From the Banal to the Surreal: Poulenc, Jacob, and *Le Bal masqué*

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ABSTRACT

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) demonstrates a remarkable affinity for surrealist poetry in his numerous settings of leading modernist French poets from the first half of the twentieth century. The poetry of Max Jacob (1876-1944), a once unduly marginalized writer who is now regarded as an influential initiator of surrealism, provided the inspiration for one of Poulenc's most significant works, the chamber cantata *Le Bal masqué* (1932).

This thesis seeks to shed light on Poulenc's largely neglected artistic interaction with Jacob by exploring musical counterparts to the poet's unique surrealist aesthetic in *Le Bal masqué*. Chapter one examines Poulenc's artistic milieu surrounding the composition and first performance of *Le Bal masqué*, and reviews previous literature on Poulenc's involvement with avant-garde art and literature. Chapter two focuses on Jacob himself and discusses key aspects of his subversive poetic aesthetic. Chapter three outlines the fundamental characteristics of surrealist art in general and reviews previous discussions of music and surrealism. The final chapter explores surrealist influences in *Le Bal masqué* while concentrating on musical parallels to central features of Jacob's poetry and surrealist art in general described in the preceding chapters.

RÉSUMÉ

La plupart des oeuvres vocales de Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) sont inspirés par les principaux poètes français des premières décennies du vingtième siècle et révèlent sa prédilection pour la poésie surréaliste. Max Jacob (1876-1944), un poète considéré à présent parmi les initiateurs du surréalisme malgré son exclusion du groupe surréaliste de l'entre-deux-guerres, jouit d'un statut particulièrement privilégié aux yeux du compositeur. C'est dans la poésie de Jacob que Poulenc puise le texte d'une de ses œuvres les plus importantes: la "cantate profane" *Le Bal masqué* (1932).

Ce mémoire tente de subvenir au manque d'attention attribué à l'association artistique entre Poulenc et Jacob en étudiant les influences de l'esthétique surréaliste de Jacob dans *Le Bal masqué*. Le premier chapitre décrit le contexte artistique dans laquelle *Le Bal masqué* fut composé, et fournit un résumé des études précédentes sur Poulenc et son intérêt pour l'art et la littérature contemporaine. Le deuxième chapitre se penche sur Max Jacob et élabore les aspects clés de son esthétique poétique. Le troisième chapitre expose les caractéristiques essentielles de l'art surréaliste en générale et résume les études précédentes sur le surréalisme et la musique. Le dernier chapitre étudie les influences surréalistes dans *Le Bal masqué* tout en établissant des rapprochements entre le langage musical de Poulenc et les particularités du style poétique de Jacob ainsi que les attributs fondamentaux de l'art surréaliste en générale.

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LE BAL MASQUE
Text: Max JACOB
Music: Francis POULENC

INTRODUCTION

From his first collection of songs, *Le Bestiaire* (1919), on poems by Guillaume Apollinaire, to his haunting one-woman opera *La voix humaine* (1958), on a text by Jean Cocteau, settings of twentieth-century French writers overwhelmingly predominate Francis Poulenc's (1899-1963) vast and diverse output of vocal music. Poulenc was particularly fond of surrealist poetry, and most of his 152 songs composed between 1919 and 1960 are settings of contemporary poetry by Apollinaire, Cocteau, Robert Desnos, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, and Max Jacob.[1]

Yet Poulenc's reputation as the preeminent interpreter of French modernist verse from the first half of the twentieth century is not only due to the sheer number of his settings.[2] Poulenc displays a remarkable sensitivity to the nuances of difficult surrealist poetry, and the French music critic Claude Rostand has even suggested that Poulenc's settings serve to illuminate the obscure imagery of the poetry: "Those who have never completely understood the poetry of Max Jacob, Jean Cocteau, Louise de Vilmorin, Guillaume Apollinaire and Paul Eluard should turn to Poulenc: it is in his mélodies that they will solve all the mysteries."[3] Poulenc himself always attached great importance to understanding the poet's personality and aesthetic intentions, and, for this reason, particularly favored the works of living poets with whom he was personally acquainted.[4]

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[1] Emmanuelle Kaës, "'Parler une pensée musicale': Poulenc lecteur d'Eluard," in Alban Ramaut ed., *Francis Poulenc et la voix: texte et contexte* (Saint-Étienne, France: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2002), p. 229.

[2] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), p. 250.

[3] Claude Rostand, "Francis Poulenc; hier et demain." Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 250.

[4] *Ibid.*

Poulenc had a special rapport with Max Jacob (1876-1944), a highly enigmatic poet who, although marginalized from the prominent group of interwar surrealists led by André Breton, is now recognized as an influential initiator of surrealism. The chamber cantata *Le Bal masqué* (1932) is not only Poulenc's most ambitious Jacob setting, but also his first large-scale vocal work. Poulenc regarded *Le Bal masqué* as one of his most personal and significant works, and in his *Journal de mes mélodies*, went as far as to say that the cantata exemplifies an essential facet of his complex musical personality:

> [...]*Le Bal masqué* me désarme. J'ai pour lui toutes mes indulgences. Je suis certain qu'on n'aime pas véritablement ma musique si on le méconnaît. C'est du Poulenc cent pour cent. A une dame du Kamtchatka qui m'écrirait pour me demander comment je suis fait, je lui enverrais mon portrait au piano par Cocteau, mon portrait par Bérard, *Le Bal masqué* et les *Motets pour un temps de pénitence*. Je crois qu'elle se ferait ainsi une idée très exacte de Poulenc-Janus.[5]

Although this generally boisterous and high-spirited "cantate profane" seems worlds apart from the solemn *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence* (1939), it embraces the bleaker nuances of Jacob's poems as well as their outwardly farcical tone, and Poulenc described his intention in composing the *Le Bal masqué* as "faire rire, mais d'un oeil seulement."[6]

Despite Poulenc's predilection for surrealist poetry, few critics have endeavored to describe surrealist influences in his music. And in general, discussions of Poulenc's vocal works with surrealist texts have focused primarily on his settings of Jacob's more famous contemporaries, Apollinaire and Eluard. This thesis seeks to shed light on Poulenc's largely neglected artistic interaction with Max Jacob by exploring musical counterparts to Jacob's surrealist aesthetic in *Le Bal masqué*.

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[5] Francis Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, trans. Winifred Radford (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985), p. 58.

[6] Francis Poulenc and Claude Rostand, *Entretiens avec Claude Rostand* (Paris: René Julliard, 1954), p. 141.

Poulenc's strong affinity with surrealist poets undoubtedly stems from his lifelong immersion in the vibrant Parisian avant-garde artistic scene. The first chapter takes a closer look at Poulenc's artistic milieu; particular attention is paid to his friendship with Max Jacob, as well as the context surrounding the commission and first performance of *Le Bal masqué*. A review of the literature on Poulenc's involvement with modernist art and literature situates this project in relation to increasing scholarly interest in the composer and his association with contemporary artistic trends.

The second chapter focuses on Max Jacob as an influential, yet unduly marginalized, figure of the Parisian avant-garde. Jacob's subversive approach to poetry was strongly tied to his complex and highly idiosyncratic personality; thus a brief introduction to the man himself precedes my discussion of his distinctive poetic aesthetic. This chapter concludes with a description of Jacob's 1921 poetry collection *Le Laboratoire central*, from which Poulenc drew the text for *Le Bal masqué*.

In many ways, Jacob's work paralleled, and even prefigured, the artistic developments of the prominent interwar surrealist movement. Chapter three begins with an overview of the fundamental characteristics of surrealist literature and visual art followed by a discussion of the features of Jacob's poetry which closely link him to surrealism. Although no musician was directly involved with the Parisian surrealist movement, some critics have described surrealist tendencies in the music of Poulenc and others. The second part of this chapter reviews previous discussions of music and surrealism and traces the general commonalities that emerge from them.

Beginning with a brief discussion of Jacob's text, the fourth chapter explores surrealist influences in *Le Bal masqué* through reference to characteristic features of Jacob's poetic style as well as central tendencies of most surrealist art. In addition,

Poulenc's own published statements about his intentions in composing the cantata are carefully considered.

CHAPTER 1

POULENC'S MILIEU AND *LE BAL* MASQUÉ: A CONTEXT FOR ARTISTIC INTERCHANGE

1.1 Poulenc and the contemporary artistic and literary scene

Poulenc's lifelong fascination with contemporary art and literature was undoubtedly ingrained from his early involvement in the Parisian avant-garde artistic world. Through several propitious encounters, Poulenc was ushered into the vibrant artistic scene of wartime Paris from the outset of his musical career. At the age of sixteen, he began lessons with the legendary Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes (1873-1943), who was as passionate about contemporary French art and literature as he was about the music of Debussy, Satie, and Ravel.[7] Viñes not only introduced Poulenc to many leading composers of the time, including Satie and Stravinsky, but also to writer and filmmaker Jean Cocteau (1889-1963).[8] Cocteau broadened the emerging composer's circle of artistic contacts even further by adding him to a group of young composers which Satie named Les Nouveaux Jeunes.[9] From 1917 to 1920, Les Nouveaux Jeunes--soon simply referred to as *Les six*--participated in a series of multimedia events called "Lyre et Palette," held at an artist's studio on rue Huygens in Montmartre.[10] The informal atmosphere of these well-attended events was rife with artistic interchange: premiere performances of works by Poulenc and his circle were interspersed with poetry readings (by Cocteau, Blaise

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[7] Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2001), p. 20.

[8] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 10.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 14. The other composers of the group were Darius Milhaud (1892-1974), Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983), Georges Auric (1899-1983), Louis Durey (1888-1979), and Arthur Honegger (1892-1955).

[10] Renaud Machart, *Poulenc* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), p. 16.

Cendrars, Max Jacob, and others) and presented in conjunction with avant-garde art (by prominent artists such as Picasso, Juan Gris, and Amadeo Modigliani).[11]

But Poulenc's early exposure to contemporary French poetry was certainly not confined to the readings he heard at the "Salle Huygens" events. Thanks to his childhood friend Raymonde Linossier, in 1916 Poulenc discovered Adrienne Monnier's recently opened bookstore on rue de l'Odéon, "La Maison des Amis du Livre," which thrived as a gathering place of the literary avant-garde.[12] Through his regular visits to Monnier's bookstore, Poulenc met the foremost modernist writers of his time—including the originators and future members of the surrealist movement—and listened to them read their latest works.[13] In *Moi et mes amis*, Poulenc recalls the famous poets he encountered at the bookstore:

> The most varied types of writers often crossed the threshold: Valéry as often as Max Jacob, Paul Claudel as often as Apollinaire. [...] Now, one afternoon in 1916, three young men, whose names I hardly knew, crossed the threshold of the shop: they were André Breton, Paul Eluard and [Louis] Aragon. [...] Adrienne Monnier introduced us, but I felt of little consequence in front of these fellows who had already published writings in avant-garde publications.[14]

Poulenc befriended at least four of Monnier's regular patrons: Jacob, Aragon, Eluard, and Desnos. Spurred on by his immersion in the vibrant avant-garde literary scene, Poulenc also avidly read numerous cultural journals, such as *Littérature* and *Les Soirées de Paris*,

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[11] Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, p. 55. The composers of *Les six* existed as a group for merely five years (1917-1921). Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 21. Although Poulenc was mobilized for military service from 1917-1920, he came to Paris as often as possible to advance his compositional career and expand his artistic contacts, and after 1919 he was able to remain in Paris and work at a desk job. See Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, pp. 50-89.

[12] Machart, *Poulenc*, p. 13.

[13] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 11.

[14] Francis Poulenc and Stéphane Audel, *My Friends and Myself [Moi et mes amis]*, trans. James Harding (London: Dennis Dobson, 1978), pp. 98-99.

which provided him with further insight into the latest literary currents.[15] But Poulenc did not read all modernist poetry with equal relish: he was never very keen on the works of the more radical poets at the center of the interwar surrealist group, particularly André Breton. Instead, Poulenc's strong affinity for the more temperate or marginalized surrealist poets (such as Eluard and Jacob) led to his highly discriminating choice of poetry for musical setting. Of course, the "affective equivalences"[16] that Poulenc discovered with these poets were often reinforced by the bonds of friendship that linked him to them.

1.2 Poulenc and Max Jacob

Of the many poets, artists and musicians with whom Poulenc corresponded throughout his life, Max Jacob was clearly among his most cherished friends.[17] Poulenc's lifelong friendship with this eccentric contemporary of Apollinaire undoubtedly encouraged his abiding fascination with the poet's oeuvre, from which he drew inspiration for several vocal works composed throughout his career.

Knowing that Poulenc was fond of Jacob's works, the precocious writer and Cocteau protégé Raymond Radiguet brought Poulenc along to visit Jacob at his Montmartre apartment in 1917.[18] When the pair arrived at Jacob's dingy dwelling, Poulenc immediately realized that Jacob easily rivaled Erik Satie in eccentricity:

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[15] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 11.

[16] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 250.

[17] This is shown not only through Poulenc's substantial correspondence with Jacob, but also through the fact that Poulenc chose to include Jacob among the eight musicians and poets to whom he dedicated a chapter in his book of conversations with Stéphane Audel, *Moi et mes amis* (aside from Jacob, these included Satie, Manuel de Falla, Éluard, Honegger, Prokofiev, Ravel, Stravinsky).

[18] Poulenc and Audel, *My Friends and Myself [Moi et mes amis]*, p. 73.

> Max lived in a big, very dark room on the ground floor. A mirror-fronted cupboard without a back took up the middle of the room, you stepped through it as you would a door, which made Max say comically: "Here's my drawing room, there's my bedroom."[19]

Poulenc also recalled being taken aback by Jacob's humility and somewhat ostentatious cordiality:

> Max had a habit of literally deluging you with compliments which he handed out indiscriminately while thinking about something else. So, affectionate, voluble and smiling, he told us of his happiness at receiving a novelist of genius and a "tremendous" musician! Just that! (Radiguet was fifteen years old and I was eighteen!) You can imagine the scene![20]

Yet Poulenc obviously found Jacob's oddness endearing: shortly after this first meeting, he began a long-lasting correspondence with the poet, and before Jacob's retreat to the monastery in Saint-Benoît in the early 1920s they were often seen in each other's company.[21]

In the summer of 1920, while Poulenc was still in military service, Jacob sent a letter with several poems that he wrote specifically for him.[22] Poulenc set these enigmatic poems immediately, and the result was *Quatre poèmes de Max Jacob* for baritone and wind quintet. At first, Poulenc was quite fond of this work which he dedicated to

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[21] James Harding, *The Ox on the Roof: Scenes from Musical Life in Paris in the Twenties* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1972), p. 114.

Jacob was also linked with some of the activities undertaken by *Les six* from 1917 to 1920. As mentioned above, he would sometimes read poetry at the "Lyre et Palette" events at Salle Huygens. But he also contributed (along with Cocteau, Radiguet, Cendrars, Paul Morand, and Lucien Daudet) to *Le Coq*, a broadsheet issued by the members of *Les six* in 1920 which contained poetry, articles, slogans, and fragments of musical scores (in total, four volumes of this broadsheet were issued). See Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 19.

[22] Francis Poulenc, *Francis Poulenc: Correspondance 1910-1963*, ed. with annotations by Miriam Chimènes (Paris: Fayard, 1994), p. 110. From the letter, it is unclear whether Poulenc requested poems from Jacob, or whether Jacob sent them of his own volition. Of the four poems that Jacob sent to Poulenc, "Est-il un coin plus solitaire," "C'est pour aller au bal," and "Dans le buisson de mimosa" were published in *Les pénitents en maillots roses* (1925), while "Poète et ténor" was published in *Le Laboratoire central* (1921). Cocteau was the only other poet to write poems specifically for Poulenc to set. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, p. 41

Milhaud, and it was first performed at a concert of the Société moderne d'instruments à vent in Paris on January 7, 1922.[23] Nevertheless, Poulenc later became so disenchanted with these settings that he destroyed his manuscript. Milhaud, however, retained a copy of the score, allowing for the recent publication of the settings by Salabert in 1997. With its pervasively dissonant harmonies and highly chromatic melodic writing, this work certainly stands out from the rest of Poulenc's oeuvre, and perhaps represented a dead end for the composer.

Ten years later, Poulenc turned to Jacob's poetry once again for his *Cinq poèmes de Max Jacob* (1931) for voice and piano. These settings of Breton poems which Jacob published under the pseudonym Morven le Gaëlique are generally popular in flavor, accurately capturing the naïve yet witty character of the text.[24] The last song, "Souric et Mouric," is remarkable for its frequent modulations and wavering, ambiguous tone.[25] *Le Bal masqué* was composed the following year, and here Poulenc turned to Jacob's 1921 collection of poetry, *Le Laboratoire central.* Near the end of his career, Poulenc set two additional poems from *Le Laboratoire central*, "Jouer du bugle" and "Vous n'écrivez plus," in *Parisiana* (1954) for voice and piano. These two songs are highly contrasting: the first is very lyrical and suggests motives featured in *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1955), while the second is a patter song.[26]

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[23] See letter to Milhaud in Poulenc, *Correspondance*, pp. 119-120. According to the manuscript, Poulenc completed these songs in August-September 1921.

[24] These poems were published posthumously in the collection *Poèmes de Morven le Gaélique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953). The five songs are entitled "Chanson bretonne," "Cimetière," "La petite servante," "Berceuse," and "Souric et Mouric."

[25] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 260.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 279.

Poulenc's numerous Jacob settings, and especially his partiality for *Le Bal masqué*, show the esteem in which he held Jacob's work. Jacob, in turn, was always highly flattered to find out that Poulenc was setting his poetry. And in his typically effusive manner, he often expressed his admiration of Poulenc's music in his correspondence with the composer: in September 1922, he wrote "tu es mon musicien préféré. Ne le dis pas aux autres,"[27] and in December 1931, he declared "Ce sera mon seul titre de gloire de figurer à côté de ton nom."[28]

1.3 *Le Bal masqué*: commission and first performance

A commission from the Vicomte and Vicomtesse Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles provided the impetus for Poulenc's composition of *Le Bal masqué*.[29] Dominant figures of the Parisian social scene in the 1920s, the Noailles maintained a thriving salon and hosted lavish costume balls at their townhouse in Paris (at Place des États-Unis), and also invited many artists, musicians and writers to their property in Fontainebleau and their ultramodern villa in Hyères in southern France.[30] Into the late 1940s, their important

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[27] Poulenc, *Correspondance*, p. 180.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 354.

[29] By the early 1930s, the Noailles were among several aristocratic patrons with whom Poulenc had established solid relationships: he also received commissions from the Princesse Edmonde de Polignac (1865-1943), and the Comte and Comtesse Jean and Marie Blanche de Polignac (1898-1958), and frequently attended their elegant salons. The Princesse de Polignac commissioned Poulenc's Concerto for two pianos (1932) as well as his Concerto for organ (1938), and Marie-Blanche de Polignac commissioned *Trois poèmes de Louise Lalanne* (1931, for voice and piano) and *Trois poèmes de Louise de Vilmorin* (1937, also voice and piano). Myriam Chimènes (trans. Sidney Buckland) "Poulenc and his patrons: social convergences," in Sidney Buckland and Miriam Chimènes eds., *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature* (London: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 222-224.

