dissonance like the fear motive.⁹⁵ In this reading, the transcendence motive conveys an overall impression of conflictedness.

More significantly, the transcendence motive is a bold rewriting of the fear motive. It has an overall descending motion in both melody and accompaniment, but the fear motive's distinct seesaw motion is accentuated in the transcendence motive. Musically, it embodies an opening out, or dissolution of the prison of fear in which Blanche is locked. At each instance of the transcendence motive, Blanche gains more of the new perspective that she seeks, just as the recourse to octaves and sixths expresses a new, and less cramped, musical perspective.

⁹⁵ Wilfrid Mellers argues for a connection to holy matters: he points out that the concordant but unrelated triads, usually in root position, were common in the liturgical music of the Renaissance. See Mellers, *Francis Poulenc*, 107.

p très doux

Mon Dieu, il en est peut-être du péril com-me de l'eau froi-de

pp très doux et lié

mettre beaucoup de pédale

(en s'efforçant de sourire)

qui d'a-bord vous cou-pe le souf-fle et où l'on se trou-ve à l'ai-se, dès qu'on y est en-tré jus-qu-au cou.

Figure 3.6a: Transcendence motive (Act I/i)⁹⁶
(N.B. Figure 3.6a and Figure 3.2 are the same example.)

We hear a fragment of the transcendence motive again in Act I/ii, beginning the ninth measure after forty-seven, when Blanche meets with the Prioress to discuss the possibility of joining the Carmelite order. Rather than welcoming her openly, the older woman warns Blanche that she cannot hide or run away from life in the convent. Blanche responds, accompanied by the transcendence motive, “Vos paroles sont dures, mais je sens que de plus dures encore ne saurait briser l’élán qui me portes vers vous. Je n’ai pas d’autre refuge, en effet.” [“Though your words are so harsh yet I feel even if they were harsher they could never break the power that draws me to you. I shall find no other

⁹⁶ The transcendence motive is taken from Poulenc’s Nocturnes for Piano. It appears both in the first Nocturne (1929) and again in the last (1938), providing a sense of having come full circle, or a sense of closure to the piece.

refuge but this.”] The motive is at a different pitch level than Figure 3.6a, but the melody begins the same way, and the harmony also includes a movement to a dominant seventh chord as well as a dominant-tonic progression to a local tonic. Unlike 3.6a, we hear only four beats of the distinctive melody and the second half of the phrase is unaccompanied.

Figure 3.6b: Transcendence motive (Act I/ii)

In Act I/iii, the two young novices, Constance and Blanche, discuss theological concepts while doing laundry. First Blanche scolds Constance for being lighthearted while the First Prioress is so ill. Constance then introduces the idea of vicarious suffering, suggesting that she and Blanche should offer their lives for that of the Prioress. At rehearsal seventy-two, we hear the transcendence motive (see Figure 3.6c) as Constance sings to Blanche, “Hé bien... j’ai compris que Dieu me ferait la grâce de ne pas me laisser vieillir, et que nous mourrions ensemble, le même jour.” [“I will... I have always known that God would be kinder than to let me grow old and that we would die together the same day.”] This version of the transcendence motive is virtually identical to 3.6a, but

it is in abbreviated form, not unlike 3.6b. Here, the young nun foreshadows both her and Blanche's death at the scaffold at the end of the opera, an ability that characterizes her as a mystic.

Constance (as post-conversion Thérèse) is not only an important spiritual guide for Blanche, but she also represents the goal of Blanche's spiritual development. Constance is present with Blanche several times when the transcendence motive is sounded; more than any other, this motive acts as a link between the two novices. The transcendence motive points toward conversion. Blanche's conversion connects her with Constance in death, and conversion also links the two halves of Thérèse of Lisieux's life.

The musical score for Figure 3.6c is written in 2/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system features a vocal line (soprano) with the lyrics "p Hé bien... j'ai com - pris que Dieu me fe - rait la grâ - ce de ne" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a triplet figure in the right hand and sustained chords in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "pas me lais - ser vieil - lir et que nous mour - rions en - sem - ble, le mê - me jour" and the piano accompaniment. The piano part continues with the triplet figure in the right hand and sustained chords in the left hand.

Figure 3.6c: Transcendence motive (Act I/iii)

Constance is also the featured singer in the fourth appearance of the transcendence motive, in Interlude I of the second act (see Figure 3.6d), beginning at rehearsal sixteen. After the First Prioress's death, Constance explains her understanding of the transference of grace further. She says that the First Prioress suffered so that

someone else might have an easier death. Blanche is confused and wonders why God might switch deaths, as one might accidentally switch coats in a cloakroom. Constance sings, “Ça veut dire que cette autre, lorsque viendra l’heure de la mort, s’étonnera d’y entrer si facilement, et de s’y sentir confortable.” [“I mean that someone else will be greatly surprised when he has to die that he finds it so simple and easy and that it feels so comfortable.”] As with 3.6c, this incidence of the transcendence motive foreshadows the nuns’ fate, and more specifically, it points to Blanche as the person who will be granted the grace of an easier death as a result of the First Prioress’s suffering. The first phrase of motive 3.6d is identical to 3.6a, but when the phrase is repeated, the music shifts up a tone.



Figure 3.6d: Transcendence motive (Act II, Interlude i)

In its final appearance in Act III/iv, three measures before seventy-three, the transcendence motive has been transformed. This is the only case in which the motive is

purely instrumental. It is merely a portion of the original transcendence motive, with altered rhythm, but the recognizable jagged melody is there (see Figure 3.6e). The motive appears when all the nuns have been guillotined except the two novices. Constance pauses in her singing when she sees Blanche, and immediately we hear the angular melody. This snippet of the transcendence motive leads into the final phrases of the opera to Blanche's last words and her death, towards which every instance of the motive has been pointing.

The final instance of the transcendence motive (3.6e) is not only significantly different from the earlier examples, but it is the only case in which the motive alters the musical fabric in which it is placed, changing what comes after it. In examples 3.6a through 3.6d, the motive is but one short episode in a series of episodes that make up the score. 3.6e, however, interrupts both the *Salve regina* chorus and the death motive ostinato. At three measures before seventy-three, the short phrase serves as a point of modulation and halts the relentless ostinato that underscores the entire final scene. At seventy-three, as if unsure of the transformation that has taken place, Constance resumes her singing, with the death motive ostinato accompanying her. However, four measures later, the guillotine marks the definitive end of the hymn and the ostinato.



Figure 3.6e: Transcendence motive (Act III/iv)

At seventy-four, Blanche continues alone, completely altering the musical material, her transformation evident in the music. Instead of finishing the *Salve regina* hymn, Blanche begins a doxology with “Deo patri sit gloria...” and sings until she is guillotined. The final phrases of music are similar to the transcendence motive. The large octave leaps can be heard in the orchestra, although they are sustained notes now and have lost their melodic function. The melody in the voice has a similar shape, but its angularity has been softened considerably, indicating that Blanche is no longer wavering between courage and fear. The general downward movement of both the melody and the bass lines is absent.

Philosopher Charles Taylor indicates that transcendence means seeing a point beyond striving for the benefit of humanity, beyond that which we can accomplish or enjoy in this life on earth. He claims that the implication of transcendence is that “life goes on after death, there is a continuation, our lives don’t totally end in our deaths.” For one who believes in transcendence, there can be meaning in suffering and death because it is “not merely negation, the undoing of fullness and life, but also a place to affirm something that matters beyond life, on which life itself originally draws.”⁹⁷ Taylor, like Underhill, suggests that transcendence involves being called to a change of identity which, in Christian terms, entails a radical decentering of self in relation to God.⁹⁸ The definition of transcendence as connected to instability, decentering, and transformation is apparent in the transcendence motive, with its unstable harmony, jagged melody, and final transformation.

⁹⁷ James L. Heft, *A Catholic Modernity?: Charles Taylor’s Marianist Award Lecture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 20.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

When Blanche walks up to the guillotine freely, she finally attains the transcendence for which she has been struggling. Underhill describes this culmination of the awakening phase, or moment of mystical conversion, as follows:

The struggle between two discrepant ideals of life has attained its term. A sudden and apparently “irrational” impulse to some decisive act reaches the surface-consciousness from the seething deeps. The impulse is followed; and the swift emergence of the transcendental sense results. This “unwonted visitation” effects an abrupt and involuntary alteration in the subject’s consciousness: whereby he literally “finds himself another man [or woman].” He is as one who has slept and now awakes.⁹⁹

Blanche’s conversion, her “irrational” impulse to freely walk up the scaffold to her death, enables her to not only complete the transference of grace from the First Prioress’s death, but to extend the transference further by taking part in the Carmelites’ martyrdom for the Catholic Church in France. Furthermore, by outlining Blanche’s movement from fear to transcendence with musical motives, Poulenc buttresses Bernanos’s reading of Blanche as mystic, rejecting the reading of hysteric that I considered at the beginning of this chapter. Ultimately, Poulenc’s musical treatment in this case underscores an affinity between the two men.

⁹⁹ Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature*, 180-81.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROGRAM AND INTERIORITY

4.1 Introduction

Dialogues des Carmélites, with its opposing choruses (the nuns and the crowd), could be interpreted as a commentary on the power struggle between pro-Catholic royalists and anticlerical republicans that exploded in 1789 and that has continued to generate tension in French politics and society ever since. From the opening of the opera, the crowd chorus is characterized as a frenzied mob, suggesting a counterrevolutionary reading of hysteria, in which violent political activity is a manifestation of collective insanity. The final scene of the opera, in which the two choruses finally intersect, has the potential to portray this power struggle most vividly. But that expectation is thwarted as Poulenc sidesteps the revolutionary conflict, focusing instead on Blanche. As a result, the opera is primarily a psychological drama about fear and extreme anxiety, shot through with metaphysical issues.

Dialogues has an unusual dramatic trajectory. The tension of the narrative builds with each act, leading to the climax at the guillotine in Act III, scene iv. This climactic scene also acts as the finale, providing an odd close to this opera. The loose ends are not drawn together by an ensemble piece or a chorus finale (at least not in the traditional sense). There is no dénouement, no orchestral fortissimo, and little opportunity for the

audience to absorb, much less process, what they have just witnessed. Ultimately, silence seems a more appropriate response than applause.¹

Set during the last days of the Terror of the French Revolution, Act III/iv portrays sixteen singing nuns marching up the scaffold toward the guillotine, surrounded by the crowd chorus. One by one, the members of the holy chorus are beheaded and silenced, marking the end of the opera. The final scene is a key episode and merits extended critical reflection. In many ways, it is a response to the First Prioress's death in Act I/iv. Together, these two scenes depict the transference of grace at the heart of this work. In Act I/iv, the First Prioress endures an agonizing death, offering her suffering for Blanche's benefit. In Act III/iv, the meaning of the Prioress's sacrifice becomes clear as timid Blanche boldly mounts the scaffold to face her own death with courage. This circulation of merits is continued as the Carmelites *en masse* offer their lives at the guillotine to atone for the execution of Louis XVI and for the salvation of an increasingly dechristianized France.

I open this chapter with the hypothesis that this final scene, in which the crowd chorus is set against the nuns' chorus at the scaffold, offers a counterrevolutionary view of hysteria. This theory would bring my study of hysteria full circle, providing an

¹ *Dialogues des Carmélites* is structurally unusual in another way: its title. (The title was supplied by Albert Béguin, Bernanos's literary executor, who pushed for the publication of the screenplay dialogues after the author's death.) It sounds perfunctory or superficial and may strike the operagoer as ironic, since Carmelites nuns are traditionally cloistered. But beyond a simple verbal exchange, the dialogue is also a hybrid genre of literature and philosophy—one which has been regarded as a thinly disguised tool for direct intervention in the world. Due to these qualities, the dialogue became a popular form not only for philosophical texts, but for theological ones, such as the dialogues of Saint Catherine of Siena, in which Catherine charts her mystical experiences of prayer in the form of a dialogue between herself and God. The didactic nature of the genre, combined with theological content, appealed to Bernanos, who used similar forms in earlier works, such as *Dialogues d'ombres* and *Journal d'un curé de campagne*. (See Eva Kushner, "The Renaissance Dialogue and Its Zero-Degree Fictionality," in *Fiction Updated: Theories of Fictionality, Narratology, and Poetics*, ed. Calin-Andrei Mihailescu and Walid Hamarneh [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985], 168.) Alma and Zock have also noted that spirituality and existential questions are not normally thought of as relational; however, *Dialogues* gives a central role to relationships in dealing with these phenomena. (See Alma and Zock, "Mercy of Anxiety," 176.)

alternate interpretation of hysteria as social degeneration to balance my reading of the First Prioress as suffering from hysteria due to political turmoil. Nevertheless, a closer look at the music and dramaturgy indicates that this hypothesis does not stand. Rather than presenting a conflict between two groups, the structure of Act III/iv highlights the psychological program of *Dialogues* and interiority. Next, I explore representations of interiority in the opera and how they are reinforced in the work. Finally, I bring the argument back to hysteria, connecting the psychological program to Poulenc himself, who identified closely with Blanche.

4.2 Is a Counterrevolutionary Reading of Hysteria Tenable in Act III, Scene iv?

Act III, scene iv at first appears to lend itself to a counterrevolutionary interpretation of hysteria, a reversal of the interpretation of hysteria as social degeneration that I applied to the First Prioress's mad scene in Act I/iv. In chapter two, drawing largely from the work of Mark Micale, I explained that French psychiatrists of the late 1700s and early 1800s theorized that mental illness could result from catastrophic political events. Applying this idea to the hysteria of the First Prioress on her deathbed, I suggested that her mental instability might be read as caused by the political violence inflicted on the Carmelite convent during the Revolution. Micale notes further that this theory of hysteria as social degeneration was reversed in the mid-1800s. Later psychiatrists adopted a counterrevolutionary view, retroactively suggesting that the violent political activity of the revolutionaries, and especially of the *sans culottes* during the Terror, had actually been a manifestation of individual or collective insanity.² The

² For more information, please refer to the section entitled "Hysteria as Social Degeneration" in chapter two of this dissertation.

implication of this reversal is that rather than interpreting the victimized nuns as hysterics in Act III/iv, the crowd chorus (representing the revolutionaries) might be understood as a mob whose violence against the nuns is a manifestation of their own collective insanity.

If it were tenable, this counterrevolutionary reading of hysteria would provide a tidy conclusion to my analysis of hysteria in Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

However, Poulenc's use of the double chorus in *Dialogues* is puzzling. In the final scene, he does not follow the expected pattern of conflict set up by references to the mob throughout the opera, beginning in the opening scene. Nor does he adhere to the older model of nineteenth-century political opera, in which double choruses were more commonly used.³ But most of all, the end of Poulenc's final scene has been significantly changed from Bernanos's, which in turn affects the portrayal of the crowd chorus.

Bernanos took his cue for the final scene at the scaffold from Gertrud von Le Fort. *Die Letzte am Schafott* ends with the nuns marching up the scaffold, singing, as they are executed one by one. When Constance is left alone singing, Blanche's voice rises up from the crowd, and the people move to let her pass by as she walks toward the scaffold. Le Fort, however, characterizes the crowd as a seething mass of dreadful women. She describes Blanche singing the *Veni creator* in a small, childlike voice across the square. She then writes (in the voice of her narrator), "Distinctly I heard the profession of faith in the Holy Trinity. The *Amen* I did not hear—the furious women struck her down on the

³ See James Parakilas, "Political Representation and the Chorus in Nineteenth-Century Opera," *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 181-202. Also see Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

spot.”⁴ Not only does Gertrud von Le Fort paint her crowd as a murderous mob, but they are women (no doubt the infamous *tricoteuses*)!

Bernanos is less graphic in his stage directions for Act V/xvii. Then again, it is important to remember that he was working from a film scenario supplied by Brückberger and was only meant to provide the dialogue, so it is difficult to know the intended effect of this last scene. Nevertheless, the reader gets the impression that Bernanos took Le Fort’s lead. In the final scene of Bernanos’s stage play, the crowd is stunned into silence when they first hear the nuns singing. Once Constance is left alone, a new voice is heard from the corner of the large square, very clean, resolved but childlike. As the crowd parts before her, Blanche advances toward the scaffold, singing the *Veni creator*. Unexpectedly, there is a quick movement in the crowd and then “a group of women surround Blanche, pushing her toward the scaffold, we lose sight of her. And suddenly her voice is stopped, just like the voices of her sisters, one by one.”⁵

In both Bernanos and Le Fort, the female mob kills Blanche before she can get to the scaffold. In Poulenc’s opera, the crowd of men and women benignly watch as Blanche climbs the scaffold to be beheaded along with her fellow nuns. From a dramaturgical point of view, instead of losing Blanche in the crowd, she becomes the focus of the scene as she rises above the crowd on the scaffold. (Or, if the opera is staged so that the crowd chorus sings from the wings, Blanche stands alone on the stage at this point.) The choruses function to some degree as representatives of the two opposing

⁴ The original German reads: “Ich hörte deutlich das Bekenntnis zum dreieinigen Gott—das Amen hörte ich nicht mehr. (Sie wissen, daß die wütenden Weiber Blanche auf dem Fleck erschlugen.)” See Le Fort, *Letzte am Schafott*, 129, and *Song at the Scaffold*, 76 [Olga Marx translation].

⁵ The original French reads: “Un groupe de femmes entoure Blanche, la pousse vers l’échafaud, on la perd de vue. Et soudain sa voix se tait comme ont fait une à une les voix de ses sœurs.” See Georges Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, ed. Yvonne Guers (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 134-35.

forces of the French Revolution. However, because Poulenc focuses on the internal narrative of the Carmelites' psychological and spiritual turmoil and avoids depicting political action onstage, the choruses are never presented as two forces directly in conflict.

While the members of the nuns' chorus are featured prominently throughout Poulenc's opera (they sing two choral pieces in Act II and one in Act III), the crowd chorus has a much lower profile. From the start, the crowd chorus is described by other characters in the opera as a violent peasant mob. Although the audience does not hear the crowd chorus until Act II, the descriptions of the group imply that the crowd has fallen victim to the madness of the mob mentality.

As I explained in chapter three, Act I/i opens as the Chevalier (Blanche's brother) rushes into his father's library to alert him that a peasant mob has gathered on the road, blocking Blanche's way home. But this is not just any peasant mob. The Chevalier is referring here to the Réveillon riots of April 28, 1789, an unprecedented show of violence (until the Revolution) in which over five thousand people rioted in protest to Jean-Baptiste Réveillon's threat to lower his wallpaper factory workers' wages. The riot took place on the eve of the meeting of the Estates-General. The mob wound its way through several Parisian neighbourhoods, blocking roads and fighting against armed troops. Several hundred people were killed and many more injured.⁶

In the opening scene, Poulenc underscores the tone of fear and paranoia associated with the mob by using, in addition to his fear motive, a musical vocabulary of terror comprised of several effects well-known from the repertory of melodrama from the

⁶ See David Andress, *The French Revolution and the People* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), 95-103, and Marquis de Ferrières, *Correspondence inédite, 1789, 1790, 1791*, ed. H. Carré (Paris, 1932), 37-41.

1790s. These musical effects may include, for example, shrill woodwinds, diminished seventh chords, musical depictions of storms, intermittent low and tremulous sounds, unbridled dissonance, tremolandi in the strings, and extremes in dynamics.⁷ Poulenc depicts the exchange between the Chevalier, who is upset about the mob and worried for his sister's safety, and the Marquis, who dismisses his son's fears, by alternating musical passages that mirror their moods. The Chevalier is represented by music that draws from the vocabulary of terror, including shrill winds, tremolandi, and sudden accents, resulting in a nervous effect; while the Marquis is characterized with quiet chromatic legato passages.

The Marquis soon becomes agitated, however, when he remembers the circumstances of Blanche's birth. Blanche was born in the context of mob violence; her birth was the result of fear. (I already touched on this point in chapter three, in my discussion of the similarities between Blanche and Thérèse of Lisieux.) At the dauphin's wedding years earlier, a fireworks display got out of control, setting a fire that escalated the crowd's mood to mass panic. The Marquis tells the Chevalier at this point, "qui n'a pas vu la multitude en panique n'a rien vu... Tous ces visages à la bouche tordue, ces milliers et ces milliers d'yeux..." ["you've seen nothing if you never saw a crowd panic. All those faces with their features contorted, thousands and thousands of eyes."] The

⁷ Other musical characteristics that served to arouse deep emotions of fear, paranoia, and agitation included pervasive chromaticism, masterly choral writing, agitated swirling string passages (meant to imitate turbulent emotions), repetitive alarms effects, sequences of syncopated chords, and massed crowds. Paul Robinson describes a similar musical vocabulary of terror used to express political and social issues in his study on Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Stephen Meyer concludes that the "soundscape of the terrible" includes widely disseminated musical indicators of terror, such as those I have already outlined and any other characteristic that creates a disjointed musical discourse. See Stephen Ace Willier, *Early Nineteenth-century Opera and the Impact of the Gothic* (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1987), 149 and 158; Stephen Meyer, "Terror and Transcendence in the Operatic Prison, 1790-1815," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55, no. 3 (2002): 477-523, see especially 479 and 493; Paul Robinson, "Fidelio and the French Revolution," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 1 (1991): 23-48.

peasant mob attacked the carriage in which he and his wife were riding. Again, in addition to the fear motive I discussed in chapter three, Poulenc accompanies the Marquis' reminiscence with all manner of musical effects meant to portray the fireworks, the rushing flames, the scurrying crowd, and the intensification of the mob's fear. Nervous sixteenth note figures and fortissimo descending chromatic passages dominate the texture. The piccolo, trumpet, and snare drum stand out with highly disjointed passages, as does the piano. Quick repeated grace notes in the piccolo and flute reference the dancing flames, while pizzicato strings, staccato winds, and percussion (including the woodblock and tambourine) create a tense, edgy effect. The whip is heard often in reference to the carriage. A syncopated bass line serves to heighten the tension, as do trills and swirling chromatic movements in the violins. Underscored by a prolonged diminished seventh chord, the Marquis describes how he and his pregnant wife tried to escape, but the mob surrounded the carriage and smashed its windows. They were finally rescued by a group of soldiers. A protracted silence follows this description, after which the Marquis, unaccompanied, quietly explains that the violent clash sent his wife into premature labour and she died later at their home while giving birth to Blanche.

The threatening chorus remains silent until Act II/iv. In this scene, the priest comes to the convent to say goodbye to the nuns before he goes into hiding. After singing *Ave verum corpus* with the nuns, he slips out. Suddenly the convent bell rings. The priest quickly comes back into the convent and tells the nuns that the streets are too busy for him to escape. The murmurings of the crowd chorus can be heard from backstage. On the other side of the convent doors, they sing menacing ninth chords, followed by a unison "Ouvrez la porte!" ["Open the door!"] They knock and bang on the doors and finally the

nuns open the convent doors. Four commissioners enter, but the mob stays outside. The commissioners read a decree of expulsion and then leave. Suddenly, the crowd outside sings two measure-long snippets of “Ah! Ça ira,” frightening Blanche.

The crowd chorus is not heard again until Act III/iv, when the nuns’ chorus and the crowd chorus finally intersect musically. A conflict between the two groups, or at the very least a frenzied cry for blood from the crowd chorus, is strangely absent. Instead, Poulenc transfers the crowd’s potentially destructive energy to the guillotine, cleverly depicting the guillotine as both a decapitating machine and a *musical* instrument of destruction against the nuns’ chorus.

4.3 Overview of Act III, Scene iv

I already introduced Act III, scene iv during my discussion of the transcendence motive in chapter three. Here, I will examine this scene in greater detail in order to discover the character of the relationship between the two choruses, to describe scene iv’s structural particularities, and to determine how this scene contributes to a critical reflection of the opera. Act III/iv is set at the Place de la Revolution in Paris during the Terror. Having been condemned to death as enemies of the Revolution, the Carmelites march one after another toward the guillotine, singing *Salve regina* as they go. A crowd looks on. Beginning with the prioress, one by one the members of the holy chorus are beheaded and silenced. Finally, only Sr. Constance, the youngest nun, remains. On her way to the scaffold she spots Blanche, who had earlier abandoned the convent because she was afraid of martyrdom. Constance sees Blanche step from the crowd to follow her. After Constance dies, Blanche sings alone—replacing *Salve regina* with part of the *Veni*

creator—until she too is guillotined. The crowd disperses quietly, marking the end of the opera.

In his stage directions, Poulenc explains that as the curtain rises, the nuns can be seen descending from the tumbrels. The young nun, Constance, jumps, almost with joy. The audience does not see the base of the scaffold that the nuns mount one by one. As for the mob, Poulenc indicates that the first row crowds together, constantly moving. We see the chaplain, wearing a phrygian bonnet in disguise, murmur absolution and make a furtive sign of the cross and then disappear quickly as the first Carmelites mount the scaffold.⁸ Poulenc does not give precise directions in regard to the mob's actions throughout the scene. That is, he does not direct them to make angry gestures or portray any specific action. If anything, he tells them to stay in the background with his musical instruction to sing more softly than the *Salve regina* at the beginning of the Carmelite chant.⁹

Poulenc's stage directions are taken, almost word for word, from Act V/xvii of Bernanos's stageplay, including his treatment of the crowd. Bernanos's version states

The Carmelites descend from the cart to the foot of the scaffold. In the first row of the packed crowd, we see, donned in a phrygian cap, the priest who murmurs absolution, making a furtive sign of the cross and then disappearing. Immediately the sisters intone the *Salve regina*, followed by the *Veni creator*. Startled, the crowd falls silent. We only see the base of the scaffold, where the sisters mount, one by one, still singing...¹⁰

⁸ The original French reads: "...Au premier rang de la foule compacte et sans cesse en mouvement, on reconnaît, coiffé d'un bonnet phrygien, l'Aumônier qui murmure l'absolution, fait un furtif signe de croix, lorsque montent les premières Carmélites, puis disparaît rapidement." (From the full orchestral score.)

⁹ The original French reads: "La rumeur de la foule est toujours moins intense que le chant des Carmélites." See the orchestral score, 495.

¹⁰ The original French reads: "Les carmélites descendent de la charrette au pied de l'échafaud. Au premier rang de la foule compacte, on reconnaît, coiffé du bonnet phrygien, le prêtre qui murmure l'absolution, fait un furtif signe de croix et disparaît rapidement. Aussitôt les Soeurs entonnent le *Salve Regina*, puis le *Veni Creator*. Leurs voix sont claires et très fermes. La foule, saisie, se tait. On ne voit que la base de l'échafaud, où les Soeurs montent une à une, chantant toujours..." (Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, 134-35, translation mine.)

In performance the scene is sometimes presented with the crowd chorus joining the nuns on stage as per Poulenc's instructions, but in many productions, the crowd chorus simply sings their part from offstage, perhaps implying that they are near the guillotine, which is not visible to the audience.¹¹ This further backgrounding of the crowd chorus keeps the focus on the nuns and the psychological element of the narrative.