[30] Shmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, p. 482 and Chimènes, "Poulenc and his patrons," in Buckland and Chimènes eds., *Francis Poulenc*, p. 220. Charles de Noailles (1891-1981) was the nephew of the poet Anna de Noailles, and Marie-Laure de Noailles (1902-1970), from a family of wealthy bankers, was the granddaughter of the countess de Chévigny, who was Proust's model for the duchess de Guermantes. See *Ibid.*, p. 220. Their salon thrived into the 1950s. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 321.

patronage of contemporary art extended from music to the visual arts and film;[31] they were particularly fond of surrealist artistic endeavors—most notably, they commissioned the surrealist films *L'Age d'or* (by Buñuel and Dali, 1930) and *Le Sang d'un poète* (Cocteau's first film, 1931).[32] Marie-Laure herself wrote and painted, and was notorious for her extravagantly eccentric taste.[33]

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Poulenc was quite close to this prominent couple, especially to Marie-Laure, with whom he corresponded frequently. He was often invited to exclusive *soirées* at their townhouse in Paris, and was an occasional guest at their villa in Hyères.[34] In 1928, Poulenc received his first commission from the Noailles: they simply asked him to provide "un spectacle musical" for a party at their Parisian residence. The result was his "concerto choréographique" *Aubade* (1929), which served as the culminating entertainment of a lavish costume ball.[35]

In the fall of 1931, the Noailles asked Poulenc to compose a work for a "spectacle concert" they were organizing for the following spring. Although this event took place at the municipal theater in Hyères (rather than at the Noailles residence), it was a private function that brought together luminaries of the Parisian artistic and musical scene. Each

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[31] Chimènes, "Poulenc and his patrons," in Buckland and Chimènes eds., *Francis Poulenc*, p. 221.

[32] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 321.

[33] Laurence Benaïm, *Marie Laure de Noailles: La vicomtesse du bizarre* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2001), p. 229.

[34] On one occasion, Poulenc was invited to a dinner at the Noailles at which guests were entertained with a private showing of Luis Buñuel's influential surrealist film *Un chien Andalou* (1928). Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, p. 172.

[35] This event took place on June 18, 1929, and guests included Max Jacob, Louis Aragon, Max Ernst and the Dalis. *Ibid.*, 171. Poulenc's ballet music was actually quite serious in tone and accompanied a scenario based on the myth of Diana. The composer opted for a complete contrast in the next commission he received from these patrons.

participant was free to contribute whatever they pleased to the event.[36] Aside from Poulenc, other composers whose works were featured in the concert included Henri Sauguet, Igor Markevitch, Georges Auric, and Nicolas Nabokoff.[37] In addition, the film director Luis Buñuel and the artist Alberto Giacometti, both of whom were associated with surrealism, collaborated on a whimsical interactive art installation: a life-size plywood cutout of a giraffe was rigged with hinged "patches" that could be lifted to uncover a peculiar assortment of pithy inscriptions such as "Un orchestre de cent musiciens se met a jouer la *Walkyrie* dans un souterrain" or "Le Christ riant aux éclats."[38] Other prominent figures who contributed to the event included the artist Christian Bérard, who designed decorations for the hall as well as linen costumes for guests, and Cocteau, who wrote the program.[39] In his autobiography, composer Igor Markevitch recalls the colorful range of attendees:

> Un amusant hasard rassemblait là les personnages les plus hétéroclites. Musiciens, surréalistes, communistes, tous s'alanguissaient dans cette hospitalité que le cadre rendait presque irréelle.[40]

Knowing that Marie-Laure de Noailles was particularly fond of Max Jacob's poetry,[41] Poulenc realized that this would be an excellent opportunity to set some poems

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[36] Chimènes, "Poulenc and his patrons," in Buckland and Chimènes eds., *Francis Poulenc*, p. 230.

[37] Two other secular cantatas were featured at this concert: Nabokoff composed a cantata entitled *Collectionneur d'échos*, which also set poetry by Max Jacob, and Sauguet contributed *La Voyante*, a cantata based on excerpts from Nostradamus's writings. Markevitch composed a *Galop*, and Auric a work for two pianos, *Bibliophilie*. See Sauguet's brief account of the event in *La musique ma vie* (Paris: Librarie Séguier, 1990), pp. 293-294.

[38] Benaïm, *Marie Laure de Noailles*, p. 248.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

[40] Igor Markevitch, *Être et avoir été* (Gallimard, 1980), quoted in Machart, *Poulenc*, p. 78.

[41] Johan Farjot, "L'expérience vocale du jeune Poulenc," in Ramaut ed., *Francis Poulenc et la voix*, p. 70n. The fact that Nicolas Nabokoff also contributed a setting of Jacob's poetry to the event also reveals the Noailles's predilection for Jacob's work.

from *Le Laboratoire central* which had "fascinated" him for some time.[42] As early as November 1931, Poulenc had already envisioned a preliminary outline of his "cantate profane," which he detailed in a letter to Marie-Laure de Noailles:

> Pour moi l'idée d'une petite *cantate* se précise de plus en plus [...] Il y aura, du moins c'est ce que je pense, *une petite entrée* pour instruments, un *premier air*, une *gavotte* genre distingué-Bobino,[43] un autre *autre air*, une autre *petite danse* et pour finir une chanson avec une surprise[...][44]

The final version of *Le Bal masqué* consists of six movements, with the four vocal sections framed by instrumental interludes: I – Préambule et air de bravoure, II – Intermède, III – Malvina, IV – Bagatelle, V – La dame aveugle, VI – Finale. Poulenc scored the cantata for baritone or mezzo and a modest yet colorful chamber ensemble consisting of a wind quartet (oboe, clarinet, bassoon and cornet), violin, cello, piano, and an unusual blend of percussion (including a whistle, castanets, and a whip). Roger Désormière conducted the premiere performance at the Hyères theater on 20 April 1932, with Poulenc at the piano and the baritone Gilbert-Moryn as vocalist.[45] The first public performance took place in Paris on 13 June 1932, at the fourth concert of "La Sérénade" series, devoted exclusively to public premiere of works commissioned by the Noailles for their "spectacle concert" in Hyères.[46]

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[42] Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, p. 59.

[43] Bobino was the name of a famous Parisian music hall.

[44] Poulenc, *Correspondance*, p. 352.

[45] Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, p. 193.

[46] Chimènes, "Poulenc and his patrons," in Buckland and Chimènes eds., *Francis Poulenc*, p. 231.

1.4 Review of the literature: Poulenc's involvement with avant-garde art and literature

Poulenc's vital connection with modernist poets and artists, and its significance for his music, has been the focus of some recent studies. Yet although research into key aspects of Poulenc's life and music has increased remarkably within the past ten years, the impact of artistic interchange on his settings of contemporary poetry has still not been extensively explored.

Of course, most general studies of Poulenc's life and oeuvre touch on his involvement with the contemporary literary and artistic scene.[47] In particular, Keith W. Daniel emphasizes Poulenc's connections with the Parisian artistic world in the five chapters he devotes to Poulenc's biography in his study *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (1982). Daniel describes the significance of Poulenc's affinity with surrealist poetry (especially that of Apollinaire, Eluard, and Jacob) for his development as the leading composer of French art song in the twentieth century, although he does not endeavor to discuss surrealist influences in Poulenc's settings.[48] Additionally, Daniel points out Poulenc's fascination with visual art, particularly contemporary artists such as Matisse and Dufy, and describes a "visual inspiration" which

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[47] Henri Hell's groundbreaking biography *Francis Poulenc: musicien français* (Paris: Fayard, 1958, rev. 1978) primarily draws attention to Poulenc's affinity for Apollinaire and Eluard, as does Jean Roy's brief overview of Poulenc's life and works, *Francis Poulenc: l'homme et son œuvre* (Paris: Pierre Seghers, 1964). Recent biographies by Renaud Machart, *Poulenc* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), and Benjamin Ivry, *Francis Poulenc* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), provide concise yet far more comprehensive accounts of Poulenc's associations with various contemporary poets and artists.

[48] In her study focusing on the stylistic features of Poulenc's vocal works, *Poulenc's Songs: An Analysis of Style* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1979), Vivian Lee Poates Wood similarly singles out Apollinaire, Eluard and Jacob as the three poets with whom Poulenc felt the greatest kinship. Although she provides an overview of Poulenc's friendship with these poets and offers brief descriptions of his principal settings of modernist poetry in the opening chapter, she devotes subsequent chapters to general observations on Poulenc's overall approach to melody, harmony, form and accompaniment.

sometimes underlies Poulenc's works.[49] The most recent (and most extensive) biographical study of Poulenc, Carl B. Schmidt's *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc* (2001) sheds new light on Poulenc's numerous interactions with important artistic and literary figures throughout his life, and thus opens up potential avenues for research on the impact these might have had on Poulenc's music.

Some recent research has focused more exclusively on Poulenc's fascination with contemporary art and literature, and the inspiration he may have drawn from it. The collection of essays edited by Sidney Buckland and Miriam Chimènes, *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art, and Literature* (1999), primarily explores Poulenc's affinity for contemporary writers and artists. For instance, in her essay "'The coherence of opposites': Eluard, Poulenc and the poems of *Tel jour telle nuit*," Sidney Buckland describes Poulenc's special rapport with Eluard, and briefly discusses the way in which Poulenc's settings reflect the conflicting moods of Eluard's poetry—yet she does not attempt to discuss features of the music itself within a broader theoretical framework of surrealism.[50] Some other essays in the collection examine aesthetic commonalities between Poulenc and the painters Dufy and Matisse.[51] None of the essays address Poulenc's association with Max Jacob.

The selection of papers compiled in the published conference proceedings *Francis Poulenc et la voix: texte et contexte* (2002) explores issues surrounding the composition

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[49] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 53.

[50] Sidney Buckland "'The coherence of opposites': Eluard, Poulenc and the poems of *Tel jour telle nuit*," in Buckland and Chimènes eds., *Francis Poulenc*, pp. 145-177.

[51] Carl B. Schmidt, "Distilling Essences: Poulenc and Matisse," and Marjorie Running Wharton, "Nogent Music: Poulenc and Dufy" in Buckland and Chimènes eds., *Francis Poulenc*, pp. 199-209 and 178-195.

and first performance of Poulenc's vocal works, and several papers deal with Poulenc's settings of Apollinaire and Eluard.[52] For instance, in "Les voix d'Apollinaire" Vincent Vivès argues that Poulenc's particular approach to prosody in his settings of Apollinaire displays his sensitivity to the poet's unique aesthetic.[53] Two of the papers discuss Poulenc's song cycle *Le Travail du peintre* (1956), on poems by Eluard which describe the works of avant-garde artists such as Picasso and Paul Klee.[54] While commenting on the relationship between music and text (in terms of prosody and rhythm), and the overall structure of the cycle, these writers do not seek to explore the possibility that Poulenc's settings may reflect some of the characteristics of Eluard's surrealist poems, or the modernist art they describe.

Two doctoral dissertations focus on Poulenc's settings of contemporary poetry. Guy Hargrove devotes the first chapter of his dissertation "Francis Poulenc's settings of Poems of Guillaume Apollinaire and Paul Eluard"[55] to an overview of the literary movement of surrealism. Yet since his dissertation essentially consists of a descriptive catalogue of Poulenc's entire output of Apollinaire and Eluard settings, the discussions of the works in question tend to be quite cursory, and he does not actually attempt to draw parallels between Poulenc's compositional approach in these songs and the surrealist aesthetic of the poetry.

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[52] Proceedings from the conference held April 19-21, 2001 at Université de Saint-Étienne, France.

[53] Vincent Vivès, "Les voix d'Apollinaire : le miracle de l'obus, du phonographe et du piano dans la prosodie poétique," in Ramaut ed., *Francis Poulenc et la voix*, pp. 75-92.

[54] Emmanuelle Kaës, "'Parler une pensée musicale': Poulenc lecteur d'Eluard, l'exemple du *Travail du peintre*" and Philip Wharton "La structure compositionelle du *Travail du peintre*," in Ramaut ed., *Francis Poulenc et la voix*, pp. 229-246 and 247-256.

[55] Guy A. Hargrove, "Francis Poulenc's Settings of Poems of Guillaume Apollinaire and Paul Eluard," Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1971.

Jeremy Cox's dissertation "Dadaist, Cubist and Surrealist Influences in Settings by Francis Poulenc of Contemporary French Poets" is the only study devoted to the impact of avant-garde artistic currents on Poulenc's vocal music.[56] Cox also provides the only previous extended discussion of *Le Bal masqué*—but he describes the cantata in reference to cubism, rather than surrealism. After outlining the general characteristics of the three artistic movements, Cox begins by discussing Dadaist influences in Poulenc's early collaborations with Cocteau, particularly *Cocardes* (1919). In this work, for instance, Cox argues that Poulenc mirrors the playful yet iconoclastic tendencies of Cocteau's particular brand of Dadaism through his "almost disdainful" treatment of the text and the generally "provocative" quality of the music.[57]

Cox's characterization of "cubist" influences in *Le Bal masqué* is similarly ambiguous and somewhat vague. Although he admits that there is no primary connection between cubism and poetry (there was never an actual "cubist" literary movement), Cox feels that Jacob's association with cubist artists such as Picasso provides sufficient grounds to describe his poetry as "cubist."[58] Cox's description of Jacob as a literary "cubist" is also contentious in light of most recent research which places Jacob as an initiator of surrealism.[59] In his discussion of *Le Bal masqué*, Cox mainly explores parallels between the music and cubist visual art, and seems less concerned with the way

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[56] Jeremy N. Cox, "Dadaist, Cubist and Surrealist Influences in Settings by Francis Poulenc of Contemporary French Poetry," Ph.D. diss., New College, Oxford University, 1986.

[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 69 and 53.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

[59] See chapter 2. Cox associates the rapid succession of unrelated imagery in Jacob's poetry with the fragmentation of perspective in cubist art (see Cox, p. 129), but, as I will show in the following chapters, this central aspect of Jacob's poetry clearly connects it with surrealism.

in which Poulenc responds to Jacob's unique poetic aesthetic. Particularly, he associates the disjointed musical idiom of the cantata which "leaves raw edges at the joins between various ideas and disregards traditional values of balance and uniformity" with the "fragmented perspective of a cubist painting."[60] Yet Cox later admits that the cantata "displays a greater number of dislocations than those found in the average cubist canvas."[61] Cubist art, while appearing fragmented on the surface, actually juxtaposes elements from a single basic image, and is thus characterized by a certain degree of consistency. As I will argue, the combination of extremely divergent elements in surrealist art and poetry provides a more appropriate analogy to describe the surprising and disorienting shifts between highly contrasting passages throughout the cantata. Furthermore, Cox does not mention Poulenc's frequent allusions to a wide-range of musical works and styles in *Le Bal masqué*, which, particularly through their placement in incongruous contexts, can be strongly correlated with a surrealist aesthetic. Although characteristics of both the text and music in *Le Bal masqué* can be more aptly described in terms of surrealism than cubism, Cox confines his discussion of music and surrealism (which I will comment on in chapter three) to Poulenc's settings of Eluard.

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[60] Cox, "Dadaist, Cubist and Surrealist influences," p. 159.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 189. Cox even mentions that Jacob's poetry is comparable with the works of proto-surrealist painter Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) through its depiction of a hostile urban environment. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

CHAPTER 2

MAX JACOB

2.1 Who was Max Jacob?

Claude Rostand's frequently evoked characterization of Poulenc as equal parts "moine et voyou"[62] could perhaps be applied even more accurately to Max Jacob. The merging of contradictory tendencies within the poet's colorful nature finds resonances in his radically subversive oeuvre.

Born in 1876 into a family of Jewish antiquarians in Quimper, Brittany, Max Jacob left for Paris in his late teens to pursue studies at the École Coloniale. Jacob, however, did not heed his family's hopes for a respectably bourgeois career as an administrator or school teacher, and soon became drawn to the prospect of a life devoted to artistic and literary pursuits.[63] Nevertheless, Jacob's literary ambitions were somewhat dampened during his early decades in Paris as he scraped by a hand to mouth existence while holding a wide assortment of jobs (thirty-six in all, ranging from notary clerk to fortune-teller).[64] In his early twenties, through his work as an art critic under the pseudonym of Léon David, Jacob found himself hobnobbing with emerging luminaries of the avant-garde artistic scene.[65] Jacob's attendance at Picasso's (1881-1973) first major

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[62] Claude Rostand, *Dictionnaire de la musique contemporaine*, p. 178. Quoted in Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 2.

[63] André Peyre, *Max Jacob quotidien* (Paris: Jose Millas-Martin Éditeur, 1976), pp. 12-13.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 14. For most of his life, Jacob's main source of income turned out to be his gouaches of Parisian and Breton scenes, which had great appeal for tourists and art collectors. In 1920, an exhibition of his paintings took place in Paris. See *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[65] Pierre Andreu, *Vie et mort de Max Jacob* (Paris: Éditions de la Table Ronde, 1982), p. 32.

exhibition in 1901 proved fateful: Jacob befriended the artist, and from 1902 to 1904 the pair shared a cramped one-room apartment in Montmartre, with Picasso painting by night and Jacob writing poetry by day.[66] When Picasso set up his studio in the notoriously ramshackle tenement dubbed the "Bateau Lavoir" two years later, Jacob decided to follow him and rent a room nearby, on rue Ravignan. Along with Picasso, Jacob found himself at the center of an ever-expanding constellation of avant-garde writers and artists: Cocteau, André Salmon, Juan Gris, Modigliani, and by 1905, Apollinaire (1880-1918).[67]

Despite sharing the same aesthetic preoccupations and often mirroring each other's experiments with language, Jacob's relationship with Apollinaire was somewhat strained: mutual praise would often be followed by public attacks. In his biography of Max Jacob, Pierre Andreu recounts an incident in which Apollinaire, announcing at a public lecture on modernist poetry in 1908 that "la renommé viendra bientôt prendre Max Jacob dans sa rue Ravignan," barely repressed a guffaw as he first mentioned Jacob's name.[68] Jacob, in turn, later read a poem satirizing Apollinaire's affair with Marie Laurencin at a society dinner.[69] The fact that his reputation was dwarfed by that of Apollinaire proved to be a lifelong source of humiliation and torment for Jacob, who was

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[66] Harding, *The Ox on the Roof*, p. 115.

[67] Neal Oxenhandler, *Looking for Heroes in Postwar France: Albert Camus, Max Jacob, Simone Weil* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996), p. 95. Because of his close involvement with cubist artists such as Picasso, some critics have attempted to describe cubist elements in Jacob's work (see Gerald Kamber, *Max Jacob and the Poetics of Cubism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971)). However, much recent research has shown that Jacob's work can be described more readily in terms of surrealism.

[68] Andreu, *Vie et mort de Max Jacob*, pp. 53-54.

[69] Oxenhandler, *Looking for Heroes in Postwar France*, p. 96.

already diffident about his own work (he only began to publish his poetry in literary journals in 1909).[70]

Although Jacob was slow to garner recognition for his writing, he quickly attracted attention for his eccentric behavior amongst the bohemia of Montmartre. Jacob's friend and biographer, André Billy, claims that his role playing, clown-like antics and dandyish attire (replete with different colored ties that he alternated according to the days of the week or the signs of the zodiac) were notorious.[71] Although he enjoyed mimicking his friends in order to make them appear foolish, Jacob was also predisposed towards extremes of self-deprecation, and his biting wit was tempered by his tendency to lavish complements upon his acquaintances in an indiscriminate, almost ostentatious way.[72] According to Picasso's mistress Fernande Olivier, Jacob was "the life and soul" of all their parties.[73] Yet underneath this good-humored façade, Jacob's years in Montmartre were marked by extreme poverty and a growing ether addiction.[74]

While Jacob was best known for his impish antics, this represented but one side of his complex personality. Jacob also sustained a profound interest in mystical and esoteric doctrines, first manifest by his fascination with cabalism and later through his conversion to Catholicism at the age of 33 (he was baptized with Picasso as godfather and adopted "Cyprien" as his Christian name).[75] Because of his quirky accounts of Jesus suddenly

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[70] Christine Van Rogger-Andreucci, *Max Jacob acrobate absolu* (Seyssel, France: Éditions Champ Vallon, 1993), p. 29, and Andreu, *Vie et mort de Max Jacob*, p. 55.

[71] André Billy, *Max Jacob* (Paris: Éditions Séghers, 1969), p. 18.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[73] Quoted in Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, p. 41.

[74] Billy, *Max Jacob*, p. 18.

[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 18 and 23.

appearing to him in a painting on the wall of his room (in 1909, on rue Ravignan) and on the screen at the cinema during a gangster film he was watching on the evening of his baptism, Jacob's friends weren't sure what to make of this sudden onset of Christian piety, and many believed it was simply one of his pranks.[76] Jacob's decision to abandon the lively Parisian social scene for a life of seclusion and contemplation at the monastery at Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire in the early 1920s thus left most of his friends stunned. While at Saint-Benoît, Jacob attended daily religious services, worked avidly on his novels and poetry, and wrote lively and whimsical correspondence, often in verse.[77] Before long, the isolation of life at Saint-Benoît began to weigh heavily on Jacob, who had difficulty resisting the attractions of Paris: not only did he readily take up invitations to a profusion of social events, but he eventually decided to move back to Paris, and took up residence at the hôtel Nollet from 1928-1937.

Jacob's talent as a brilliant conversationalist—and an effusive gossip—made him a sought-after guest at Parisian salons.[78] But even on evenings out he did not completely leave the trappings of monastic life behind: dressed in his frock coat, top hat, and monocle, he often carried a rolled-up mat which he would use to protect his knees from the stone floors of nearby churches.[79] His paradoxical existence eventually became a

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[76] Harding, *The Ox on the Roof*, p. 116.

[77] Jacob sent some letters in verse to Poulenc. For instance, in a letter from May 12, 1924, Jacob congratulates the composer on the successful premiere of his ballet *Les Biches* in Monte Carlo:

> [...]J'ai su de ton immense succès à Monte-Carle
> car les journaux entiers sont emplis de ton nom
> plus que des députés, de toi, Francis, on parle
> depuis les bords du Gange et jusqu'au Phlégéton [...] Poulenc, *Correspondance*, p. 231.

[78] Harding, *The Ox on the Roof*, p. 118. Poulenc said Jacob's colorful conversations were filled with "wildness and fleeting blasphemies." Poulenc and Audel, *My Friends and Myself [Moi et mes amis]*, p. 75.

[79] Harding, *The Ox on the Roof*, p. 119.

source of profound inner turmoil, and he seemed to be caught in an ongoing cycle of indulgence and religious penitence.[80] During the final years of his life, Jacob retreated once again to the tranquility and seclusion of Saint-Benoît.

Despite Jacob's gregarious personality many of his friends called him "poor Max," in reference not only to the abject poverty in which he led most of his life, but also to his profoundly insecure nature.[81] According to Poulenc, Jacob was plagued by fears of betrayal his whole life, and often felt that everyone was against him: "...fear of displeasing Picasso, fear of quarrelling with Breton and Éluard, fear of Reverdy, fear of Cocteau; fear was one of the fundamentals of Max's character."[82] Jacob's fear of being persecuted as a Jew was, alas, brutally realized: he died of pneumonia at the Drancy concentration camp outside Paris shortly after his arrest by the Gestapo in 1944, despite his friends' efforts to save him. To the end, even for his close friends, Jacob fundamentally remained enigmatic and elusive. Poulenc, however, understood how the essential facets of Jacob's nature were often revealed in the nuances of his poetry: "when you read Max Jacob's poems, you have to bring out the grotesque and comic side as much as the poetic and human."[83]

Jacob's literary output embraces an extremely broad scope of expression, from short impertinent works based on puns, to biting satires of bourgeois life, and especially later in life, to mystical effusions. Jacob is primarily known for his poetry, and he is most

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[80] Billy, *Max Jacob* p. 48.

[81] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-60.

[82] Poulenc and Audel, *My Friends and Myself [Moi et mes amis]*, p. 84.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

famous for his groundbreaking collection of prose poems, *Le cornet à dés* (1917), which Poulenc counted among the masterpieces of French prose poetry, on a par with Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris* and Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer* (1873).[84] Jacob's other collections of poetry, including *Le Laboratoire central* (1921), *Les pénitents en maillot rose* (1925), and *Poèmes de Morven le Gaélique* (published posthumously in 1953) are the subject of increasing critical interest. Jacob also wrote novels, including *Saint Matorel* (1911, illustrated by Picasso), *Le cabinet noir* (1922), *Bourgeois de France et d'ailleurs* (1932), as well as several religiously-inspired works, such as *L'Homme de cristal* (a collection of poetry dating from 1934) and *Méditations religieuses* (published posthumously in 1947).

2.2 Jacob's poetic aesthetic

As Apollinaire, Jacob cultivated a non-discursive approach in his writing, characterized by abrupt juxtapositions of images and whimsical plays on words. Since the poetic styles of both men seemed to develop simultaneously, it is often difficult to determine who preceded and influenced whom.[85] Yet in contrast to Apolliniare's cultivation of "surprise,"[86] Jacob sought to disorient the reader on an even more profound level: in the 1916 preface to *Le cornet à dés*, Jacob admonishes that "surprendre est peu

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[84] *Ibid.*, p. 73. *Le cornet à dés* was particularly significant in terms of Jacob's influence on the later generation of surrealist poets. As André Billy explains, "*Le cornet à dés* est probablement l'œuvre la plus importante de Max Jacob, et je dis importante dans le sens de révélatrice et de rayonnante. (...) Son esprit, son influence règnent depuis *Le cornet à dés* sous le vague nom de surréalisme lancé par Apollinaire et repris dans un sens plus concret par les poètes du subconscient." Billy, *Max Jacob*, p. 27.

[85] Billy, *Max Jacob*, p. 37. Poulenc likens their mutual influence (between 1911 and 1913) to that of Braque and Picasso. See *My Friends and Myself [Moi et mes amis]*, p. 73.

[86] See chapter 3.

de chose, il faut transplanter."[87] To achieve his goal of total disorientation, Jacob subverted the conventions of poetic expression in numerous ways.

Instead of logical sequences of ideas, Jacob favored free associations, resulting in a disjointed and disorienting stream of abrupt juxtapositions. This lack of external coherence in Jacob's poetry stems, to a certain degree, from his interest in dreams and the bizarre associations of the unconscious. Some scholars, including Christine Van Rogger-Andreucci, go as far as to describe many of Jacob's poems as "invented dreams."[88] Nevertheless, Jacob's extensive use of wordplay and puns is perhaps the most significant source of the free associations which characterize his poetry. [89] Words are used as sonic objects, linked not through meaning, but rather through sound; this ludic use of language most often lends an overall frivolous and humorous quality to many of Jacob's poems.[90] An extreme example of Jacob's impertinently comical—and nonsensical—use of wordplay can be found in the poem "Véritable petit orchestre," from *Le Laboratoire central*: "Saint Sein! Vive le rein!/ Vive le vin divin du Rhin/ Où Chio? ou Tonédo? louez l'Ohio!"[91] The results of Jacob's wordplay are not always simply farcical, however, and

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[87] Max Jacob, preface to *Le cornet à dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 16. In a letter to Jacques Doucet dating from January 30, 1917, Jacob described the quality that he valued most in works of art: "(...) cette espèce de transplantation qui fait que l'oeuvre vous met les pieds dans un autre univers." Jacob, *Correspondance de Max Jacob - Tome I*, ed. François Garnier (Paris: Éditions de Paris, 1953.), p. 132.

[88] See Van Rogger-Andreucci, *Max Jacob*, pp. 62-64.

[89] Even more than Apollinaire, Jacob cultivated the use of puns and word-play, which had a decisive influence on later surrealist poets. Billy, *Max Jacob*, p. 29.

[90] Annette Thau comments on how Jacob's use of wordplay in his poetry was viewed negatively by critics who felt that playful and humorous elements should not intrude into the "serious" sphere of poetry. See Annette Thau, *Poetry and Antipoetry: A Study of Selected Aspects of Max Jacob's Poetic Style* (North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures 5. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), pp. 16-17.

[91] Jacob, *Le Laboratoire central* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 125.

darker nuances of meaning occasionally surface as it is difficult for the reader to ignore the semantic content of words, as objectified as they may be in the context of his poetry.

Jacob also eschewed poetic convention by including highly contrasting forms of diction within the same poem. Through combining snatches of everyday conversation and verbal clichés, along with parodies of various literary styles from the fairy tale to journalistic discourse, Jacob expanded the traditional scope of poetic language.[92] In fact, Annette Thau describes Jacob's tendency to incorporate vernacular into his poetry as "anti-poetic."[93] For example, the last stanza of "Réflexion d'un auteur inédit" (also from *Le Laboratoire central*) clearly shows his predilection for conversational language:

> Rien qu'une course en fiacre à faire.
> --Ah! j'ai justement votre affaire.
> Un vaudeville! six cents francs
> Payable en tempérament.[94]

Jacob's pervasive use of parody, which André Billy and others view as central to his unique poetic personality, also seems to disperse any sense of consistent poetic "voice," which can be disconcerting for the reader.[95]

Jacob's work marked a departure not only from conventional poetic language, but also from traditional poetic subjects. Frequently, Jacob's poetry refers to mundane, banal objects—a hole in the wall, a corn on one's foot—as well as ordinary people (a police officer or a school teacher, for instance) and the routine situations in which they find

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[92] William Kulik, preface to Jacob, *The Selected Poems of Max Jacob*, ed. and trans by William Kulik (Oberlin: Oberlin College Press, 1999), pp. 15-16.

[93] Thau, *Poetry and Antipoetry*, p. 17.

[94] Jacob, *Le Laboratoire central*, p.124.

[95] See Billy, *Max Jacob,* p. 26 and Van Rogger-Andreucci, *Max Jacob*, pp. 17 and 64. In this regard, Jacob's poetry differs from Apollinaire's, which is more strongly characterized by a sense of "subjective radiance." Oxenhandler, *Looking for Heroes in Postwar France*, p. 130.

themselves.[96] But this is only to mislead the reader before the disorienting intrusion of a fantastical dimension: "en poésie, l'intérêt naîtra du doute entre la réalité et l'imagination."[97] For Jacob, the work of art should create its own system of reference, and rather than simply imitating nature or reality, he felt that poetry should project a sort of bizarre parallel universe with its own rules and logic.[98] In particular, he was interested in the possibility of creating or projecting "new" realities by bringing together opposing entities, or as he described, "le rassemblement des forces contradictoires constituant un nouveau noyau dans l'univers."[99]

2.3 *Le Laboratoire central*

Le Laboratoire central was Jacob's first collection of poetry in verse form.[100] Although published in 1921, the 105 poems in this collection actually represent a compendium of Jacob's poetry written up to that date (one poem is even entitled "Écrit en 1904").[101] Instead of following a simple chronological ordering, Jacob arranged the

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[96] Yvon Belaval, preface to Jacob, *Le Laboratoire centrale*, p. 28.

[97] Quoted in Plantier, *L'Univers poétique de Max Jacob* (Paris : Librairie Klincksieck, 1976), p. 19.

[98] Van Rogger-Andreucci, *Max Jacob*, p. 50. His aims were thus very similar to Apollinaire and the later surrealists in their attempts to distance themselves from the constraints of reality and of the established order.

[99] Quoted in Plantier, *L'Univers poétique de Max Jacob*, p. 19.

[100] The title of this collection actually relates back to Jacob's early years in Paris: he once lived on the upper floor of a building which housed a pharmaceutical firm, and on his way upstairs to his room he would pass a door with the sign "Laboratoire central." Arlette Albert-Birot, "Le Laboratoire central, « Pour prouver que je suis poète »," in Paule Vidal ed., *Qui (ne) connaît (pas) Max Jacob?* (Vannes: L'Université du troisième âge et pour tous, Institut Culturel de Bretagne, 1987), p. 103.

[101] Between 1913 and 1920, many of the poems eventually published in *Le Laboratoire central* appeared in literary periodicals such as *Les Soirées de Paris*, *Littérature*, and *Nord-Sud*. Arlette Albert-Birot, "Max Jacob poète moderne dans *Le Laboratoire central*," in Arlette Albert-Birot ed., *Max Jacob et la création-colloque d'Orléans* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1997), p. 67.

poems into four sections, according to thematic content. Although Jacob himself did not give titles to the four sections, the tentative titles Yvon Belaval provides in his preface to the Gallimard edition suggest the overall semi-biographical "progression" that Jacob attempts to convey: I-Quimper, II-La rue Ravignan, III-Le bal masqué, IV-Méditation chrétienne.[102] Jacob traverses all of his spheres of experience, starting with pastoral evocations of his native Brittany, then meandering through the delights and pitfalls of the urban scene, and finally reaching a religious apotheosis.

All four poems which Poulenc chose to set in his cantata are from the third ("Bal masqué") section, which contains 33 poems in all. Most of the poems in this section offer bizarre and somewhat sinister takes on middle or upper-class Parisian life, with satirical depictions of characters driven to such extremes of eccentricity as to become veritably grotesque. Yet beneath the predominantly farcical tone of these poems, one can also detect hints of Jacob's compassion for the predicament of his poetic subjects. Here, as throughout the entire collection, descriptions of mundane situations are interspersed with fantastical references to exotic locales ("Abd-el-Kader") and figures from ancient history and mythology ("Agamemnon"). The poems feature extremely diverse and colorful vocabulary and imagery, with colloquial expressions freely juxtaposed with obscure or recherché terminology, on the whole creating what Belaval describes as "un discours hiéroglyphique."[103]

Although Jacob was still relatively unknown amidst the general reading public by the time *Le Laboratoire central* was published, an up-and-coming group of young writers,

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[102] Belaval, preface to Jacob, *Le Laboratoire central*, p. 12.

[103] *Ibid.*, p, 26. Belaval also points out that each poem in *Le Laboratoire central* has more internal diversity than the prose poems in *Le cornet à dés*.

soon to become prominent members of the interwar Parisian surrealist movement, enthusiastically embraced his work and hailed him as a leading-light for their own subversive experiments with language.[104] Between 1919 and 1922, Jacob's poetry (including several poems from *Le Laboratoire central*) was published extensively in *Littérature*, which would become the organ of interwar surrealism.[105] However, by the end of 1922, the stance of the "official" surrealists towards Jacob had changed: not only did his work no longer appear in *Littérature*, but he was also not on André Breton's list of important predecessors to the surrealist movement included in the 1924 *Manifeste du surréalisme*.[106] Although Breton and his followers offered no clear explanation for this sudden reversal of opinion, several Jacob scholars suggest that the poet's open homosexuality and increasingly devout Christian faith played a role in his marginalization from the staunchly heterosexual and dogmatically atheist circle of interwar surrealists.[107] The increasing number of studies devoted to Jacob's life and works have reestablished his position as a profoundly influential modernist poet who, along with Apollinaire, was an important originator of the surrealist aesthetic.[108] An overview of the key characteristics

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[104] Arlette Albert-Birot, "Le Laboratoire central," pp. 95-97, and Emmanuel Rubio, "Max Jacob et le regard surréaliste: présence et disgrâce de l' « esprit faux »," in Albert-Birot ed., *Max Jacob et la création-colloque d'Orléans*, pp. 35-37.

[105] During these years, Jacob's poetry was actually featured in *Littérature* more often than works by prominent surrealist poet Paul Eluard. Rubio, "Max Jacob et le regard surréaliste," in Albert-Birot ed., *Max Jacob et la création*, p. 37.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[107] See Albert-Birot, "Le Laboratoire central," in Albert-Birot ed., *Mac Jacob et la création*, p. 98, Plantier, *L'Univers poétique de Max Jacob*, p. 9, and Kulik, preface to Jacob, *The Selected Poems of Max Jacob*, p. 25. Some surrealist poets such as Michel Leiris and even André Breton later reconsidered their position towards Jacob, and Eluard continuously held Jacob's work in esteem, regardless of the opinions of his fellow surrealists. Rubio, "Max Jacob et le regard surréaliste," in Albert-Birot ed., *Max Jacob et la creation*, p. 43.

[108] Some of the key studies on Jacob's biography and literary career are André Billy's *Max Jacob* (1945, rev. 1969), André Peyre's *Max Jacob quotidien* (1976), and Pierre Andreu's *Vie et mort de Max Jacob*

of surrealist art will reveal how closely Jacob prefigured the prominent movement of surrealism in post-War Paris.

(1982). While Billy and Peyre offer intimate portraits of the poet based on personal testimony from his friends, Andreu's account is more chronologically detailed and describes Jacob's works more extensively.

Scholarly investigations of Jacob's subversive poetic aesthetic began to appear in the early 1970s and interest in his work has continued to increase since then. Gerald Kamber attempts to formulate a literary theory of cubism in his *Max Jacob and the Poetics of Cubism* (1971), yet he nevertheless concludes by stating that Jacob "stands as one of the incontrovertible initiators of surrealism" (p. 162). René Plantier's extensive study, *L'Univers poétique de Max Jacob* (1976), provides a detailed analysis of various characteristics of Jacob's poetic style (puns, imagery, metaphors) based on the aesthetic principles described in Jacob's own writings, and clearly establishes Jacob's place as an authentic originator of surrealism. In *Poetry and Antipoetry: A Study of Selected Aspects of Jacob's Poetic Style* (1976), Annette Thau describes how Jacob broke with tradition through his use of puns, his parodic reworking of clichés, and his predilection for oneiric imagery. Sidney Lévy's *The Play of the Text: Max Jacob's "Le Cornet à dés"* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981) describes the subversive nature of Jacob's wordplay, and claims that his "verbal acrobatics" (p. 4) in *Le Cornet à dés* were fundamentally influential for subsequent experiments in language by surrealist poets. Christine Van Rogger-Andreucci examines the paradoxical strands of Jacob's literary output in *Max Jacob: acrobate absolu* (1993), exploring both the disorienting tendencies in his poetry as well as the more lyrical quality of some of his religiously-inspired works. And in his book *Looking for Heroes in Postwar France: Albert Camus, Max Jacob, Simone Weil* (1996), Neal Oxenhandler offers a somewhat contentious analysis of Jacob as a forerunner of postmodernism.

Finally, a number of recent symposia devoted to Jacob have further contributed to the reassessment of the pioneering achievements of this once unduly marginalized writer. See Paule Vidal ed., *Qui (ne) connaît (pas) Max Jacob?* (Institut Culturel de Bretagne, 1987), Christine Van Rogger-Andreucci ed., *Max Jacob poète et romancier - Actes de colloque du CRPC, Université de Pau, 25-28 mai, 1994*, (Pau, France: Publications de l'Université Pau, 1995), and Arlette Albert-Birot ed., *Max Jacob et la création – colloque d'Orléans*, (1997).

CHAPTER 3

SURREALISM

3.1 Surrealism: evolution and general characteristics

Apollinaire coined the term "surréalisme," first using it in a preface to the program accompanying Jean Cocteau's and Erik Satie's ballet *Parade* (1917), and then discussing its meaning at length shortly thereafter in the prologue to his play, later set by Poulenc, *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (also 1917). Although Apollinaire defines surrealism in somewhat ambiguous and paradoxical terms, literary critic Willard Bohn notes that a couple of key aesthetic principles emerge: "surprise" (which for Apollinaire essentially meant the cultivation of the unexpected and the absurd) and the creation of analogical parallels to reality (which, as opposed to mimesis, results in a "translation" or perversion of the laws of nature according to the poet's imagination).[109] The emphasis on the absurd and the unlimited potential of human imagination, which lay at the heart of Apollinaire's notion of surrealism, proved influential for the development of interwar surrealism.

Dadaism, and its questioning of bourgeois concepts of art through the cultivation of the scandalous and the absurd, also contributed to the evolution of surrealism.[110] Yet although Breton and others who later became prominent members of the surrealist movement at first found common cause with Tristan Tzara and his cohorts who launched the Parisian Dada movement in 1919, they eventually became disenchanted with Dada

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[109] Willard Bohn, *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvellous* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 124-128.