Act III, scene iv is comprised of four main musical elements: an ostinato made up of the death motive, *Salve regina* sung by the nuns' chorus, intermittent interjections from the crowd chorus, and the guillotine. I will introduce each of these elements separately before discussing how they interact in this finale.

The death motive, previously heard in the First Prioress's mad scene, opens the final scene. It acts here to underline the connection between the Prioress's and Blanche's deaths. It also signifies the transference of grace effected by the martyrdom of the Carmelites as a group. Heard in Act I/iv as an ominous bassline near the beginning of the First Prioress's death scene (see Figure 4.1 below), it becomes an ostinato in the bass in Act III/iv. While it outlines a minor third on B and D in the first instance, it begins in A minor in this final scene.



Figure 4.1: Death motive (from Act I/iv)

¹¹ The most recent video recording, Riccardo Muti's production with La Scala (2004), stages this scene with the crowd chorus backstage.

The death motive ostinato supplies unrelenting forward momentum and a good deal of harmonic direction. The ostinato's rhythm is created by incessant eighth notes supported an octave below by quarter notes and continues almost uninterrupted throughout. Near the beginning of the scene, before most of the nuns are killed, the ostinato provides dramatic impetus, driving each of the nuns toward the guillotine.

While the ostinato is an important feature of the musical background in the final scene, *Salve regina*, sung by the nuns' chorus, acts as the foreground. *Salve regina* is one of four large-scale Marian antiphons, traditionally sung at the end of Compline, but also often sung at the end of every hour of the Office. It is a commonly-used chant in the Carmelite tradition, reflecting a strong Marian devotion originating from the late thirteenth century.

Poulenc's *Salve regina* chorus has a double role: it functions as both a chanted prayer and an operatic chorus. From the beginning of the *Salve regina* at rehearsal mark sixty-three, Poulenc's newly-composed melody is delivered by the nuns in unison, in a vocal style reminiscent of plainchant, despite the orchestral accompaniment. Like plainchant, the melody features several repeated notes, few awkward intervals, a narrow range, and a rhythm matching that of the text. Poulenc adapted the prayer for its operatic context by repeating several of the phrases. This repetitive structure, typical of opera choruses, extends the piece to accommodate the drama.¹²

¹² Most of the repetition is near the beginning of the piece. "Salve regina, Mater misericordiae, vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve" ("Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope") is repeated three times. In addition, "ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes" ("to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping") is sung twice. The text proceeds as usual until the final line, "O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria" ("O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary"), which is sung twice by Constance. Blanche immediately follows this line with the *Veni creator*.

Poulenc's chorus has some commonalities with the emotionally-charged choruses of nineteenth-century opera, such as French grand opéra and Verdi's *Risorgimento* works. In his study of grand opéra, Anselm Gerhard explains that the role of the chorus changed in the nineteenth century as a result of changing plot patterns. As exemplary heroes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave way to protagonists driven to death by fate, the chorus became one of the *dramatis personae*. The chorus was more active, both dramatically and musically, and moved beyond self-contained choral pieces to interaction with solo characters.¹³ James Parakilas postulates that the political nature of this repertoire is manifested in three dramaturgical practices, including casting the chorus as a people whose status is at stake, treating solo characters as representative of the people, and dividing the chorus so that the dramatic issue is represented as a political dispute.¹⁴ In line with this model, the nuns' chorus portrays a group of people whose destiny is at stake. In addition, most of the solo characters are members of this chorus, including Blanche, Constance, Mère Marie, and the Prioress. Poulenc divides the chorus so that the female nuns' chorus is aurally opposed to the mixed voices of the crowd chorus, who are ostensibly sympathetic to the Revolution. His focus on the nuns' chorus and the backgrounding of the crowd ensures that the crowd remains an anonymous mob to the audience members, while the nuns appeal to their sympathies.¹⁵

¹³ Audiences related to this new style of chorus. Gerhard notes that after the mid-1800s, choruses even dressed and moved differently than in earlier work. He cites Auber's *La Muette de Portici* and Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* as examples of this development. See Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 82, 84.

¹⁴ Parakilas, "Political Representation and the Chorus," 188.

¹⁵ To highlight the powerful connection created between the nineteenth-century opera chorus and its audience, Parakilas recounts a performance of Verdi's *Don Carlo* in the Verona Arena in 1969 in which the audience joined in as the chorus sang the Act III finale, *Spuntato ecco il di d'esultanza*. Although he notes that these situations are rare, he points out that musical characteristics of these choruses (e.g., a memorable and much-repeated tune, unison singing) can lend themselves to audience participation. (See Parakilas, "Political Representation and the Chorus," 181-82.) In a similar vein, Claude Gendre describes a performance of Bernanos's *Dialogues des Carmélites* on November 20, 1951 in Munich in which the play

In Poulenc's *Dialogues*, the division of the chorus into opposing groups that map the struggle of forces in the drama hearkens back to nineteenth-century opera practice. By this time, it was already common in politically-charged operas to denote opposing forces with representative music. This practice later became *de rigueur*, and musical references to the Revolution, such as military sounds, revolutionary songs, and funeral marches were contrasted with musical forms meant to represent the *ancien régime*, such as court dances or church music.¹⁶ This practice is evident in *Dialogues* via the revolutionary tune ("Ah! Ça ira") assigned to the crowd chorus in Act II and the nuns' choruses, all on Latin liturgical texts, highlighting the Carmelites' role as representatives of both the Church and the *ancien régime*.

When public executions were introduced into serious opera in the early 1800s, the watching chorus was portrayed as savagely curious and emotionally volatile. According to Gerhard, the epitome of uncontained brutality was depicted in Meyerbeer's Catholic chorus in Act V of *Les Huguenots* (1836). He describes the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre scene (in which the Catholics murder the Huguenots) as a manifestation of collective insanity: "All at once the crowd has no need of leaders, it has been let off the leash, and works itself unaided into a frenzy of blood-lust." Meyerbeer's chorus's actions

was "spontaneously transformed into liturgy: in the final scene, as the Carmelites started climbing the scaffold singing the *Salve regina*, the audience rose to their feet to sing with them." (See Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*: The Historical Background," 287.)

¹⁶ Elizabeth Bartlet notes that indications of this struggle between two opposing forces are present in much earlier opera (although not necessarily expressed through the chorus). She indicates that, beginning in the late 1700s, operas with political overtones, especially those directly related to the French Revolution (her study refers in particular to the repertoire of the Paris Opéra during the Reign of Terror), incorporated military sounds, revolutionary songs, and often, a funeral march. See M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, "The New Repertory at the Opéra During the Reign of Terror: Revolutionary Rhetoric and Operatic Consequences," in *Music and the French Revolution*, ed. Malcolm Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 132-33.

are a “calculated blend of solemn consecration and screamed exhortations to murder.”¹⁷

The Act V massacre scene in *Les Huguenots* confirmed then-current conceptions of crowd psychology, according to which both the horrors of St. Bartholomew’s Day and the Jacobin Terror of the 1790s were attributed to the collective hysteria of the Parisian mob.¹⁸

Although *Dialogues des Carmélites* focuses on the cloistered nuns, the crowd chorus grows more and more threatening as the opera progresses. By the final scene, the audience would not be surprised to see the crowd chorus appear as a violent, bloodthirsty mob, not unlike many opera choruses of the nineteenth century. After learning about the violent peasant mob from the de la Force family in the first act of *Dialogues*, and then hearing the crowd shouting and pounding on the convent doors while singing snippets of a revolutionary song in Act II, the audience expects an angry, violent crowd when faced with the nuns in Act III. But these expectations are thwarted. Poulenc takes a different approach than Meyerbeer, and instead completely neutralizes the mob chorus. There is no onstage clash between the two choruses and no antagonistic finale with contrasting music or disturbed harmony.¹⁹

Poulenc’s crowd chorus does not play a significant musical role in the final scene. As seen in Figure 4.2, at the beginning of the *Salve regina*, rather than trying to unseat the nuns harmonically, the crowd chorus simply reinforces the A minor harmony established by the nuns. Further sidelining the crowd chorus, Poulenc indicates that they

¹⁷ Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 230. Also see 226-27, 231. Gerhard notes that after *Les Huguenots*, Meyerbeer’s choruses took a less active part in onstage violence. The composer denounced mass hysteria, depicting later choruses as less bloodthirsty.

¹⁸ See Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules* (Paris: Alcan, 1895).

¹⁹ According to Parakilas, the nineteenth-century model typically features an onstage clash between parts of a divided chorus, represented by contrasting music. Normally, abrupt changes in key or rhythm, or disturbed harmony indicates a fight between the two groups. Parakilas, “Political Representation and the Chorus,” 183 and 199.

must stay in the background, singing at a lower dynamic level than the nuns throughout the finale, so they are barely heard. Additionally, he paints the mob as a toothless collective with an ill-formed voice by assigning them only exclamatory syllables like “oh” and “oi” in reaction to the nuns’ execution. With a strikingly inventive spirit, Poulenc transfers the important musical task of undercutting the nuns’ chorus to a machine—the guillotine.

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes a [Crowd chorus] at the top, a [Nuns' chorus] in the middle, and a [death motive] in the bottom piano part. The [Crowd chorus] consists of two staves with the lyrics "Oh!" and "Oh!". The [Nuns' chorus] consists of two staves with the lyrics "Sal - ve Re - gi - na ma - ter mi - se - re - cor - di-æ, vi - ta, dul - ce - do et". The [death motive] is a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern. The second system continues the [Nuns' chorus] and the [death motive]. The [Nuns' chorus] has the lyrics "spes nos - tra, sal - ve et spes nos - tra sal - ve. Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Ma -". The [death motive] continues with a steady eighth-note pattern. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *pp*, *mf*, *ff*, *p*, and *ff sec*, as well as performance instructions like "sans crescendo" and "moins la Prieure à 14".

Figure 4.2: Act III/iv at rehearsal number 63
(The guillotine is indicated in figures 4.2, 4.3a, and 4.3b by downward-pointing arrows.)

Poulenc's staging instructions for Act III/iv indicate that the guillotine is not meant to be visible, but its sonic representation as a *musical* instrument of destruction is highlighted instead, creating an atmosphere of acoustic horror. I have already commented on the similarity between Poulenc's stage directions for this scene and Bernanos's direction for Act V/xvii of his stageplay. In her novella, *Die Letzte am Schafott*, Gertrud von Le Fort also focuses on sounds heard during the guillotine scene. To describe the nuns' execution, Le Fort assigns narration duties to M. Villeroi, a man too short to see anything above the heads of the crowd. Villeroi remarks,

I stood in the midst of the howling rabble [...] You know that I am not tall. Chaos surged above me. I was immersed in it. I could not see what happened, I could only hear. All my powers of perception centred in the sense of hearing and sharpened it incredibly.²⁰

Villeroi then describes the execution via aural cues, a strategy that, while unusual for a novella, lends itself perfectly to operatic treatment. Poulenc did not specify how the sound of the guillotine was to be produced, but he assigned the machine a separate line in his orchestral score so that he might indicate its entrances with precision. Although percussion instruments might supply the desired effect, in most stagings of the opera today, a recording is used.

The guillotine was adopted as an egalitarian and humanitarian mode of execution in France in 1792, replacing a system in which capital punishment varied depending on the criminal's class and gender. But from its inception until it was finally retired in 1981, the machine's detractors saw it as a tool of political oppression and questioned its

²⁰ The original German reads: "Ich stand mitten im Gedränge des johlenden Pöbels [...] Sie wissen, daß ich nicht von großer Statur bin: ich stand buchstäblich bis zur Scheitelhöhe im Chaos, mein Gesicht schon gleichsam in ihm versunken; ich konnte tatsächlich nicht sehen, was vorging, ich konnte nur noch hören. Verstehen Sie, meine Freundin, daß alle Wahrnehmungskraft, die in mir war, in diesen einen Sinn flüchtend, fast zur übersinnlichen Wahrnehmung werden mußte." Le Fort, *Letzte am Schafott*, 125; and *Song at the Scaffold*, 73 [Olga Marx translation].

humane reputation. The guillotine represented an early step in creating a mechanized death, one in which human agency was disguised, distancing the act of decapitation even from those who may have set the machine in motion in the first place. Transferring violence to a machine reduced the visibility of human involvement, absolving people from responsibility and allowing them to take on the role of spectator.²¹ In a similar fashion, the guillotine in Poulenc's opera takes on the kinetic role of the crowd chorus, allowing the mob itself to abdicate an active role and instead, passively react to the situation at hand.²²

At first the guillotine's mechanical self-sufficiency seemed like a triumph of technology, but soon it became deeply threatening. Its reputation for impersonal efficiency was transferred to the revolutionary government itself, which seemed to have spun out of control by the Terror, destroying everyone in its path, including Robespierre, one of the politicians who first implemented the machine.²³ On a broader level, the guillotine is a symbol of technology as social control, prefiguring later fascist movements

²¹ Regina Janes, "Beheadings," in *Death and Representation*, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 251-53.

²² In 1789, in a step toward societal equality, the French National Assembly decreed that all capital crimes would be punished by beheading. Previously, the mode of execution was determined by social status and gender: nobles and women were beheaded, while commoners were hanged. Beheading by sword under the new law was inappropriate because neither the executioner nor the blade itself would be able to withstand the increase in beheadings that this change in law promised. The guillotine was named for Dr. Joseph Ignace Guillotin, a physician who was elected to the National Assembly in 1789. He was a member of the Health Committee, through which he worked toward a more swift and humane manner of execution. With his associate, Dr. Antoine Louis, and German harpsichord builder, Tobias Schmidt, France's first guillotine was devised, based on existing models (especially the Maiden, a beheading machine that had been used in Scotland). This machine was originally called the *Louissette* or *Louison* after Dr. Louis and later became known as the guillotine. After testing on livestock and human cadavers, France first used the guillotine on a live subject when it executed the murderous highwayman, Jacques Pelletier, in Paris in 1792. Improvements to the machine were made as its popularity grew, especially during the Terror of the Revolution: the high platform was abandoned for a machine that sat on flat ground, a 45-degree angled blade was introduced, shallow depressions were created to properly align the prisoner's head, a metal bucket was used to catch the head, and a metal tray to catch the blood. The last public execution by guillotine in France took place in the 1930s, while, behind closed doors, the last criminal to face the guillotine was Hamida Djadoubi in 1977.

²³ Janes, "Beheadings," 257-59.

that used technology as a control mechanism. In Le Fort's text, Villeroi is relieved that he cannot see the guillotine; he hates looking at it. He states,

Life should not be shattered by machinery. And yet the machine is the very symbol of our destiny [...] the machine cannot discriminate, it is not responsible, it shudders at nothing, it feels nothing—it destroys indifferently everything that is brought to it, the noble and the pure as well as the most criminal. Truly, the machine is a worthy tool of chaos, perhaps even its crown, flaunted enthusiastically by the soulless mob...²⁴

Contrary to the concept of guillotine as social control, Villeroi views it as a “worthy tool of chaos.” Regina Janes, too, called the guillotine “an instrument of order that generated (what seemed to many) disorder.”²⁵ In *Dialogues des Carmélites*, although to some degree the guillotine still remains a mechanism of control by eliminating societal “undesirables,” Poulenc rejects the machine as a mechanism of control, adopting it as a primary means of generating disorder in the finale.

The Disintegration of the Nuns' Chorus

Fifteen nuns enter at rehearsal sixty-three (see Figure 4.3a), singing *Salve regina*, their collectivity reinforced with unison singing. In this scene, the guillotine generates musical disorder and deterioration. It is clear that Poulenc seriously considered the timing of the guillotine slices and was eager for them to sound realistic, and therefore not occur at regular intervals. Several of the guillotine slices occur not only in the middle of phrases, but on an unaccented beat, or even in the middle of a word. This irregularity adds to the *Salve regina*'s disintegration by disrupting the phrasing of the nuns' chorus.

²⁴ The original German reads: “Man soll das Leben nicht durch die Maschine zermalmen! Indessen gerade dies ist ja das Symbol unseres Schicksals: [...] die Maschine unterscheidet nichts, sie verantwortet nichts, ihr graust vor nichts, sie rührt nichts, sie stampft gleichmütig nieder, was man ihr bringt, das Edelste und Reinste wie das Verbrecherischste—wahrhaftig, die Maschine ist das würdige Organ des Chaos, gleichsam seine Krone, getragen von der Begeisterung einer seelenlosen Masse...” See: Le Fort, *Letzte am Schafott*, 124-25, and *Song at the Scaffold*, 74 [Olga Marx translation].

²⁵ Janes, “Beheadings,” 242.

While working on Act III/iv, Poulenc stated in a letter to Pierre Bernac that he was frustrated by the guillotine's timing. He said,

These women are driving me crazy. Sometimes I wish there were twenty of them, sometimes fourteen!!! It is horribly difficult to work out a *plausible* moment for the beheading of the poor nuns that does not coincide with the beginning and ending of phrases. I will solve it eventually, but it is like a puzzle. At one time I thought of taking as a guideline a certain number of bars, but that became too automatic. So I am now resorting to instinct.²⁶

The first guillotine slice is perhaps the most jarring, not only because the sound itself is disturbing, but also because it marks the loss of the prioress, the Carmelites' leader. As we hear the blade drop for the first time (see Figure 4.2), the dynamics explode into fortissimo on a G-sharp diminished seventh chord (over an A pedal) supplied by both the orchestra and the crowd chorus, there is a modulation up a third from A minor to C minor, and the ostinato march motive is momentarily interrupted. Each of Poulenc's carefully-timed guillotine entrances marks a further deterioration of the nuns' chorus: by signalling increased dissonance, by forcing immediate modulation, with a sudden change in dynamics or an interruption of the ostinato, or in the consistent rearrangement of the remaining voices.

After the execution of the prioress (one measure before rehearsal sixty-four), the higher pitch of the modulated melody lends a new urgency to the women's voices. The death march ostinato disintegrates more and more as each nun is beheaded, and in turn, the tonal stability, provided largely by this ostinato bass, is also compromised. As the

²⁶ The original French reads: "Ces dames me rendent fou. Je les voudrais de temps en temps 20, de temps en temps 14!!!! C'est horriblement difficile de calculer un temps plausible pour la décollation des malheureuses qui ne doit pas tomber exactement avec des débuts ou fins de phrases. J'en sortirai mais c'est un puzzle. J'avais pensé un moment prendre le repère d'un certain nombre de mesures mais cela faisait automatique. Je m'en rapporte à l'instinct." See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 828; and *Echo and Source*, 233-35.

melody soars higher after rehearsal sixty-four, the mezzo-sopranos drop down to the lower octave at the highest notes in the melody.

By the second guillotine slice six measures after rehearsal sixty-four, the motive modulates again. Immediately before the guillotine's appearance here, the harmony is much less stable, wavering between G major/minor and D minor until five measures after sixty-five, when F minor is established. Although the nuns are technically still in unison, they slowly begin to separate after the loss of their leader. By rehearsal mark sixty-five, the sopranos are so high that the two groups sing an entire phrase an octave apart. Two measures before rehearsal sixty-six, dissonance overpowers any sense of tonal harmony. F-sharp minor emerges at sixty-six but the harmony quickly moves into other key areas. Between sixty-five and seventy, eight additional members of the chorus are eliminated and Poulenc indicates a drop in dynamics at each rehearsal mark, which accentuates the thinning out of the chorus. The exception is rehearsal sixty-eight, which is marked back at *forte*, perhaps to lend urgency to the repetition of an already emphatic phrase: "Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum, lacrimarum valle."²⁷ The crowd chorus emerges more clearly behind the smaller nuns' chorus. They react to the chaos generated by the guillotine with dissonant tone clusters, especially after the sixth, ninth, and tenth cuts between rehearsal sixty-seven and seventy.

²⁷ English translation: "To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears."

[orchestra et al. omitted]
 La Prieure, Sœur Constance.
 11 Carmélites, Mère Jeanne,
 Sœur Mathilde

63 *pp*

Sal - ve Re - gi - na, ma - ter mi - se - re - cor - di - æ, vi - ta, dul -

ce - do et spes nos - tra, sal - ve et spes nos - tra sal - ve.

p *mf* moins la Prieure

64 *ff* à 14

Sal - ve Re - gi - na, Ma - ter mi - se - ri - cor - di - æ,

vi - ta dul - ce - do, et spes nos - tra sal - ve.

à 13

65 *ff*

Sal - ve Re - gi - na, ma - ter mi - se - ri - cor - di - æ,

vi - ta dul - ce - do et spes nos - tra sal - ve.

à 12

66 *f* à 11

Ad te cla - ma - mus ex - su - les fi - li - i He - væ

à 10

67 *mf* à 9

ad te sus - pi - ra - mus ge men - tes et flen - tes

68 *f* à 8

Ad te sus - pi -

ra - mus ge - men - tes et flen - tes in hac la - cri -

à 7

69 *pp* à 6

ma - rum, la - cri - ma - rum val - le E - ia er -

go, ad - vo - ca - ta nos - tra, il - los tu - os mi - se - ru -

Figure 4.3a: Act III/iv at rehearsal number 63 to five measures after 69

A radical musical shift occurs at rehearsal seventy (see Figure 4.3b), when the four remaining nuns begin to sing in a four-part texture. Here the nuns are definitively transformed from a chorus with one collective (unison) voice into an ensemble of individuals. Musically, Poulenc's strategy is an effective one: because each nun is singing a distinct part, each guillotine slice marks a discernible sonic loss. In addition to the musico-dramatic purpose, however, this strategy also reminds the audience of the personal nature of this tragedy by highlighting each nun individually.

A few measures past rehearsal seventy, the harmony settles into C major/minor. The ostinato death motive begins losing its vigour, and is replaced in some measures with a chordal texture. Most of the nuns have been executed by this point, so the march no longer serves a dramatic purpose. Five measures after seventy, the quartet becomes a trio, then a duo one measure before seventy-one. This duo is comprised of contralto Mère Jeanne and light soprano Constance—the oldest and youngest members of the community and the two whose voices contrast most sharply.

Just prior to seventy-two, Mère Jeanne is beheaded, leaving Constance to intone the final line alone while she watches Blanche emerge from the crowd and mount the scaffold. The ostinato comes to a complete stop at this point, and the harmony returns to the opening key, A minor. Harmonically, the music has come full circle, and dramatically, the opera is about to come full circle as well with the transference of grace (from the First Prioress) to Blanche. At rehearsal seventy-three, the death motive resumes while Constance steps up to the guillotine. Five measures later, Constance is guillotined,

the death march stops, and Blanche is left to mount the scaffold accompanied by a serene pedal on C. Blanche sings alone until she, too, is cut down in mid-phrase, offering neither final cadence nor *amen* to provide a sense of closure to the work.

Beyond the obvious evisceration of the chorus, other factors contribute to this lack of closure. The ostinato march that drives the piece forward starts to deteriorate after seventy and completely stops at Constance's death, to be replaced by a pedal C underlying Blanche's text. The pedal adds to the ambiguity by presenting C as a viable tonic in place of A. A sense of finality is nearly impossible. On the other hand, instead of continuing the *Salve regina* text, Blanche begins a doxology, typically an ending prayer. And although she is beheaded before she can sing *amen*, the crowd chorus's final utterance is "a," perhaps hinting at the closing word. The lack of closure speaks to the larger structure of the opera: not only does this scene not have a final cadence in the true sense, but, as I explained in the introduction, the opera as a whole lacks a *dénouement* and leaves loose ends dangling. The work is cut off in mid phrase.

In the end, the crowd chorus is neutralized and takes on the role of spectator while the destructive energy of the mob is channeled through the guillotine. The personal aspect of this scene is foregrounded, and all attention is on Blanche and her martyrdom. I would like to suggest that the guillotine functions as a manifestation of collective insanity in machine form. However, rather than focusing on the guillotine, I will consider how minimizing the crowd chorus is just one part of a strategy whereby Poulenc emphasizes interiority in this opera.

Sr. Constance, Sr. Mathilde,
1 Carmélite, Mère Jeanne

70

à 5

cor - des o - cu - los ad nos con - ver - te.

f Et Je -

ff à 3

- sum be - ne - dic - tum fruc - tem ven - tris tu - i,

no - bis post hoc ex - si - li - um os - ten - de.

71

Sœur Constance,
Mère Jeanne
pp très doux

O cle - mens, o pi - a, o dul - cis Vir - go Ma - ri - a, o

Sœur Constance **72** **ppp** très doux

dul - cis Vir - go Ma - ri - a O cle - mens...

73

pp O pi - a, o dul - cis Vir - go Ma

74 Un peu plus lent et
extraordinairement
calme **pp** Blanche

De - o Pa - tri sit glo - ri - a Et Fi - li - lo qui a mor - tu - is

Sur - re - xit ac Pa - ra - cli - to In sæ - cu - lo rum sæ - cu - la, In sæ - cu - lo - rum...

Figure 4.3b: Act III/iv
(at three measures before rehearsal number 70 to eleven after 74)

4.4 Focusing on Interior Space

In chapters two and three, I demonstrated how Poulenc's treatment of Bernanos's text underscores an affinity between the two men. As I discussed in chapter two, Poulenc's mad scene serves not only to reinforce Bernanos's conception of the First Prioress's difficult death, but also highlights the theme of transference of grace, a distinctly Bernanosian addition to the Carmelites' story. In chapter three, I examined how Poulenc uses motives to trace Blanche's spiritual development, thus strengthening Bernanos's view of Blanche as mystic (as opposed to hysteric). Unlike my analyses in chapters two and three, Poulenc's treatment of the final scene, Act III/iv, reveals a marked divergence from Bernanos's stage play. I argue that Poulenc and Bernanos's different treatments of the scaffold scene illustrate a slight difference in their conceptions of religion.

While chapters two and three focused on the faith experience of individual characters, in this chapter I began by looking at the interaction of two choruses, in effect a society in microcosm. In my investigation of the political and faith backgrounds of Bernanos and Poulenc in chapter one, I demonstrated that although the two men were both devout Catholics, they diverged in their view on the place of religion in society. Bernanos argued for a reunification of church and state in public life and held that the French national identity must be connected to Catholicism. He saw the church and state fighting each other for power in the public sphere. Poulenc, on the other hand, emphasized the personal nature of faith and shied away from politics. He viewed religion as part of the private sphere within a secular society. To emphasize his viewpoint in the opera, Poulenc not only reoriented the final scene of *Dialogues des Carmélites* so that its

focus is on the individual, but he excised many scenes from the entire work in which the outside, public world is portrayed in order to emphasize the interior, private realm.

In his investigation of interior space in Verdi and Meyerbeer's operas, Anselm Gerhard concludes that as individual human passions become more important, the historical setting, chorus and all, fades into the background. He points out examples from Meyerbeer's operas that show a similar lack of interest in the crowd chorus as in Poulenc's finale for *Dialogues*. Gerhard explains that while the massacre scene from *Les Huguenots* (1836) shows the bloodthirsty chorus at its peak of violence, crowd scenes were less central by *Le Prophète* (1849), retreated even further into the background in *L'Africaine* (1865), and eventually lost any reason for existing.²⁸ Gerhard gives similar examples from Verdi's oeuvre, illustrating how the chorus must retire into the wings (figuratively and literally) when the drama places the isolation of despairing individuals centrestage.²⁹ Within this overall structure, a common theme is the protagonist's longing for a sheltered, interior space, just as Blanche longs for a safe space in *Dialogues*. Poulenc's lack of interest in the crowd chorus in the finale is an indication of his opera's reorientation towards the individual. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine how Poulenc focuses on the psychological program and interiority beyond the finale at the scaffold, but throughout the entire opera.