[110] J. H. Mathews, *An Introduction to Surrealism* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965), p. 20.

shock tactics which were rendered stale through repetition.[111] After Dadaism crumbled under its own nihilist pretensions in the early 1920s, surrealism rose to prominence as a more zealous anti-bourgeois artistic movement, less bent on the destruction of "high art" per se than its revitalization as a means to transform people's outlook on life.[112]

In distrust of the superiority of rational thought and the validity of all previously established artistic, social and moral codes, the surrealists were fascinated by the workings of the unconscious mind. Several surrealists, including Breton and Apollinaire, even studied Freud's theories of the subconscious and were interested in the application of these theories to art.[113] Yet the surrealist interest in dreams and the free associations of the unconscious was not motivated by a desire to escape from the outside world; rather, as literary critic J.H. Mathews explains, the goal was to reach a fuller awareness of the inconsistencies and paradoxes of reality and human nature. [114] The early surrealist experiments in "automatism" (or means of artistic production which attempt to evade all premeditation and "conscious" control), especially "automatic writing," were clearly motivated by an urge to unleash the creative powers of the unconscious. In fact, the first "official" definition of surrealism, issued by Breton in 1924, emphasizes this desire to give free reign to the unconscious:

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[111] Gérard Durozoi, *Le Surréalisme : théories, thèmes, techniques* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1972), pp. 30-32.

[112] Surrealism is often described as an outgrowth of Dadaism (or that the anti-art tendencies of Dadaism "paved the way" for surrealism). The two movements, however, were quite distinct in terms of their inherent philosophies and aesthetic (or anti-aesthetic) aims. See Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970), pp. 45-46.

[113] Thomas Greer, "Music and Its Relation to Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism," Ph.D. diss., North Texas State University, 1969, p. 136.

[114] Mathews, *An Introduction to Surrealism*, pp. 65-66.

> Surrealism, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, or in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought. Dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation.[115]

Recent reassessments of surrealism, however, have shifted the central focus from automatism to include the more "conscious" explorations of the bizarre and the irrational frequently undertaken by surrealist writers and artists.[116]

Surrealist art (whether verbal or pictorial) is characterized by a tendency to subvert the traditional emphasis on mimesis of nature and aesthetic coherence. But despite the desire to dramatically renew conventional modes of expression and representation, the materials used in surrealist art are often quite ordinary; the revolutionary, disorienting tendency of surrealism is thus manifested in the way in which these commonplace elements are combined. Breton himself even stated that the combination of familiar—and sometimes even banal—materials was the only path to innovation: "...human effort, which never ceases to vary the disposition of existing elements, cannot succeed in producing a single new element."[117] In both surrealist poetry and visual art, it is the "rapprochement inattendu" of clearly recognizable, yet distantly related elements that produces bizarre, disconcerting results.[118]

Surrealist poetry abounds in sudden, unexpected juxtapositions of images since words are linked in absurdly surprising combinations that defy logical understanding.

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[115] André Breton, *Premier manifeste du surréalime*, quoted and trans. by Daniel Albright in Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 310.

[116] See Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, Cambridge Studies in French 56 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.12.

[117] André Breton, *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p. 7.

[118] Max Ernst, *Écritures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 262. Of course, these fantastical juxtapositions are attempts to mirror the paradoxical associations of dreams and the unconscious.

For Breton, the power of surrealist poetic imagery is likened to an electric jolt—the more distantly related the entities, the more effective their resulting combination: "La valeur de l'image depend de la beauté de l'étincelle obtenue; elle est, par conséquent, fonction de la différence de potential entre les deux conducteurs."[119] Thus a surrealist poem, resisting any straightforward reading, usually amounts to a series of startling juxtapositions. But despite its semantic incoherence, surrealist poetry usually abides by the conventions of syntax and grammar, though often stretching these to the limit.[120] Surrealist poetry also makes use of common, clichéd expressions, but in bizarre and incongruous contexts, thereby reinvesting them with new meaning.

In surrealist visual art, as in poetry, the familiar landmarks of artistic conventions are never simply discarded, but rather exploited and subverted in order to disorient the reader or viewer. Despite its realistic representation of objects and perspective, surrealist art defies mimesis through the process of "dépaysement": commonplace (and mostly banal) elements are placed in incongruous and often fantastical surroundings, or "monstrous" entities are inserted into clichéd settings.[121] The processes of collage and assemblage characterized some of the earliest forms of surrealist production, and Elza Adamowicz describes how the principle of collage, defined as the manipulation of pre-

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[119] Quoted in Jaqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Le Surréalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), p. 90. Some surrealists (including Breton) particularly valued these incongruous juxtapositions since they felt that the jolt or spark that these images created in the mind of the viewer or reader would lead them to a higher state of awareness where contradictions cease to exist.

[120] Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, p. 46. Surrealist poetry differs from Dadaist "poetry," which often simply consists of a series of meaningless phonemes. See the example of Hugo Ball's "sound poem" in Albright, *Modernism and Music*, p. 313.

[121] Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, p. 86.

existent signs, continued to underlie all surrealist art (both verbal and pictorial).[122] As opposed to cubist collage, surrealist collage uses far more disparate elements (embracing both "high" and "low" cultural fragments, and especially the outmoded and the clichéd) and deploys these materials as signifying units (rather than as structural units in cubist collage) which are combined to suggest the "marvelous."[123]

The sheer diversity of the materials that are combined in surrealist art and literature is remarkable; for instance, an advertising slogan may be juxtaposed with a poetic verse. Adamowicz aptly points out that this seemingly indiscriminate assemblage of materials from various cultural registers can be described as carnivalesque (in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense of the term), since traditional aesthetic hierarchies are dismantled while elements are freed from their traditionally fixed meanings and functions.[124] By staging hitherto unprecedented forms of interaction between divergent cultural signs, surrealist art thus invites various readings, from parodic to poetic.[125]

Finally, the ultimately heterogeneous and fragmented nature of all surrealist art (due to the lack of either visual cohesion or semantic coherence) seems to destabilize any

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[122] *Ibid.*, p. 11. Adamowicz argues that all surrealist texts are "inhabited by fragments of earlier texts." *Ibid.*, p. 14 Yet she does make a distinction between actual collage, and texts which exploit collage effects (which can even be the case with "automatic" texts.) *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[123] *Ibid.*, p. 32. For the surrealists, the "marvelous" is essentially a critique (or even negation) of the conventional, utilitarian functions of objects. The "marvelous" is also associated with the surrealist belief in the power of the imagination to project new realities through unprecedented associations. See *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12, and Mathews, *An Introduction to Surrealism*, pp. 135-140. This emphasis on the "marvelous" in surrealist collage not only sets it apart from cubist collage, which retains the realistic function of the elements it combines, but also from the mostly random assemblage of materials in Dadaist collage, which presents disruptive combinations for their own sake. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, pp. 17, 68 and 69.

[124] Adamowicz, p. 63. Literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque emphasizes the reversal of established hierarchies through the juxtaposition of wildly contrasting modes of discourse. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iwolsky (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 8 and 34.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

sense of unified authorial voice or subjectivity. Instead, some argue that surrealist works combine multiple discourses and "voices," particularly because of the appropriation of pre-existing textual or iconic fragments. As Claude Abastado claims,

> Le 'lieu' du texte [surréaliste] est celui d'une hétérogénéité radicale; une infinité de textes en interrelation, toute une culture, une conscience foisonnante et incohérente du monde surgit dans les 'bribes de plusieurs discours' les 'interférences', les 'lacunes.'[126]

Several surrealist poets and artists (such as Aragon and Max Ernst) frequently expressed a desire to deflate the Romantic concept of the artwork as the "original" expression of the artist's individual ego.[127] But the surrealists were subjectively engaged with the selection and combination of pre-existent elements in their works, and to a certain degree all surrealist art seems to bear the individual imprint of its creator (for instance, a Dali painting can easily be distinguished from a work by Ernst).[128] Thus despite challenging notions of organic unity and artistic originality, in practice the surrealists did not entirely do away with individual "voice" and style.

Despite his marginalization from the "official" circle of surrealists led by Breton, Jacob clearly paralleled (and largely prefigured) most of the artistic developments of interwar surrealism. Although he never actually dabbled in automatic writing, Jacob's fascination with the spontaneous associative forces inherent in the sounds of words is certainly akin to the surrealist interest in the fortuitous combinations of ideas unleashed through the suppression of "logical" thought. The bizarre, disorienting intrusions of fantastical imagery in the midst of Jacob's descriptions of mundane situations not only

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[126] Claude Abastado, "L'écriture automatique et l'instance du sujet," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 184 (1981): p. 60.

[127] See Chénieux-Gendron, *Le Surréalisme*, pp. 156-157.

[128] Adamowicz emphasizes the high level of subjective engagement involved in surrealist collage. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, p. 33.

coincide with the surrealist's interest in the strange materializations of dreams or hallucinations, but also seem to foreshadow the surrealist concept of "dépaysement" or defamiliarization of the commonplace. Furthermore, the surrealist's emphasis on the rapprochement of extremely disparate entities echoes Jacob's belief in the creative potential generated through "le rassemblement des forces contradictoires."[129] Particularly, the mixture of the banal and the clichéd with more "elevated"—and even arcane—elements in his poetry corresponds to the heterogeneous nature of surrealist art. And perhaps even more than the "official" surrealists, Jacob seems to undermine the notion of a unifying authorial presence, especially through his parodying of various different types of discourse. Yet, as Annette Thau observes, Jacob's poetry does not simply consist of an indiscriminate pastiche,[130] and his works seem to embody the paradox inherent in all surrealist art between internal multiplicity and the inevitable imprint of the author's individual subjectivity.

3.2 Surrealism and music: previous models for understanding the analogy

Until recently, discussions of surrealism and music have been somewhat sparse. This reluctance to explore musical analogies to surrealist art perhaps originates with the anti-music stance of the "official" surrealists. Breton's circle of Parisian surrealists did not include any musicians, and Breton himself, despite conceding his own lack of musical knowledge, described music as the least valuable and most confusing of all forms of

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[129] Quoted in Plantier, *L'Univers poétique de Max Jacob,* p. 19.

[130] Thau, *Poetry and Antipoetry,* p. 112.

artistic expression, particularly because of its lack of semantic specificity.[131] No reference to music is made in Breton's *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924), and in his *Le surréalisme et la peinture* (1928), Breton describes music in highly negative terms in comparison to visual art:

> À ces divers degrés de sensations correspondent des réalisations spirituelles assez précises et assez distinctes pour qu'il me soit permis d'accorder à l'expression plastique une valeur que par contre je ne cesserai de refuser à l'expression musicale, celle-ci de toutes la plus profondément confusionelle.[132]

> Les images auditives le cèdent aux images visuelles non seulement en netteté, mais encore en rigueur, et n'en déplaise à quelques mélomanes, elles ne sont pas faites pour fortifier l'idée de la grandeur humaine.[133]

Poulenc himself deplored the antipathy towards music which many surrealists exhibited:

> [The surrealists] all detested music. For Breton, for example, music had no meaning, it was useless and cumbersome. At the end of his life, Eluard became more accessible to it, and Aragon listens to it willingly, but without any great pleasure.[134]

Later in life, however, even Breton softened his anti-musical stance, and acknowledged that music might contribute to surrealist artistic expression through its fusion with poetry.[135] And although the artists and poets associated with interwar surrealism were not inclined to elaborate a theory of surrealist music themselves, several critics have retrospectively observed musical parallels with surrealist art.

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[131] Breton, however, went as far as to admit that he was tone deaf: "Je ne sais pas reconnaître la différence entre deux sons. Pour moi, les rapports entre les sons, qui constituent la musique, m'échappent totalement." Quoted in Robert Wangermée, "Surréalisme et musique à Paris et à Bruxelles," *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises* 75, nos. 3-4 (1997): p. 311.

[132] Quoted in Wangermée, "Surréalisme et musique à Paris et à Bruxelles," p. 310.

[133] *Ibid.*

[134] Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself [Moi et mes amis]*, p. 101.

[135] "For the first audible diamond to be obtained, it is evident that the fusion of the elements—music and poetry—into one, could only be accomplished at a very high emotional temperature. And it seems to me that it is in the expression of the passion of love that both music and poetry are most likely to reach this supreme point of incandescence." Quoted in Anne Le Baron, "Reflections of Surrealism in Postmodern Musics" in *Postmodern Music/ Postmodern Thought*, ed. Joseph Auner and Judith Lockhead (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 30.

Adorno was among the first to discuss music in terms of surrealism. Stephen Hinton observes that Adorno most often focuses his discussions of music and surrealism on Kurt Weill's collaborations with Brecht, and, in particular, describes *Mahagonny* (1927) as the first surrealist opera. For Adorno, Weill's incorporation of jazz and dance idioms by way of a "montage" technique is evidence of a surrealist influence.[136] Adorno attributes the surrealist effect to the clash of styles that ensues when the "clichés" of popular music, such as dance idioms, are combined with art music.[137] He also views the "refunctioning" of old music, a sort of critique of bourgeois musical taste, as surrealist.[138] Although he does describe certain aspects of Weill's compositional style as "surrealist," Adorno uses the term primarily in the context of an ideological interpretation of Weill, in which he describes the use of older musical styles and clichés associated with bourgeois taste as critical and confrontational.[139] Hinton points out that the problem with Adorno's use of the word "surrealism" is that in terms of musical style alone his definition of musical surrealism is very similar (if not essentially identical) to his description of *Neue Sachlichkeit.*

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[136] Stephen Hinton, "Weill: *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Surrealism, and *Gebrauchsmusik*," in *A New Orpheus: Essays on Kurt Weill*, ed. Kim H. Kowalke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 69.

[137] Hinton, "Weill," p. 76.

[138] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[139] Adorno's position towards the montage techniques he attributed to musical surrealism changed quite dramatically from his early to late writings on the subject. In *Philosophy of Modern Music [Philosophie der neuen Musik]* (1949), Adorno objected to surrealist montage techniques since he felt that they constituted a "fetishization" or crass duplication of fragments from everyday life. Later in *Aesthetic Theory [Ästhetische Theorie]* (1970), Adorno pointed out the positive attributes of montage, stating that its "shock effects" sought to undo bourgeois aestheticism. See Richard Wolin, "Benjamin, Adorno, Surrealism" in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays on Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), pp.106-119.

For Ernst Krenek, the idea of "refunctioning" old music is also central to a definition of surrealism in music. In his article, "What is Called the New Music and Why" (1937),[140] Krenek contrasts surrealism with neoclassicism, pointing out that while the intention of neoclassicism is to create an apparent synthesis out of pre-existent material, in surrealism, divergent elements are "mounted into an ensemble so that one can see that they do not fit together."[141] Like Adorno, Krenek feels that musical surrealism has a strong polemical quality which further differentiates it from neoclassicism.[142] In another discussion of music and surrealism in his book *Music Here and Now* (1939), Krenek proposes Stravinsky was the initiator of musical surrealism, especially through his *L'Histoire du soldat* (1918).[143] Particularly because of his association with Jean Cocteau, Krenek argues that Stravinsky went beyond neo-classicism and into the realm of the surreal since his use of old (or "classical") musical styles was more "destructive" than restorative.[144] Stravinsky, according to Krenek, built upon the "surrealist trends" of Busoni's technique of neoclassicism, in which classical elements are treated like conjured-up "ghosts walking about in what must be, to them, incomprehensible surroundings...treated like excavated fragments, used with quotations marks, set in

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[140] From Ernst Krenek, *Über neue Musik: Sechs Vorlesungen zu Einführung in die Theoretischen Grundlagen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977). Translated by Daniel Albright in Albright, *Modernism and Music*, pp. 330-336.

[141] *Ibid.*, p. 333.

[142] *Ibid.*

[143] Ernst Krenek, Music Here and Now, trans. Barthold Flies (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1939), p. 72. Krenek also briefly mentions Satie as an initiator of musical surrealism. However, the iconoclastic composer was closely linked to the nihilist Dada movement, and was a supporter of the extremist activities of Dada leader Tristan Tzara. Furthermore, Satie contemptuously referred to the members of the emerging surrealist movement as "faux-Dadas." See Robert Orledge, Satie the Composer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 233-235.

[144] Krenek, *Music Here and Now*, p. 72.

strange and startling proximity to heterogeneous materials."[145] Classical elements become "wreckage" which is distorted and then placed in an alien context in order "to be built into a system contradicting the original arrangement."[146] According to Krenek, this treatment of older material creates a "shock very similar to that produced by the introduction of really new features."[147] Of course, one could argue that Stravinsky was not intent on actually "destroying" old music, but rather on holding it up for ironic scrutiny, or perhaps on creating an eclectic synthesis by combining it with modernist techniques.

In his doctoral dissertation "Music and Its Relation to Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, 1905-1950" (1969) Thomas Greer focuses his discussion of surrealism and music primarily on works by composers who collaborated with surrealist artists and poets or who showed an affinity for surrealist art. Particularly, he feels that the most important connection between music and surrealism results from a composer's interest in surrealist poetry.[148] Thus, while mentioning works by composers such as Satie, Auric and Antheil, who he claims demonstrated a predilection for surrealist artistic endeavors, Greer feels that Poulenc may be more of a surrealist than most of his contemporaries because of his numerous settings of surrealist poetry.[149] Yet apart from listing or providing cursory descriptions of the works in question (as well as the texts

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[145] Ernst Krenek, "Busoni—Then and Now," quoted in Greer, "Music and Its Relation to Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism," p.378.

[146] Krenek, *Music Here and Now*, p. 72.

[147] *Ibid.*

[148] Greer, "Music and Its Relation to Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism," p. 445.

[149] *Ibid.*, p. 367.

which they set), Greer does not identify any particular qualities of the music itself that could be correlated with surrealism. Therefore, Greer describes several musical works as "surrealist" but does not attempt to formulate an actual definition or specific characterization of surrealism in music.

Most recent discussions of surrealism and music have focused more specifically on individual composers. Robert Wangermée has extensively researched the music of André Souris (1890-1970), a composer closely linked to the Belgian group of surrealists.[150] The works that Souris composed during his association with surrealism feature commonplace or banal musical elements, such as popular song, folk music, and excerpts of works from the concert music canon, which are "transformed" through their placement in a new, modernist musical context. For instance, in one of his key surrealist works, *Quelques Airs de Clarisse Juranville mis à jour par André Souris* (1928), certain passages recall popular song, waltz rhythms, *Sprechgesang*, or even plainchant.[151] Wangermée emphasizes, however, that like fellow Belgian surrealist, the painter René Magritte, Souris's prevalent use of pre-existent fragments does not simply result in a heterogeneous pastiche, but rather that all elements are integrated into continuous and cohesive texture.[152]

Possible surrealist influences in the music of Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959), who lived in Paris for several years, have also been recently explored. In

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[150] See Robert Wangermée, *André Souris et le complexe d'orphée : entre surréalisme et musique sérielle* (Liège: Mardaga, 1995), and "La métamorphose des lieux communs dans le surréalisme Bruxellois" in *Musique, signes, images : liber amicorum François Lesure*, ed. Joël-Marie Fauquet (Genève: Éditions Minkoff, 1988), pp. 279-287.

[151] Wangermée, "La métamorphose des lieux communs," p. 285.