Comparison of Bernanos and Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Poulenc's backgrounding of the crowd chorus is symptomatic of a more systematic minimization of the outside world, or the public space, in *Dialogues*.

²⁸ See Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 438.

²⁹ Ibid., 439-40. This retreat away from historical narratives into the intimate sphere of private life is typical of the *drame lyrique* genre.

Obviously, due to the constraints of the operatic stage, Poulenc was forced to cut a great deal of Bernanos's text, but what he chose to cut—and keep—is telling. Poulenc discarded all scenes that do not deal directly with the dominant theme and extracted cogent material from others in order to bring into sharp focus the interior workings of fear, martyrdom, and vicarious suffering. He shortened or omitted scenes that took place outside the convent or that involved characters other than the nuns. He relegated minor nuns to the nuns' chorus and the townspeople to the wings. Poulenc also tended to shorten or omit many of the scenes in which Blanche does not appear. Ultimately, Poulenc turned Bernanos's five-act play, with 64 scenes in total, into a three-act opera with four scenes each, with four additional optional interludes. A comparison of the two texts reveals that Poulenc omitted 31 of Bernanos's scenes entirely and shortened 21. Despite these cuts, the text is solely Bernanos.

Poulenc did not delete any of the scenes from Bernanos's first act; however, he shortened them so that they would fit into the opening scene of his opera, all of which takes place at the de la Force home. By the end of Poulenc's first scene, Blanche has announced to her father that she would like to become a Carmelite nun.

All of Bernanos's Act II takes place inside the convent, and Poulenc keeps much of this material as well. Bernanos's Act II/i contains the material for Poulenc's Act I/ii, in which Blanche discusses her entry into Carmel with the First Prioress. Poulenc omitted the textless, mimed scenes from Bernanos's stage play, with the exception of the final scene with the *Salve regina*. Some of these scenes represent religious rituals, including Blanche's entrance into the community as a postulant (Bernanos, Act II/ii), Blanche taking the veil (Bernanos, Act III/iv), and the priest blessing the nuns (Bernanos, Act

V/vi). For obvious reasons, the scenes with no dialogue are not particularly suited to operatic adaptation. However, Poulenc also dismissed portrayals of the outer trappings of religious life in favour of focusing on Blanche's inner spiritual state. The First Prioress's death is also in Bernanos's second act, and Poulenc streamlines the scenes in question in order to focus on her. He keeps Bernanos's scenes vii, viii, ix, and x, although he shortens vii, viii, and ix. While he retains scenes in which Mère Marie and Blanche converse with the Prioress before her death, he omits the scene in which Doctor Javelinot speaks with Mère Marie about the First Prioress's failing health (Bernanos, Act II/v). In this scene, Marie foreshadows the Prioress's difficult death when she explains to the doctor that only very holy nuns and mediocre nuns die peacefully.

Poulenc eliminated most of Bernanos's third act. In this act, Bernanos addresses the world outside the convent and the politics of the Revolution. He represents class tensions in French society with recurring conflicts between the Second Prioress, originally from the peasant class, and Mère Marie, an aristocrat. Initially, Marie believes that Blanche should not take her first vows because her fearful nature would dishonour the Carmelites. The Prioress disagrees, realizing that religious vows will soon be outlawed. Later in Act III, after the law forbidding religious vows has been passed, Marie encourages the Prioress to break the law, insisting that it is a matter of honour that novices be allowed to take their vows. Poulenc omits both of these scenes. He also edits out Act III/vi, an extensive discussion among the nuns about surviving after their property has been seized by the state. Blanche suggests that they could take in sewing, but the Prioress reminds her that she is not equipped for the task, with her aristocratic lineage. Other nuns chime in, claiming that they are not afraid of hard work. Sister

Martha argues that there are no class differences in the convent because all are equal in baptism. Sister Valentine expands on Martha's point, explaining that from a Christian view, each person is responsible for others, but more is expected from the aristocrats, to whom more has been given. Class conflict is muted in Poulenc's version, although hints of it remain, such as his double-dotted motive for Mère Marie (see Figure 2.3 in chapter two), referring to her aristocratic roots. Sams describes the motive as "firm and noble." Kestner notes that the Mère Marie character was modelled on François-Genevieve Philippe, an illegitimate child of a royal prince.³⁰

Bernanos's Act III conveys the revolutionaries' negative views of the Catholic Church more strongly than Poulenc's opera. In scene ix, the priest invites the Chevalier for dinner. The young man proceeds to explain his plans for escape and vents his frustration about his father, who does not understand the urgency of the situation. Drawing from Voltaire, who promoted civil rights and denounced the injustices of the *ancien régime* in his writings (and in the process, inspired the Revolution), the priest explains that the revolutionaries fear the aristocrats, but hate the Church. In the next scene (Act III/x), also omitted by Poulenc, a commissioner searches the convent, believing that he will find several young women sequestered there against their will. The commissioner's views come directly from Diderot, who stated in his novel *La Religieuse* that nuns are innocent victims in an age of tyranny. Bernanos countered that view: the commissioner found only one frightened young nun (Blanche, of course), and she was frightened of the commissioner himself. Despite his failure, in the next scene, the commissioner tells Marie that she and her community are the enemies of liberty and the Church is an instrument of spiritual enslavement. He compares the Carmelite convent to a

³⁰ See Sams, "From the Scaffold to La Scala," 516 and Kestner, "Scaffold of Honor," 16.

prison, telling Marie that he is determined to free prisoners from all “bastilles” in France. Poulenc relegated issues of the Revolution, and the historical context of the work in general, to the background, in effect foregrounding theological themes and ultimately, emphasizing the interior nature of the opera.

Poulenc eliminated most of the discussion among the nuns on martyrdom in Bernanos’s Act III and Act IV. He downplays the nuns’ questions and fears, presenting them as a united front. As a result, Blanche’s fears about martyrdom are put into high relief. In Poulenc’s opera, arguments for and against martyrdom are limited to the Second Prioress, who is against, and Mère Marie, who initially suggests the vow of martyrdom. In Bernanos’s Act IV/i, omitted by Poulenc, the Prioress explains that martyrdom is not something to be hoped for or chosen. A nun who wishes for martyrdom is like a soldier who wishes to die before having carried out his orders. Marie argues that the Carmelites should take a vow of martyrdom in response to the suspension of vows by the government. In Bernanos’s Act IV/ix, also omitted by Poulenc, all of the nuns discuss their thoughts on martyrdom: the difference between martyrs and criminals, the meaning of Jesus’ Agony in the Garden, and how to prepare for martyrdom. Some of the nuns are astounded that Constance is so joyful, while other nuns poke fun at Blanche for being so afraid.

Poulenc stays focused on Blanche by removing the nuns’ reactions to their fate while in prison in Bernanos’s Act V. In scene xii in particular, Bernanos portrays an array of responses to impending martyrdom. One of the nuns complains about not being able to sleep because another nun is snoring. Constance says, jokingly, that her neck is sore from sleeping under the window. Some of the other nuns pray, while others cry quietly. In

contrast, Poulenc portrays the nuns serenely accepting their fate, while fearful Blanche runs away. Poulenc tightens the end of the opera by omitting several scenes that deal with the fate of Blanche's father. Bernanos brings the Marquis back into the story in his Act V. First, he is in prison (scenes i and ii), but Blanche manages to get him released (scene iii). Scene iv shows the Marquis and Blanche back at their home. Here, Blanche colludes with the revolutionaries in order to get her father released. This, along with scene ix, in which Blanche asks two old women on the street about Compiègne, pretending that she has never been there (a scene that Poulenc retains), are the equivalent of Peter's denial of Christ.

Although he clearly edited Bernanos's text in order to concentrate more on the interior story of Blanche's spiritual progression, Poulenc was anxious to preserve the thematic and structural integrity of Bernanos's work. He retained Bernanos's key contributions, including the transformation of Blanche's character, the alteration of Marie and Constance's personalities, and the emphasis on theological themes. Even the composer's choice to keep the name *Dialogues des Carmélites* seems an indication of his eagerness to solidify an allegiance with Bernanos. Poulenc was very successful in streamlining Bernanos's text, allowing the transference of grace theme to emerge much more sharply in the opera than in Bernanos's play. Poulenc achieved this effect not only by eliminating excess material, but also by rearranging the work into three acts, and highlighting the First Prioress's death by placing it at the end of the first act.³¹ Poulenc stressed the importance of the Prioress's death scene in a letter to Pierre Bernac, dated

³¹ Rosmarin, *When Literature Becomes Opera*, 63-64, 68.

December 19, 1953, saying, “This is the crux of the whole play.”³² Although Poulenc never knew Bernanos, who unfortunately died some years before he began working on the opera, the composer sensed that only a real identification with the spirit of Bernanos could make the work successful. And, like Albert Béguin, who had noticed the empathy between composer and writer, after seeing the opera, Bernanos’s confessor Abbé Daniel Pézeril thanked Poulenc on Bernanos’s behalf for understanding the text. Pézeril claimed that from the beginning, Poulenc found his way into the heart of *Dialogues*, and the opera was a “meeting of souls if ever there was one.”³³

Defining Space

In the introduction to this chapter, I proposed that Poulenc is less concerned with the revolutionaries’ battle for power in the public realm than Bernanos. In the final scene, which provides an opportunity to portray the power struggle between the revolutionaries and the royalists, Poulenc avoids conflict between the representative choruses, and instead, funnels the destructive energy to the guillotine. Poulenc is focused on examining the drama of the private sphere and, more specifically, on Blanche’s spiritual and psychological development. I argue that this stance reflects Poulenc’s conception of religion as part of the private sphere within a secular society, in contrast to Bernanos, who believed that the Catholic Church should play a major role in France’s politics and national identity. In the previous section, I outlined Poulenc’s alterations to Bernanos’s stage play, showing how the composer systematically edited out scenes that portrayed the

³² See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 777; and *Echo and Source*, 214-15. The original French reads: “C’est toute la pièce.”

³³ Kestner, “Scaffold of Honor,” 13.

outside world, or the public sphere. In this section, I will explore the private sphere of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* in more detail.

Gendered Space: The Male Public Sphere and the Female Private Sphere

In her article on women and the *Prix de Rome*, Annegret Fauser outlines the development of the bourgeois concept of gendered spheres through the denial of women's rights under bourgeois law in France. She notes that, during the *ancien régime*, many aristocratic women had access to public institutions such as the Académie. However, the French Revolution and subsequent *Code Napoléon* (1804) changed France's social situation drastically. French women lost "the limited civil rights that at least aristocratic women had previously enjoyed."³⁴ After 1793, all French women, no matter their class, lived under the legal tutelage of their fathers, husbands, brothers, or other male relatives, or, as in the case of the nuns, male clergy. The sole purpose of their existence was "Republican motherhood." As a result, women's education was oriented toward the goal of raising future French soldiers, workers, and citizens.

Appropriating Habermas's concept of the changing structure of public space, Fauser describes the phenomenon of gendering public and private spheres as follows,

The Republic gendered the public sphere as masculine after "the fall of the absolutist public sphere" in which "masculinity in and of itself carried some but not vast privileges"; this "structural change of the public sphere" necessitated the creation of a counterpart in the form of a feminine sphere, demanding "women's domesticity and the silencing of "public" women, of the aristocratic and popular classes."³⁵

³⁴ Annegret Fauser, "La Guerre en dentelles: Women and the *Prix de Rome* in French Cultural Politics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (1998): 88.

³⁵ Ibid., 88. Phrases in quotes are taken from Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 170, 2; and Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990).

The public sphere, open only to men, was the space of industry, politics, science, and state business. The private sphere, now solely the realm of women, was the interior space of domesticity and child-rearing and, as I will demonstrate, religion. Women were expected to conform to the image of the ideal Republican woman, loyal and submissive to the state and its public institutions. According to Edward Berenson, this concern with gender resulted from

a perceived decline of French power that commentators related to moral decay and to changing relations between the sexes. If France was weak, writers commonly asserted, its weakness stemmed from a growing demographic deficit caused by the emancipation of women, the legalization of divorce, and the emasculation of men.³⁶

The more public space women were allowed to access, the more likely they were to renounce their role of Republican motherhood and become “sterile *hommesses*.”³⁷

In Poulenc’s *Dialogues des Carmélites*, the nuns’ chorus and crowd chorus not only represent the pro-Catholic royalist and anticlerical republican camps of the Revolution, but they represent the inner world of the convent and the public world outside the walls. By omitting most of the scenes that take place outside the convent, Poulenc creates an opera almost entirely concerned with the private sphere. In addition, as Camille Naish notes,

Vocally, there results an interesting opposition between sexes: except for the Almoner, the male voices heard belong entirely to the world outside Carmel—in striking contrast to the voices of the female sanctum.³⁸

³⁶ Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 11. According to Debra Silverman, conservatives linked the following three factors to the emancipation of French middle-class women: a socialist attack on the family, access to higher education (and therefore, to male vocations), and the declining birthrates (at least relative to its neighbour, Germany) due to women leaving the home. See Debra Silverman, “The ‘New Woman’, Feminism, and the Decorative Arts in Fin-de-Siècle France,” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 148-49.

³⁷ Fauser, “*La Guerre en dentelles*,” 91.

³⁸ Naish, *Death Comes to the Maiden*, 229.

Roger Nichols describes the relationship between the nuns' chorus and the crowd chorus as a sharp delineation between an "enclosed family of women and the men who impinge on it from the outside world" (even though the crowd chorus is not composed of men alone).³⁹ Parakilas notes that, while segregation by gender in a double chorus may simply seem like a natural organization, it serves as a dramatic device of social representation, reinforcing divisions of labour and social function in a traditional society. From an operatic standpoint, no other chorus division is as striking, both visually and aurally, and none evokes such immediate instinctive responses.

The assumption underlying the gendering of public and private spaces is that the public space is the sphere of power and dominance, while the private sphere is not. This delineation of space aligns with the traditional association of female as submissive victim and male as dominating oppressor. For this reason, political struggle (at least in nineteenth-century opera) is commonly portrayed with the opposition of an all-male choral group against a mixed chorus. In this paradigm, the forces of tyranny, represented by perhaps a male chorus of soldiers, are posed against an oppressed people, represented by a mixed group of civilians. This model can be seen in Act III of Verdi's *Don Carlos*, in which heretics, both male and female, are dragged to the stake by a group of monks. In the final act of Musorgsky's *Khovanshchina*, male soldiers are pitted against a mixed group of Old Believers. Even when this model is not replicated exactly, as in *Dialogues des Carmélites* (which pits a group of women against a mixed chorus), the sympathies of the audience are normally directed toward the women. In the case of Poulenc's opera, the presence of an all-female chorus tags that group as innocent victims, winning sympathy

³⁹ Roger Nichols, Liner Notes, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Orchestra de l'Opéra de Lyon, Virgin Classics compact disc, 1992, p. 30.

for their cause.⁴⁰ In addition, the pacifist nuns could be seen as doubly victimized, since they are under patriarchal rule within the Church, which itself is under attack during the Revolution.

Designating Space Secular or Sacred

The ongoing secularization of French society during the Third Republic that came to a head in 1905 with the official separation of church and state was, more than anything, a battle for space. The French Revolution had initiated this battle, challenging the *ancien régime* structure in which church and state shared public space (although the most radical of the revolutionaries had aimed to eradicate the Catholic Church altogether and contest its role in both the public and private spheres, rather than merely erase it from public life). During the Third Republic, the church retreated even further from the public sphere due to educational reforms and changes to the healthcare system and other state-run institutions.⁴¹ By 1905, the church had been totally sidelined from the public sphere and belonged to the private sphere. In effect, the sacred became part of the private, feminine sphere, while the male, public sphere was secular. However, because the Catholic Church was, and still is, a patriarchal institution, its status as belonging to the feminine, private sphere is something of a paradox.

While the patriarchal Catholic Church's status as part of the private feminine sphere is paradoxical, so is the role of women in the Church. Burton suggests that, from the Revolution to World War II, the position of women in the Catholic Church could be characterized as both marginal and central. Their position was marginal because the male

⁴⁰ Parakilas, "Political Representation and the Chorus," 197-99.

⁴¹ I touch on this topic in chapter three in the section entitled "Hysteric or Mystic: The Mystic Conundrum."

authority was unchallenged; women could not gain real power in the Church. On the other hand, women were central to the political and social project of the French Catholic Church and they were targeted as key figures in the Church's struggle with modernity. Their role was to serve, obey, care for the suffering, and to suffer themselves. The doctrine of vicarious suffering gave meaning to women's daily tribulations and empowered them. In their choice to suffer for the monarchy, the Church, and the nation, Catholic women could participate in their joint redemption.⁴²

The shift of hegemonic power in France after the Revolution and the paradoxical position of women in the Catholic Church resulted in a palpable change in French Catholic culture. The church was, in effect, feminized. Claude Langlois describes a sharply marked sexual dimorphism in religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices after the Revolution. An increasingly non- or even anti-religious masculine population in all classes of French society was confronted with a largely believing female population. Men did not attend Mass in the same numbers as women and women took on the responsibility for religious formation and the policing of morality.⁴³ Women founded several charitable organizations that were, like convents, domains in which they could exercise greater influence than any other sphere. However, also like convents, they were subordinate to male ecclesiastical authority. In addition, while boys were usually educated in secular schools, girls were more likely to be educated by nuns.⁴⁴

This feminization, or "othering," of the French Catholic Church was also apparent aesthetically in both the liturgy and church structure. Flowers, incense, lacework, clerical

⁴² Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, xiii-xvii, xxi.

⁴³ Claude Langlois, "La 'déchristianisation,'" in *Histoire de la France religieuse*, vol. 3, *Du roi très chrétien à la laïcité républicaine*, ed. René Remond, Jacques Le Goff, and Philippe Joutard, Univers historique series (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 240.

⁴⁴ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, xxi-xxii.

robes, singing, and muted candlelight marked the space as feminine. Literary metaphors to support the feminization were abundant: Flaubert compares Notre-Dame de Rouen to a gigantic boudoir in *Madame Bovary*. Some writers addressed cathedrals and the Virgin Mary interchangeably. Claudel's Chartres was "full of grace," while Péguy's pilgrimage poems equate Notre Dame with Notre-Dame.⁴⁵ In addition, most important figures of the French Catholic Church were female, and religious feeling itself even came to be considered a feminine quality. Joan of Arc remained a pivotal and endlessly controversial emblem of female Catholic heroism, and Thérèse of Lisieux, as I explained in chapter three, became the newest saintly superstar at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mary took on a greater role in Catholic devotion, partly due to the increased rate of Marian apparitions in France through the 1800s.⁴⁶ Even images of Jesus became more feminized: he was "curiously androgynous, with his wispy beard, doelike eyes, and delicate, soft-limbed body."⁴⁷ The idea of the Motherhood of God regained popularity via St. Thérèse, who described the deity as, "an androgynous being, combining the power and authority of the archetypal father with the tenderness and mercy of the mythical mother."⁴⁸

The feminization of the French Catholic Church resulted from the shift of hegemonic power after the Revolution, which upset the traditional associations between power and patriarchy in the Church. Furthermore, this feminization suggests a more solid

⁴⁵ Ibid., xxv, 206-7.

⁴⁶ Mariophanies between 1830 and 1871 that were formally recognized by the Church include the apparition of Mary at La Salette witnessed by Melanie Calvat and Maximim Giraud in 1846, Eugene and Joseph Barbedette's vision of Mary in Normandy in 1871, and of course, Bernadette Soubirous' famous sighting of the Virgin at Lourdes in 1858. For more information on Marian apparitions, see Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, especially xxiii-xxiv and chapter one.

⁴⁷ Ibid., xxiii.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 40, 46. Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis de Sales had written about the Motherhood of God centuries earlier. Thérèse's revival of this tradition accentuated the underlying movement toward the comprehensive feminization of Catholicism. Thérèse also references androgyny in her contemplative writings on the Song of Songs, the principal source of the imagery of the soul as the Bride of Christ. She mixes sexual metaphors in which she is, like her Lover, simultaneously masculine and feminine, both penetrating and waiting to be penetrated in turn.

link to the female role: just as woman is the Other of patriarchal society, the disenfranchised Catholic Church is itself an Other.⁴⁹ The status of the French Catholic Church as more disenfranchised than dominant was characteristic of the post-1905 cultural milieu and, as such, Poulenc's Carmelites should be considered from this viewpoint. The Catholic patriarchy that might normally act to disempower the nuns is itself disempowered by the revolutionaries in Poulenc's work.

How does the paradoxical position of women in the Catholic Church after the Revolution inform the role of the Carmelites? On the surface, the martyred nuns in the opera are victims of the revolutionaries. At the same time, Bernanos empowers them through the theology of the transference of grace, intimating that the nuns chose to give their deaths in exchange for something more meaningful and powerful. While the Carmelites' relationship to the outside world can be read as both victimizing and empowering, their relationship with the patriarchy of the Church itself is ambiguous. This ambiguity is always a concern when considering the relationship between Christianity and women. For example, in her study of women's mysticism and hysteria, Mazzoni explains that mystics can be seen in two ways. They might be viewed as victims of the Catholic patriarchy, which grudgingly lets them speak but ultimately means to silence the female voice. Or they might be read as empowered women who articulate propositions that criticize and disturb the patriarchal status quo through a discourse that borders on the unorthodox and heretical.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood*, 182, and Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 157.

⁵⁰ Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria*, 156.

A Reading of Space in *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Referring to the twentieth century, Michel Foucault noted that “the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space.”⁵¹ In *Dialogues*, Poulenc displays the bifurcation of space with enclosures that separate the sacred female private sphere from the secular male public sphere. Since he has edited out almost all of the scenes that depict the public sphere, Poulenc portrays the outside world with a series of invasions into the nuns’ private space. Until the final scene of the opera, the Carmelites are enclosed, first in their convent and then in prison. Poulenc’s convent allows the nuns to carve out a space all their own in a world controlled by men until, of course, they are expelled from their cloister.

In Act I, Poulenc defines and delineates interiority and the private space in which his story takes place. In the first scene, Blanche is introduced as a young woman who lives in a world of men. She is surrounded by an overprotective brother and a doting father. Even the servants are male. Blanche’s brother worries about her constantly and treats her like a child. Immediately upon her entrance, Blanche acknowledges the tone of their relationship by referring to her brother’s pet name for her from childhood (“petit lièvre”). But Blanche wants to escape the noise and excitement of this world. She suffers from extreme anxiety and is seeking a refuge. At the end of this scene, she tells her father she wants to become a cloistered nun. In the following scene (Act I/ii), Blanche meets with the First Prioress to ask permission to become a postulant in the Carmelite order. The Prioress corrects Blanche’s naïve view of the cloister, telling her that the convent is a house of prayer and cannot provide protection or easy sanctification for those within.

⁵¹ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22. This article was based on a lecture given in March 1967.

When she witnesses the First Prioress's difficult death, Blanche learns that the aspects of the outside world that frightened her so much are also part of cloistered life.

In Act II, Poulenc depicts a breakdown of the private sphere. The integrity of the cloister is compromised as a series of male characters infiltrates the nuns' private space. In scene iii, a brief panic ensues when a strange man arrives at the convent, but it is Blanche's brother. In the following scene, the Chevalier meets with Blanche and tries to convince her to leave the convent and return home with him because, as a nun and an aristocrat, she is in serious danger. Blanche's brother, still overprotective, bullies her to go with him and refers to her as his "petit lièvre." But Blanche is empowered in the space of the convent, and for the first time in her life, she resists and stands up to her brother. He accuses her of being afraid to leave the convent, but Blanche says she is no longer afraid. He insists that she cannot be happy and free in the cloister because it is not in her nature, but she demands respect from her brother, telling him that as a daughter of Carmel, she will suffer for him. In scene iv, realizing the severity of the political situation, Mère Marie proposes a vow of martyrdom. In the most constricting situations, women search for strategies of empowerment, concurrently playing the victim and the enfranchised. The Carmelites re-vision their impending execution as a potential sacrifice (via the theology of the transference of grace) instead of a punishment. Finally, in the same scene, an angry crowd is heard outside as officials enter to read the nuns an order of expulsion.

Poulenc's Act III is about the redefinition of space. The private sphere has collapsed in on the nuns. They are forced to leave their convent, but choose to stay together as a community and vow to accept martyrdom. Without the cloister, Blanche is

overwhelmed by her fear and runs away to her father's house. But he has been guillotined and she is left to the mercy of the revolutionaries. In scene iii, the nuns are in a prison cell, a substitute cloister. (Besides Blanche and Mère Marie, the nuns are not shown in public space except in the first interlude of Act III when they stand on the street outside their convent and the final scene at the guillotine.) Once again, a male figure impinges on their community: a jailer enters their cell and reads the death sentence. The Second Prioress sings to her sisters,

Mes filles, voilà que s'achève notre première nuit de prison. C'était la plus difficile. Nous en sommes venues à bout quand même. La prochaine nous trouvera tout à fait familiarisées avec notre nouvelle pour nous; il n'est, en somme, de changé que le décor. Nul ne saurait nous ravir une liberté dont nous nous sommes dépouillées depuis longtemps. [...] Soyez tranquilles! [...] Au jardin des Oliviers, le Christ n'était plus maître de rien. Il a eu peur de la mort.

[My daughters, we have almost come to the end of our first night in prison. Believe me, by far the hardest. And yet we've reached the end in spite of all. By tomorrow morning, we will all be familiar with our new surroundings and quite accustomed to the discipline, which, I must admit is not new to us, as it is really nothing more than a change of scene. No one could ever deprive us of liberty that we so long ago surrendered of our free will. [...] You need not fear. [...] Standing on the Mount of Olives, Christ Himself was no longer master. He knew the fear of death.]

The Prioress assures her nuns that the closed space of the prison is analogous to their convent and, since the Carmelites gave up their physical freedom when they entered religious life, being in prison has deprived them of nothing. In her reference to Christ's agony in the garden, a theme Bernanos references over and over in his works to describe fear of death, she foreshadows the Carmelites' martyrdom in the following scene.

Continuing my reading of space, I would like to revisit Act III, scene iv, which I discussed at length at the beginning of this chapter. On the surface, the nuns appear to be victims of the Revolution, their march to the scaffold an unholy pilgrimage. To distance

the violence of the guillotine, a number of metaphors were applied to it that turned the old world of the *ancien régime* on its head. In the new world of the Republic, the guillotine was feminized and beatified. It was christened La Sainte Guillotine and decked in blue velvet and roses for Robespierre's Festival of the Supreme Being, matching the older iconography in which roses and the colour blue are associated with the Virgin Mary.⁵² Beatification served to placate and neutralize the guillotine, as "she" could be appeased by continual sacrifice and ritual attendance in the new religion of rationalism.