[152] *Ibid.* This is one of the ways in which the Belgian surrealists differed from their Parisian counterparts, who strove instead to draw attention to the disparity between the elements they combined. See *Ibid*, p. 283.

particular, discussions of surrealism in his music have focused on his opera *Julietta* (1938), based on a surrealist play by Georges Neveux. In the opera, the boundaries between dream and reality are constantly blurred, and Katrin Stöck and Vladimir Karbusicky attempt to show how the music contributes to this surreal atmosphere.[153] Stöck claims that Martinů employs a combination of highly contrasting musical styles (which she feels are derived from neoclassicism, impressionism, and folk music) in order to help characterize the bizarre dislocations of the opera (although she does not describe exactly how these different styles are deployed or correlated to specific events in the opera).[154] Stöck also claims that the use of contrasting vocal techniques, such as the combination of speech and *Sprechgesang* with more conventional operatic vocal styles, as well as the use of women's voices for several male characters, contributes to the strange, dream-like atmosphere of the opera.[155] In his discussion of the stylistic features of the opera, Karbusicky explores how Martinu frequently employs commonplace sounds or musical styles and combines them in unexpected ways (or dissociates them from their usual context) in order to disorient the audience.[156]

Because of Poulenc's predilection for modernist poetry, some scholars have scrutinized his music for surrealist influences. In his 1986 dissertation "Dadaist, Cubist, and Surrealist Influences in Settings by Francis Poulenc of Contemporary French Poetry"

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[153] Katrin Stöck, "Der Einfluß von Surrealismus und Poetismus auf Martinůs Oper *Julietta,*" in *Musikkonzepte – Kozepte der Musikwissenshaft*, ed. Kathrin Eberl and Wolfgang Ruf (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998), p. 677-683; and Vladimir Karbusicky, "Der erträumte und nacherlebte Surrealismus: Martinůs Oper *Juliette ou La clé des songes*," *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenshaft* 13 (1995): pp. 271-336.

[154] Stöck, "Der Einfluß von Surrealismus," p. 683.

[155] *Ibid.*, pp. 682-683.

[156] Karbusicky, "Der ertraümte und nacherlebte Surrealismus," p. 301.

(that I mentioned in chapter one), Jeremy Cox confines his discussion of surrealism to Poulenc's settings of Eluard. Although he contends at first that Poulenc's "essentially conservative"[157] musical style is often inimical to the composer's attempts to reflect the subversive qualities of Eluard's poetry, he nevertheless argues that in these settings Poulenc seems to embrace a more adventurous approach to musical composition, in which he experiments with novel combinations of traditional gestures.[158] Cox draws special attention to outwardly serene and harmonious works, such as "Peut-il se reposer" from *Cinq poèmes de Paul Eluard* (1935), and "Homme au sourire tendre" from *La fraîcheur et le feu* (1950), in which Poulenc goes beyond the usual conservative bounds of his style in subtle ways.[159] While he readily admits that his characterizations of cubist and surrealist influences in music are similar in that they both involve a certain level of unpredictability and disruption, he paradoxically argues that in Poulenc's settings of Eluard's surrealist poetry this disjointed quality is attenuated by an overall sense of "organic growth" or "spiritual unity."[160] Nevertheless, in describing Poulenc's response to the poetry, Cox does not emphasize that this underlying sense of coherence or development is distinctive of Eluard's particular brand of surrealism, and is not a fundamental characteristic of surrealist art in general.[161]

Poulenc is the main focus of Daniel Albright's extended discussion of surrealism in music in *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts*

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[157] Cox, "Dadaist, Cubist, and Surrealist Influences," p. 388.

[158] *Ibid.*, p. 390.

[159] *Ibid.*, p. 341.

[160] *Ibid.* pp. 370-371 and 470.

[161] See Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, p. 185.

(2000).[162] Albright claims that there is a substantial body of music that could be considered surrealist, and his list, which includes works by Poulenc, Honneger, Milhaud, Ravel, Martinů, Stravinsky and Antheil, consists primarily of settings of surrealist texts.[163] Despite noting that surrealist music usually sounds quite conservative on the surface, in terms of both melody and harmony, he feels that works by Poulenc (and other composers he associates with surrealism) defy musical conventions as boldly as contemporaneous twelve-tone works through the cultivation of incongruity, or "semantic dissonance," instead of mere dissonance in sound.[164] He suggests that surrealist music, especially settings of surrealist texts, features incongruities on many levels: between the music and the text, between the music and the stage action (in the case of an opera or ballet), or between different elements of the music itself. Albright also points out the differences between Dadaist and surrealist influences in music, and he contrasts Dadaist experiments in the destruction of musical language with the surrealist approach of dislocation.[165]

Albright associates Poulenc's widespread use of musical quotations with surrealist collage;[166] he claims that surrealist music often consists of an "acoustic collage" in which familiar sounds are used to "assault or discredit" conventional systems of musical

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[162] Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and the Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[163] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[164] *Ibid.*, p. 305.

[165] *Ibid.*, p. 289.

[166] Albright seems to use the term "quotation" quite broadly since he also seems to include stylistic references under this designation. He feels that Poulenc's heavy reliance on pre-existing music calls into question traditional notions about authenticity or creativity, and he goes as far as to describe Poulenc as "a kind of human gramophone, a device for recording old music and playing it back with heightened artificiality." See *Ibid.*, p. 291.

meaning.[167] Among his examples of Poulenc's "surrealizing misquotations,"[168] Albright briefly discusses the short quotation of the "Waltz of the Snowflakes" from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* (1892) in the final movement of *Le Bal masqué*.[169] In this instance, he argues that Poulenc subverts the traditional "high" versus "low" dichotomy since the Tchaikovsky quotation takes on the "vulgar" tone of the music-hall inspired music which surrounds it.[170]

Albright also draws attention to the way in which the "semantic tropes" of the music seem to undermine the denotation of the text in several of Poulenc's surrealist vocal works, creating a sense of "mismatch" between text and music.[171] In his extensive discussion of *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (1944) (which he dubs "Poulenc's masterpiece of surrealism"), Albright argues that there is a high level of incongruity between Apollinaire's light-hearted, comically absurd text, and Poulenc's "earth-bound" setting.[172] Albright describes how Poulenc's surrealist approach to text setting transgresses established operatic conventions: despite noting that Poulenc never entirely disregards the text, he argues that the composer tends to emphasize "misleading" or insignificant aspects in his setting.[173] Because of this keen musical attention to the more trivial or unimportant aspects of the text (such as figures of speech), instead of the presumed emotions of the

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[167] Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 289.

[168] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

[169] Albright's brief description of *Le Bal masqué* focuses exclusively on the final movement.

[170] Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent.*, pp. 293-294.

[171] *Ibid.*, pp. 291-292.

[172] *Ibid.*, pp. 297-298.

[173] *Ibid.*, p. 302.

characters, he feels that different affects succeed each other so quickly in Poulenc's setting as to be dehumanized or mechanical.[174]

One could argue that the problem with Albright's emphasis on the incongruity between text and music is that he seems to maintain that surrealist texts such as Apollinaire's do indeed have a straightforward, literal meaning from which Poulenc deviates in his setting: "Poulenc's surrealist practice consists of writing music that glances away from the primary denotation of the text, that follows semantic ricochets."[175] Yet it is often difficult to uncover a central meaning (if indeed there is one) or continuous narrative thread in surrealist texts such as *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. Therefore, in setting surrealist poetry, does the composer have much choice other than to follow the rapidly shifting images of the text? Even Albright suggests, paradoxically, that the peculiar nature of surrealist texts is such that they usually cannot truly oppose any particular reading: "the text [*Les mamelles de Tirésias*] is too strange, too much-meaning, too little-meaning, to resist any construal the music may choose to make of it."[176]

Although there is considerable room for debate in discussing musical parallels to surrealism, some striking commonalities emerge from these different theories. Essentially all of these critics contend that surrealist music does not incorporate radically innovative musical procedures, but is rather characterized by the use of conventional elements and pre-existent musical idioms. Jarring combinations of disparate musical textures are also emphasized, particularly the "collage" or "montage" effect of juxtaposing allusions to pre-existing musical works or styles in startling and incongruous ways. My discussion of

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[174] *Ibid.*, pp. 300-301.

[175] *Ibid.*, p. 303.

[176] *Ibid.*, p. 304.

surrealist influences in *Le Bal masqué* will further explore this subversive treatment of pre-existent or commonplace musical elements.

CHAPTER 4

SURREALIST INFLUENCES IN *LE BAL MASQUÉ*

4.1 Jacob's text

The creative impetus behind Poulenc's composition of *Le Bal masqué* clearly stems from his fascination with Max Jacob's poetry. In *My Friends and Myself*, Poulenc describes his immediate attraction to the poems he selected from *Le Laboratoire central*:

> Their violence, their truculence, their whimsicality attracted me to them. I found in them that splashy quality of the Parisian "weeklies" of my youth, and from there was born that odd musical carnival I've always prized so greatly.[177]

As I mentioned in chapter two, the four poems which he chose to set in the cantata are from the third section of *Le Laboratoire central*, which Jacob scholar Belaval actually labeled "Le bal masqué." Although "Le bal masqué" is also the exact title of one of the poems in this section of *Le Laboratoire central,* ironically Poulenc did not choose this particular poem for his setting. Nevertheless, three of the poems that Poulenc did choose, "Malvina", "La dame aveugle," and the untitled poem beginning with "Réparateur perclus..." feature the designation "Personnages du bal masqué."[178] Like most other poems in this "Bal masqué" section, these three poems are colorful and disconcerting "character sketches" of middle and upper-class people driven to extremes of eccentricity. In these somewhat satirical poems, Jacob seems to attack bourgeois complacency by revealing the shady underbelly of humdrum urban life.

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[177] Poulenc and Audel, *My Friends and Myself [Moi et mes amis]*, p. 80.

[178] The last eight poems in the third section of *Le Laboratoire central* all refer to "Personnages du Bal masqué," and were published as a series entitled "Bal masqué" in *Les Soirées de Paris* in 1913. See Albert-Birot, "Max Jacob poète moderne dans *Le Laboratoire central*?," in Albert Birot ed., *Max Jacob et la création*, p. 67. As mentioned in chapter 2, there are 33 poems in the entire third section of *Le Laboratoire central*.

The poem that Poulenc chose for the opening movement of the cantata is actually the very first poem in the entire third section of *Le Laboratoire central*. But unlike the poems Poulenc chose for the other vocal movements, this poem is not a "portrait" of a single protagonist (nor does its title refer to a "bal masqué"). Instead, Jacob strings together a series of disjointed images in which words and phonemes are spontaneously linked through wordplay—or as Poulenc describes, "ces mots enchaînés par la simple fantaisie":[179] (the elements in parenthesis do not appear in Poulenc's setting)

Madame la Dauphine
Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, (fine, fine
Fine, fine, fine, fine.)
Ne verra pas, ne verra pas le beau film
Qu'on y a fait tirer
-- Les vers du nez --
Car on l'a mené en terre avec son premier né
En terre et à Nanterre
Où elle est enterrée.

Quand un paysan de (la) Chine
Shin, Shin, Shin, Shin, Shin, Shin.[180]
Veut avoir des primeurs
(-- Fruits mûrs --)
Il va chez l'imprimeur
Ou bien chez sa voisine
Shin, Shin, Shin, Shin, (Shin, Shin,)
Tous les paysans de la Chine
Les avaient épiés
Pour leur mettre des bottines
Tine! (tine!)
Ils leur coupent les pieds.

M. le comte d'Artois
Est monté sur le toit
Faire un compte d'ardoise
Toi, toi, toi, toi
Et voir par la lunette
Nette! Nette! Pour voir si la lune est
Plus grosse que le doigt.
Un vapeur et sa cargaison
Son, son, son, son, son, son,
Ont échoué contre la maison.
(Son, son, son, son,)

[179] Francis Poulenc, "Éloge de la banalité," *Présence* III, no. 8 (October 1935): p. 25.

[180] In Poulenc's setting, this line is written as "Chine, Chine, Chine, Chine,"

Chipons de la graisse d'oie
Doye, doye, doye[181]
Pour en faire des canons.[182]

This poem clearly shows Jacob's propensity to freely associate words through phonic resemblances, much akin to the surrealist practice of automatic writing. Furthermore, the repeated use of phonemes based on the final syllables of certain words also reveals Jacob's fondness for using words as "objects" which seem to be chosen primarily for their sound. Yet, of course, Jacob also seems to delight in the abrupt dislocations and zany imagery that this approach to poetry engenders. Here, as in other poems of *Le Laboratoire central*, Jacob "defamiliarizes" the commonplace by combining it with outlandish or fantastical elements: in particular, the reference to the Parisian suburb Nanterre seems oddly out of context within the stream of bizarrely gruesome images which Jacob conjures in the first stanza. As in most of the poems in *Le Laboratoire central*, the treatment of rhyme and meter is quite free, and assonance and alliteration abound. For instance, in the last stanza, there are twelve iterations of the sound "oi" and seventeen iterations of the sound "on." In fact, the frequent interspersion of nonsense "refrains" of phonemes throughout the poem actually seems to evoke children's songs, and perhaps here Jacob is parodying nursery rhymes.

For the following three vocal movements, "Malvina," "La dame aveugle" and "Finale," Poulenc chose poems which also feature a peculiar blend of unsettling and farcical elements. All three feature strikingly visual imagery, and it is easy to see how Poulenc associated them with the garish photos of crime scenes he remembers from the Parisian weeklies he perused during his youth:

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[181] Poulenc repeats "Doye" six times in his setting.

[182] Jacob, *Le Laboratoire central*, p. 119.

> C'est l'atmosphère des crimes en chromo du *Petit Parisien* des dimanches de mon enfance. « Quelle horreur! » s'écriait à cette époque la cuisinière de la grand-mère. « Encore un type qui a assassiné sa belle-sœur. » Il se pourrait que la *Dame aveugle* ait subi le même sort.[183]

In "Malvina," the poem Poulenc chose for the third movement, sudden changes in tone and perspective seem as disorienting as the rapid succession of completely unrelated images in "Madame la Dauphine":

> Voilà qui j'espère vous effraie
> Mademoiselle Malvina ne quitte plus son éventail
> Depuis qu'elle est morte.
> Son gant gris perle est étoilé d'or.
> Elle se tirebouchonne comme une valse tzigane
> Elle vient mourir d'amour à ta porte
> Près du grès où l'on met les cannes.
> Disons qu'elle est morte du diabète
> Morte du gros parfum qui lui penchait le cou
> Oh! l'honnête animal! si chaste et si peu fou!
> Moins gourmet que gourmande elle était de sang lourd
> Agrégé ès lettres et chargée de cours
> C'était en chapeau haut qu'on lui faisait la cour
> Or, on ne l'aurait eue qu'à la méthode hussarde
> Malvina, ô fantôme, que Dieu te garde![184]

Poulenc envisioned this poem as a character sketch of a rather presumptuous woman holding a minor academic posting who "(plays) the Duchess, her little finger raised, goes to the ball in blue stockings—which is fatal for her: they talk to her about Nietzsche when all she wants is to be taken by storm."[185] Her death, from love "or let's say diabetes," is thus primarily described in ironic rather than tragic terms. There is also a tongue-in-cheek quality to the first line, which is probably not meant to be taken at face value. Nevertheless, there are hints of pathos—or mock pathos—that suddenly surface amidst the derision and the irony: "Oh! l'honnête animal!..." and "Malvina, ô fantôme, que Dieu te garde!"

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[183] Francis Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, p. 60.

[184] Jacob, *Le Laboratoire central*, p. 161.

[185] Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mélodies]*, p. 61.

Although there is a central "subject" (as opposed to the poem Poulenc sets in the first movement), the descriptive images often seem to follow each other in a manner that seems ludicrously arbitrary. Thus, here again, Jacob associates words by playing with phonic resemblances (particularly assonance) (for instance, "Moins **gour**met que **gour**mande elle *é*tait de sang **lourd** /Agr*égé* ès lettres *et* charg*é* de **cours**..."). This poem also displays Jacob's propensity to incorporate conversational language into his poetry: for instance on the lines "Disons qu'elle est morte du diabète" and "Oh! l'honnête animal! si chaste et si peu fou!"

Jacob's poem, "La dame aveugle", which Poulenc chose for the fifth movement, triggered even more specific childhood memories of an eccentric couple he used to observe while visiting the suburb of Nogent:

> While writing 'La dame aveugle' I often recalled an astonishingly stout lady of apparently independent means who, around 1912, frequented the Île de Beauté at Nogent-sur-Marne. She lived in a chalet, half Swiss, half Norman and passed her days playing solitaire, sitting on her front door steps attired in a dress of black silk. On a cane armchair a few steps from her sat a man who looked like Landru,[186] with pince-nez and a cyclist's cap, reading his newspaper.[187]

As "Malvina," this poem is a bizarre assemblage of absurd details, creating a "character sketch" that is as horrific and pitiful as it is farcical.

La dame aveugle dont les yeux saignent choisit ses mots
Elle ne parle à personne de ses maux

Elle a des cheveux pareils à la mousse
Elle porte des bijoux et des pierreries rousses.

La dame grasse et aveugle dont les yeux saignent
Écrit des lettres polies avec marges et interlignes

Elle prend garde aux plis de sa robe de peluche
Et s'efforce de faire quelque chose de plus

Et si je ne mentionne pas son beau-frère

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[186] Henri Désiré Landru (1869-1922) was a notorious French murderer, who was convicted of murdering 10 women and a boy (he was sometimes referred to as "the modern Bluebeard.")

[187] Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, p. 61.

C'est qu'ici ce jeune homme n'est pas en honneur

Car il s'enivre et fait s'enivrer l'aveugle
Qui rit, qui rit alors et beugle.[188]

In a similar fashion to other poems in the collection, mundane details ("Écrit des lettres polies avec marges et interlignes", "Elle prend garde aux plis de sa robe") are combined with the grotesque and absurd ("La dame grasse et aveugle dont les yeux saignent"). Although the line division in this poem seems to suggest a regular rhyme scheme, the treatment of rhyme is still quite free, as the "rhyming" couplet pattern seems to disintegrate in the fourth and fifth couplets. Instead of traditional approaches to rhyme, Jacob plays with assonance (for instance in the fifth stanza: "mentionne," "jeune homme," "honneur") and alliteration (for instance, in the fourth stanza: "prend," "plis," "peluche," "plus.") As in "Malvina," there are snatches of conversational language, "Et si je ne mentionne pas son beau-frère/ C'est qu'ici ce jeune homme n'est pas en honneur," as well as the occasional intrusion of "low" or colloquial vocabulary ("beugle").

For the last movement of the cantata, Poulenc chose the final poem in the third ("Bal masqué") section of *Le Laboratoire central.*[189] Poulenc felt that the poem was Jacob's self-portrait, at least in part, illustrating his tendencies towards extreme eccentricity, emotional volatility, and self-deprecation. The poem, which describes an eccentric crippled automobile repairman who feels he is "too old for Paris," may even be read as a sort of farewell to Paris before Jacob's retreat to Saint-Benoît :

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[188] Jacob, *Le Laboratore central*, p. 163.

[189] Just as the poem chosen for the fist movement also happens to be the first poem in the third section of Jacob's collection.

Réparateur perclus de vieux automobiles
L'anachorète[190] hélas a regagné son nid
Par ma barbe je suis trop viellard pour Paris
L'angle de tes maisons m'entre dans les chevilles
Mon gilet quadrillé a, dit-on, l'air étrusque
Et mon chapeau marron va mal avec mes frusques
Avis! c'est un placard qu'on a mis sur ma porte
Dans ce logis tout sent la peau de chèvre morte.[191]

The poem features a disorienting mixture of seemingly incongruous juxtapositions (for instance between the first two lines) and outlandishly absurd imagery ("L'angle de tes maisons m'entre dans les chevilles"). The combination of colloquial expressions (such as "Par ma barbe" and "frusques") with more elevated or exotic vocabulary ("anachorète" and "étrusque") is also typical of Jacob's poetic language. Apart from the last four lines of the poem, there appears to be no fixed rhyme scheme, but here Jacob adopts a conventional approach to meter: each line is an alexandrine.[192] Although Poulenc chose this poem for the boisterous bravura "Finale," even more than the others that Poulenc has chosen, it reveals a sense of bleakness and desolation beneath the surface clowning of Jacob's seemingly playful free associations.

4.2 Poulenc's setting

Poulenc provides his most extensive description of *Le Bal masqué* in his 1935 article "Éloge de la banalité," written to explain his intentions in composing the cantata before its performance in Geneva:

> Dans une atmosphère familière et qui fleure la banlieue parisienne, nous avons, Max Jacob et moi, promené une manière de carnaval au cours duquel une amoureuse, prétentieuse et inassouvie, Mlle Malvina, donne la main à une monstrueuse dame aveugle qui, vêtu d'une robe de peluche, se grise avec son beau-frère.

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[190] An "anachorète" is a hermitic monk.

[191] Jacob, *Le Laboratoire central*, p. 164.

[192] This twelve-syllable meter is standard in French poetry.

> Tous ces personnages, aperçus par quelque fenêtre d'un « chalet coquet » sur les bords de la Marne, nous avons essayé de les ramener à une optique plus universelle en les grossissant exagérément.
> Un *Air de bravoure* qui découle du *Préambule* entraîne dans une chimérique galopade ceux qui veulent bien chevaucher sans contrôle ces mots enchaînés par la simple fantaisie.
> Un vieillard violent et obtu, « réparateur de vieux automobiles » clôt cette galerie d'étranges portraits auxquels des interludes instrumentaux servent de cadre. Max Jacob et moi avons recherché, avant tout, le rire franc, le rire issu de surprise, voir même de la stupeur, et non ce sourire ironique, pincé, logique, dit « supérieur », cher aux amateurs d'esthétique rare.[193]

In referring to the creation of *Le Bal masqué* as a sort of collaboration between Jacob and himself, Poulenc clearly reveals his affinity for Jacob's particular surrealist aesthetic. In many respects, Poulenc's setting seems to reflect not only the fundamental characteristics of Jacob's poetry, but also those of surrealist art in general. To begin, I will explore how the intermingling of extremely disparate musical styles throughout the cantata can be correlated with the central surrealist impulse towards the spontaneous combination of contradictory elements. Throughout the cantata, popular Parisian musical idioms glaringly clash with the hallmarks of concert music, providing a musical counterpart to Jacob's tendency to freely mix "high" and "low" elements of discourse in his poetry. Furthermore, I will associate Poulenc's numerous quotations and allusions to the works of various art music composers, as well as his tendency to juxtapose them with highly contrasting popular-flavored material, with the surrealist concept of "dépaysement." Poulenc's setting also seems to take on the essentially fragmented nature of Jacob's poetry, and of all surrealist art, through privileging disorienting and abrupt shifts in musical texture and affect rather than continuity and expressive consistency. Finally, I will address the contentious issue of locating Poulenc's individual "voice" in the cantata while taking surrealist attitudes towards creative originality and subjective integrity, as well as Poulenc's own aesthetic pronouncements, into account.

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[193] Poulenc, "Éloge de la banalité," p. 25.

4.2.1 Stylistic diversity

In surrealist art, as discussed in the previous chapter, the convergence of disparate entities is privileged as a means to disorient the audience. The rapprochement of opposing elements and forms of discourse is, of course, also a fundamental impulse behind most of Jacob's poetry. In particular, the disconcertingly heterogeneous quality of Jacob's poetry is largely due to the combination of hackneyed and colloquial expressions with more "elevated" forms of poetic language. Through its extreme stylistic multiplicity, and especially the prominent intermingling of popular elements with those associated with concert music, Poulenc's setting seems to closely mirror Jacob's privileging of diversity and heterogeneity over uniformity and consistency. Poulenc himself discussed the mixture of "vulgar" and "refined" elements as one of the central characteristics of *Le Bal masqué*:

> J'ai essayé d'y trouver un style vocal assez hallucinant—quelque chose comme les photos de crimes ou les chromos vulgaires—et fort disparate, mélangeant des harmonies vulgaires ou choisies, déformant les mots et les sons.[194]

As opposed to other twentieth-century composers who seek to integrate popular elements within their modernist musical language, such as Ravel and Stravinsky, Poulenc makes no attempt to synthesize popular with more sophisticated musical tendencies in his music, and in *Le Bal masqué* he markedly plays up the ensuing clash of styles.

Poulenc, as the other composers associated with *Les six,* often evokes Parisian popular music in his compositions, particularly in his early works.[195] Such Parisian

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[194] Franck, Nino. "Poulenc à Montmarte." *Candide* (28 April, 1932). Quoted in Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 344.

[195] However, Daniel emphasizes that Poulenc, compared to other major twentieth-century French composers, "is the most explicit, and the most convincing in his use of Parisian popular music." Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 6.

popular idioms are exceptionally conspicuous in *Le Bal masqué*. For Poulenc, Jacob's poetry, and its cast of eccentric middle-class characters, triggered feelings of nostalgia for his childhood experiences in the Parisian suburb of Nogent and the lively, carnival-like atmosphere of its cafés, featuring popular entertainments such as *bals musettes* and floor shows.[196] Poulenc frequently refers to the distinctly suburban—or "nogentais"—quality of the cantata:

> *Le Bal masqué*, c'est, pour moi, une sorte de Carnaval nogentais avec les portraits de quelques monstres aperçus, dans mon enfance, aux bords de la Marne.[197]
>
> C'est la seule de mes œuvres (où) je pense avoir trouvé le moyen de magnifier l'atmosphère banlieusard qui m'est chère.[198]

Poulenc colorfully evokes the garish, boisterous quality of the café-concert or the music hall in many passages throughout the cantata, especially in the first and final movements. Yet, of course, it is not the popular elements themselves, but rather their juxtaposition with highly contrasting "refined" passages, which contributes to a sense of surrealist incongruity in the work. Poulenc brings out these obtrusive stylistic clashes through changes in instrumentation, thematic material, and vocal writing.

Poulenc's choice of ensemble—consisting of oboe, clarinet, bassoon, cornet, violin, cello, piano, and percussion (both conventional and unusual, including a whip and whistle)—allows him to create a wide range of atmospheres in *Le Bal masqué*. The cornet is an instrument usually associated with popular music, and was extensively used in wind

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[196] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[197] Poulenc and Rostand, *Entretiens*, p. 142.

[198] Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, p. 60.

bands in France and Britain from the nineteenth century onward.[199] Many of the percussion effects featured throughout the cantata, especially the use of drum rolls, castanets, whip cracks and whistle, also have "low" implications. At times the instrumentation can suggest the ensembles featured in *bals musettes*, which normally consisted of violin, cornet, bass drum and triangle;[200] this is the case at the end of "La dame aveugle" where Poulenc's use of the cornet, violin and drums enhances the boisterous nature of this passage. And in the opening of the first movement, the prevalence of the nasal sonority of the oboe and the pungent sound of the cornet clearly evokes the strident quality of street music. At other moments, more traditional combinations of instruments suggest chamber ensembles usually featured in concert music. For instance, the passage beginning at r.27 on in the "Intermède" features a "duet" for clarinet and cello (with piano accompaniment) which lends a graceful and "refined" character to this passage. Notwithstanding the inclusion of the cornet and certain percussion instruments, the combination of instruments that Poulenc chose is actually strikingly reminiscent of that featured in Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) and other vocal works with chamber ensemble composed before or during the war. [201]

The cantata also contains a diverse range of melodic material. Extended melodies are scarce, however, and many passages abound in short motivic fragments bearing the distinctive stamp of Parisian popular music: for instance, the lengthy instrumental introductions in both the first and last movements are pervaded by simple yet catchy two-

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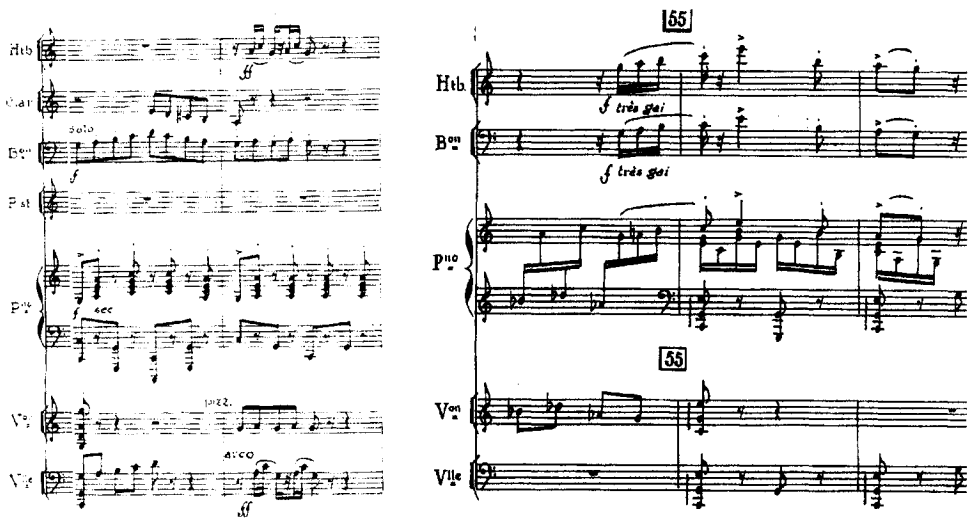
[199] The cornet is also quite similar to the modern trumpet, although it has a shorter and less tapered bore. Anthony C. Baines and Arnold Myeres, "Cornet (i)," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 10 May 2005), http://www.grovemusic.com.

[200] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 17.

[201] Poulenc's ensemble is also strikingly similar to that featured in Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* (1918) which consists of clarinet, bassoon, cornet, trombone, violin, double bass, and percussion.

bar melodic figures which recur throughout (ex. 1). When more clearly defined eight-bar themes are featured, they are often somewhat banal in character, and the melodic continuity is often impertinently interrupted through the insertion of passages completely devoid of melodic interest, such as the dissonant wind scales which disrupt the opening folk-like theme of the second movement, "Intermède." Yet the cantata also includes expansive, flowing melodic writing more conventionally associated with concert music, such as the fifteen-bar clarinet melody near the end of the "Intermède."

Ex. 1 Melodic fragments from the first and last movements of *Le Bal masqué*



The vocal writing throughout *Le Bal masqué* is extremely varied, ranging from vocal effects associated with popular song to quasi-operatic passages. The popular Parisian influence is apparent in the patter-like text delivery which prevails in the first and last movements. At several moments in the cantata, Poulenc even takes this patter style of singing to further extremes when he calls for absurdly rapid text delivery, most often with one syllable per sixteenth-note. In her study *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie*, Nancy Perloff associates Poulenc's use of extremely rapid text declamation with the practice of music hall singers—especially

Maurice Chevalier—to squeeze several syllables onto the same pitch (and thereby create a comically garbled effect).[202] A striking example of this occurs in the "Finale" (in the passage beginning on "Réparateur perclus de vieux automobiles" at r.78) which is marked "éxagérément articulé" and *ff*, although the singer must deliver the text at breakneck speed, resulting in a grotesquely distorted delivery of the text. The intrusion of spoken passages throughout the cantata may also show the influence of Chevalier who, according to Perloff, was notorious for suddenly breaking into speech in the middle of a song.[203] In both "Malvina" (at "Son gant gris perle..." just before r.31) and "La dame aveugle" (at the final ominous utterance of "la dame aveugle"), Poulenc instructs the performer to actually speak rather than sing the text. Yet still other instances abound where fully notated passages are written to sound speech-like. For instance in "Malvina" the phrase "qu'à la méthode hussarde" is intoned in a declamatory manner, unaccompanied.

Certain unconventional vocal effects which Poulenc deploys in order to emphasize the bizarre and impertinent quality of the text also have popular (or "low") connotations. For instance, the *fff* downward glissando on the word "beugle" at the end of "La dame aveugle" (followed by another glissando on "Ah!") demonstrates that Poulenc clearly delighted in bringing out the brazen character of Jacob's poetry with impudent vocal gestures which would not be out of place at the café-concert or music-hall. In his paper on Poulenc's settings of Apollinaire, Vincent Vivès suggests that the use of falsetto in *Les mamelles de Tirésias* is related to the practices of the café-concert and the operetta.[204]

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[202] Nancy Perloff, *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 157-158.

[203] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[204] Vivès, "Les voix d'Apollinaire," in Ramaut ed., *Francis Poulenc et la voix*, p. 91.

Poulenc also instructs the vocalist to sing falsetto at the end of the bravura finale of *Le Bal masqué*, on three repetitions of "son nid."[205]

Poulenc offsets these "low" vocal effects with passages where the vocal writing alludes to the "sophisticated" practices associated with art music, particularly opera. Such moments of "operatic" intensity, occur in "Malvina" (on the final line of the text, "Malvina, oh fantôme…") and in "La dame aveugle" (on the line "elle prend garde aux plis…") and strike the listener as completely absurd in the context of these bizarre character sketches.[206] Despite the prevalence of the "low" and often somewhat comical vocal writing and the seeming irony of many of the passages with more "refined" uses of the voice, Poulenc insisted that the performer should sing the cantata with as much conviction and seriousness as he would the role of Scarpia and that the vocalist "must above all believe in the words that he sings. No reticence, no false knowing looks, no conniving winks."[207] Poulenc seems to imply that he does not intend the extreme shifts of vocal style in his setting to have a merely farcical effect: rather, as in most surrealist art, the incongruity which the merging of these disparate tendencies generates is absorbed into a "serious" aesthetic enterprise.

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[205] This is actually sung ten times in total, calling for different effects: first "angoissé," then falsetto, then in normal range.

[206] These "operatic" passages will be discussed in more detail below.

[207] Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, p. 63. Also, in his description of *Le Bal masqué* from his article "Éloge de la banalité," quoted above, Poulenc seems to infer that he did not intend the incongruities of *Le Bal masqué* to be perceived as ironic.

4.2.2 Quotations and allusions

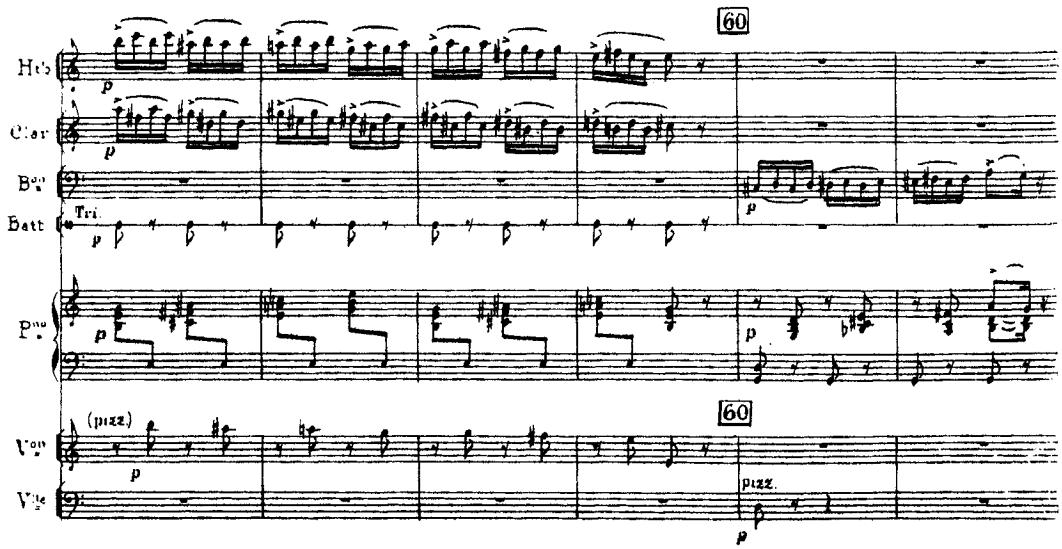
As Jacob frequently parodies various types of discourse in his poetry, Poulenc alludes to a wealth of familiar musical idioms and works in *Le Bal masqué*. Poulenc also seems to embrace the surrealist tendency to uproot and defamiliarize the banal or the commonplace, be it popular idioms or the clichés of "classical" music. In this cantata, Poulenc seems especially fond of decontextualizing allusions and quotations from Tchaikovsky's well-known ballet, *The Nutcracker* (1892).[208]

The most extensive *Nutcracker* quotation is featured in the "Finale." Within the lengthy and generally boisterous instrumental prologue that precedes the singer's entrance, Poulenc repeatedly inserts a quotation from the "Waltz of the Snowflakes" (ex. 2). Although the chromatic oboe line seems to allude to the rapidly descending flute gesture at r.10 in the original (as Albright points out in his discussion of the quotation), Poulenc seems to be primarily quoting a recurring passage which is first heard just before r.40 (ex. 3). Not only does Poulenc's clarinet line emulate the rapidly alternating thirds and fourths in the flute and clarinet from the original passage, but most noticeably, Poulenc copies the chromatic harmonic progression in the original almost exactly: he retains the E pedal, the descending chromatic line in the strings and directly transcribes the first three chords of the Tchaikovsky passage into the piano accompaniment (after this, Poulenc changes the harmonies slightly since he condenses the progression from the original). Poulenc retains some of the graceful quality of the original through the use of a *p* dynamic level, pizzicato strings and delicate triangle strokes, but he also plays down the quotation somewhat by replacing the flute in the original with an oboe, and by using a

[208] Although *The Nutcracker* is now performed so frequently that is has become a sort of commonplace of "classical" music, it may not have been quite as widely known in Poulenc's time.

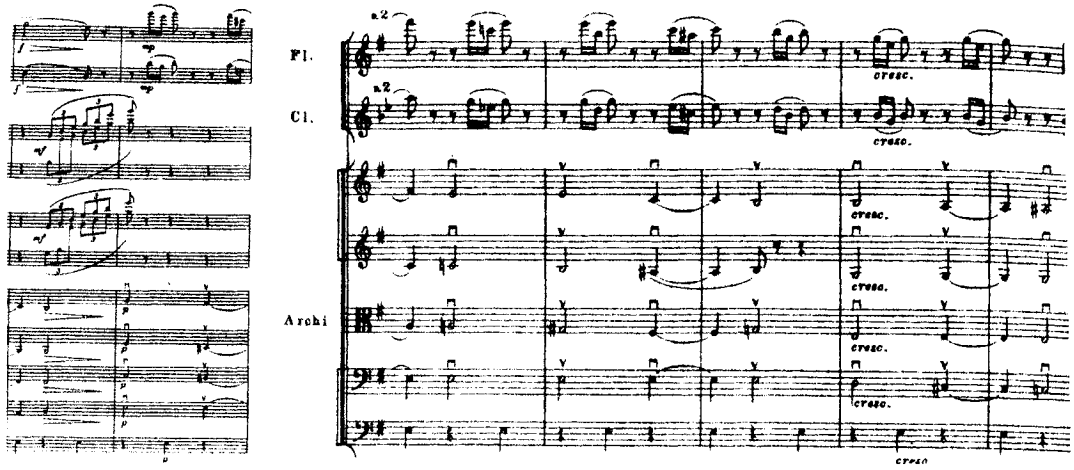
continuous stream of running sixteenth notes, as opposed to the short groupings in the original. Yet one can argue that the *Nutcracker* quotation is further trivialized in this context through its incongruous placement (or "dépaysement") amidst the rowdy music-hall inspired atmosphere that surrounds it. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Albright suggests that the quotation seems to take on the "vulgar" tone of the music that surrounds it and that Poulenc disables the hierarchy between "high" and "low" art.[209]

Ex. 2 *Nutcracker* quotation in the "Finale"



[209] Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 294.