I argue that the Carmelites take control of the final scene with song and in so doing, they manipulate metaphors for the guillotine and reconfigure the Place de la Revolution as a sacred space. According to Laura Mason, women used song as a tool of empowerment during the Revolution because it could both buoy spirits and mobilize the populace in a milieu that systematically silenced women.⁵³ Similarly, Robert Kendrick and Craig Monson explain that, even from within monastic enclosures reintroduced to weaken the public role of religious women after the Tridentine reform, nuns found ways

⁵² Janes, "Beheadings," 254-57.

⁵³ Despite the Revolution's claim for the equality of all citizens, it held a contradictory position vis à vis the feminist movement. While militant women played an important role in the Revolution, when they tried to pursue their own political agendas, they were reminded that their social role was in the home. In 1792, the Jacobin publication, *Révolution de Paris*, stated that the "honour of women [...] consists in cultivating in silence all the virtues of their sex, beneath the veil of modesty and in the shallow of retreat." (Naish, *Death Comes to the Maiden*, 132.) By October 1793, the male Assembly outlawed all female clubs, fearing they would divide the Revolution. After a group of women invaded the Convention in 1795 calling for bread, the men responded with an even more severe restriction: women were confined to their homes until otherwise permitted. Women were not allowed to attend political gatherings, and women's meetings were broken up by force. Olympe de Gouges, a feminist of the Revolutionary era, pointed out that since women could mount the scaffold, they should also have the right to mount the speaker's podium in the Assembly. In 1791, in response to the *Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, de Gouges wrote the *Déclaration des droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*. But theoretical feminism was discouraged for the rest of the Revolution. After the Revolution, Napoleon repressed feminism further. See Laura Mason, "Angels and Furies: Women and Popular Song During the French Revolution," in *Music and History: Bridging the Disciplines*, ed. Jeffrey H. Jackson and Stanley C. Pelkey (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 51; Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Naish, *Death Comes to the Maiden*, 132-37, 184.

to empower themselves by launching their presence into their communities via music.⁵⁴

Ultimately, Poulenc's Carmelites empower themselves by turning their execution into a sacred ritual and redefining their deaths as a sacrifice for the French Catholic Church in the context of vicarious suffering.

In *Dialogues*' final scene, the private and public spheres collapse in on each other. By singing *Salve regina* as they process up to the guillotine, the Carmelites delineate the secular male public space as a sacred space.⁵⁵ The nuns redefine their sacrifice at the altar of Marianne, the female symbol of the new Republic, as a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine. Thus the march to the scaffold becomes a sacred procession and the guillotine becomes the tool through which the nuns' sacrificial execution is carried out. Poulenc's use of the *Salve regina* text is taken directly from Bernanos, but in the context of this finale, it has a deeper meaning.⁵⁶ The use of *Salve regina* as a Carmelite death hymn is not without

⁵⁴ Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens* and Monson, *Disembodied Voices*.

⁵⁵ The historical Carmelites also used song to define their space, both during their imprisonment and during their march to the scaffold, as I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation. While imprisoned at the Conciergerie, the Carmelites sang hymns and prayers to encourage themselves and those around them. They also wrote a Christianized parody text to the revolutionary hymn, *La Marseillaise*. Mason describes *La Marseillaise* as a "distinctively masculine hymn in both cultural association and composition." Popularized by soldiers, the hymn features "a vigorous and relatively complex tune that moves steadily toward the lower registers of the voice," paired with militaristic and sometimes graphically violent lyrics. (Mason, "Angels and Furies," 47.) The nuns appropriated the military imagery in their parody, depicting themselves as soldiers for Christ. The text, written by Sr. Julie Louise, refers not only to the nuns' martyrdom, but how that martyrdom will provide the grace to resurrect a dying French Catholic Church, in effect detailing a transference of grace. This is most evident at the end of the first stanza: "Let's give our bodies in His Name! / Let's climb, let's climb, the scaffold high! / We'll give God the victory!" See Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 36. The original French lyrics can be found in, Marie de l'Incarnation, *La Relation du martyre*. The English translation is Bush's.

⁵⁶ Bernanos's adoption of *Salve regina* for the final scene in his stageplay is taken from history: the Carmelite martyrs sang this chant in 1794 on their way to the scaffold. See Bush, *To Quell the Terror* for documentation of the 1794 event. Although historical documents attest that the nuns sang the *Salve regina* chant, no evidence remains as to which chant melody they used. Because of the strong neo-Gallican movement in the French Catholic Church in the late 1700s and later chant reforms in the 1800s, it is almost impossible to discern in which chant tradition these nuns participated. Informal conversations with Katherine Ellis and Alejandro Planchart confirmed this. For more information on Gallican chant and the neo-Gallican movement, please refer to Kenneth Levy et al., "Plainchant," in *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, and David Hiley, "Neo-Gallican Chant," in *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online. Surviving Carmelite chant manuscripts distinguish the Carmelite rite from diocesan practice and the

precedent: according to Benedict Zimmerman, in 1291, Mount Carmel was attacked and the Carmelite brothers were killed while singing *Salve regina*.⁵⁷ Furthermore, *Salve regina* functions as a conclusion to Vespers in Carmelite liturgy, and is also sung during processions to the altar of the Virgin Mary, who acts as a sacred foil to secular Marianne in French society.⁵⁸

I wish to briefly consider whether my interpretation of Poulenc's Act III/iv as a redefinition of space is served by Poulenc's alteration of Bernanos's drama. Perhaps Poulenc decided to have Blanche guillotined instead of crushed by a seething mass of dreadful women simply because it made for a more dramatic conclusion. Visually, there is little difference, since the guillotine is meant to be offstage. On the other hand, *hearing* Blanche's voice suddenly stop in tandem with the heavy slice of the guillotine blade is infinitely more bone-chilling than hearing a voice smothered by a bunch of angry *tricoteuses*. I suggest that, in addition to the singular dramatic effect, Poulenc's alteration strengthens the reading of this scene as sacred ritual. Perhaps Blanche's mode of execution is inconsequential, since her intent was the same as her fellow Carmelites—to offer her life for the Church in France. However, Poulenc's version, in which Blanche climbs up to the altar-like scaffold to be killed by the holy blade, is more effective as sacred ritual than Bernanos's version.

practice of other orders both musically and liturgically. See James John Boyce, "The Medieval Carmelite Office Tradition," *Acta Musicologica* 62, nos. 2-3 (1990): 129-51.

⁵⁷ Benedict Zimmerman, "The Carmelite Order," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (New York: Appleton, 1908), accessed February 1, 2007, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03354a.htm>.

⁵⁸ According to Maurice Agulhon, the first written mention of the name Marianne to designate the French Republic was in October 1792. It probably came from a song in the Provençal dialect on a text by the poet Guillaume Lavabre, "La guérison de Marianne." In her earliest incarnations, Marianne was often depicted with the tricolour cockade and the Phrygian cap. In September 1792, the National Convention decreed that the new state seal would depict a woman standing, holding a spear with a Phrygian cap held on top of it. Since the *ancien régime* was embodied in masculine figures, a feminine allegory was considered appropriate to show a break with the old rule. See Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne Into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 10.

After the opera's French premiere at the Paris Opéra in 1957, Poulenc confided to Claude Rostand that he wanted to see the opera at the Opéra-Comique.⁵⁹ Poulenc envisioned the performance in the Salle Favart, believing the smaller space (compared with the Palais Garnier) would lend itself well to the intimacy of the work. Early in 1964, shortly after the composer's death, *Dialogues des Carmélites* was slated to be performed at the Opéra-Comique.⁶⁰ After some delay, the opera finally opened at the Salle Favart in early April to mixed reviews. The principal criticism was that the orchestra was too loud for the smaller space and the work lost its noble and mystical atmosphere because the singers were too near the audience. Above all, the final scene at the guillotine lost its sense of drama. On the other hand, the smaller theatre gave the work a tone of intimacy and dramatic intensity that it did not have at the Palais Garnier. Most of the reviews were optimistic. Antoine Golea commented that he thought the space so appropriate for the work that he felt like he had seen and heard *Dialogues des Carmélites* for the first time.⁶¹

Foucault suggested that the "anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space."⁶² The close concentration on the nuns' individual voices at the end of this chorus instructs us to shift focus from the external trappings of the story and the public clash

⁵⁹ Claude Rostand, "La musique: Les 'Carmélites' entrent à l'Opéra-Comique," *Figaro littéraire*, April 1964.

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the production's opening was postponed because Denise Duval was ill with influenza. So much was made about this in the press that she had to issue a statement that she was not feigning the illness, but the public developed a negative view of her nevertheless. She even received threatening letters before the opening of the opera. This situation was probably exacerbated by Duval's controversial publicity stunt to promote the opera: She was photographed in religious habit, driving her car on the Champs-Élysées. See "Les Carmélites s'agitent," *Aux Écoutes*, April 10, 1964. For related information, see "Denise Duval a engagé le Dialogue malgré des lettres anonymes," *Le Figaro*, April 11, 1964.

⁶¹ See René Dumesnil, "*Dialogues des Carmélites* à l'Opéra-Comique," *Le Monde*, April 9, 1964; "Le fantôme de l'opéra," *L'Entr'acte*, April 30, 1964; Vincent Gambau, "Présentation du *Dialogues des Carmélites*," *Democratic*, April 16, 1964; Antoine Golea, "Grande semaine à l'Opéra-Comique," *Carrefour*, April 15, 1964; Claude Samuel, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*: L'Opéra-Comique mérite d'échapper à la guillotine," *L'Intransigeant*, April 9, 1964; and Marcel Schneider, "Nouvelle croisière pour *Dialogues des Carmélites*," *Combat*, April 9, 1964.

⁶² Foucault and Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces," 23.

between church and state, and attend to the private, personal struggle of the individual. This individualized attention also clarifies the political implications of private struggles and highlights the private sphere as an object of political conflict, just as the convent itself is an object of conflict in *Dialogues*. While Poulenc's focus was on Blanche and the sacred interior space of the nuns, I will end this chapter by arguing that the composer developed a personal connection with his protagonist, suggesting that he, too, saw religion as a highly personal matter and may have been longing for a sheltered, private space.

4.5 A Biographical Reading of *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Blanche was me...
*(Blanche c'était moi...)*⁶³
 —Francis Poulenc

I will complete this chapter by taking my argument on interiority and the psychological program of *Dialogues des Carmélites* one step further. While I am aware of the perils inherent in suggesting a biographical reading in a post-Barthian era, the extensive references in Poulenc's correspondence to his personal connections with the Carmelites, and Blanche in particular, beg to be addressed. In the last few years of his life, after completing *Dialogues*, Poulenc retrospectively strengthened his identification with *Dialogues* and with Blanche, and extended this connection to all three of his operas. This section is divided into three separate but intertwined discussions: Poulenc as hysteric, Poulenc's identification with Blanche, and the dual character of Poulenc.⁶⁴

⁶³ From a letter to Hervé Dugardin dated March 30, 1958. See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 890.

⁶⁴ Poulenc's identification with Blanche and his personal difficulties while composing *Dialogues des Carmélites* parallel Lou Harrison's experience writing his opera *Rapunzel* (1952, premiered 1959). Leta E. Miller outlines the pivotal role of the opera in Harrison's life in her article, "Method and Madness in Lou

Poulenc as Hysteric?

As I explained earlier in this dissertation, Guido Valcarengi of Ricordi first suggested that Poulenc set Bernanos's *Dialogues* as an opera in March 1953, when Poulenc was on a concert tour in Italy with Pierre Fournier. Poulenc immediately took to the idea and in August 1953, he had become consumed with composing the opera. Initially, the intensity of the subject material affected Poulenc so deeply that he was unable to sleep. He wrote to Pierre Bernac on August 22, 1953, saying, "I have begun *Les Carmélites* and literally *cannot sleep* because of it. I think it will be all right but there are so many problems."⁶⁵ Poulenc commented to several friends that he was obsessed and working so hard on the opera that it was "driving him crazy." On August 31, 1953, Poulenc wrote to Stéphane Audel,

Just a brief line as Mother Marie will not allow me the slightest distraction. I am working like a *madman*, I do not go out, do not see anyone [...] I do not want to see anyone—not even you, and that says all. I do not want to think of anything else; things are going (I might even say) too well. I am completing one scene a week. I hardly recognize myself. I am crazy about my subject, to the point of believing that I have actually known these women.⁶⁶

Harrison's 'Rapunzel'" (see *Journal of Musicology* 19, no. 1 [2002]: 85-124). The libretto explored themes related to Harrison's psychological troubles in the late 1940s, and the opera's composition culminated a period marked by a debilitating mental breakdown that required hospitalization. Furthermore, like Poulenc, Harrison developed physical ailments, longed for a stable romantic partnership, and turned to religion for consolation. Unlike Poulenc, Harrison's anxiety translated into a dissonant contrapuntal language. *Cambridge Quarterly's* April 2000 issue, dedicated to a critical look at biographical readings, is a good source for more general information. Of special note are two articles: J. C. Carlier, "Roland Barthes's Resurrection of the Author and Redemption of Biography," *Cambridge Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2000): 386-93; and Frédéric Regard, "The Ethics of Biographical Reading: A Pragmatic Approach," *Cambridge Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2000): 394-408.

⁶⁵Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 206; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 758. The original French reads: "Les *Carmélites* sont commencées, je n'en dors plus (littéralement). Je crois que cela ira mais il y a tant de problèmes."

⁶⁶Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 206; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 759. The original French reads: "Deux mots seulement car Mère Marie m'interdit la moindre distraction. Je travaille comme *un fou*, ne sors pas, ne vois personne [...] je ne veux voir personne, même pas vous c'est tout dire, je ne veux penser à rien d'autre car cela marche (je dirai même) trop bien. Je fais un tableau par semaine. Je ne me reconnais pas. Je suis fou de mon sujet au point de croire que j'ai connu ces dames."

The following month, Poulenc wrote to his friend Doda Conrad, “This whole venture is making me completely crazy. I can think of nothing else, I live for nothing else.”⁶⁷

While Poulenc’s correspondence about *Dialogues* in late summer and early fall of 1953 convey the effusive composer’s excitement about his new work, from this point forward, his correspondence takes on a disturbing, ominous cast. At the end of September, Poulenc wrote to Yvonne Gouverné, saying, “Sanctity is difficult enough but sacred music of the *Carmélites* kind is terrifying. I go through alternating states of satisfaction and despondency for if this opera fails, it will fail dismally.”⁶⁸ Poulenc continued work on the opera throughout the winter, but by early 1954, it was clear that composing *Dialogues* had become a nearly unbearable ordeal for him. Not only was he disturbed by the difficult subject matter and the atmosphere of death surrounding the work, but he also had doubts about his abilities as a composer. On February 14, 1954, he wrote to Henri Hell (one of his biographers), saying,

You would give me *immense pleasure* by coming to dinner as I am *horribly sad*, which I can say to no one but you. [...] No doubt this anguished climate was necessary for my nuns. You will see—the atmosphere is terrifying and I think by the time the interval comes, the audience will have the shivers [...] I would never have believed that I could write a work in this style. I thank God for it, despite the suffering involved. And yet with all that suffering, I will still be known as “the charming Poulenc.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 211-12; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 766. The original French reads: “Cette aventure me rend complètement dingo. Je ne pense qu’à cela, je ne vis que pour cela.”

⁶⁸ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 212-13; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 769. The original French, from September 24, 1953, reads: “La sainteté c’est difficile mais la musique sacrée genre *Carmélites* c’est terrible. Je passe par des alternatives de satisfaction et de découragement car si cet opéra est raté il le sera épouvantablement.”

⁶⁹ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 216; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 769. The original French reads: “Vous me feriez un *immense plaisir* en venant dîner car je suis *horriblement triste*, ce que je ne peux dire qu’à vous. [...] Sans doute ce climat d’angoisse était-il nécessaire à mes dames. Vous verrez c’est une atmosphère terrible et je crois qu’à l’entracte les gens auront froid dans le dos [...] Je n’aurais jamais cru que je pourrais écrire une oeuvre de ce ton. J’en remercie Dieu en dépit de ce que cela comprend de souffrances. Et on dira cela, ‘le charmant Poulenc.’”

It is notable that Poulenc acknowledged his reputation as a charming, cosmopolitan, lighthearted composer at the end of this excerpt. He appeared to feel hemmed in both personally and creatively by his public image and was concerned that it might taint *Dialogues*' reception. By May 1954, composing *Dialogues* had become such a strain for Poulenc, both physically and mentally, that he forced himself to take a break from the project. On May 26, 1954, he wrote to Jacques Leguerney, stating, "I have been practising the piano non-stop, having put those Nuns into retirement in the cupboard behind my Paris piano. To tell the truth, I am missing them terribly, but it is better this way."⁷⁰

Poulenc's state of mind deteriorated further by the summer of 1954. Several factors served to intensify his already compromised mental and physical health. For several years, he had been in an obsessive and difficult relationship with Lucien Roubert, a travelling salesman, while still with his long-time lover Raymond Destouches.⁷¹ In addition, the previous December (1953), he learned that an American named Emmet Lavery held the performing rights for Bernanos's stage play, and could in turn prevent Poulenc's opera from being staged. Several months later, the conflict still had not been resolved.⁷² Combined with these stressors, what began as insomnia in August 1953 was

⁷⁰ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 219; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 793. The original French reads: "Je travaille sans relâche mon piano, ayant mis ces Dames en retraite dans le placard derrière mon piano de Paris, à la vérité elles me manquent terriblement, mais c'est mieux ainsi."

⁷¹ Destouches, a chauffeur by trade, was the dedicatee of both *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1944) and *La figure humaine* (1943). Poulenc's relationship with Lucien Roubert spanned six years in total.

⁷² Emmet Lavery, an American playwright, acquired the rights to any stage production based on the novel by Gertrud von Le Fort, when he wrote his own stage version of the work, called *The Last on the Scaffold*. Lavery subsequently prohibited the production of Bernanos's play unless specifically authorized by himself. Although Bernanos's heirs would have willingly granted Poulenc the rights to perform his opera, they could not do so without the permission of Lavery, with whom they were on bad terms. A legal battle ensued, and finally permission was granted, with the provision that Poulenc had to add to all programs, publicity, and printed libretti that Lavery had granted permission for the opera adaptation.

escalating towards a full-fledged breakdown. Recognizing his sorry state, Poulenc wrote a long letter on July 28, 1954 to his long-time confidante, Pierre Bernac, commenting,

Yes, you are right, I have indeed poisoned myself little by little. Too much introspection—emotional as well as intellectual—has been gnawing away at me for months [...] I fell into a blind panic that was not helped at all by worries about my liver [*foie*], about my faith [*foi*], about the von Le Fort Bernanos obstruction which means that I may be writing a work that can never be performed, and that I may not be able to sign up with Ricordi, etc...⁷³

Poulenc's play on words with his reference to worries about his liver (*foie*) and his faith (*foi*) belie the seriousness of his situation. As his stresses mounted in 1954, his physical ailments became more acute, further exacerbating anxiety about his work and spiritual state. As he explained to Bernac later in the same letter, these ailments were somewhat "mysterious" in origin,

Delmas [Poulenc's doctor] follows my progress with extraordinary vigilance. He has done a series of medical tests in an attempt to get to the bottom of the intestinal problems troubling me over the past two years [...] Obviously, six weeks of near mad anxiety have seriously wrecked my nerves, and what this has done to the level of my uric acid is unimaginable. I have started gargling again as I have inflamed tonsils, which may well be the cause of all this mess. Remember my knee in '44, which was caused by my throat. You may be right; perhaps I will always suffer from the same little problems and persist in believing they are serious illnesses. Let's hope that's all it is.⁷⁴

In addition to providing friendship and musical collaboration, Bernac was often the voice of reason for Poulenc. From Poulenc's response above, it seems that Bernac had

⁷³ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 219-21; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 796. The original French reads: "Oui, je me suis intoxiqué moi-même peu à peu. C'est certain. Une trop grande introspection, aussi bien sentimentale qu'intellectuelle, m'a rongé depuis des mois [...] j'ai eu une panique folle que rien n'a arrangé, ni mon foie, ni ma foi, ni l'obstruction von Lefort Bernanos qui me fait peut-être écrire une oeuvre injouable, ni l'impossibilité de signer avec Ricordi, etc..."

⁷⁴ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 219-21; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 797. The original French reads: "Delmas me suit avec une vigilance extraordinaire. Il a fait faire un examen clinique de mes urines et mes matières voulant lutter contre cette flore intestinale qui me fleurit depuis deux ans [...] Evidemment six semaines de quasi-folie anxieuse m'ont profondément détraqué et ce que je fais d'acide urique par neuro-arthritisme est inimaginable. Je me remets à mes lavages de gorge car j'ai des calculs amygdaliens qui prouvent mon encrassage. Souvenez-vous de mon genou de 44 causé par ma gorge. Peut-être avez-vous raison et traînerai-je toujours les mêmes petites misères que je prends pour des maladies graves. Souhaitons-le."

suggested Poulenc was blowing many of his physical problems out of proportion and perhaps the real issue was his mental state. At the end of this letter, Poulenc rejected the idea of entering a mental clinic to get help and instead, told Bernac he was going back to Noizay to resume work on his opera. He asked Bernac if he would join him to help him get back to the opera and “see his cure through to its completion.”⁷⁵

Also in the summer of 1954, Poulenc began corresponding with Father Griffin, a Carmelite priest who lived in Dallas, Texas. Poulenc shared his troubles with the priest, asking him to rally his community to pray for the composer. Poulenc stated,

God knows if I shall ever complete *Dialogues des Carmélites* because I am very ill. It is my stomach. Cancer. In spite of my doctors’ reassurances that there is nothing wrong with me, I fear that I will never be able to work again. Will you ask the Carmelite Fathers of Dallas to make a novena that I recover my health and that I may be able to glorify God and the blessed martyrs of Compiègne with my music? I am in terrible fear. Will God take into account my poor efforts—the Mass, the religious motets?⁷⁶

This excerpt aptly demonstrates Poulenc’s state of mind and his predilection for connecting his creative work, his physical health, and his spiritual state. It also provides evidence for Jeremy Sams’ claim that “Poulenc was one of the great hypochondriacs of the century.”⁷⁷

Poulenc did not have cancer, but unfortunately, his health did not improve at Noizay. He wrote in a letter to Henri Hell on September 10, 1954, that the climate and the solitude of Noizay was “killing him.” His medical doctor could find nothing organically wrong with him, so he decided to return to Paris and consult a psychiatrist. Poulenc assured Hell that all of his melancholy was not going to waste, since it had made its way

⁷⁵ Poulenc’s letter to Bernac of July 28, 1954 is clearly a response to an earlier communication by Bernac; however, there is no letter in any of the published correspondences that coincides with the dates.

⁷⁶ Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, 395.

⁷⁷ Sams, “From the Scaffold to La Scala,” 516.

into *Dialogues*, intensifying the tragedy of the nuns' story.⁷⁸ Poulenc also wrote to Simone Girard on September 10, telling her that he was going to see Jean Lhermitte, a neurologist at the Salpêtrière in Paris.⁷⁹ By October 1954, Poulenc shamefully admitted that he was having a breakdown. In a letter to Pierre and Simone Girard, he stated, in reference to his breakdown, "No doubt my Sacred Ladies have wanted to purify me by fire [...] I think these Nuns, before losing their heads, have wanted me to sacrifice mine."⁸⁰ Of course, the morbidly playful equation of mental illness with decapitation is irresistible here!

Bernac and Poulenc had planned a tour of Germany for November 1954. Bernac was aware of Poulenc's deteriorating health and did not trust his overemotional friend to recognize his own inability to function. On November 4, 1954, with the German tour imminent, Bernac wrote to Poulenc, warning him that he did not want to undertake the tour unless Poulenc could promise that he would be mentally stable. Bernac's biggest fear was that Poulenc would harp on incessantly about his on-and-off relationship with Roubert, thus destroying Bernac's ability to focus on his singing. Hoping to shock Poulenc into sense, Bernac was harsh in his judgment of the situation. He stated,

Unfortunately, through your lack of moral virility, you have worn down the affection of this loyal but not very interesting boy. I am sorry for you if you really love him as much as you think you do, something of which I am not entirely convinced. You loved the character you wanted him to play at your side. If you had really loved him you would have loved him for himself and not for you. But that was not the case. As proof I merely observe that before this break-up you would not have hesitated to form other attachments, yet you were jealous of any he might have made. In fact, what I wish most for you now is to see you find someone else, if indeed you have honestly not yet succeeded in finding another

⁷⁸ See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 805-6.

⁷⁹ See *Ibid.*, 806.

⁸⁰ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 224-25; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 809. The original French reads: "Sans doute mes Saintes Dames me voulaient-elles purifier par le feu [...] Je pense que ces terribles dames avant de perdre le tête ont voulu que je leur en sacrifie une."

formula for your time of life [...] Face the reality plainly and squarely and put up with it. You are neither the first nor the last to suffer a broken heart. It's too convenient, don't you see, to put everything down to illness. Your inclination to let yourself go does not date from today. What is more, there is human dignity to be preserved. I suffer so much to see you losing it completely in the eyes of everyone, not only your friends. Francis Poulenc, even on the human plane, is surely greater than this.⁸¹

Bernac and Poulenc did not cancel the German tour; however, Bernac's fears were well-founded. Poulenc collapsed shortly after the tour began, forcing him to return to France. He was taken to a clinic at L'Haÿ-les-Roses and placed under Dr. Maillard-Verger's care.⁸²

Poulenc was clearly suffering from severe anxiety due to his stormy relationship with Roubert, the opera's copyright problems, and a number of mysterious physical ailments, not to mention the metaphysical anguish in which he was immersed when working on *Dialogues*. Nevertheless, in reference to his stay in the mental clinic, Poulenc persistently downplayed his anxiety in his correspondence, simply stating that he needed some sleep. While in the clinic, Poulenc wrote to his friend Marthe Bosredon, saying, "I am in a clinic for three weeks in an attempt to get some sleep. I was not sleeping for more than two hours and sometimes not even that [...] I am now sleeping 18 to 19 hours out of

⁸¹ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 225-26; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 810. The original French reads: "Vous avez hélas par votre absence de virilité morale lassé l'affection de ce garçon loyal mais peu intéressant. J'en suis triste pour vous si vraiment vous l'aimiez autant que vous croyez, ce don't je ne suis pas convaincu. Vous aimiez le personnage qu'il devait jouer auprès de vous. Quand on aime vraiment quelqu'un on l'aime pour lui-même et non pour soi. Et cela n'était pas le cas. Je n'en veux pour preuve que le fait qu'avant cette rupture vous n'auriez pas hésité à trouver un autre attachement mais que vous étiez jaloux de celui qu'il aurait pu avoir. C'est d'ailleurs ce que je vous souhaite, de trouver quelqu'un d'autre si vraiment, même arrivé à notre âge, vous n'avez pas encore réussi à trouver une autre formule pour vos vieux jours [...] Mettez-vous en face de la réalité et supportez-la. Vous n'êtes ni le premier ni le dernier à avoir des chagrins d'amour. C'est trop commode, voyez-vous, de tout mettre sur le compte de la maladie. Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui que vous avez pris l'habitude de vous laisser aller. Il y a tout de même une dignité humaine à conserver. Je souffre tant de vous la voir complètement perdre aux yeux de tout le monde, et pas seulement de vos amis. Francis Poulenc, même sur la plan humain, doit être autre chose que cela."

⁸² Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, 297.

24.”⁸³ Poulenc left the clinic before staying there the full three weeks, continuing his convalescence on his own. The following month, on December 18, 1954, he wrote to Simone Girard, stating that he was better, but still on edge, and still having trouble sleeping. He told Girard, “Fortunately I have a marvellous neurologist who is getting me to unwind, but my system is still poisoned due to the barbituates.”⁸⁴ Poulenc had been diligently avoiding Roubert in an attempt to regain his emotional balance, and, while he had nothing in writing from Lavery, was assured that Lavery would not prevent *Dialogues* from being staged.

Months later, in a letter to Rose Dercourt-Plaut in July 1955, Poulenc told his friend that he was well but still unable to sleep without medication. However, circumstances in his life had turned around. Roubert, who was one of the primary causes of Poulenc’s suffering, had become seriously ill. In this reversal of circumstances, Roubert and Poulenc decided to resume their relationship. Poulenc explained to Dercourt-Plaut,

So now suddenly the tables have turned [...] I have become so much my old self again—of years ago—that I am seeing everything in a new light [...] Sometimes these ordeals are necessary. No doubt my Carmelites have required this of me.⁸⁵

Having almost completely regained his balance, and with Roubert back at his side (although not well himself), Poulenc was ready to complete the final scenes of *Dialogues des Carmélites* at the end of the summer of 1955.

⁸³ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 226; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 811. The original French reads: “Je suis en clinique pour trois semaines afin d’essayer de dormir. Je ne dormais plus que deux heures et encore [...] Je dors 18 à 19 heures sur 24.”

⁸⁴ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 228-29; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 811. The original French reads: “J’ai heureusement un merveilleux neurologue qui me dénoue mais c’est physiquement qu’à cause des barbituriques je suis encore tout intoxiqué.”

⁸⁵ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 230-31; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 821-22. The original French reads: “Du coup toutes les cartes se sont retournées [...] Je suis tellement redevenu moi-même comme il y a plusieurs années que je juge tout sous un angle différent [...] Il y a parfois des épreuves nécessaires. Sans doute mes Carmélites exigeaient tout cela.”

How do we characterize Poulenc's personal crisis while composing *Dialogues*? Did he have a mental breakdown? Was he physiologically compromised, or, as Jeremy Sams claimed, a hypochondriac? Was he a madman? Was he hysterical? On August 12, 1955, Poulenc wrote another letter to Rose Dercourt-Plaut. He was in good spirits and told her, "I am *perfectly* well. My menopause is over!"⁸⁶ Poulenc identified his breakdown as feminine, reinforcing the idea that madness, or certain types of madness, like hysteria, reside in the feminine realm. Susan McClary classifies madmen into two categories: men whose madness is a manifestation of guilt and men who have wounded or insufficient masculinity and are thus feminized.⁸⁷ In a similar vein, Catherine Clément describes madmen as, among other things, "men who have women's troubles happen to them."⁸⁸ Poulenc's identification with the feminine suggests a re-reading of his opera as a type of cross-gendered personal testament.

Sams' claim that Poulenc was a hypochondriac is worth exploring, as it carries with it an underlying charge of hysteria. Michel Foucault points out in *Madness and Civilization* that "hysteria and hypochondria [had] come to be seen as symptoms of the same disease."⁸⁹ In his recent book, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness*, Mark Micale explains the initial connection between hypochondria and hysteria. In the 1600s, hysteria and hypochondria were grouped under the diagnostic umbrella of melancholia. But as long as hysterical symptoms were attributed to the uterus, hysteria would remain a female issue. The same symptoms in men could not be

⁸⁶ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 231; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 825. The original French text reads: "Je vais *parfaitement* bien, ma ménopause est finie!"

⁸⁷ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 190, n. 10.

⁸⁸ Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing*, 118.

⁸⁹ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 136. The author explains that this parallelism is largely based on Georg Ernst Stahl (1659-1734)'s comparison of menstrual flow and hemorrhoids. If hysteria is relieved with a flow of excess blood, then menstrual flow achieves this in women, while in men, excess blood might only be relieved via vomiting or hemorrhoids (145).

classified as hysteria, so were called hypochondria. Micale points out that “the first medical intellectuals explicitly to reject the womb theory also defended the possibility—in fact the undeniability—of hysterical breakdown in men.”⁹⁰ Proponents of the neural theory saw the separation of hysteria and hypochondria as a semantic game. Thomas Sydenham considered them the same pathological entity, which had been labelled differently “only because of linguistic tradition.” Hysteria and hypochondria were “kindred clinical categories, sibling syndromes with similar symptomatology that traced to the nervous system.”⁹¹

The association between hysteria and hypochondria was first proposed in the 1600s, but the connection persisted for generations. While some practitioners, including Charcot in the late 1800s, referred to their male patients as hysterics, Micale points out that this terminology was rarely applied to a certain type of man—“the white, Christian, middle-class, professional, heterosexual male.”⁹² Also by the late 1800s, the hysteric, or hypochondriac, male was ever-present in literature. Writers formally assigned diagnoses of hysteria or neurasthenia to their male protagonists, giving them vague, quasi-clinical nervous symptoms, like exhaustion, insomnia, and hypersensitivity. This was nowhere more prevalent than in the literature of French decadence (whose protagonists were typically androgynous or effeminate).⁹³ By the twentieth century, hysteria and hypochondria had become so linguistically enmeshed that they were used almost interchangeably. With a different doctor, Poulenc may have easily been diagnosed as an hysteric.

⁹⁰ Micale, *Hysterical Men*, 18.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 208.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 208-10.

“Blanche, c’était moi”: Poulenc’s Identification with Blanche

Poulenc’s personal crisis while composing *Dialogues des Carmélites*, especially its mix of spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects, in many ways parallels his character Blanche’s journey from fear to faith. The composer’s identification with Blanche invites a more private, more personal reading of *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Hinting at his own intense anxieties about religion and death, Poulenc confided in a letter to his close friend Simone Girard in October 1955 that he hoped, when his time comes, he will know how to die “as Blanche did.”⁹⁴ A few years later, in March 1958, while he was working on *La Voix humaine*, Poulenc wrote to Hervé Dugardin, stating, “Blanche was me and Elle [the protagonist of *La Voix humaine*] is also me.”⁹⁵ Poulenc confirmed this blunt identification with his operatic characters in a letter to Rose Dercourt-Plaut, dated April 20, 1958, in which he says that he is the protagonist of *La Voix humaine*, “just as Flaubert said ‘Bovary is me’.”⁹⁶

By appropriating Gustave Flaubert’s famous quip, Poulenc performs a double duty. Not only does he identify with Blanche and Elle, but he aligns himself with French men of letters such as Valéry, Mallarmé, Verlaine, and Baudelaire, who essentially described themselves as hysterics at a time when the idea of masculine hysteria was not generally accepted. Flaubert himself complained of symptoms of hysteria. In the spring of 1874, his nerves were so bad that his doctor called him an “hysterical woman.”

⁹⁴ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 236; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 831. The original French reads: “J’espère que lorsque viendra ma vraie mort je saurai alors mourir... comme Blanche.”

⁹⁵ Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 890. The original French reads: “Blanche, c’était moi et Elle c’est encore moi.”

⁹⁶ Ibid., 894. The original French reads: “comme Flaubert disait ‘Bovary, c’est moi.’” Both Keith Clifton and Denis Waleckx have written about autobiography in Cocteau and Poulenc’s *La Voix humaine*. See Waleckx, “A Musical Confession: Poulenc, Cocteau, and *La voix humaine*,” in *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature*, 320-347; and Clifton, “Mots cachés: Autobiography in Cocteau’s and Poulenc’s *La voix humaine*,” in “Jean Cocteau: Evangelist of the avant-garde,” special issue, *Canadian University Music Review/Revue de musique des universités canadiennes* 22, no. 1 (2001): 68-85.

Agreeing with the diagnosis, Flaubert flaunted his symptoms, sometimes with playful self-denigration or conscious self-dramatizations. At other times, Flaubert's hysteria was revived in his literary characters, such as Madame Bovary. Hysteria became a point of identification with other writers who shared the effort and agony "unavoidably associated with the production of a great work of art."⁹⁷

According to Paul de Man, the culture of French literary Romanticism carried a rich tradition of autobiographical display of psychological suffering.⁹⁸ In addition, the representation of male literary hysterics was closely entwined with the androgyne. While this androgynous element could be read as a reflection of the writer's own identity, it might also be seen as part of a literary exercise. Many of Flaubert's contemporaries called attention to his feminine nature, and biographers have hinted at a latent homosexuality, transsexuality, or perhaps bisexuality. On the other hand, in his review of *Madame Bovary*, Baudelaire insisted that Flaubert had accomplished an extraordinary literary feat by creating a complex and convincing female figure. He had attained cross-gender knowledge using the hysteria metaphor to constructively examine the gender identities of both sexes.⁹⁹

In addition to Blanche, Poulenc related to all of the Carmelites, often referring to them as if he had known them personally. When he first started composing *Dialogues*, he

⁹⁷ Micale, *Hysterical Men*, 239, 244-45, quote is 245. By examining a series of letters Flaubert wrote to Louise Colet, his mistress in the summer of 1846, Janet Beizer uncovers Flaubert's notion of "gendered writing." In Flaubert's view, literary style of the time was either realist or romantic. He valorized realist writing as male, with its hard, hairy, and muscular phraseology, pumping through the body like blood. Conversely, Flaubert denoted romantic writing as female, as poor writing, because it is soft and fatty and seeps out like breast milk or vaginal discharge. But he also notes the general feminization of contemporary literature, claiming that it is drowning in menstrual flow. Clearly, although Flaubert denigrates the romantic style of writing, he adopts it in *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert admits to having two literary personae: the masculine and his repressed Other, the feminine. See Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 76-79 and 85-86.

⁹⁸ Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), see chapter 4.

⁹⁹ Micale, *Hysterical Men*, 250-51.

took on the task with obsessive fervour, not leaving his house for days on end. Most of the opera was composed at Poulenc's country home in Noizay, which he occasionally referred to as his cloister (or sometimes, his prison). He wrote to his friend Doda Conrad in September 1953, saying, "since 15 August, it has been Carmel at Noizay."¹⁰⁰ (A Carmelite convent is often referred to as a "Carmel.")

Extending his identification with the Carmelites—particularly Blanche—Poulenc partnered himself with Lucien Roubert in a mystical substitution. In 1955, when Poulenc was near the end of composing *Dialogues*, Roubert became seriously ill and as his condition rapidly worsened, Poulenc cared for him.¹⁰¹ The experience of helping Roubert through his terminal illness served to intensify the composer's connection to his opera's subjects. In a letter to Pierre Bernac in August 1955, Poulenc stated,

I have entrusted him [Lucien] to my sixteen blessed Carmelites: may they protect his final hours since he has been so closely involved with their story. In fact I began the work at his side, in happiness, in Lyon in August 1953. After all the torment, which I need not describe to you, I have just finished the work, at his side, during the last days of his earthly life. As I wrote to you once before, I am haunted by Bernanos's phrase: "We do not die for ourselves alone... but for, or instead of, each other." If Raymond remains the secret of *Les Mamelles* and *Figure humaine*, Lucien is certainly that of the *Stabat* and *Les Carmélites*.¹⁰²

Poulenc mapped his relationship with Roubert onto the opera. Just as the First Prioress's death effected a transference of grace to Blanche in order to grant her an easier death, Roubert suffered so that Poulenc might finish composing *Dialogues*. In later

¹⁰⁰ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 211-12; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 766. The original French reads: "dès le 15 août, Carmel de Noizay."

¹⁰¹ It is not clear what Roubert was suffering from. Different sources variously indicate tuberculosis, pleurisy, or cancer. At any rate, his illness was sudden and developed quickly.

¹⁰² Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 231-33; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 825-26. The original French reads: "Je l'ai confié aux 16 bienheureuses Carmélites pour qu'elles protègent sa fin puisqu'il aura été si étroitement mêlé à leur histoire. En effet, j'ai commencé près de lui, dans le bonheur, cette oeuvre à Lyon en août 53. Après la grande tourmente que vous savez je viens de l'achever près de lui, dans ses derniers jours de vie terrestre. Comme je vous l'ai déjà écrit, la phrase de Bernanos 'On ne meurt pas chacun pour soi... mais les uns à la place des autres' me hante. Si Raymond reste le secret des *Mamelles* et de *Figure humaine*, Lucien est bien celui du *Stabat* et des *Carmélites*."

correspondence, Poulenc emphasized his idea of a transference of grace between him and Roubert, even going so far as to say that Lucien was martyred for the sake of the opera.¹⁰³

Poulenc identified strongly with each of his three opera protagonists. The cross-gendered connection was introduced especially effectively with the gender-bending character, Thérèse/Tirésias, from his first opera, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. Poulenc's interest in the female psyche was intensified by his privileged rapport with Denise Duval, a cabaret/opera singer who created the roles of Thérèse/Tirésias, Blanche, and Elle. Poulenc called Duval his theatrical mouthpiece, just as Pierre Bernac was the primary voice for which he wrote his *mélodie* repertoire. In June 1957, Poulenc wrote to Rose Dercourt-Plaut, thrilled at the prospect of *Dialogues*' Paris premiere with Denise Duval as Blanche. He said, "Denise is sublime. What an actress! Blanche, so much a part of me for so long, is at last springing to life."¹⁰⁴ In January 1959, Poulenc wrote to Dercourt-Plaut again, this time raving about Duval's performance in *La Voix humaine*, and reinforcing his own personal connection to the piece. He stated, "Duval is *superb* in an astonishing production by Cocteau. I will send you the music of this atrocious tragedy

¹⁰³ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 236; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 831. The letter to Simone Girard on October 31, 1955 reads: "Lucien [was] delivered from his martyrdom ten days ago, the final copy of *Les Carmélites* completed (take note) at the very moment the poor boy breathed his last. I got up from the table and said to my faithful Anna [Poulenc's housekeeper]: 'I have finished: Monsieur Lucien will die now'. Who will ever know all that lies at the secret heart of certain works?" The original French reads: "Lucien délivré de son martyre voici dix jours, les *Carmélites* achevées de recopier (lisez-moi bien) exactement à l'heure même où mon pauvre grand rendait le dernier soupir. Je me suis levé de ma table et j'ai dit à ma fidèle Anna: 'Monsieur Lucien va mourir maintenant car j'ai fini'. Qui dira jamais assez le secret de certaines oeuvres?"

¹⁰⁴ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 246; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 871. The original French reads: "Denise est sublime! Quelle actrice! Je vois enfin vivre ce personnage que j'ai tant porté en moi."

(my own). It is a musical confession!!!”¹⁰⁵ Poulenc felt such an affinity to Duval that he remarked to her in 1960, “you are so much me that it is as if I were split in two.”¹⁰⁶

“Split in two”: A Struggle for Consolidation

Several factors contributed to Poulenc’s mental breakdown while composing *Dialogues*, not least his copyright problems and his rocky relationship with Roubert. However, Poulenc’s intense engagement with the difficult subject matter and his identification with Blanche affected him at a more fundamental level, forcing him to face his own psychological and spiritual issues. Poulenc’s quote about being “split in two” references a common theme in writings by and about the composer: the theme of duality. The composer is well-known in the context of *Les Six* and is often characterized as a rakish *bon vivant* who composed lighthearted works. However, Poulenc’s rediscovery of the Catholic faith in 1936 poses a challenge for biographers. While usually defined as a conversion, it was not a conversion in the commonly-understood sense of the word—Poulenc was not suddenly and irrevocably transformed. His first trip to Rocamadour did inspire him to make some changes in his life, but in many ways, he remained the “old” Poulenc. He started composing sacred music, attended Mass regularly, made frequent trips to Rocamadour, consulted a spiritual director, and began to recognize and articulate a connection between his spirituality and his creative work. On the other hand, Poulenc kept his busy social calendar, drawn to all manner of entertainments. He also continued to

¹⁰⁵ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 257; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 906. The original French reads: “Duval est sublime dans une étonnante mise en scène de Cocteau. Je vous enverrai la musique de cette atroce tragédie (la mienne). C’est une confession musicale!!!”

¹⁰⁶ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 273-74; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 947, from a letter from Poulenc to Denise Duval on July 19, 1960. The original French reads: “...vous êtes tellement moi que c’est comme si je me dédoublais.”

compose secular works that expressed the fun-loving, cosmopolitan irreverence that characterized his earlier works. In addition, he continued to live as an openly gay man, which at some level at least is usually considered inconsistent with Catholic devotion.

Poulenc attributed his dual nature to his parents, both of whom died while he was a teenager. His mother, Jenny Royer, was a cultured urban socialite who loved the arts, while his father, Emile (director of the pharmaceutical company that later became Rhône-Poulenc) was a devout Catholic, but far from dogmatic. The composer claimed to be torn between the country faith of his father and the fun-loving, cosmopolitan irreverence of his mother. He attributed his faith to heredity and associated his religious music with his father's Aveyronnais roots, while his secular music was firmly connected to Paris.¹⁰⁷

Poulenc's biographers highlight the duality of Poulenc's personality, calling him "Janus-faced," or citing Claude Rostand's famous phrase—"half monk, half guttersnipe"—to describe the composer.¹⁰⁸ But these descriptions carry the implication that Poulenc was a deeply conflicted individual. I argue that, unlike Thérèse of Lisieux, who characterized her own conversion as a sudden and complete change of heart, or Blanche, who struggled towards a mystical awakening, Poulenc initiated a consolidation of the two sides of his character in his 1936 conversion experience at Rocamadour.

Poulenc's experience might be accommodated by Snow and Machalek's broad definition of conversion, in which one universe of discourse is displaced by another or a formerly peripheral worldview ascends to the status of a primary authority.¹⁰⁹ However,

¹⁰⁷ The original French reads: "Toute ma musique religieuse tourne le dos à mon esthétique parisienne ou banlieusarde. Quand je prie c'est l'Aveyronnais qui reparaît en moi. Evidence de l'hérédité. La foi est puissante chez tous les Poulenc." See Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs*, 48-49.

¹⁰⁸ See Daniel, *Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 41; Mellers, *Francis Poulenc*, 75; Hell, *Musicien français*, xix, 45-46; Claude Rostand, *Dictionnaire de la musique contemporaine* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1970), 178, where he states: "En Poulenc, il y a du moine et du voyou."

¹⁰⁹ Snow and Machalek, "Sociology of Conversion," 170.

D.F. Gordon's definition of "consolidation" fits Poulenc's experience more neatly: the adoption of a belief system that combines two prior but contradictory worldviews or identities.¹¹⁰ The contradictory nature of his two identities emerged in Poulenc's struggle with spirituality. As I explained in chapter one, while Poulenc was quick to attribute success in his creative life after 1936 to God, Rocamadour, or the Virgin Mary, he was just as likely to brood about his lack of faith when he was depressed or when his work was not going well.

Poulenc's struggle with faith is apparent in his letters immediately after his first Rocamadour visit, and this struggle continued throughout his life. In 1951, he wrote to Simone Girard, again referencing the notion of being split in two: "I am not as religious as I would like to be. Half of me remains quite the opposite."¹¹¹ Complaining in 1954 (again to Girard) about his difficulties writing the opera and his challenges with personal relationships, Poulenc stated, "Unfortunately, saintliness is not quite yet my lot in life."¹¹² In August 1956, Poulenc wrote to Pierre Bernac,

I am in a total spiritual desert right now. I am bored stiff at mass and I wait for the *Ite missa* as I used to wait for the bell at the Lycée Condorcet. It is sad, but what can I do? I beg of you, pray for me in Assisi, that I may meet a simple, good priest (like the dean of Rocamadour) who, wafer in hand and wine before him, will be able to do something for me [...] My desire for everything to come right shows that deep down I have an atavistic, very real need, a craving, for something.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Gordon, "The Jesus People," 159-78.

¹¹¹ The original French reads: "Je ne suis pas pas hélas aussi religieux que je voudrais l'être. Une moitié de moi reste à l'oppos." (See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 714; and *Echo and Source*, 221.)

¹¹² The original French reads: "Hélas la sainteté n'est pas encore mon lot." (See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 808; and *Echo and Source*, 254.)

¹¹³ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 241-43; and *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, 847. The original French reads: "C'est le désert spirituel total. Je m'ennuie à la messe et j'attends l'*Ite missa* est comme jadis le tambour à Condorcet. C'est triste mais qu'y faire. Je vous en prie, priez pour moi à Assise pour que je rencontre le brave curé, genre doyen de Rocamadour, qui le quignon de pain à la main et le verre de vin devant lui pourra seul quelque chose pour moi [...] Ce désir que tout s'arrange prouve que dans le fond j'ai, atavisme ou besoin réel, soif de quelque chose."

Poulenc searched for models of consolidation to help him integrate the two sides of his personality. His earliest model was his father, who was a free thinker with a positive conception of religion. He did not believe in a strict adherence to organized religion, but rather a profound deism. Like his father, Poulenc disliked “proselytizing, breastbeating, and mental or spiritual self-criticism.”¹¹⁴ The sensuous gaiety that pervades much of his religious music expresses this realistic, humanistic interpretation of the Catholic faith.

In July 1954, when Poulenc was nearly at his lowest, he told Pierre Bernac that his spiritual advisor, Father Carré, had compared him to the main character in Massenet’s opera, *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (1902).¹¹⁵ *Le Jongleur* provided Poulenc with an important model for integration: he was an irreverent, fun-loving, devout Catholic. The opera is based on a story by Anatole France about a tumbler (Jean) who enters a monastery to devote his life to the Virgin Mary. But Jean, an entertainer by trade, lacks the skills of most of his fellow monks. In the final scenes of the opera, having been accused of blasphemy by the monks, Jean dances himself to death in front of the statue of the Virgin, whose arm is miraculously extended to bless him as he dies. The epigraph Poulenc chose for *Dialogues* expresses a similar sentiment: “May God deliver me from gloomy saints.”¹¹⁶

While *Le Jongleur* provided a model of the fun-loving entertainer as man of God, how might Poulenc have integrated his Catholic faith with his homosexuality? Several

¹¹⁴ Daniel, *Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 1.

¹¹⁵ Poulenc, *Echo and Source*, 219-20.

¹¹⁶ “Que Dieu m’éloigne des saints mornes” (St. Teresa of Avila). Quoted in Francis Poulenc, “Comment j’ai composé les *Dialogues des Carmélites*,” *L’Opéra de Paris* 17 (n.d.) as quoted in Daniel, *Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 300.

scholars have traced out viable paths, and I will briefly suggest a few here.¹¹⁷ Most scholars point to a disconnect between the supposed immutable moral doctrine and the culture of the Church. In his groundbreaking study on the historical attitudes towards homosexuality in Christianity, John Boswell argues that the current condemnation of homosexuality does not reflect the Catholic Church's historical position. Before the twelfth century, the Church did not condemn homosexuality. Other scholars, such as Ellis Hanson, aim to illustrate the historical relationship between homosexuality and Catholicism through the study of a Catholic aesthetic, such as that of the decadent writers. With a similar approach, Mark Jordan argues that official Catholic doctrine against homosexuality is not very compelling. Instead, anti-gay sentiment in the Catholic Church is connected closely to institutional power and clerical culture. Jordan uses the metaphor of the Catholic Church as a closet to illustrate how Catholicism is actually both homophobic and homoerotic. Thomas Lawrence Long states that the Catholic Church provides compensatory mechanisms like the sacrament of penance for those with an "ambiguous interiority." Long concludes that the Catholic Church "that tolerated carnival excesses prior to Lenten austerities and offered daily sacramental confession after libertine nights could be understood as a psychic counterweight for some people."¹¹⁸ No doubt Poulenc was one of those people. As I said earlier in this chapter, the shift of

¹¹⁷ A detailed discussion on the relationship between Catholicism and homosexuality is beyond the scope of this dissertation. See the following for more information: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Mark D. Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Lowell Gallagher, Frederick S. Roden, and Patricia Juliana Smith, eds., *Catholic Figures, Queer Narratives* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). Richard D. E. Burton has written an extensive study on Poulenc, Catholicism, and homosexuality. He draws on several aspects of the composer's life, arguing that Poulenc was moving towards a synthesis of these two aspects of his life. See Richard D. E. Burton, *Francis Poulenc* [from the Outlines series] (Bath, ENG: Absolute Press, 2002).

¹¹⁸ Thomas Lawrence Long, "Queer Converts: Peculiar Pleasures and Subtle Antinomianism," in *Catholic Figures, Queer Narratives*, 21.

hegemonic power away from the French Catholic Church upset traditional associations between power and patriarchy, and in addition to opening up space for women in the Church, it became a more welcoming space for less “traditional” males. As religion moved to the periphery of French society, it came to share space with fellow peripheral “others.”

There are several references to Poulenc’s sense of guilt or shame for his general spiritual shortcomings, but there is no evidence that he considered his homosexuality an obstruction to his faith. Near the end of his life, just after finishing *Sept répons des ténèbres*, Poulenc admitted to Bernac he was still not as pious as he wanted to be, but hoped that his sacred works would make up for it: “With the *Gloria* and the *Stabat* I think I have three good religious works. May they spare me a few days of purgatory, if I do narrowly avoid going to hell.”¹¹⁹ Throughout his life, Poulenc loathed being labelled. He chafed against Rostand idea of being split into a monk and a guttersnipe, and, as Burton points out, “the idea of being cast as a ‘gay composer’ would surely have appalled him.”¹²⁰

While my initial hypothesis that the final scene of *Dialogues des Carmélites* offers a counterrevolutionary view of hysteria did not prove fruitful, considering the scene as a study of space, and extending that view to the entire opera, was a productive exercise. Focusing on how Poulenc emphasizes the interior space, and the psychological program of the opera, lead me back to the composer himself, who identified closely with

¹¹⁹ The original French reads: “Avec le *Gloria* et le *Stabat* j’ai là, je crois, trois bonnes oeuvres religieuses. Puissent-elles m’épargner quelques jours de purgatoire si j’évite, de justesse, l’enfer.” (See Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963* 990; and *Echo and Source*, 337.)

¹²⁰ Burton, *Francis Poulenc*, 121 and 123.

Blanche. Unlike my studies in chapters two and three, this chapter identified a divergence in interpretations between Bernanos and Poulenc that can be traced to their differing views on the place of religion in society. Throughout his life, Bernanos continued to fight for a place in the public sphere for the Church, while Poulenc was more concerned with the personal nature of faith.