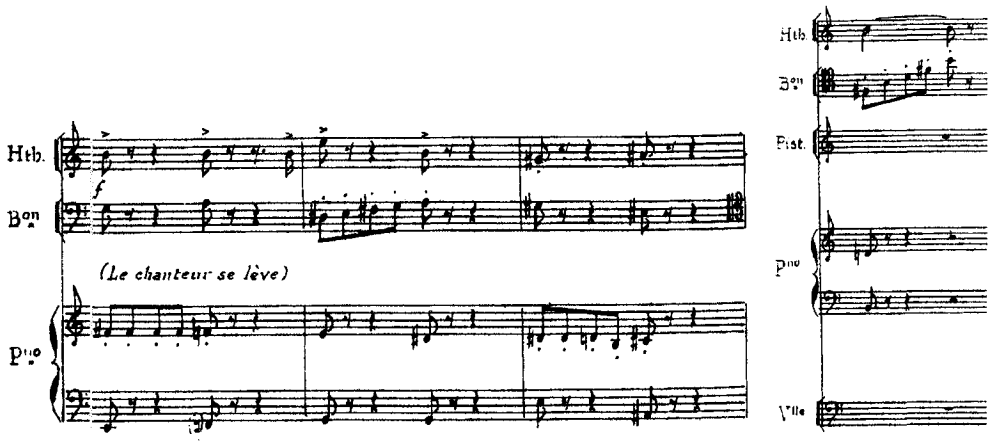
Ex. 3 Passage from "Waltz of the Snowflakes" from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* (1892)



Other *Nutcracker* borrowings in the preceding movements are somewhat less salient. In a short passage preceding the vocalist's entrance in the first movement (just after the frivolous opening theme suddenly gives way to a more subdued solemn passage at r.8, marked "moins vite"), a melodic fragment in the oboe alludes to the march from the first scene of the *Nutcracker* (ex. 4). While preserving the basic outline of the melody, Poulenc omits the triplet repeated notes and uses a dotted rhythm instead.[210] Furthermore, the short motives in the bassoon four bars before entrance of the oboe seem to allude to the repeated notes (in triplets) at the beginning of the phrase in the original march. Of course, Poulenc deflates the stateliness of the original through the sparse texture of this allusive passage, as well as through the wistful "echoes" of the dotted oboe theme in the piano and cornet immediately following the allusion. Again, Poulenc places this allusion in a completely incongruous context: the "dignified" march theme is sandwiched between the frenetic, popular-flavored instrumental introduction and the impetuous lead-in to the frantic patter-like vocal entrance on "Madame la Dauphine..."

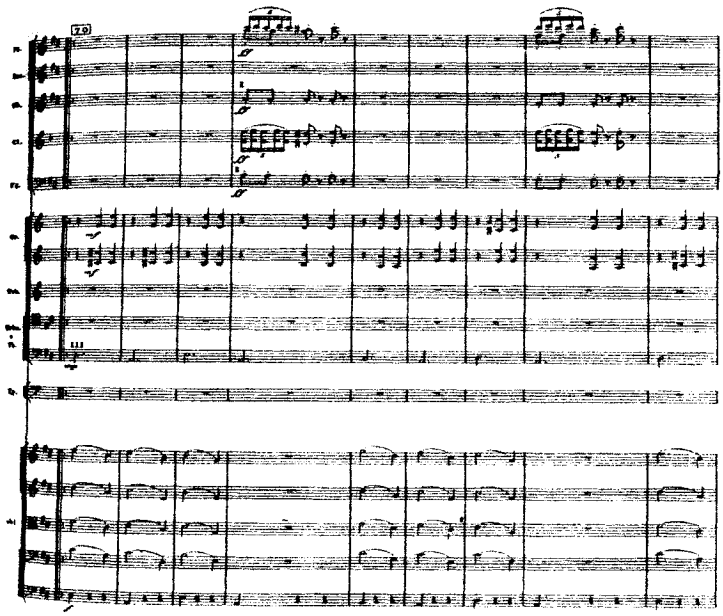
[210] And although the basic melodic shape of the original is retained, in Poulenc's allusion, an ascending fourth instead of a second leads into the second downbeat.

Ex. 4 *Nutcracker* allusion in the first movement

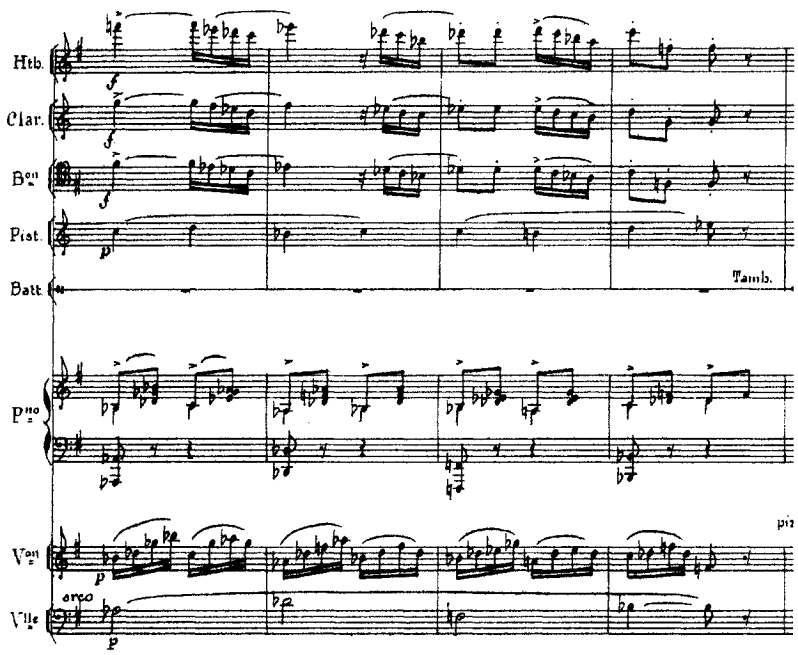


Another bewilderingly intrusive *Nutcracker* allusion occurs in the next movement, the instrumental "Intermède." Twice in the course of the movement, Poulenc alludes to the "Waltz of the Flowers" while interrupting the predictable continuity of the brisk folk-like opening theme (see ex. 6). Poulenc embellishes the sequential movement in the melody from the original (consisting of a descending fourth, followed by an ascending third, see ex. 5) by inserting descending sixteenth notes at each upbeat. Yet Poulenc also dispels the mellow, graceful quality of the original through placing the melody in the winds (oboe, clarinet and bassoon) as opposed to the strings in the original. Tchaikovsky's delicate flute and clarinet motives which punctuate each phrase of the melody are also transformed into a trite cadential gesture which would not be out of place at the music-hall. Poulenc also defamiliarizes the passage by harmonizing it mostly with dissonant ninth and thirteenth chords instead of the triads and seventh harmonies in the original. As with the "Waltz of the Snowflakes" quotation in the last movement, these brief passages seem to take on the impertinent tone of the popular idioms which surround them.

Ex. 5 Excerpt from "Waltz of the Flowers" from *The Nutcracker*



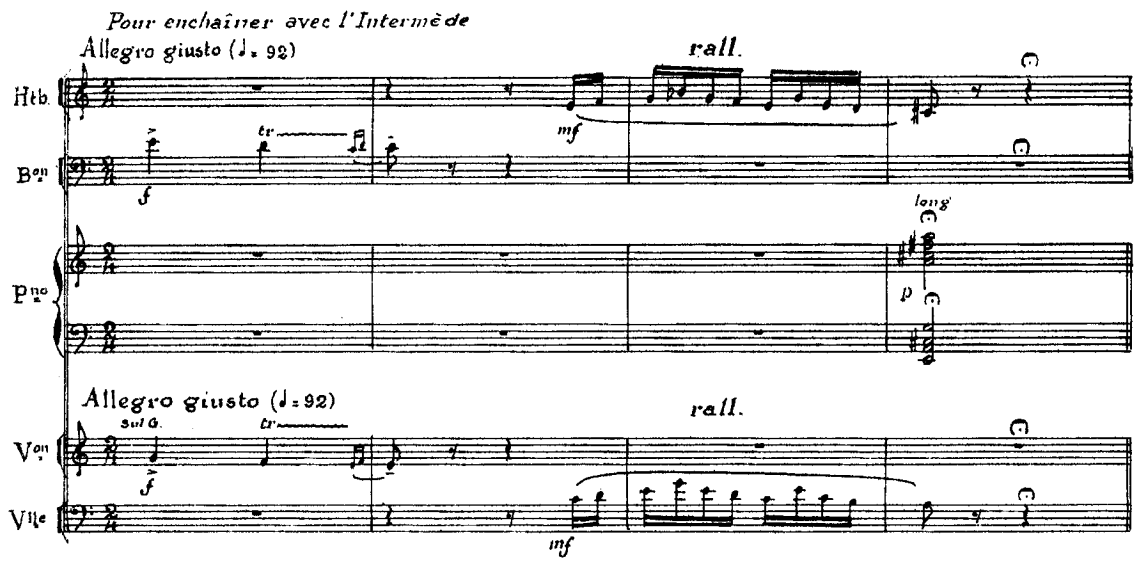
Ex. 6 *Nutcracker* allusion in the "Intermède"



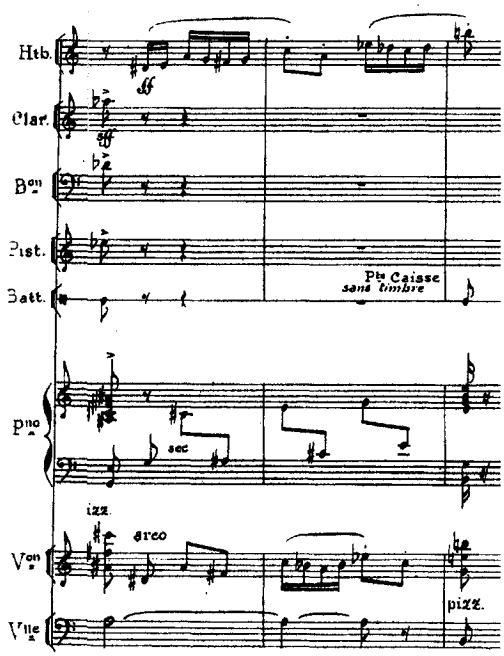
Poulenc's borrowings from the concert music canon are not limited to Tchaikovsky. One of the most conspicuous stylistic clashes in the cantata results from an allusion to the "refined" music of Haydn and Mozart in the brief transitional passage

between the first and second movements (ex. 7). The "Classical" implications of the sedate, stepwise descending three-note cadential gesture (on scale degrees 5-4-3 in the violin and 3-2-1 in the bassoon), ornamented with a trill, are reinforced through the tempo marking "allegro giusto." Not only does Poulenc disorient the listener by following this gesture with a sinuous, cabaret-style "lead-in" in the oboe and cello (marked "rall.") ending with an impertinent ninth chord in the piano, but this entire four-bar "transition" is also absurdly out of place sandwiched between the brusque ending of the frenetic first movement and the folk-like staccato opening of the second movement. Another brief Mozart allusion occurs in the frenetic, music-hall inspired opening of the "Finale." Shortly before the "Waltz of the Snowflakes" quotation, Poulenc quotes the two-bar rising melodic gesture from the opening of the 'Rondo alla Turca' (from the piano sonata KV 331), but with a couple of jarring minor seconds in his harmonization (ex. 8).

Ex. 7 "Transition" between the first and second movements



Ex. 8 Quotation from Mozart's "Rondo alla turca" in the "Finale"

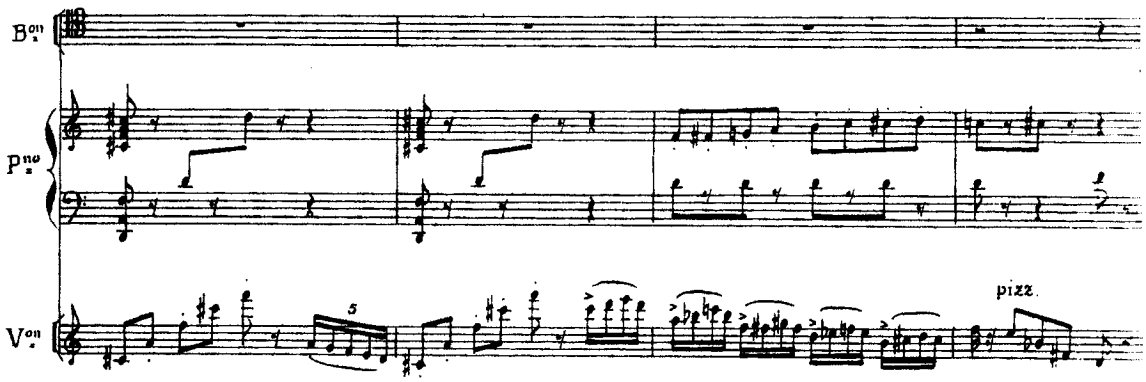


In the "Bagatelle," Poulenc disconcertingly combines Paganini-inspired string writing with more banal, popular-flavored material, and also some stridently dissonant passages. Poulenc acknowledged this Paganini allusion in a letter to Marie-Laure de Noailles (from February 14, 1932, before the first performance in Hyères), in which he describes this movement as "un caprice à la Paganini pour violon assez inouï."[211] At the opening of the movement, a frenzied, and almost barbaric dialogue between violin and piano (with jagged melodies and stridently dissonant, percussive chords) culminates in descending chromatic tremolos in the violin, seemingly parodying the virtuosic string gestures associated with Paganini—humorously diminished in speed and intensity just before r.38. This is suddenly followed by a graceful but excessively ornamented theme in the violin (ex. 9). Yet Poulenc further trivializes the Paganini-inspired violin theme by

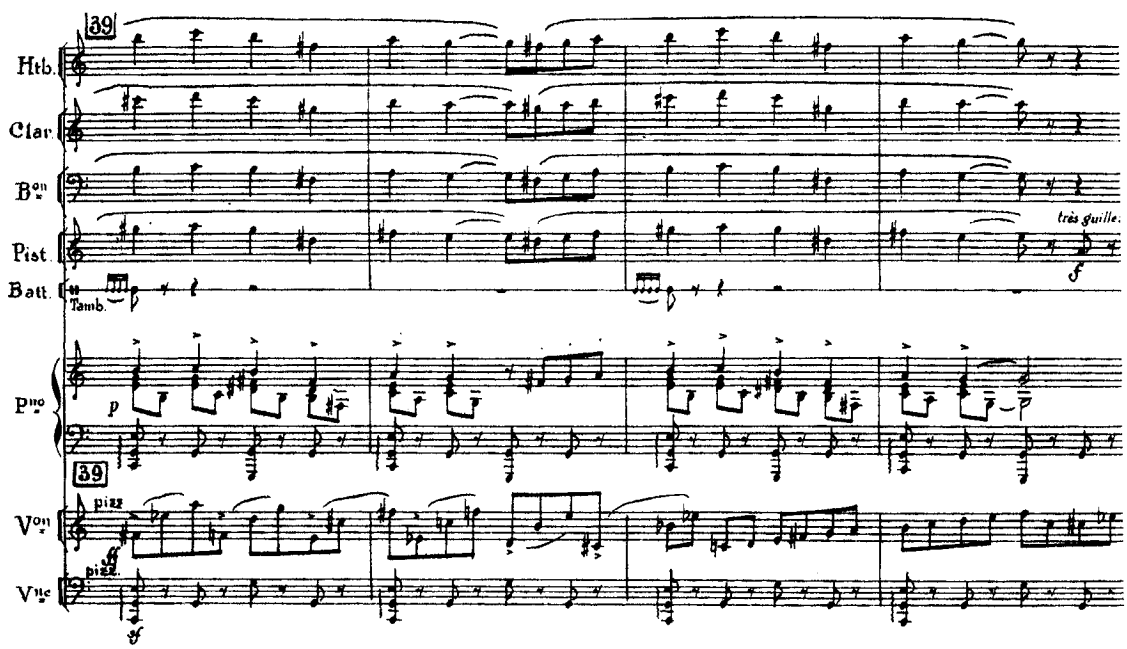
[211] Poulenc, *Correspondance*, p. 363.

interjecting a pedestrian, popular-sounding melody in the winds (ex. 10), after which the violin theme resumes at r.40.

Ex. 9 Paganini allusion in the "Bagatelle"



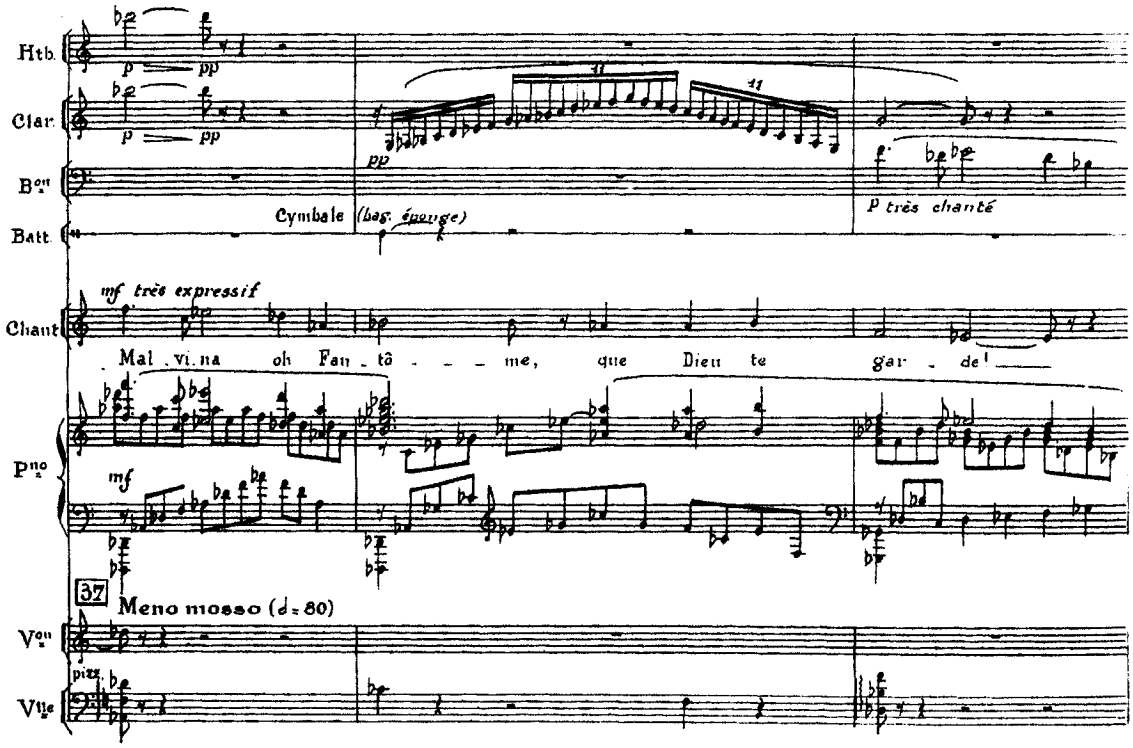
Ex. 10 Contrasting popular-flavored passage in the "Bagatelle"



As I mentioned above, Poulenc also seems to enjoy incongruously inserting somewhat clichéd operatic gestures in some of the vocal movements. At the end of "Malvina," the excessively passionate outburst on "Malvina, oh fantôme…" actually recalls Des Grieux's aria "Ah fuyez douce image" in Massenet's *Manon*.[212] The descending vocal line at the beginning of this passage (with descending fourths followed by ascending thirds or seconds) seems to refer to the phrase in the Massenet which begins on "Que mon coeur l'emplirait," yet Poulenc then continues the descending motion, as opposed to the original which ascends, perhaps to convey an exaggerated impression of pathos, and he further defamiliarizes the passage by minimizing the use of dotted rhythms. Echoes of the vocal line which Poulenc places in the piano accompaniment actually mirror the melodic outline from the beginning of Des Grieux's aria. Harmonically, Poulenc stays close to the Massenet through the use of a pedal tone and by preserving some of the original harmonies, particularly the seventh and ninth chords from the passage beginning on "Que mon coeur," as these harmonies are often found in Poulenc's music. Furthermore, the arpeggios in Poulenc's piano accompaniment recall the running string figurations in the A' section of the Massenet. Of course, the allusion to this aria in which Des Grieux sings of Manon strikes the listener as completely absurd in the context of this movement which depicts the monstrous "Malvina."