CONCLUSION

In *Georges Bernanos: The Theological Source of His Art*, Michael Tobin argues that *Dialogues des Carmélites* is a “fictional expression of Bernanos’s mourning for his country after the debacle of 1940.”¹ He suggests that the work is an allegory in which Blanche represents France of 1940, debased and an object of scorn. The Old Prioress is a metaphor for the Motherland, humiliated but still called to spiritual greatness. Finally, Mère Marie is Bernanos himself, contemplating his country’s indignity. I agree with Tobin’s allegory only insofar as it suggests that *Dialogues* conveys France’s political instability. I interpret the work as an expression of spiritual anxiety and personal discontent in response to France’s instability.

The goal of my study was not to read *Dialogues des Carmélites* as an allegory. If, however, I were to engage in the exercise, the First Prioress would be a veiled version of Bernanos and Blanche, Poulenc. Although part of the old order, the First Prioress is really a prophet and advisor in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Not only is she Blanche’s spiritual director, but the Prioress’s deathbed vision foretells the destruction of the Carmelite convent during the French Revolution. The Prioress dies before political violence reaches the convent, but she endures a difficult death for Blanche’s sake. Like the First Prioress, Bernanos saw himself as an advisor and prophet to the French people. In his polemical works, he encouraged the French to go back to their Catholic roots. In many ways, he was also part of the old order because he yearned to return to a monarchist model of government and envisioned Catholicism as central to the nationhood of France. Like the Prioress, who is “removed” from the story early in the plot, Bernanos exiled himself from

¹ Tobin, *Georges Bernanos*, 199.

France, influencing French society with his writings from afar.

Bernanos is connected to the character of the First Prioress on a much more personal level as well. As I explained in chapter two, Bernanos suffered ill health his entire life, encouraging his obsession with the mystery of Christ's agony and death. In particular, his experiences during the First World War led Bernanos to a lifetime of meditation on the meaning of Christ's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane.² The mad scene on the Prioress's deathbed is the author's exploration of his own death agony, as Bernanos was ill with liver disease while writing *Dialogues* and died shortly after.

In some circles, Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* might have been seen as counterrevolutionary or a critique of progressive politics because of its sympathetic portrayal of Catholic nuns. As I explained at length in chapter four, though, Poulenc's opera reflects events of his personal life far more than it does the turbulent politics of France.³ Like Blanche, Poulenc struggled with his faith throughout his life, at times experiencing extreme anxiety, fear, insecurity, and emotional distress. His faith was linked intrinsically to his emotions, his creative work, and his personal relationships. Retrospectively, Poulenc made several connections between *Dialogues* and his own life. He likened the transference of grace between the First Prioress and Blanche, for example, to his relationship with Lucien Roubert.

² This narrative is found in parallel passages in the synoptic gospels: Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:39-46. In this biblical passage, just before his arrest and subsequent trial and crucifixion, Jesus sorrowfully prays for God's mercy, but ultimately for His will to be done. Gethsemane is sometimes referred to as the Mount of Olives. The Agony in the Garden (as it is commonly called) is near the beginning of the sequence referred to as Christ's Passion and is unique because it gives a personal view of Jesus's suffering as He faced impending death.

³ Ronald Schechter, "Conceptualizing the French Revolution: Problems and Methods," in *The French Revolution: The Essential Readings*, edited by Ronald Schechter, 1-30 (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001), 1. Schechter explains that, until François Furet (1927-1997) opened the academy to a rich historiography of the French Revolution in the late 1960s, pro-revolution historians dominated the Sorbonne. Furet, unlike most French historians of his generation, took into account the work of English language historians, who had been open to different interpretations of the Revolution decades before the French.

In the opening paragraphs of this dissertation, I suggested that the religious element that had become an important part of Francis Poulenc's repertoire resulted from the composer's 1936 conversion at Rocamadour and as part of a larger shift toward spirituality in French music. Locating Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* within the framework of French musical scholarship, however, tells only part of the story. The trend toward spiritualism was not limited to France, and even within France, the spiritual element remained a concern for composers long after World War II. In her recent book, *Saints in the Limelight: Representations of the Religious Quest on the Post-1945 Operatic Stage*, Siglind Bruhn surveys 38 operas on religious themes written after 1945 from across Europe and North America. Bruhn includes Poulenc's *Dialogues* in this collection.

With the growing popularity of secularism throughout the twentieth century, not only in France, but in the Western world at large, the place of religion shifted from the public arena to the private sphere. Religion became taboo, an inappropriate subject for public consumption. Bruhn points out, however, that in an age when religion was pushed to the periphery, the opera stage became host to a large pool of works that portray people striving for transcendence.⁴ Philosopher Charles Taylor has written extensively about the advance of secularism and the role of religion in democratic liberal societies, challenging the idea that secularism takes the place of religion in a culture. In *A Secular Age*, he claims instead that secularism emerges in the midst of religion, which remains one ideology among many.⁵ Furthermore, Taylor argues in *A Catholic Modernity* that religion has not receded from the forefront of modern society because it has been trumped by the

⁴ Bruhn, *Saints in the Limelight*, xiv.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

scientific worldview but because of the failure of religious institutions themselves. In other words, Taylor articulates the tension between religion and modernity as a spiritual and moral tension, not an intellectual one.⁶

Perhaps the most important contribution to emerge from this study is my identification of the connection between hysteria and religion in modern opera. One might argue that, while sex was purportedly a source of anxiety in the nineteenth century (at least for the Victorians), religion or spirituality was a prevalent source of anxiety in the twentieth century. A number of operas, most of them from the twentieth century, bring together religion and hysteria. In this case, hysteria might be read as a critical response to the unstable role of religion in Western society, or anxiety about religion or spirituality itself. That said, while adopting hysteria as a hermeneutic tool with which to examine *Dialogues des Carmélites* did prove useful in fleshing out the work's hysteria theme and the metaphor of hysteria as social degeneration, it also illuminated interpretive points about the opera that had nothing to do with hysteria. For example, I opened chapter four by suggesting that the final scene offers a counterrevolutionary view of hysteria (in which violent political activity is considered a manifestation of collective hysteria instead of its cause), but I ultimately concluded that this interpretation is not viable because Poulenc sidesteps a violent clash between the nuns and the crowd chorus in the final scene to focus on the psychological angle of the work.

For example, as I mentioned at the end of chapter two, the mad scene that closes Puccini's *Suor Angelica* (1918) is similar to the First Prioress's mad scene in *Dialogues*: in both, a nun becomes hysterical on the eve of her death. I attributed the First Prioress's madness largely to the impending political upheaval and how it will affect her

⁶ See Heft, *A Catholic Modernity*.

Carmelites, but Suor Angelica's hysteria is the result of discord between her religious beliefs and her personal aspirations. Having heard that her son (born years earlier out of wedlock) has died, Suor Angelica drinks a poisonous draught in order to be with him in heaven. At the moment she ingests the poison, she realizes that she has doomed herself to hell, since suicide is a mortal sin. Realizing what she has done, and powerless to change it, Angelica goes mad. Puccini, however, challenges the prevailing Catholic stance on suicide (which has softened considerably since 1918). He ends the mad scene with a vision of the Virgin Mary, Angelica's son in hand, beckoning Angelica toward heaven.

While I discarded the feminist model of hysteria (one that suggests a sexual undertone to hysteria, that is) in my study of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, it would be invaluable for a study of operas that combine hysteria with religion and sex. Paul Hindemith's *Sancta Susanna* (1921), for example, examines the relationship between celibacy and lust, depicting a convent's descent into sexual frenzy. Similarly, Krzysztof Penderecki's *Die Teufel von Loudun* (1969) shows a convent of nuns gradually taken over by a mass possession, manifested at its height by a sexual orgy.

Some operas that depict religion and hysteria feature saints as protagonists. Olivier Messiaen's *St. François d'Assise* (1983) is one example. Joan of Arc is an important figure, not only because she has been portrayed in countless films, stage plays, and operas, but because her story foregrounds the simultaneity of mysticism and hysteria. This is an important point for interpretation in most works dealing with the saint. Several composers have set music-dramatic works on the story of Joan of Arc, including Verdi (1845), Tchaikovsky (1881), Honegger (1935), and most recently, American Steven Jobe (2010), to name just a few.

After attending the premiere of Poulenc's opera at La Scala in January 1957, British Catholic critic Martin Cooper expressed disapproval at seeing nuns on the operatic stage. In a January 30, 1957 article in the *Daily Telegraph* he stated,

The monastic life does not lend itself to representation on the lyric stage. Its hidden virtues of silence and recollection; the disciplining of emotion, and the ban on external expression through raised voice, dramatic gesture or spontaneously impulsive movement—all this is at the opposite remove to the art of the theatre.⁷

Bruhn would likely argue that Cooper missed the point completely: Operas with religious themes usually engage with the drama beneath the surface of silence and discipline. Like Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, they are works that convey a psychological program and that explore the inner lives of their protagonists. Fortunately for Poulenc, Cooper's reaction was atypical, and *Dialogues des Carmélites* quickly became part of the performed repertoire.

In examining Poulenc's work in the context of his cultural milieu and personal beliefs, it is possible to offer an insightful interpretation of *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Given the twentieth century's predilection for religious operas with an hysterical theme—Hindemith's *Sancta Susanna*, Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise*, and Penderecki's *Die Teufel von Loudun* among them—critical interpretations such as this one can provide a methodological model for future scholarship and highlight the efficacy of such case studies.

⁷ Nigel Simeone, "Le *Dialogues des Carmélites* dans la presse anglaise en 1957-1958: Petite histoire d'une oeuvre incomprise." *Francis Poulenc et la voix: Texte et contexte*, ed. Alban Ramaut (Saint-Etienne, France: Université de Saint-Etienne, 2002), 23.

Appendix A: Opera Synopsis

ACT I

Scene i: The library in the house of Marquis de la Force in Paris, April 1789.

The first rumblings of the French Revolution are evident. The Chevalier, the son of the Marquis, rushes in, concerned about his sister Blanche. Her carriage has been stopped by a mob of peasants. The Marquis, awakened from a nap, recalls the horror he and his wife faced when accosted by a mob many years earlier. His wife was pregnant with Blanche at the time and went into premature labour due to the stress of the situation. She died giving birth. The Chevalier is worried because Blanche is high strung, impressionable, and pathologically afraid. Blanche finally enters. She appears fine. She says she is tired and goes upstairs to rest. A scream is heard and Blanche rushes downstairs. She was terrified by a shadow on the wall. She asks her father's permission to join the Carmelite convent because she can no longer take the stress of the outside world.

Scene ii: The parlor of the Carmelite convent.

Several weeks later, in the parlor of the Carmelite convent in Compiègne, the aging Prioress Mme. de Croissy interviews Blanche. She educates Blanche about the order, warning her against illusions about the heroism of religious life, and interrogates her about her reasons for wanting to join the Carmelites. The First Prioress tells Blanche that the convent is not meant to be a shelter or protection for the nuns; rather, it is a house of prayer. Blanche is resolved to join and the Prioress agrees.

Scene iii: Inside the convent.

While doing laundry, Blanche discusses death with another young novice, Sr. Constance. Constance is a fun-loving girl who treats life and death with the same lightness. Blanche scolds Constance for her seemingly immature cheerfulness, but Constance happily tells Blanche that she believes they will both die young and on the same day.

Scene iv: The infirmary.

On her deathbed, the First Prioress charges Mère Marie with Blanche's spiritual development after her death. The Prioress and Blanche share a tender farewell. When Blanche exits, the Prioress becomes delirious, questions her relationship with God, and has a vision of their convent, destroyed. Blanche re-enters and witnesses the Prioress's death.

ACT II

Scene i: The chapel.

In the convent chapel that night, the Prioress lies in state, watched over by Blanche and Constance. When Constance goes to fetch their replacement, Blanche is left alone. She becomes frightened and, in a panic, starts to leave. Mère Marie chastises Blanche and then reassures her, seeing that she is genuinely afraid. Constance tells Blanche that the First Prioress's difficult death did not suit her and so must have been meant for someone else, who will one day find death surprisingly easy.

Scene ii: The chapter room.

The nuns gather in their chapter room for the ceremony of obedience to the new prioress, Mme. Lidoine. The Second Prioress warns the nuns that trouble is ahead for the convent. Brief panic follows the announcement that a stranger has arrived, but it is only Blanche's brother, the Chevalier. The Second Prioress allows him to visit with Blanche as long as Mère Marie is present.

Scene iii: The parlor.

The Chevalier begs Blanche to leave the convent and return home with him. As an aristocrat and a nun, she is in tremendous danger from the coming political violence. Blanche refuses to leave and tells her brother that she will stay and die with the Carmelites, if necessary. When her brother leaves, disappointed, Blanche confesses to Mère Marie that, although she tried to appear courageous, she was filled with fear while talking to her brother.

Scene iv: The sacristy.

In the sacristy, the chaplain, forbidden to perform his clerical duties, celebrates his last Mass with the Carmelites. He bids them goodbye and tells them he must go into hiding. As he leaves, the sisters discuss the epidemic of fear that has left France unable to defend its priests. Mère Marie is inspired and suggests that the nuns offer their lives for the Church in France, but the Second Prioress insists that one cannot choose martyrdom. An angry mob is heard outside, and the chaplain returns, saying his departure was blocked. He leaves by another route as the mob bangs on the door. Officials enter and tell the nuns they have been expelled from their convent. One of them claims to be sympathetic to the Carmelites, but he cannot help them. Blanche is given a statue of the Infant Jesus by Mère Jeanne but during the chaos, she drops and breaks it.

ACT III**Scene i: The chapel.**

The chapel is in ruins and the nuns prepare to leave their devastated convent. In the absence of Mme. Lidoine, Mère Marie addresses the sisters. She proposes that they take a vow of martyrdom, which must be unanimous. She suggests a secret vote, but there is one dissenting vote, rendering the vow null. The nuns think Blanche voted against the vow, but Constance claims that she did. She asks permission to change her vote, and so the vow stands. Blanche, frightened, runs away to her family. The nuns are told their community is illegal and they will be arrested. The Second Prioress agrees to the vow of martyrdom, as it was made before God.

Scene ii: The library of the Marquis.

Blanche is working as a servant for the revolutionaries who have taken over her father's estate. She is terrified, as her father was guillotined the week before. Mère Marie finds Blanche and tells her that she may have saved her life, but she has not saved her soul. Marie encourages Blanche to rejoin the other Carmelites, so she gives Blanche an address and tells her to report there within twenty-four hours. Later, in a street near the Bastille,

Blanche learns from an old woman from Compiègne that the nuns have been arrested.

Scene iii: The Conciergerie.

In a cell in the Conciergerie prison, Mme. Lidoine tells the Carmelites she will join in the vow of martyrdom made during her absence. Constance tells the other nuns that she dreamed Blanche would return. A jailer enters and reads the death sentence pronounced by the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Prioress gives the nuns her blessing for strength and courage. The chaplain meets with Mère Marie, who is distraught to be separated from her sisters. The priest tells her the nuns have been condemned and reminds her that she cannot make a martyr of herself: that is for God to choose.

Scene iv: Place de la Revolution.

The Carmelites march to the guillotine, chanting *Salve regina*. A crowd looks on as one by one, the nuns are executed, beginning with the Prioress. One by one, the voices are silenced. Finally, only Constance remains. On her way to the scaffold, she sees Blanche step from the crowd, take up the chant, and follow her. Blanche sings alone until she too is guillotined. The dumbfounded crowd disperses.

Appendix B: Relationship Between Bernanos and Poulenc Texts

BERNANOS tableau, scene	Text Adaptation	POULENC act, scene
Prologue, i No dialogue: A flashback to the 1774 fireworks celebrating the dauphin's wedding. An explosion sets off a riot and the young Marquis and pregnant Marquise de la Force are caught in their carriage in the middle of a mob.	The text of m.127-165 in Act I, scene i is an interpolation made by Poulenc in order to relate the events of the night on which Blanche was born.	
Prologue, ii Later at the de la Force home, a doctor tells the Marquis that his wife died giving birth to Blanche.		
I, i It is 1789. The Chevalier bursts into the house, asking his father about Blanche. He thinks she has been caught in a peasant mob and is concerned for her peace of mind. They discuss her anxious disposition.	shortened	I, i
I, ii Blanche appears. She tells her father and brother that she was afraid in the carriage, but she is safe. She goes to her room.	shortened	I, i
I, iii A scream is heard from offstage. A porter tells the Marquis Blanche was frightened by a shadow on the wall when he lit a candle.	intact	I, i
I, iv The Marquis goes to Blanche's room to check on her. She announces that she wants to become a Carmelite nun.	shortened	I, i
II, i Blanche meets with the Prioress to discuss her entry into Carmel. The Prioress tries to dissuade her, but finally agrees to allow her in.	shortened	I, ii
II, ii No dialogue: Blanche is received into the community as a postulant.	omitted	
II, iii Along the main hallway of the convent, the Prioress stops into Blanche's room and tells her that their doors are to be kept closed at night. She suspects that Blanche kept her door open because she was afraid.	omitted	
II, iv In the presence of Mère Marie, the doctor informs the Prioress that he can do no more to help her.	shortened	I, iv
II, v In the hallway of the infirmary, Mère Marie and the doctor speak about the death struggle.	omitted	
II, vi While doing their chores, Blanche and Constance dialogue about death and the Prioress. Blanche is disturbed by Constance's lighthearted attitude.	shortened	I, iii
II, vii In the infirmary, the Prioress tells Mère Marie about her fears about death. The Prioress entrusts the care of Blanche to Marie.	shortened	I, iv
II, viii The Prioress says farewell to Blanche.	shortened	I, iv
II, ix The Prioress becomes more delirious as death overtakes her. She has a vision of their chapel, desecrated.	shortened	I, iv
II, x Blanche returns and the Prioress dies.	intact	I, iv
II, xi Blanche and Constance finish their shift keeping vigil over the Prioress's body and Constance goes to look for their replacements. Afraid, Blanche leaves the chapel and is immediately confronted by Mère Marie for abandoning her post.	intact	II, i
III, i Constance and Blanche talk about the election of a new prioress. Constance also outlines her idea that the Prioress died	shortened	II, Interlude i Int

BERNANOS tableau, scene	Text Adaptation	POULENC act, scene
in place of someone else.		
III, ii The new Prioress addresses her Carmelite community.	shortened	II, ii
III, iii Mère Marie and the Prioress argue over whether Blanche should be allowed to take her first vows or not, due to her fearful nature.	omitted	
III, iv No dialogue: Blanche takes the veil.	omitted	
III, v No dialogue: Officials come to the convent to explain to the nuns that they must take an inventory of their valuables, as those, along with the Carmelites' convent, will from now on belong to the state.	omitted	
III, vi In this extensive scene, the nuns discuss the ramifications of the visit by the officials and how long their supplies will last them. They also discuss several aspects of France's current political situation.	omitted	
III, vii The Chevalier de la Force arrives at the convent.	intact	II, Int ii
III, viii Blanche's brother, who is joining the military, has come to say goodbye and to try and convince Blanche to leave the convent and go back to live with their father.	shortened	II, iii
III, ix The priest-confessor stops the Chevalier before he leaves the convent and they discuss current political events.	omitted	
III, x A commissioner searches the convent, accompanied by Mère Marie. He is looking to free young women held in the convent against their will, but he only finds Blanche.	omitted	
III, xi One by one, each nun is called into the chapter room and interrogated by the commissioners. This scene features Marie's interview.	omitted	
III, xii The priest-confessor says his final Mass at the convent and tells the nuns he must go into hiding. Then he bids that they sing together.	shortened	II, iv m. 1-46
III, xiii Blanche, worried, talks to the priest about his future. He reassures her.	shortened	II, iv m. 47-76
III, xiv Blanche asks Marie if she has agreed to be responsible for her before God. Marie reassures her.	omitted	
III, xv Sr. Mathilde and Sr. Constance are in the garden. Mathilde is amazed that Constance can enjoy recreation while she is supposed to prepare for martyrdom. Constance's answers underscore her childlike spirit.	omitted	
III, xvi Marie and the Prioress discuss martyrdom and a recent decree forbidding religious vows.	omitted	
IV, i After reciting the prayer of St. Teresa of Avila, the Prioress makes an announcement about the recent decree. She then discourages her nuns from martyrdom, reminding them that it is not something to be hoped for.	omitted	
IV, ii Blanche asks Mère Marie her opinion about she and Constance taking their vows in secret.	omitted	
IV, iii We can hear revolutionary songs from the other side of the wall. The nuns pray in the chapter room while revolutionaries pillage the convent.	omitted	
IV, iv Mère Jeanne has made new garments for the statuette of the Infant King. She tells Blanche he will be taken to each nun's cell on Christmas Day.	intact	II, iv m. 252-266
IV, v It is Christmas Day and the Prioress and Mère Marie	shortened	II, iv m. 252-266

BERNANOS tableau, scene	Text Adaptation	POULENC act, scene
bring the Infant King to each room. While holding the statuette, Blanche is startled to hear the Carmagnole outside. She drops the Infant King and its head breaks off.		
IV, vi The Prioress goes to Blanche's cell. They pray together and the Prioress talks to Blanche about her fear. She wonders if the young woman might not be suited to the life of a Carmelite.	omitted	
IV, vii The priest returns for a secret Good Friday service.	omitted	
IV, viii While waiting for the priest to return for Easter Sunday Mass, the sisters discuss the political situation. Mère Marie suggests a vow of martyrdom. The Prioress warns against it. Constance is drawn into the discussion.	shortened	II, iv m. 77-111
IV, ix While sewing, several of the nuns discuss the priest's sermon and their thoughts on martyrdom.	Omitted (The final line is reattributed to Mère Jeanne in II, iv, m. 242-248.)	
IV, x The Carmelites are taking recreation out in the garden. Their discussion on martyrdom is interrupted by the sounds of bells and trumpets from the nearby town. The priest returns, in disguise.	shortened	II, iv m. 112-145
IV, xi The mob draws closer and bangs on the doors of the convent. Marie opens the door to let them in, and a commissioner reads the nuns an order of expulsion.	shortened	II, iv m. 146-236
IV, xii No dialogue: The curtain rises to a devastated convent.	omitted	
IV, xiii The nuns, along with the disguised priest, are gathered in the sacristy, in disarray. Mère Marie raises the subject of the vow of martyrdom and the nuns discuss it. They take a vote. The result is one against, but Constance says she would like to change her vote. The nuns take the vow. Blanche leaves the convent in secret.	shortened	III, i
IV, xiv The nuns are dressed in civil clothes and ready to leave the plundered convent. The Prioress returns and she and Marie discuss the vow of martyrdom.	omitted	
V, i At the de la Force home, a man enters, looking for Blanche. He was sent by her father.	omitted	
V, ii The scene opens in a jail cell in which several prisoners are being held, among them, the Marquis de la Force. A jailer calls the Marquis to come forward.	omitted	
V, iii The Marquis is taken in for questioning. At this point, Blanche arrives. Because she is supposedly there to thank her liberators for "freeing" her from the convent, she and her father are both released.	omitted	
V, iv No dialogue: The Marquis and Blanche are back at home.	omitted	
V, v Back in Compiègne, the Carmelites are told they will have to take an oath to freedom. The Prioress wants to warn the priest. Mère Marie thinks caution is unnecessary since they all took the vow of martyrdom.	intact	III, Int i
V, vi No dialogue: The priest returns and he blesses the nuns.	omitted	
V, vii The priest informs Marie and the Prioress that Blanche's father has been guillotined. They talk about helping her escape. It is agreed that Marie will go to look for her.	omitted	
V, viii Mère Marie arrives at the de la Force home, where Blanche is cooking in one of the rooms. Marie wants Blanche to go to a safer house, and she gives her an address.	intact	III, ii
V, ix Blanche is out on the street. From two old women, she	intact (spoken)	III, Int ii

BERNANOS tableau, scene	Text Adaptation	POULENC act, scene
discovers that the Carmelites have been arrested.		
V, x At the home of Rose Ducor, Marie tries to convince Blanche that they must go back to Compiègne to join their sisters, who have been arrested. Blanche argues that they should try to save them. She then flees.	omitted	
V, xi The priest arrives at the Ducor household. He gives Marie an update on the Carmelites. He says she should write to the Prioress for advice about whether or not she should join them.	omitted	
V, xii The Carmelites are held in prison. They speak among themselves, then the Prioress talk to them.	shortened	III, iii
V, xiii No dialogue: The Carmelites are condemned to death for forming counterrevolutionary groups and fanatic writings.	shortened	III, iii
	Poulenc includes substantial parts of the decree of condemnation, which is referred to only indirectly by Bernanos.	
V, xiv The Prioress delivers her final speech to her nuns. She tells them she wishes she could save them.	shortened	III, iii
V, xv No dialogue: Rose Ducor arrives at her house and pulls the Infant Jesus statue from under her coat. Marie kneels in front of it.	omitted	
V, xvi The priest comes to tell Mère Marie that the Carmelites have been condemned. She wants to join them, but the priest tells her not to go to the guillotine to fulfill her will, but to be obedient to God's.	shortened	III, Int iii
V, xvii No dialogue: While singing <i>Salve regina</i> , one by one the Carmelites mount the scaffold and are beheaded. Blanche is surrounded by a crowd of women and crushed to death.	intact	III, iv

Appendix C: Act I, Scene iv Dialogue

A. THE FINAL COMMAND OF THE prioress

A cell in the infirmary

Marie of the Incarnation is at the bedside of the Prioress.

Prioress Would you be so kind as to raise this pillow? Do you suppose that Monsieur Javelinot will allow me to be placed in the chair? I find it very painful indeed to be seen by my daughters while I lie so helpless, like someone drowning who has just been pulled from the water... And this at a time when my head is still clear. Oh, it is not that I wish to deceive anyone! But when one feels such a lack of courage, one should at least be able to maintain one's composure.

Mother Marie I had the impression, Mother, that your pains were entirely relieved last night...

Prioress It was only a lethargy of the soul. God be thanked nonetheless! I no longer felt that I was dying. 'To see yourself die'—that is only a phrase that people use. Very well, Mother Marie, it is true I am watching myself die! And there is nothing to distract me from the sight! I am all alone, alone and helpless, without the slightest consolation. Tell me please, frankly—how long does the doctor give me to live?

Mother Marie of the Incarnation kneels at the head of the bed and gently places her crucifix on the lips of the Prioress.

Mother Marie He says your constitution is remarkably strong, and fears that you will have a very long and bitter struggle. But God...

Prioress God has become a shadow... Alas! I have been a nun for thirty years, and Prioress for twelve. I have been thinking of death each day of my life, and now it does not help me at all... It seems to me that Blanche de la Force is late today. After yesterday's meeting, does she still hold to the name that she has chosen?

Mother Marie Yes, if it please you, she would still like to be called Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ. You seem to be deeply moved by this choice.

Une cellule de l'infirmerie

Marie de l'Incarnation est au chevet de la prieure.

La prieure Ayez le bonté de relever ce coussin... Ne pensez-vous pas que M. Javelinot permettra qu'on m'installe dans le fauteuil? C'est une grande peine pour moi de me montrer à mes filles ainsi étendue comme une noyée qu'on vient de sortir de l'eau, alors que j'ai si bien gardé toute ma tête. Oh! Ce n'est pas que je veuille tromper personne! Mais quand fait si misérablement défaut le courage, il faudrait être au moins capable de composer son maintien.

Mère Marie J'avais cru comprendre, ma mère, que vos angoisses s'étaient bien apaisées cette nuit...

La prieure Ce n'était qu'un assoupissement de l'âme. Dieu en soit pourtant remercié! Je ne me voyais plus mourir. "Se voir mourir" passe pour n'être qu'un dicton de bonnes gens... Hé bien, ma mère, il est vrai que je me vois mourir. Rien ne me distrait de cette vue. Je suis seule, ma mère, absolument seule, sans aucune consolation. Parlez-moi franchement! Combien de temps M. Javelinot me donne-t-il encore à vivre?

Mère Marie de l'Incarnation s'agenouille au chevet du lit, et pose doucement son crucifix sur les lèvres de la prieure.

Mère Marie Votre tempérament est des plus forts qu'il ait vus. Il craint pour vous un passage lent et difficile. Mais Dieu...

La prieure Dieu s'est fait lui-même une ombre... Hélas! J'ai plus de trente ans de profession, douze ans de supériorat. J'ai médité sur la mort chaque heure de ma vie, et cela maintenant ne me sert de rien!... Je trouve que Blanche de la Force tarde beaucoup! Après la réunion d'hier, s'en tient-elle décidément au nom qu'elle a choisi?

Mère Marie Oui. Sauf votre bon plaisir, elle souhaite toujours s'appeler soeur Blanche de l'Agonie du Christ. Vous m'avez toujours paru fort émue de ce choix.

Prioress It was mine too long ago. Our Prioress at that time was Madame Arnoult, and she was eighty years old. She told me: 'You must look within your heart! Who enters Gethsemane will never leave it. Do you feel you have the courage to remain, until the end, a prisoner of the most Holy Agony?' ... It was I who brought into our House Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ. Of all my daughters, there is none who gives me greater cause for worry. I have often thought of recommending her to your kindness. On reflection, and if God permits, that will be the last deed of my incumbency. Mother Marie...

Mother Marie My Reverend Mother?

Prioress In the name of obedience, I entrust you with Blanche de la Force. You will answer for her to me before God.

Mother Marie Yes, Mother.

Prioress You will need great firmness of judgment and character, for these are precisely what she lacks, and what you possess in abundance.

Mother Marie It is very true. You see me clearly, as always.

B. BLANCHE'S FAREWELL

A knock on the door.

Prioress She is here. Ask her to come in.

Mother Marie goes to the door, steps aside in order to let Blanche enter, then goes out. Blanche comes forward and kneels beside the bed.

I pray you rise, my daughter. I intended to have quite a long talk with you, but the conversation I just finished has left me weary. You are the last who came to us, and for that reason the closest to my heart. Yes, of all my daughters by far the dearest, like the child of one's old age, but also the one most exposed to danger, the one most threatened. Ah, to avert that fearful danger I would gladly have given my humble life. Oh yes, willingly I would have yielded it. Now, alas, all I can give is my death, a very humble death...

Blanche falls to her knees once again and sobs. The Prioress puts her hand on Blanche's head.

La prieure C'est qu'il fut d'abord le mien, jadis. Notre prieure était en ce temps-là Mme. Arnoult, elle avait quatre-vingts ans. Elle me dit: "Interrogez vos forces. Qui entre à Gethsemani n'en sort plus. Vous sentez-vous le courage de rester jusqu'au bout prisonnière de la très sainte agonie?"... C'est moi qui ai introduit dans cette maison soeur Blanche de l'Agonie du Christ. De toutes mes filles, aucune ne m'inquiète davantage. J'avais pensé la recommander à votre charité. Mais réflexion faite, et si Dieu le veut, ce sera le dernier acte de mon supériorat. Mère Marie...

Mère Marie Ma révérende mère?

La prieure C'est au nom de l'obéissance que je vous remets Blanche de la Force. Vous me répondrez d'elle devant Dieu.

Mère Marie Oui, ma mère.

La prieure Il vous faudra une grande fermeté de jugement et de caractère, mais c'est précisément ce qui lui manque, et que vous avez de surcroît.

Mère Marie Il n'est que trop vrai. Vous voyez clair en moi, comme toujours.

On frappe à la porte.

La prieure La voici, priez-la d'entrer.

Mère Marie va jusqu'à la porte, s'efface pour laisser entrer Blanche, puis sort. Blanche vient s'agenouiller près du lit.

Relevez-vous, ma fille. J'avais fait le projet de vous entretenir un peu longuement, mais la conversation que je viens d'avoir m'a beaucoup fatiguée. Vous êtes la dernière venue, et pour ce fait la plus chère à mon cœur. Oui, de toutes mes filles, la plus chère, comme l'enfant de la vieillesse, et aussi la plus hasardée, la plus menacée. Pour détourner cette menace, j'aurais bien donné ma pauvre vie, oh! Certes, je l'eusse donnée. Je ne puis donner maintenant que ma mort, une très pauvre mort...

Blanche se jette de nouveau à genoux et sanglote. La prieure pose la main sur sa tête.

God derives great glory through His Saints, through His heroes and martyrs. He also reaps glory through the poor and the needy.

Blanche I have no fear of being poor.

Prioress Oh, there are many ways of being poor, down to the most miserable, and that is the one to which you are doomed. Dearest child, no matter what happens to you, you must not surrender your simplicity. Oh! my daughter, remain forever so sweet and pliant in the hands of God! The Saints did not always resist temptation. They did not rebel against their own nature. Rebellion is always the work of the devil. And, above all, never despise yourself! God has taken your honour into His keeping, and it is safer by far in His hands than in your own. Now rise again, this time for good. Goodbye. I bless you. Goodbye, my dearest child...

Blanche goes out. Mother Marie of the Incarnation returns with the doctor and Sister Anne of the Cross.

C. THE MAD SCENE PROPER

Monsieur Javelinot, I beg you to give me another dose of this medicine.

Monsieur Javelinot Your Reverence cannot take any more.

Prioress Monsieur Javelinot, you know it is customary in our Houses that a Prioress says farewell to her Community. Mother Marie, please try to convince Monsieur Javelinot. This drug or another, it does not matter. Oh! Mother, will you look—can I possibly show this face to my dear daughters?

Mother Marie Oh! my Mother, you should not think about us any more. Your only concern from now on should be with God.

Prioress Who am I, wretched as I am at this moment, to concern myself with Him! Let Him first concern Himself with me!

Mother Marie (*Almost harshly*) Your Reverence is delirious!

The Prioress's head drops heavily on the pillow. Her death-rattle begins.

Dieu se glorifie dans ses saints, ses héros et ses martyrs. Il se glorifie aussi dans ses pauvres.

Blanche Je n'ai pas peur de la pauvreté.

La prieure Oh! Il y a bien des sortes de pauvreté, jusqu'à la plus misérable, et c'est de celle-là que vous serez rassasiée. Mon enfant, quoi qu'il advienne, ne sortez pas de la simplicité. Oh! Ma fille, soyez toujours cette chose douce et maniable dans les mains de Dieu! Les saints ne se raidissaient pas contre les tentations, ils ne se révoltaient pas contre eux-mêmes, la révolte est toujours une chose de diable, et surtout ne vous méprisez jamais. Dieu a pris votre honneur en charge, et il est plus en sûreté dans ses mains que dans les vôtres. Relevez-vous cette fois pour tout de bon. A Dieu, je vous bénis. A Dieu, ma petite enfant...

Blanche sort. Mère Marie de l'Incarnation rentre avec le médecin et soeur Anne de la Croix.

Monsieur Javelinot, je vous prie de me donner une nouvelle dose de ce remède.

M. Javelinot Votre Révérence ne la supporterait pas.

La prieure Monsieur Javelinot, vous savez qu'il est d'usage dans nos maisons qu'une prieure prenne publiquement congé de la communauté. Mère Marie, tâchez de convaincre M. Javelinot. Ce élixir ou un autre, n'importe quoi. Oh! Ma mère, regardez vais-je dans un instant montrer ce visage à mes filles?

Mère Marie Oh! Ma mère, ne vous mettez plus en peine de nous! Ne vous inquiétez plus désormais que de Dieu.

La prieure Que suis-je à cette heure, moi misérable, pour m'inquiéter de Lui? Qu'Il s'inquiète donc d'abord de moi!

Mère Marie *Presque durement* Votre Révérence délire.

La tête de la prieure retombe lourdement sur l'oreiller. Presque aussitôt, on entend son râle.

Mother Marie (*To Sister Anne of the Cross*)
You had better shut the window tight. Our Reverend Mother is no longer responsible for what she is saying, but I think it is better not to scandalise your sisters...

Sister Anne looks faint.

O come! Sister Anne of the Cross, you are not going to faint like a silly little girl! Down on your knees and pray! It will do you more good than smelling salts!

While Mother Marie speaks, the Prioress almost sits up in bed. She stares before her and as soon as she stops speaking her lower jaw drops.

Prioress Mother Marie of the Incarnation! Mother Marie...

Mother Marie My Reverend Mother?

Prioress I have seen our chapel empty and desecrated—the altar split in two. There was straw and blood on the ground... Alas! God has forsaken us, God has abandoned us!

Mother Marie Your Reverence is beyond the stage where she can restrain her tongue. I do implore her to say nothing that might...

Prioress Say nothing... Say nothing... Does it matter what I say? I have no more control of my tongue than of my face!

She tries to sit up in bed.

Despair clings to my skin like a waxen mask... Oh! if I could only tear away this mask with my nails!

She falls back on the pillow.

Mother Marie (*to Sister Anne of the Cross*)
Inform your sisters that they will not see the Reverend Mother today. At ten o'clock, recreation as usual.

Sister Anne of the Cross leaves the room. The Prioress, who has heard everything, suddenly sits up.

Prioress Mother Marie of the Incarnation, in the name of Holy Obedience, I command you...

Mère Marie *À soeur Anne de la Croix*
Poussez tout à fait cette fenêtre. Notre révérende mère n'est plus responsable des propos qu'elle tient, mais il est préférable qu'ils ne scandalisent personne...

Soeur Anne défaille.

Allons! Soeur Anne de la Croix, vous n'allez pas vous évanouir comme une femmelette. Mettez-vous à genoux, priez! Cela vous vaudra mieux que des sels.

Tandis que mère Marie parle, la prieure s'est presque soulevée sur son séant. Elle a les yeux fixes, et dès qu'elle cesse de parler sa mâchoire inférieure retombe.

La prieure Mère Marie de l'Incarnation! Mère Marie...

Mère Marie Ma révérende mère?

La prieure Je viens de voir notre chapelle vide et profanée—l'autel fendu en deux, de la paille et du sang sur les dalles... Oh! Oh! Dieu nous délaisse! Dieu nous renonce!

Mère Marie Votre Révérence est hors d'état de retenir sa langue, mais je la supplie d'essayer de ne rien dire qui puisse...

La prieure Ne rien dire... Ne rien dire... Qu'importe ce que je dis! Je ne commande pas plus à ma langue qu'à mon visage.

Elle essaie de se dresser sur son lit.

L'angoisse adhère à ma peau comme un masque de cire... Oh! Que ne puis-je arracher ce masque avec mes ongles!

Elle se laisse de nouveau retomber sur l'oreiller.

Mère Marie *À soeur Anne de la Croix*
Prévenez vos soeurs qu'elles ne verront pas la révérende mère aujourd'hui. A dix heures, récréation, comme d'habitude.

Soeur Anne de la Croix sort. La prieure, qui a tout entendu, se redresse.

La prieure Mère Marie de l'Incarnation, au nom de la sainte obéissance, je vous ordonne...

D. THE PRIORESS'S DEATH

Exhausted by the effort, she falls back again. Her death rattle resumes. The door opens and Blanche enters as though walking in her sleep. The Prioress catches sight of her and makes an effort to call her. Blanche remains standing as if petrified.

Mother Marie Our Reverend Mother wants you to come to her bedside.

Blanche, distraught, kneels by the bed. The Prioress puts her hand on Blanche's forehead.

Prioress Blanche...

She tries to say something and suddenly chokes.

Mother Marie It really is an outrage... they should not be allowed to see her!

Prioress Beg forgiveness... death... fear... fear of death!

She falls dead.

Blanche Our Reverend Mother wants... our Reverend Mother wanted... would have wanted...

She falls on her knees, sobbing, and buries her face in the sheets.

Brisée par l'effort, elle retombe à nouveau en râlant. La porte s'entrouve et Blanche entre d'un pas de somnambule. La prieure l'aperçoit et on comprend qu'elle l'appelle. Blanche reste debout, comme pétrifiée.

Mère Marie La révérende mère veut que vous approchiez jusqu'à son lit.

Blanche, hagarde, s'agenouille près du lit. La prieure lui pose la main sur le front.

La prieure Blanche...

On comprendre que la prieure fait une recommandation à Blanche, puis tout à coup elle suffoque.

Mère Marie C'est une chose insensée... On ne devrait pas permettre...

La prieure Demande pardon... mort... peur... peur de la mort.

Elle tombe morte.

Blanche La révérende mère désire... La révérende mère désirait... aurait désiré...

Elle tombe à genoux, le visage enfoui dans les draps du lit, en sanglotant.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbate, Carolyn. "Opera, or, The Envoicing of Women." In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, edited by Ruth A. Solie, 225-58. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- . "Immortal Voices, Mortal Forms." In *Analytical Strategies and Musical Interpretation: Essays on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Music*, edited by Craig Ayrey and Mark Everist, 288-300. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- . *In Search of Opera*. Princeton Studies in Opera. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Abbate, Carolyn, and Roger Parker. "On Analyzing Opera." In *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, 1-26. California Studies in 19th Century Music 6. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Agulhon, Maurice. *Marianne Into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Albouy, Serge. *Bernanos et la politique, La société et la droite française de 1900 à 1950*. Toulouse: Éditions Privat, 1980.
- Alma, Hans A., and T. Hetty Zock. "The Mercy of Anxiety: A Relational-psychoanalytic Study of *Dialogues des Carmélites*." *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2001): 175-92.
- Almond, Frank Ward. "Melody and Texture in the Choral Works of Francis Poulenc." PhD diss., Florida State University-Tallahassee, 1970.
- Amos, Shaun McClelland. "The Sacred Choral Works for Women's Voices of Francis Poulenc." DMA diss., University of Alabama, 1994.
- Andress, David. *The French Revolution and the People*. London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004.
- Arblaster, Anthony. *Viva la Libertà!: Politics in Opera*. London and New York: Redwood Books, 1992.
- Auzolle, Cecile. "Le sujet, l'effet et l'emotion: Trois formes de theatrification du silence dans l'opera du XXe siècle." In "Musique et silence." Special issue, *Les Cahiers du CIREM* 32-34 (1994): 73-79.

- Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Le Chretien Bernanos*. Translated by Maurice de Gandillac. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1956.
- _____. *An Ecclesial Existence*. Translated from the German and French by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996.
- Bankston, W. B., C. J. Forsyth, and H. H. Floyd. "Toward a General Model of Radical Conversion: An Interactionist Perspective on the Transformation of Self-Identity." *Qualitative Sociology* 4 (1981): 279-97.
- Bartlet, M. Elizabeth C. "The New Repertory at the Opéra during the Reign of Terror: Revolutionary Rhetoric and Operatic Consequences." In *Music and the French Revolution*, edited by Malcolm Boyd, 107-56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Béguin, Albert. *Bernanos par lui-même*. Paris: Éditions du seuil, 1957.
- Beizer, Janet. *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-century France*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Belhomme. *Influence des événements et des commotions politiques sur le développement de la folie*. Paris: Baillière, 1849.
- Beltrando-Patier, Marie-Claire, Huguet Calmel, and Georgie Durosoir, eds. *Le Livret malgré lui: actes du colloque du Groupe de recherche sur les rapports musique-texte (G.R.M.T.): Paris-Sorbonne, le 23 novembre 1991*. Paris: Publimuses, 1992.
- Berenguer, Bruno. "Denise Duvall—Francis Poulenc: Une amitié intime a la base d'une étroite collaboration artistique." [Denise Duvall—Francis Poulenc: An Intimate Friendship as the Basis of a Broad Artistic Partnership] In "Poulenc et ses amis." Special issue, *Revue internationale de musique française* 31 (1994): 49-71.
- Berenson, Edward. *The Trial of Madame Caillaux*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Bernac, Pierre. *Francis Poulenc: The Man and His Songs*. Translated by Winifred Radford. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Bernanos, Georges. *The Star of Satan* [*Sous le soleil de Satan*, 1926]. Translated by Pamela Morris. New York, NY: Fertig, 1975.
- _____. *The Impostor* [*L'imposture*, 1927]. Translated by J. C. Whitehouse. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.
- _____. *Joy* [*La joie*, 1929]. Translated by Louise Varèse. New York: Pantheon, 1946.

- _____. *Jeanne relapse et sainte*. Paris: Plon, 1934.
- _____. *A Crime* [*Un Crime*, 1935]. Translated by Anne Green. New York: Dutton, 1936.
- _____. *The Diary of a Country Priest* [*Journal d'un curé de campagne*, 1937]. Translated by Pamela Morris. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1983.
- _____. *Mouchette* [*Nouvelle histoire de Mouchette*, 1937]. Translated by J. C. Whitehouse. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966.
- _____. *A Diary of My Times* [*Les Grands cimetières sous la lune*]. Translated by Pamela Morris. New York: MacMillan, 1938.
- _____. *Les Grands cimetières sous la lune*. Plon, 1938.
- _____. *Monsieur Ouine*. 1943. Translated by William S. Bush. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.
- _____. *Lettre aux Anglais*. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.
- _____. *Dialogues des Carmélites*. 1949. Edited by Yvonne Guers. New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- _____. *Night is Darkest* [*Un mauvaise rêve*]. Translated by W. J. Strachan. London: Bodley Head, 1950.
- _____. *The Last Essays of Georges Bernanos* [*La liberté pour quoi faire?* 1953]. Paris: Gallimard, 1953.
- _____. *Dialogue d'ombres, nouvelles. Suivies des Premiers essais romanesques*. Paris: Plon, 1955.
- _____. *Correspondance*. 2 vols. Collected by Albert Béguin. Selected and presented by Jean Murray. Paris: Plon, 1971.
- _____. *Essais et écrits de combat*. 2 vols. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. [Paris]: Gallimard, 1971.
- _____. *Lettres retrouvées. Correspondance inédite 1904-1948*. Selected, annotated, and presented by Jean-Loup Bernanos. Paris: Plon, 1983.
- Bernstein, Jane, ed. *Women's Voices Across Musical Worlds*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.
- Boly, Joseph. *Dialogues des carmélites [par] Georges Bernanos; étude et analyse*. Paris: Les Éditions de l'école, 1960.

- Bonfils, J. F. *De la folie ou aliénation mentale*. Paris: Didot Jeune, 1819.
- Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Bottex, Alexander. *Rapport statistique sur le service des aliénés de l'hospice de l'Antiquaille et considérations générales sur le traitement de la folie*. Paris: Lyon, 1839.
- Boutin, Aimée. "'Ring Out the Old, Ring in the New': The Symbolism of Bells in Nineteenth-Century French Poetry." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 30, nos. 3-4 (2002): 267-81.
- Boyce, James John. "Cantica Carmelitana: The Chants of the Carmelite Office." PhD diss., New York University, 1984.
- . "The Medieval Carmelite Office Tradition." *Acta Musicologica* 62, nos. 2-3 (1990): 129-51.
- Braun, William R. "Dialogue on *Carmélites* I: The Nun's Story." *Opera News* 67, no. 7 (January 2003): 20-24.
- Brett, Philip. "Britten's Dream." In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, edited by Ruth A. Solie, 259-80. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Bridel, Yves. *L'esprit d'enfance dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Georges Bernanos*. Paris: Minard Lettres Modernes, 1966.
- Brierre de Boismont, A. *Extrait des Annales d'Hygiène publique*, tome XXI, 2e partie, 'De l'influence de la civilisation sur le développement de la folie', 16, 17, 19, 23, 47.
- Brody, Elaine. *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870-1925*. New York: Braziller, 1988.
- Bronfen, Elisabeth. *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Bruhn, Siglind. *Saints in the Limelight: Representations of the Religious Quest on the Post-1945 Operatic Stage*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2003.
- Burr Margadant, Jo. *Madame le Professeur: Women Educators in the Third Republic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

- Burton, Richard D. E. *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789-1945*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- _____. *Francis Poulenc* [from the Outlines series]. Bath, ENG: Absolute Press, 2002.
- _____. *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Bush, William. *Souffrance et expiation dans la pensée de Bernanos*. Paris: Minard Lettres Modernes, 1962.
- _____. *Georges Bernanos*. New York: Twayne, 1969.
- _____. *To Quell the Terror: The True Story of the Carmelite Martyrs of Compiègne*. Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1999.
- Carlier, J. C. "Roland Barthes's Resurrection of the Author and Redemption of Biography." *Cambridge Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2000): 386-93.
- Catherine of Siena. *The Dialogue*. Translation and introduction by Suzanne Noffke. New York: Paulist, 1980.
- Cervantes, Fernando. "'Great Cemeteries Under the Moon': Bernanos and the Spanish Civil War." *New Blackfriars* 79, no. 933 (1998): 492-501.
- Charlton, David. "On Redefinitions of 'Rescue Opera'." In *Music and the French Revolution*, edited by Malcolm Boyd, 169-88. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Chimènes, Myriam, and Sidney Buckland, eds. *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.
- Chisholm, Rose Marie. "The Poulenc Sonata Cantilena: A Vocal Connection," *Flutist Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 25-26.
- Citron, Marcia. *Gender and the Musical Canon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Clark, W. H. *The Psychology of Religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1958.
- Clément, Catherine. *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* [*L'Opéra, ou la défaite des femmes*]. Translated by Betsy Wing. London: Tauris, 1997.
- Clément, Catherine, and Hélène Cixous. *The Newly Born Woman*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

- Clifton, Keith. "Mots caches: Autobiography in Cocteau's and Poulenc's *La voix humaine*." In "Jean Cocteau: Evangelist of the Avant-garde." Special issue, *Canadian University Music Review/Revue de musique des universités canadiennes* 22, no. 1 (2001): 68-85.
- The Convent, or the History of Julia*. 2 vols. London: Printed for T. Lowndes, 1767.
- Cooke, John E. *Georges Bernanos: A Study of Christian Commitment*. Amersham, Buckinghamshire: Avebury, 1981.
- Corbin, Alain. *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century Countryside* [*Les Cloches de la terre*]. Translated by Martin Thom. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Cox, Virginia. *The Renaissance Dialogue: Literary Dialogue in Its Social and Political Contexts, Castiglione to Galileo*. Cambridge, ENG: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Daniel, Keith W. *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982.
- _____. "The Choral Music of Francis Poulenc." *American Choral Review* 24, no. 1 (January 1982): 5-36.
- De Ferrières. *Correspondence inédite, 1789, 1790, 1791*. Edited by H. Carré. Paris, 1932.
- De Lioncourt, Guy. *Un témoignage sur la musique et sur la vie au Xxe siècle*. Paris, 1956.
- De Man, Paul. *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- De Moor, Marysa. "'His way is thro' chaos and the bottomless and pathless': The Gender of Madness in Alfred Tennyson's Poetry." *Neophilologus* 86, no. 2 (2002): 325-35.
- De Solliers, Jean. "Dialogues des Carmélites: Commentaire littéraire et musical." *L'Avant-scène opéra* 52 (May 1983): 43-81.
- Machlis, Joseph. English translation. *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Opéra de Lyon. Kent Nagano, cond. Virgin Classics compact disc. 1992.
- Diderot, Denis. *The Nun* [1796]. A new translation and introduction by Russell Goulbourne. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

- . *La Religieuse* [1796]. Edited with introduction, notes, and bibliography by Heather Lloyd. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2000.
- Dixon, Graham. "Handel's Music for the Carmelites—A Study in Liturgy and Some Observations on Performance." *Early Music* 15, no. 1 (1987): 16-29.
- Doerner, Klaus. *Madmen and the Bourgeoisie: A Social History of Insanity and Psychiatry*. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel and Jean Steinberg. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981.
- Döhring, Sieghart. "Die Wahnsinnszene." In *Die 'couleur locale' in der Opera des 19. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Heinz Becker, 279-314. Regensburg, 1976.
- Dorschell, Mary Frances Catherine. *Georges Bernanos' Debt to Therese of Lisieux*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen University Press, 1996.
- . "Georges Bernanos: The Vocation of the Christian Writer." *Christianity and Literature* 55, no. 3 (Spring 2006), 323.
- Duchesneau, Michel. *L'avant-garde musicale à Paris de 1871 à 1939*. Sprimont: Mardaga, 1997.
- Durand, Béatrice. "Diderot and the Nun: Portrait of the Artist as a Transvestite." In *Men Writing the Feminine: Literature, Theory, and the Question of Genders*, edited by Thäis Morgan, 89-106. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Ebensberger, Gary Lee. "The Motets of Francis Poulenc." PhD diss., University of Texas-Austin, 1970.
- Erikson, Erik. *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton, 1950.
- Etang, Luc. "Les Dialogues des Carmélites." *Bulletin de la société des amis de Georges Bernanos* 1 (1949).
- Estève, Michel. *Bernanos*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1965.
- Evans, Martha Noel. *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Fabbri, Paolo. "On the Origins of an Operatic Topos: The Mad-Scene." In *Con che soavità: Studies in Italian Opera, Song, and Dance, 1580-1740*, edited by Iain Fenlon and Tim Carter, 157-95. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Falret, J. P. *Observations et propositions médicochirurgicale*. Paris: Didot Jeune, 1819.
- Fausser, Annegret. "La Guerre en dentelles: Women and the *Prix de Rome* in French

- Cultural Politics.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (1998): 83-129.
- Fischer, Michel. “La musique sacrée en France de 1945 à 1995: Approches d’une réalité paradoxale.” In *La musica e il sacro (Music and the sacred)*, edited by Biancamaria Brumana and Galliano Ciliberti, 201-17. *Historiae musicae cultores* biblioteca 79. Florence: Olschki, 1997.
- Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* [1965]. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Vintage, 1988.
- Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. “Of Other Spaces.” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-27.
- Fulcher, Jane F. *The Nation’s Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- . *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914-1940*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Fuller, Anne. *The Convent, or the History of Sophia Nelson*. 2 vols. London: Wilkins, 1786.
- Garb, Tamar. *Sisters of the Brush: Women’s Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Garrigou-Lagrange, Reginald. “La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?” Translated by Suzanne M. Rini. *Angelicum* 23 (1946): 126-45.
- Gaucher, Guy. “Bernanos et Sainte Thérèse de l’Enfant-Jésus.” In “Études bernanosiennes.” Special issue, *La Revue des Lettres Modernes* 7, nos. 56-57 (1960): 228-68.
- . *The Story of a Life: St. Thérèse of Lisieux*. Translated by Anne Marie Brennan. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.
- . *Georges Bernanos ou l’invincible espérance*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994.
- Gendre, Claude. “Rencontres spirituelles autour des Carmélites de Compiègne et Blanche de la Force.” In *Paradoxes et permanence de la pensée bernanosienne*, 137-45. Paris: Amateurs de livres, 1989.
- . *“Dialogues des Carmélites: The Historical Background, Literary Destiny, and*

- Genesis of the Opera.” In *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature*, edited by Myriam Chimènes and Sidney Buckland, 274-319. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.
- Gerhard, Anselm. *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Mary Whittall. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Gillespie, V. B. *Religious Conversion and Personal Identity: How and Why People Change*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education, 1979.
- Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory. Baltimore, 1977.
- _____. *Le bouc émissaire*. Paris: Grasset, 1982.
- Godineau, Dominique. *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*. Translated by Katherine Streip. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Goldstein, Jan Ellen. *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Gordon, D. F. “The Jesus People: An Identity Synthesis.” *Urban Life Culture* 3 (1974): 159-78.
- Gosselin, Monique. “*Dialogues des Carmélites*, l’ultime méditation de Bernanos.” In *Europe: revue littéraire mensuelle*, nos. 789-90 (January-February 1995): 129-39.
- Gossett, Philip. “Becoming a Citizen: The Chorus in *Risorgimento* Opera.” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2, no. 1 (1990): 41-64.
- Gouverné, Yvonne. *Poulenc et Rocamadour*. Paris: Zodiaque, 1974.
- Griffiths, Paul. *Igor Stravinsky: The Rake’s Progress*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Griffiths, Richard. *The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870-1914*. London: Constable, 1966.
- Groos, Arthur, and Roger Parker, eds. *Reading Opera*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Grover-Friedlander, Michal. “The Call of the Human Voice in Poulenc’s *La voix humaine*.” In *Music, Sensation, and Sensuality*, edited by Linda Phyllis

- Austern, 199-210. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990.
- Halda, Bernard. *Bernanos, ou la foi militante et déchirée*. Paris: Téqui, 1980.
- Hanson, Ellis. *Decadence and Catholicism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Happold, F. C. *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*. Middlesex, ENG: Penguin, 1963.
- Harper, Patricia. "A Fresh Look at Francis Poulenc's Sonata for Flute and Piano." *Flutist Quarterly* 17, no.1 (Winter 1992): 8-23.
- . "A Further Look at Francis Poulenc's Sonata for Flute and Piano." *Flutist Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1993-94): 48-57.
- Harris, Ellen T. "Abandoned Heroines: Women's Voices in Handel's Cantatas." In *Women's Voices Across Musical Worlds*, edited by Jane A. Bernstein, 232-56. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.
- Harris, Jennifer. "The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans 1789-94." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (1981): 283-312.
- Harris, Ruth. *Murder and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin de Siècle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Hayes, Susan Nanette. "Chamber Music in France Featuring Flute and Soprano, 1850-1950, and a Study of the Interactions Among the Leading Flutists, Sopranos, Composers, Artists, and Literary Figures of the Time." DMA diss., University of Maryland-College Park, 2006.
- Hebblethwaite, Peter. *Bernanos: An Introduction*. London: Bowes and Bowes, 1965.
- Heft, James L. *A Catholic Modernity?: Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Hell, Henri. *Francis Poulenc: Musicien français*. Translated by Edward Lockspeiser. London: John Calder, 1959.
- Herrold, Charles M., Jr. "Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*: An Historical, Literary, Textual, Musical Analysis." Master's thesis, University of Rochester-Eastman School of Music, 1975.
- Heyer, Astrid. "La femme dans le monde imaginaire de Georges Bernanos." PhD diss.,

- University of Western Ontario, 1994.
- Hibberd, Sarah. "'Dormez donc, mes chers amours': Hérold's *La Somnambule* (1827) and Dream Phenomena on the Parisian Lyric Stage." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 2 (2004): 107-32.
- Huebner, Steven. *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . "Naturalism and Supernaturalism in Alfred Bruneau's *Le rêve*." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11, no. 1 (1999): 77-101.
- . "'O patria mia': Patriotism, Dream, Death." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14, nos. 1-2 (2002): 161-75.
- Hunt, Lynn Avery. *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Hutcheon, Linda, and Michael Hutcheon. *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.
- Hyer, Brian. "Parsifal Hystérique." *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2006): 269-320.
- Imbert-Gourbeyre, Antoine. *La stigmatisation, l'extase divine et les miracles de Lourdes: Réponse aux libres penseurs*. 2 vols. Clermont-Ferrand: Librairie Catholique and Paris: Bellet, 1894.
- l'Incarnation, Marie de. *La Relation du martyre des seize Carmélites de Compiègne. Aux sources de Bernanos et de Gertrud von le Fort. Manuscrits inédits*. Collected and annotated by William Bush. Paris: Cerf, 1993.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum de l'autre femme*. Editions de Minuit, 1974.
- Ivry, Benjamin. *Francis Poulenc*. London: Phaidon, 1996.
- Jacob, Françoise, and Allan Beveridge. "Madness and Politics: French Nineteenth-century Alienists' Response to Revolution." *History of Psychiatry* 6 (1995): 421-29.
- Jackson, G. *The Fact of Conversion: The Cole Lectures for 1908*. New York: Revell, 1908.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. 1902. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908.
- Janes, Regina. "Beheadings." In *Death and Representation*, edited by Sarah Webster

- Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, 242-62. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Jarman, Douglas. *Alban Berg, Wozzeck*. Cambridge Opera Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Jésus-Marie, Bruno de. *Le sang du Carmel ou la véritable passion des seize Carmélites de Compiègne*. Paris: Cerf, 1992.
- Jodock, Darrell, ed. *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-modernism in Historical Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Jordan, Mark D. *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Keck, George Russell. *Francis Poulenc: A Bio-bibliography*. Bio-bibliographies in Music 28. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1990.
- Kelly, Gary, ed. *Varieties of Female Gothic*. Enlightenment Gothic and Terror Gothic, vol. 1. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002.
- Kendrick, Robert L. *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and Their Music in Early Modern Milan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Kestner, Joseph. "The Scaffold of Honor: The Strength to Conquer Fear Figures as a Central Theme in the Carmelite Dialogues of Bernanos and Poulenc." *Opera News* 45, no. 9 (1981): 12-27.
- Kimball, Carol. "Jane Bathori's Interpretive Legacy." *Journal of Singing* 57, no. 3 (January-February 2001): 17-45.
- Kimmel, William. "The Phrygian Inflection and the Appearances of Death in Music." *Journal of the College Music Society* 22, no. 2 (1980): 42-76.
- Klaits, Joseph. *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Korsyn, Kevin. "Beyond Privileged Contexts: Intertextuality, Influence, and Dialogue." In *Rethinking Music*, edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, 55-72. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Kramer, Lawrence. *Music as Cultural Practice 1800-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Word, Dialogue, and Novel." In *Desire in Language: A Semiotic*

- Approach to Literature and Art*. Edited by Léon S. Roudiez. Translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Léon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Kushner, Eva. "The Renaissance Dialogue and Its Zero-Degree Fictionality." In *Fiction Updated: Theories of Fictionality, Narratology, and Poetics*, edited by Calin-Andrei Mihailescu and Walid Hamarneh, 165-172. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Lagarde, André, and Laurent Michard. *XXe Siècle: Les Grands auteurs français, Anthologie et histoire littéraire*. Paris: Bordas, 1988.
- Landes, Joan B. *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Lang, K., and G. E. Lang. *Collective Dynamics*. New York: Crowell, 1961.
- Langlois, Claude. "La 'déchristianisation'." In *Du roi très chrétien à la laïcité républicaine*. Vol. 3, *Histoire de la France religieuse*. Edited by René Rémond, Jacques Le Goff, and Philippe Joutard. Univers historique series. Paris: Seuil, 1991.
- Le Bon, Gustave. *Psychologie des foules*. Paris: Alcan, 1895.
- Lee, M. Owen. "It Is Your Turn to Speak: *Dialogues des Carmélites*." In *A Season of Opera: From Orpheus to Ariadne*, 170-81. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
- Le Fort, Gertrud von. *Die Letzte am Schafott*. Munich: Ehrenwirth Verlag, 1931.
- . *The Song at the Scaffold [Die Letzte am Schafott]*. Translated by Olga Marx. Kirkwood, MO: Catholic Authors Press, 1954.
- Lespinard, Bernadette. "L'oeuvre chorale de Poulenc: L'âge d'or du chant français a cappella?" In *Francis Poulenc et la voix: Texte et contexte*, edited by Alban Ramaut, 139-51. Sainte-Etienne, France: Université de Saint-Etienne, 2002.
- Limonick, Natalie. "The Opera Workshop: The University of California Opera Workshop." *Opera Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 79-92.
- Lindenberger, Herbert. "Rossini, Shelley and Italy in 1819." Chap. 3 in *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage*, 81-106. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Lisieux, Thérèse de. *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: Cerf, Desclée de Brouwer, 1992.
- Loome, Thomas Michael. *Liberal Catholicism, Reform Catholicism, Modernism: A*

- Contribution to a New Orientation in Modernist Research*. Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1979.
- Lynch, F. R. "Toward a Theory of Conversion and Commitment to the Occult." *American Behavior Science* 20 (1977): 887-908.
- Machart, Renaud. *Francis Poulenc*. Paris: Seuil, 1995.
- Maître, Jacques. *L'Orpheline de la Bérésina: Thérèse de Lisieux (1873-1897)*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995.
- Martin, Terence J. *Living Words: Studies in Dialogues Over Religion*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.
- Mason, Laura. "Angels and Furies: Women and Popular Song during the French Revolution." In *Music and History: Bridging the Disciplines*, edited by Jeffrey H. Jackson and Stanley C. Pelkey, 44-60. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
- Matter, E. Ann. "Il matrimonio mistico." In *Donne e fede: Santità e vita religiosa in Italia*, edited by Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri, 43-60. Bari: Laterza, 1994.
- Mawer, Deborah. "'Dancing on the Edge of the Volcano': French Music in the 1930s." In *French Music Since Berlioz*, edited by Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter, 249-80. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- Mazzoni, Cristina. *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- McClary, Susan. "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen." In *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, 80-111. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- McClatchie, Stephen C. "Benjamin Britten, Owen Wingrave and the Politics of the Closet, or, 'He shall be straightened out at Paramore'." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8, no. 1 (1996): 59-75.
- McDonald, Christie V. *The Dialogue of Writing: Essays in Eighteenth-Century French Literature*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1984.
- McDonald, Ellen. "Women in Benjamin Britten's Operas." *Opera Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 83-101.
- McManners, John. *The French Revolution and the Church*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982.

- Mellers, Wilfrid Howard. *Francis Poulenc*. Oxford Studies of Composers. Oxford: Oxford University, 1993.
- Meyer, Stephen. "Terror and Transcendence in the Operatic Prison, 1790-1815." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55, no. 3 (2002): 477-523.
- Micale, Mark S. *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- _____. *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Midgett, Anne. "Bare Essence." *Opera News* 62, no. 6 (1997): 54-57.
- Mihailescu, Calin-Andrei, and Walid Hamameh, eds. *Fiction Updated: Theories of Fictionality, Narratology, and Poetics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Miller, Leta E. "Method and Madness in Lou Harrison's 'Rapunzel'." *Journal of Musicology* 19, no. 1 (2002): 85-124.
- Molnar, Thomas Steven. *Bernanos: His Political Thoughts and Prophecy*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960.
- Monson, Craig. *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995.
- Moore, Alison M. "History, Memory and Trauma in Photography of the *Tondues*: Visuality of the Vichy Past through the Silent Image of Women." *Gender and History* 17, no. 3 (2005): 657-81.
- Moore, Stephen D. "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality." *Church History* 69 (2000): 328-49.
- Moreau, J. *Les facultés morales considérées sous le point de vue médical, de leur influence sur les maladies nerveuses, les affections organiques*. Paris: Librairie des Sciences médicales, 1836.
- Morrison, Toni. *Paradise*. New York: Knopf, 1998.
- Murray, S. Meredith. *La genèse de "Dialogues des Carmélites"*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1963.
- Myers, Rollo. *Modern French Music from Fauré to Boulez*. New York: Praeger, 1971.
- Naish, Camille. *Death Comes to the Maiden: Sex and Education 1431-1933*. London:

- Routledge, 1991.
- Nichols, Roger. Liner Notes. *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Orchestra de l'Opéra de Lyon, Virgin Classics compact disc. 1992.
- _____. *The Harlequin Years: Music in Paris 1917-1929*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Nichols, Roger, and Richard Langham Smith. *Claude Debussy: Pelléas et Mélisande*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Nock, A. D. *Conversion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Nolan, Simon. "Carmel and Music II: Handel's Music for the Carmelites." *Carmel in the World* 42, no. 1 (2003). <http://www.carmelites.ie/Periodicals/citw2003.1.htm>.
- Nordau, Max Simon. *Entartung (Degeneration)*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.
- Nye, Robert A. *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- O'Connell, Mavin Richard. *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994.
- Offen, Karen. "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France." *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 648-76.
- Orledge, Robert. "Poulenc and Koechlin: 58 Lessons and a Friendship." In *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature*, edited by Sidney Buckland and Myriam Chimènes, 9-47. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.
- _____. "Satie and Les Six." In *French Music Since Berlioz*, edited by Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter, 223-48. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- Padel, Ruth. "'Piangi, piangi, o misera': Putting Words in Women's Mouths—The Female Role in Opera." *London Review of Books* 19, no. 2 (January 1997): 12-17.
- Palmer, R. R. *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.
- Papal Encyclicals Online. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/all.htm>.
- Parakilas, James. "Mozart's Mad Scene." *Soundings* 10 (1983): 3-17.
- _____. "Political Representation and the Chorus in Nineteenth-century Opera." 19th-

- Century Music* 16 (Fall 1992): 181-202.
- Parrucci, D. J. "Religious Conversion: A Theory of Deviant Behavior." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (1968): 144-54.
- Paxton, Robert O. *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*. New York: Knopf, 1972.
- Pazdro, Michel, ed. "Dialogues des Carmélites, La voix humaine." *L'Avant-scène opéra* 52 (1983).
- Pendle, Karin. "A bas les couvents! Anticlerical Sentiment in French Opera of the 1790s." *Music Review* 42, no. 1 (1981): 22-45.
- Perloff, Nancy Lynn. *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.
- Petit, Marc-Antoine. "Discours sur l'influence de la Revolution française sur la santé publique." In *Essai sur la Medecine du Coeur*, 116-57. Lyon, 1806.
- Petrey, Sandy, ed. *The French Revolution, 1789-1989: Two Hundred Years of Rethinking*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1989.
- Pézeril, Abbé Daniel. "Bernanos et sa mort." In *Georges Bernanos*, 355-58. Paris: Seuil, 1949.
- Pines, Roger G. "Virginia Zeani." *Opera News* 67, no. 7 (January 2003): 38-41.
- Pistone, Daniele. "La musique et le sacre a Paris de la Revolution a nos jours: Caracteristiques et evolution." In *La musica e il sacro (Music and the sacred)*, edited by Biancamaria Brumana and Galliano Ciliberti, 183-99. *Historiae musicae cultores biblioteca* 79. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1997.
- Popkin, Jeremy D. *A History of Modern France*. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2001.
- Potter, Caroline. "French Musical Style and the Post-War Generation." In *French Music Since Berlioz*, edited by Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter, 331-54. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- . "French Music and the Second World War." In *French Music Since Berlioz*, edited by Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter, 281-301. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- Poulenc, Francis. "Comment j'ai composé les *Dialogues des Carmélites*." *L'Opéra de Paris* 17 (n.d.).

- _____. *Entretiens avec Claude Rostand*. Paris: René Julliard, 1954.
- _____. *Dialogues des Carmélites: An opera in 3 acts and 12 scenes* (Piano-vocal score English and French). Milano: Ricordi, 1959.
- _____. *Emmanuel Chabrier*. Geneva and Paris: La Palatine, 1961.
- _____. *Moi et mes amis*. Paris and Geneva: La Palatine, 1963.
- _____. *Correspondance (1915-1963)*. Compiled by Hélène Wendel. Paris: Seuil, 1967.
- _____. "Dialogues des carmélites, La voix humaine." *L'Avant-scène opéra* 52 (May 1983).
- _____. *Diary of My Songs (Journal de mes mélodies)*. Translated by Winifred Radford. London: Gollancz, 1985.
- _____. *Francis Poulenc: 'Echo and Source', Selected Correspondence 1915-1963*. Edited and translated by Sidney Buckland. London: Gollancz, 1991.
- _____. *Correspondance, 1910-1963*. 2nd ed. Edited by Myriam Chimènes. SACEM. Paris: Fayard, 1994.
- _____. "My Ideal Library." In *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*, edited by Sidney Buckland and Myriam Chimènes, 140-44. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.
- Pratt, J. B. *The Religious Consciousness*. New York: Macmillan, 1926.
- Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- Puffett, Derrick, ed. *Richard Strauss: Salome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Quartararo, Anne T. *Women Teachers and Popular Education in Nineteenth-Century France: Social Values and Corporate Identity at the Normal School Institution*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995.
- Rabinowitz, Peter J. "Singing for Myself: *Carmen* and the Rhetoric of Musical Resistance." In *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, edited by Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, 133-52. Zürich: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999.
- Rae, Caroline. *The Music of Maurice Ohana*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000.
- Ramaut, Alban, ed. *Francis Poulenc et la voix: Texte et contexte*. Sainte-Etienne, France: Université de Saint-Etienne, 2002.

- Rauhut, Franz. "Les motifs musicaux de l'opéra *Dialogues des Carmélites* de Francis Poulenc." *Revue des lettres modernes*, 4th ser., nos. 340-45 (1973): 211-49.
- Regard, Frédéric. "The Ethics of Biographical Reading: A Pragmatic Approach." *Cambridge Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2000): 394-408.
- Reich, Nancy B. "Women as Musicians: A Question of Class." In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Musical Scholarship*, edited by Ruth A. Solie, 125-46. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.
- Rémond, René. *The Right Wing in France from 1815 to De Gaulle*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969.
- Rétat, Pierre. "Forme et discours d'un journal révolutionnaire: Les Révolutions de Paris en 1789." In *L'instrument périodique: La fonction de la presse au XVIIIe siècle*, edited by Claude Labrosse, Pierre Rétat, and Henri Duranton. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1986.
- Richardson, J. T. "Conversion Careers." *Society* 17 (1980): 47-50.
- Richardson, J. T., and M. Stewart. "Conversion Process Models and the Jesus Movement." *American Behavior Science* 20 (1977): 819-38.
- Robinson, Paul. "*Fidelio* and the French Revolution." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 1 (1991): 23-48.
- Rosand, Ellen. "Operatic Madness: A Challenge to Convention." In *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, edited by Steven Paul Scher, 241-87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Rosmarin, Léonard. *When Literature Becomes Opera: Study of a Transformational Process*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1999.
- Rostand, Claude. *French Music Today*. Translated by Henry Marx. New York: Merlin Press, 1952.
- Rudé, George F. E. *The Crowd in the French Revolution*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Salaun, Daniel. "Francis Poulenc: Musique chorale et spirituelle." In *Etudes* [France], Issue 3911-12 (July-August 1999): 89-99.
- Sams, Jeremy. "From the Scaffold to La Scala." *Opera* 50, no. 5 (1999): 512-18.

- Santurenne, Thierry. "Noces de sang: 'hymen et guillotine: *Dialogues des Carmélites* de Francis Poulenc." In "Erotisme et ordre moral." Special issue, *Revue d'études culturelles* 1 (2005): 189-97.
- Sayre, Kenneth. *Plato's Literary Garden: How to Read a Platonic Dialogue*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.
- Schachtel, E. G. *Metamorphosis: On the Development of Affect, Perception, Attention and Memory*. 1959. New York: Da Capo, 1984.
- Schechter, Ronald. "Conceptualizing the French Revolution: Problems and Methods." In *The French Revolution: The Essential Readings*, edited by Ronald Schechter, 1-30. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Schmidt, Carl B. *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc*. Lives in Music 3. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2001.
- Schnitzler, Gunter. "The Rake's Progress: Hogarth, Lichtenberg, Stravinsky." In *Musikalisches Welttheater: Festschrift für Rolf Dammann zum 65 Geburtstag*, edited by Susanne Schaal, 177-201. Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1995.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*. New York: Pantheon, 1985.
- Silverman, Debra. "The 'New Woman', Feminism, and the Decorative Arts in Fin-de-Siècle France." In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, edited by Lynn Hunt, 144-63. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Simeone, Nigel. "Le *Dialogues des Carmélites* dans la presse anglaise en 1957-1958: Petite histoire d'une oeuvre incomprise." In *Francis Poulenc et la voix: Texte et contexte*, edited by Alban Ramaut, 23-33. Sainte-Etienne, FR: Université de Saint-Etienne, 2002.
- _____. "La Spirale and La Jeune France: Group Identities." *Musical Times* 143, no. 1880 (2002): 10-36.
- _____. "Making Music in Occupied Paris." *Musical Times* 147, no. 1894 (2006): 23-50.
- Six, Jean François. *La Véritable enfance de Thérèse de Lisieux: névrose et sainteté*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972.
- Slawinska, Irena. "Les *Dialogues des Carmélites* aux prises avec la scène." In *Bernanos: Création et modernité*, edited by Max Milner, 153-57. Klincksieck, Paris: Presses de l'Université Marie Curie-Sklodowska, 1998.
- Smart, Mary Ann. "The Silencing of Lucia." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4 (1992): 119-

- _____. “*Dalla tomba uscita*: Representations of Madness in Nineteenth-century Italian Opera.” PhD diss., Cornell University, 1994.
- _____. “Ulterior Motives: Verdi’s Recurring Themes Revisited.” In *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, edited by Mary Ann Smart, 135-39. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Snipes-Hoyt, Carolyn. “Jeanne d’Arc Visits Paris in 1912: *Dramatis personae* and Personification.” *French Review* 73, no. 6 (2000): 1141-54.
- Snow, David A., and Richard Machalek. “The Sociology of Conversion.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 167-90.
- Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- Spoto, Donald. “Dialogue on *Carmélites* II: A Roman Catholic’s Perspective.” *Opera News* 67, no. 7 (2003): 25-27.
- Starzyk, Lawrence J. *The Dialogue of the Mind With Itself: Early Victorian Poetry and Poetics*. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 1992.
- Stiennon, Isabelle. “L’oeuvre choral a cappella de Francis Poulenc.” *Bulletin de la Société Liegeoise de Musicologie* 34 (July 1981): 1-11.
- Taine, Hippolyte. *Les origines de la France contemporaine*. Vol. 2, *La révolution—l’anarchie*, book 1. Paris: Hachette et Cie., 1877.
- Taruskin, Richard. “Christian Themes in Russian Opera: A Millennial Essay.” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2, no. 1 (1990): 83-91.
- _____. *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- _____. “*Khovanshchina*.” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed May 23, 2010).
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Tobin, Michael R. *Georges Bernanos: The Theological Source of His Art*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007.
- Tombs, Robert. *France, 1814-1914*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1996.

- Tonneau, Leopold Fernand Charles. "De Tirésias aux Carmelites, ou Le transfert de la grâce: Essai sur le cheminement spirituel de Francis Poulenc tel que je l'ai perçu dans son oeuvre musicale (From Tirésias to the Carmelites, or The Transference of Grace: Essay on the Spiritual Development of Francis Poulenc as Perceived in His Musical Works)." PhD diss., Faculté Université de Théologie Protestante, Bruxelles, 2000.
- Travisano, R. V. "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations." In *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*, edited by G. P. Stone and H. A. Farberman, 594-606. Waltham, MA: Ginn Blaisdell, 1970.
- Undank, Jack. "Diderot's 'Unnatural' Acts: Lessons from the Convent." *French Forum* 11 (1986).
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. 12th ed. New York: Dutton, 1961.
- Ussher, Jane M. *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.
- Van Kley, Dale K. *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Van Orden, Kate. "Female 'Complaintes': Laments of Venus, Queens, and City Women in Late Sixteenth-Century France." *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 801-45.
- Vasse, Denis. *La Souffrance sans jouissance, ou le martyre de l'amour: Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1998.
- Vives, Vincent. "Du livret à 'l'aventure prosodique': *Dialogue des Carmélites* ou le transfert de la grâce." In *Le Livret malgré lui: actes du colloque du Groupe de recherche sur les rapports musique-texte (G.R.M.T.): Paris-Sorbonne, le 23 novembre 1991*, edited by Marie-Claire Beltrando-Patier, Huguette Calmel, and Georgie Durosoir, 106-20. Paris: Publimuses, 1992.
- Von la Chevallierie, Eleonore. "Gertrud von le Fort and the Fear of Blanche de la Force." In *Renascence. Essays on Values in Literature, Literature and Martyrdom* 18, no. 1 (1995): 11-25.
- Vuarnet, Jean-Noël. *Extases féminines*. Paris: Arthaud, 1980.
- Wajeman, Gérard. *Le Maître et l'hystérique*. Paris: Na-varin-Seuil, 1982.
- Waleckx, Denis. "Les Mamelles de Tiresias: Opera-bouffe en deux actes et un prologue—Musique de Francis Poulenc sur un poème de Guillaume Apollinaire."

- DEA, Université de Lyon II, Faculté des lettres, sciences du langage, 1991.
- _____. "La musique dramatique de Francis Poulenc (les ballets et de théâtre lyrique)." PhD diss., Université de Paris, 1996.
- _____. "A Musical Confession: Poulenc, Cocteau, and *La voix humaine*." In *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature*, edited by Myriam Chimènes and Sidney Buckland, 320-47. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.
- _____. "In search of a libretto." In *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature*, edited by Myriam Chimènes and Sidney Buckland, 252-73. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.
- _____. "Poulenc et ses interpretes: Le cas particulier de la mélodie et du théâtre lyrique." In *Francis Poulenc et la voix: Texte et contexte*, edited by Alban Ramaut, 1-9. Sainte-Etienne, FR: Université de Saint-Etienne, 2002.
- _____. "La voix humaine filmée par Dominique Delouche: Transmission, interpretation, mise en abyme." In *Francis Poulenc et la voix: Texte et contexte*, edited by Alban Ramaut, 257-65. Sainte-Etienne, FR: Université de Saint-Etienne, 2002.
- Wallach Scott, Joan. *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Watkins, Glenn. *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Whitesell, Lloyd. "Images of Self in the Music of Benjamin Britten." PhD diss., State University of New York-Stony Brook, 1993.
- Willier, Stephen Ace. "Early Nineteenth-century Opera and the Impact of the Gothic." PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1987.
- Winn, Colette H., ed. *The Dialogue in Early Modern France, 1547-1630: Art and Argument*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993.
- Wood, Marc Andrew. "The Influence of Stravinsky on the Music of Francis Poulenc." PhD diss., University of London-Goldsmiths College, 1997.