[212] Steven Huebner pointed out this allusion.

Ex. 11 *Manon* allusion in "Malvina"



Yet Poulenc not only borrows from composers of the past, but occasionally looks to his contemporaries. In "La dame aveugle", there appears to be an allusion to the movement "Nacht" from Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Although this might seem surprising considering how Poulenc always remained firmly rooted in tonality, it is important to recall that the performing forces of *Le Bal masqué* are actually quite similar to those of *Pierrot Lunaire*. The speech-like vocal line, marked "un peu parlé – très gracieux," beginning on "Elle a des cheveux..." is similar in quality to Schoenberg's use of *Sprechstimme*, and in particular, the descending chromatic setting of the line "Elle porte des bijoux et des pierreries rousses" is reminiscent of the vocal line at the beginning of "Nacht." The running sixteenth-note figurations in the winds and strings seem to allude to the piano accompaniment figurations near the end of "Nacht" (m. 21), which are also pervaded by semitones and minor thirds. The abrupt shift to a thicker texture at r.48,

accompanied by a sudden increase in dynamics (from *p* to *ff*) may allude to a similarly jolting dynamic and textural change in "Nacht" at m.14—although there are many other instances of this in *Pierrot Lunaire*. Furthermore, the repetitive rising and falling chromatic gestures in the piano accompaniment at r.48 in "La dame aveugle" seem to refer to similar figurations in the cello, clarinet and piano from mm.12 to 16 in the Schoenberg. This particular allusion does not seem as incongruous as most of other ones throughout *Le Bal masqué* since the eerie, ominous atmosphere of this *Pierrot Lunaire* movement coincides with the sinister tone of this section of *Le Bal masqué*, although it does add to the overall heterogeneity of the cantata since *Pierrot lunaire* is certainly far from the café-concert. Poulenc also seems to be alluding to certain aspects of Stravinsky's compositional style through the cantata. For instance, the grating string gestures at the opening of the "Bagatelle" seem to refer to Stravinsky's percussive string writing in *L'Histoire du soldat* (1918) and *Violin Concerto* (1931).

4.2.3 Abrupt shifts in musical texture and affect

As described in the previous chapter, surrealist art works are fundamentally fragmented by nature, privileging discontinuity over a conventional aesthetic of coherence.[213] Poulenc responded to the startling dislocations, which he described as "ricochets imprévus,"[214] fundamental to Jacob's surrealist aesthetic by opting for an extremely disjointed musical setting, abounding in abrupt shifts in texture and affect. The two central vocal movements, "Malvina" and "La dame aveugle" are particularly striking in their seeming lack of musical continuity and emotional consistency.

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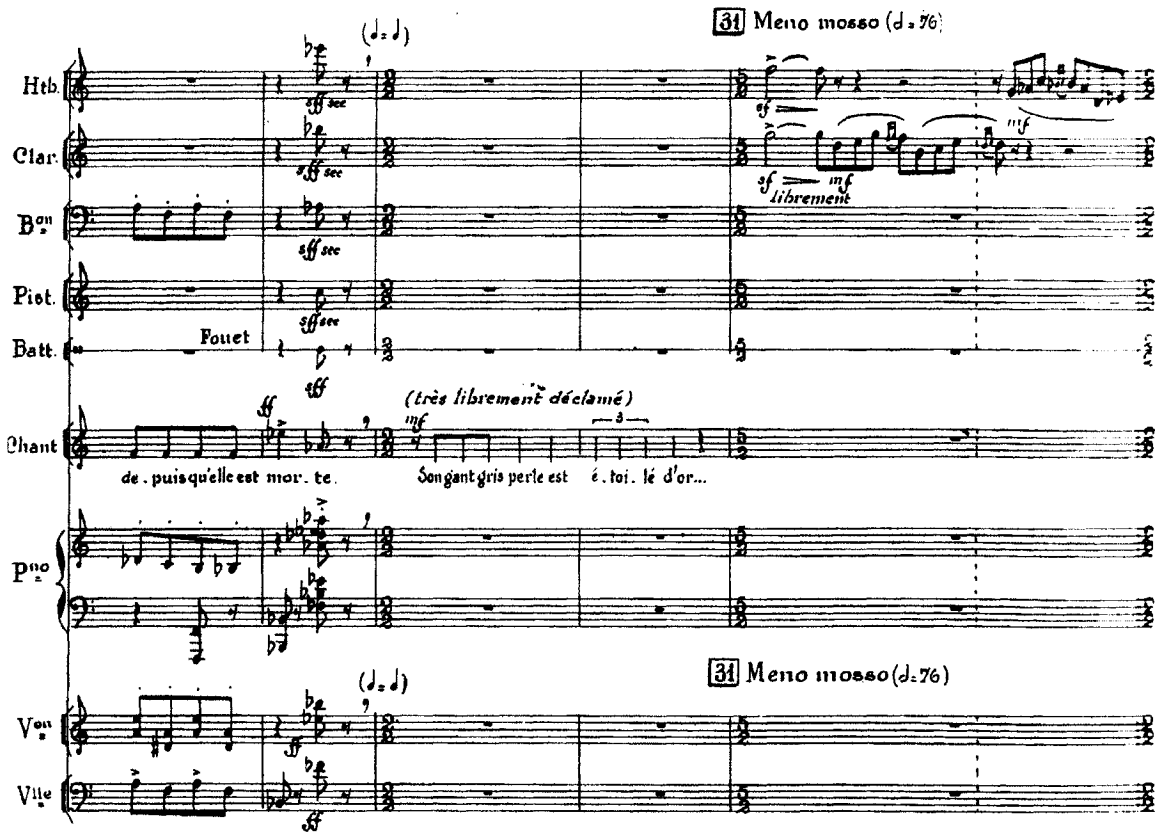
[213] Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, pp. 5, 13, 93.

[214] Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]* , p. 60.

In the third movement, "Malvina," Poulenc effectively captures the dizzying fluctuations of tone and perspective in Jacob's poem. From the outset, Poulenc sets up the unpredictable character of the movement with brief and seemingly erratic outbursts of activity. A brusque fanfare-like passage in the oboe and clarinet, ending with a crash of the cymbals, opens the movement, followed by abrupt interjections in the cornet (outlining a descending diminished seventh on E-flat with some chromatic embellishments) and bassoon (based on a repeated D and then circling around D-flat) which leave the listener in suspense, without even a clear sense of tonality. After a short pause, Poulenc offers another jolt to his listeners at the vocalist's entrance: the two hastily declaimed statements of the opening line of the poem ("Voilà qui j'espère vous effraie"), marked *ff* and punctuated by those percussive Stravinskian string gestures that I mentioned earlier, are brusquely cut off, thwarting any sense of continuity. Following another pause, the passage beginning with the line "Mademoiselle Malvina" achieves a certain degree of momentum through the pulsating staccato accompaniment (marked "très sec"), although the vocal line remains somewhat static, as it rarely strays from a repeated F, and discontinuous since it is declaimed in short, three-bar phrases separated by rests. Yet any sense of predictability is not sustained for long: a *sff* whip crack and highly dissonant thirteenth chord on the word "morte" abruptly terminate this line. All that is left to fill the silence is the singer's unaccompanied utterance of the phrase "Son gant gris perle est étoilé d'or..." (ex. 12).

Ex. 12 Excerpt from "Malvina"



After this point Poulenc's setting becomes somewhat more continuous, although perhaps even more disconcerting through extreme and sudden changes in character. A gentle, wistful mood is set up in the lilting instrumental passage which introduces the next line of text ("Elle se tirebouchonne comme une valse tzigane", marked "avec charme"). Here, Poulenc seems to directly evoke the "Hungarian waltz" music described in the text through the gentle, chordal piano accompaniment and the modal inflections of the vocal line and bassoon melody. But just as the vocal line takes on a more expansive quality (on "près du grès où l'on met les cannes"), the "waltz" accompaniment is quashed by the intrusion of accented staccato chords. In complete contrast to the gently expressive character of the previous passage, the next line of text ("Disons qu'elle est morte du

diabète...") is set in a dry, patter-style, sung at rapid-fire pace mostly on a single pitch (E-flat), at first unaccompanied and then set against stridently dissonant *ff* arpeggios (played simultaneously in minor seconds) in all instruments which emphasize the derisive tone of this line. Nevertheless, this impetuous passage is only a brief diversion before the return to a more benevolent mood for the next line of the text, "Oh! l'honnête animal…", where the descending chromatic gesture at the opening of the vocal line (marked "Tendre" and *mp*) conveys an exaggerated sense of pathos. Once again, the music abruptly takes on a more insolent quality to reflect the sardonic character of the next line of text ("Moins gourmet que gourmande elle était de sang lourd"). Although this passage begins very dryly, with the text declaimed in short three or four-note phrases, accompanied by rhythmic, staccato chords, it eventually becomes more expansive on "C'était en chapeau haut…" (marked "à pleine voix"). But just as the passage seems to be tending towards an emotional peak (on the line "Or on ne l'aurait eu…"), Poulenc defies expectations once again by brusquely cutting it off with the intrusion of forceful, ascending arpeggiated seventh chords in all instruments. The vocalist then bluntly declaims the rest of the sentence ("qu'à la méthode hussarde"), speech-like and unaccompanied, in complete opposition to the impassioned setting of the first half of the same line of the text, perhaps underscoring its blatant sexual implications.

The culminating moment of this movement is the above-mentioned *Manon* allusion on "Malvina oh Fantôme," its quasi-operatic character emphasized through the lush piano accompaniment, chromatic swells in the winds, and string tremolos. But Poulenc does not sustain the intensity of this grotesquely incongruous passage for long before it is abruptly terminated in turn with a *sff* eleventh chord and whip crack, which further trivialize this outburst and leave the listener once again in suspense. After a brief

pause, sparse interjections in the piano, winds and strings recall the impertinent opening: the first brief phrase in the bassoon (which consists of a repeated A-flat followed by a short descending quasi-scalar figuration[215]) is reminiscent of the opening cornet and bassoon passages, the only return of "thematic" material throughout this movement. A blow of the whistle, perhaps to evoke police intervention at the scene of Malvina's "death," embellishes the final "cadence" in F minor and brings this bizarrely episodic movement to a flippant close.

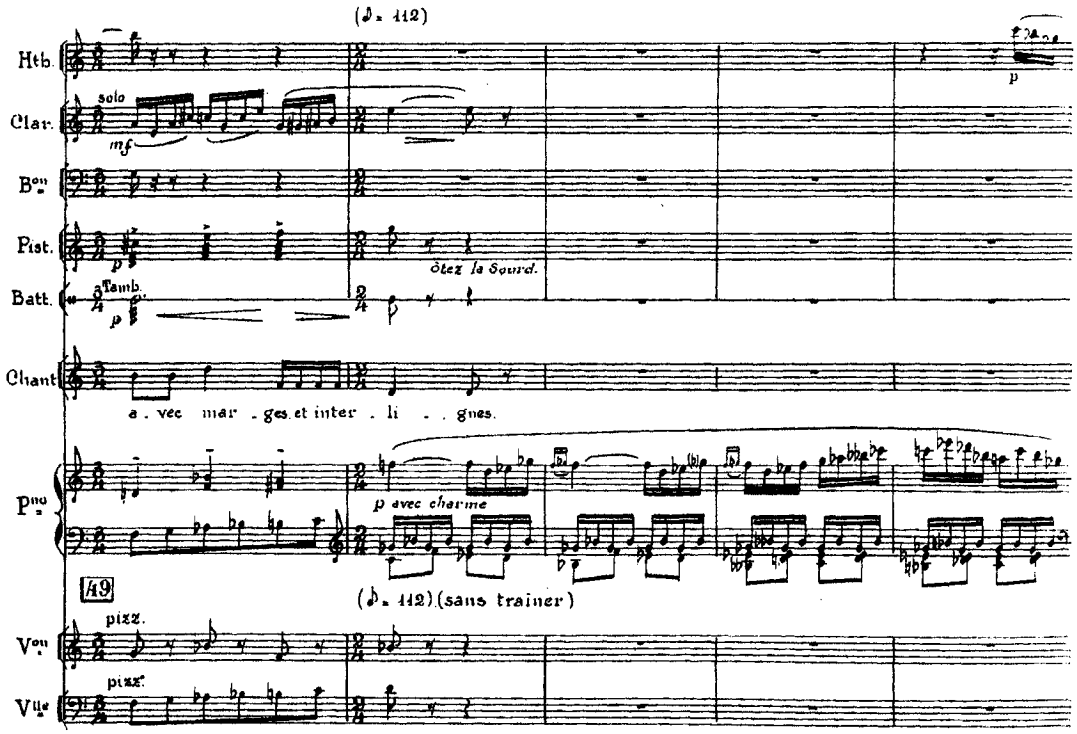
"La dame aveugle," is somewhat less emotionally volatile than "Malvina" since a generally sinister atmosphere, appropriate to this monstrously afflicted character, pervades most of the movement. Nevertheless, Poulenc's setting features several disconcerting excursions into extremely contrasting moods. The eerie, forbidding character of the opening, with insistently repeating chromatic sixteenth-note figuration in the piano set off by stridently dissonant chords in the winds, continues through the vocalist's deliberate intonation of the first two lines of the text.[216] Like the piano accompaniment, the highly chromatic vocal line mostly alternates between G, F-sharp and A-flat. For the next line stanza of the text (beginning on "Elle a des cheveux..."), Poulenc suddenly deviates from the bleakness of the opening to a lighter, wistful, tone: the vocal line, marked "un peu parlé, très gracieux," takes on a wider-ranging contour, with each of the two lines of the stanza sung in descending phrases, outlining a sixth and seventh respectively, and the soft yet full-textured accompaniment features running chromatic figurations and grace notes in all instruments (as mentioned above, this passage

[215] Which may be analyzed as a dominant seventh (on B-flat) with an E-flat instead of D.

[216] In his brief discussion of *Le Bal masqué* in his book on Poulenc, Benjamin Ivry claims that the piano figurations in this passage might refer to the clock-ticking motif from Boris Godunov's madness and death scene from Mussorgsky's opera—although I find this possible allusion tenuous. See Ivry, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 77.

may allude to the "Nacht" movement from *Pierrot Lunaire.*) But the harshness of the opening abruptly returns as the singer stridently intones "La dame grasse et aveugle...," with the repetitive chromatic figurations rendered even more grating since they now appear in almost all instruments. The driving intensity of this passage builds to a climax on the absurdly pedestrian phrase "écrit des lettres polies avec marges et interlignes," with the voice soaring upwards on "marges." Another incongruous intrusion of a graceful passage ensues, beginning with a four-bar phrase in the piano (marked "avec charme"), whose melancholic character, delicate ornaments and arpeggiated melodic figurations are reminiscent of Chopin's Nocturnes. This phrase, which is immediately answered in the violin, could not be more inconsistent with the tawdry vocal outbursts which immediately precede and follow it.

Ex. 13 Incongruous intrusion of Chopinesque passage in "La dame aveugle"



While Poulenc's setting of the first three stanzas of the poem seems to reflect the fat blind lady's existential angst, the second half of this movement generally portrays her in a more disparaging manner. After the brief Chopinesque interlude, Poulenc unsettles the listener through a sudden, forceful outburst on the mundane line "Elle prend garde aux plis de sa robe de peluche," marked "à pleine voix." Drum rolls and rapidly ascending or descending runs in the woodwinds and strings trivialize the extravagantly operatic quality of this passage. Although the beginning of the next line of text is set in a similarly theatrical fashion, just as the rising vocal line seems to be leading towards a dramatic climax it is interrupted by a drum roll in mid-sentence (just after "et s'efforce"), and brusquely cut off. Following this conspicuous disruption, the rest of the sentence ("de faire quelque chose de plus") is declaimed unaccompanied in a very dry manner (perhaps reminiscent of *Pierrot Lunaire* here too), with the vocal line (first on a repeated D-flat then descending chromatically to B) suggesting a sneering tone of speech. This impertinent vocal interjection is then mockingly imitated by the bassoon (marked *p*). After this hiatus in the musical momentum, stepwise ascending lines in the cello and oboe (which sound gratingly dissonant since they are played together in minor seconds) lead into the next vocal phrase, "Et si je ne mentionne pas son beau frère…," declaimed almost as an aside over a sparse, static accompaniment, perhaps to emphasize the secretive, gossipmongering character of this line. Poulenc's unexpected evocation of raucous, street fair music for the final stanza of the poem constitutes the most startling excursion in the movement: the exuberant vocal line, reminiscent of popular song, develops into a festive, march-like theme in the winds, marked "gai," which is accompanied by repetitive figurations in the piano and strings, as well as a profusion of drumrolls. Here, Poulenc is obviously responding to the crude tone of the final two lines

of the text: "car il s'enivre et fait s'enivrer l'aveugle/ qui rit, qui rit alors et beugle." Yet just as unexpectedly as this rollicking passage begins, it is abruptly suspended on a single B-flat in the piano. The final hushed, speech-like utterance of "la dame aveugle" (marked "très librement parlé" and "sinistre"), perhaps another brief allusion to Schoenberg, recalls the desolate atmosphere of the opening, and seems a harrowing afterthought to the garishly lively passage which immediately precedes it.

In the "Finale," Poulenc's setting also takes on the disorienting volatility and emotional inconsistency of Jacob's poetry. As mentioned above, Poulenc felt that Jacob's poem was a sort of self-portrait, and he certainly had this in mind when he composed his setting:

> Le *final* doit être ahurissant et presque terrifiant. C'est la clef de l'œuvre et, pour moi, un portrait exacte de Max Jacob par lui-même, tel que je l'ai connu lorsqu'il habitait la rue Gabrielle à Montmartre en 1920.[217]

In this movement, Poulenc seems to capture the contradictory tendencies of Jacob's idiosyncratic personality: his impish sense of humor, his deep-seated anxieties, his sensual, hedonistic appetites (which he tried to suppress).

The almost violently high-spirited opening of this movement perhaps evokes Jacob's gregarious personality and biting sense of humor. But its frantic, carnival-like quality is suddenly interrupted before the vocalist enters by the unsettling intrusion of an extremely contrasting atmospheric "tango" section (marked "subito più lento"), resulting in one of the most jarring dislocations in the entire cantata. Although marked "Mouvement de Tango," the gently expressive tone and rhythmic ostinato of this

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[217] Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, p. 62.

intrusive passage seem to suggest a habanera rather than a tango.[218] To emphasize the abrupt change of mood, Poulenc indicates that the four bars leading up the "tango" must be performed "sans ralentir," while leaving the listener uncertain of what to anticipate next as the previous section suddenly halts on a ninth chord. Poulenc accentuates the sudden turn to an intimate, gentle character in the brief habanera passage through dramatically thinning the texture and having the instruments answer each other in their presentation of the thematic material, and also through performance indications such as "mélancolique" and "amoroso." This disruptive "exotic" interlude may be an attempt to portray the hedonistic side of Jacob's character, yet its somewhat wistful quality may also reflect the profound sensitivity hidden behind his gregariousness. Poulenc does not sustain the subdued atmosphere for long before the tempo quickly accelerates in preparation for the defiant tone of the vocalist's entrance.

Throughout the vocal section, Poulenc captures the mercurial temperament of the repairman, which, of course, can be likened to that of Jacob himself, through sudden and extreme contrasts in text delivery, and rapid alternations of key or mode. The deliberately, and somewhat ominously, intoned opening lines, "Réparateur perclus de vieux automobiles,/ l'anachorète, hélas, a regagné son nid" (marked *ff*, in C minor) are immediately juxtaposed with a far more rapid, rhythmically declaimed passage beginning on "Par ma barbe..." (marked *fff*), which becomes increasingly vehement in tone, through

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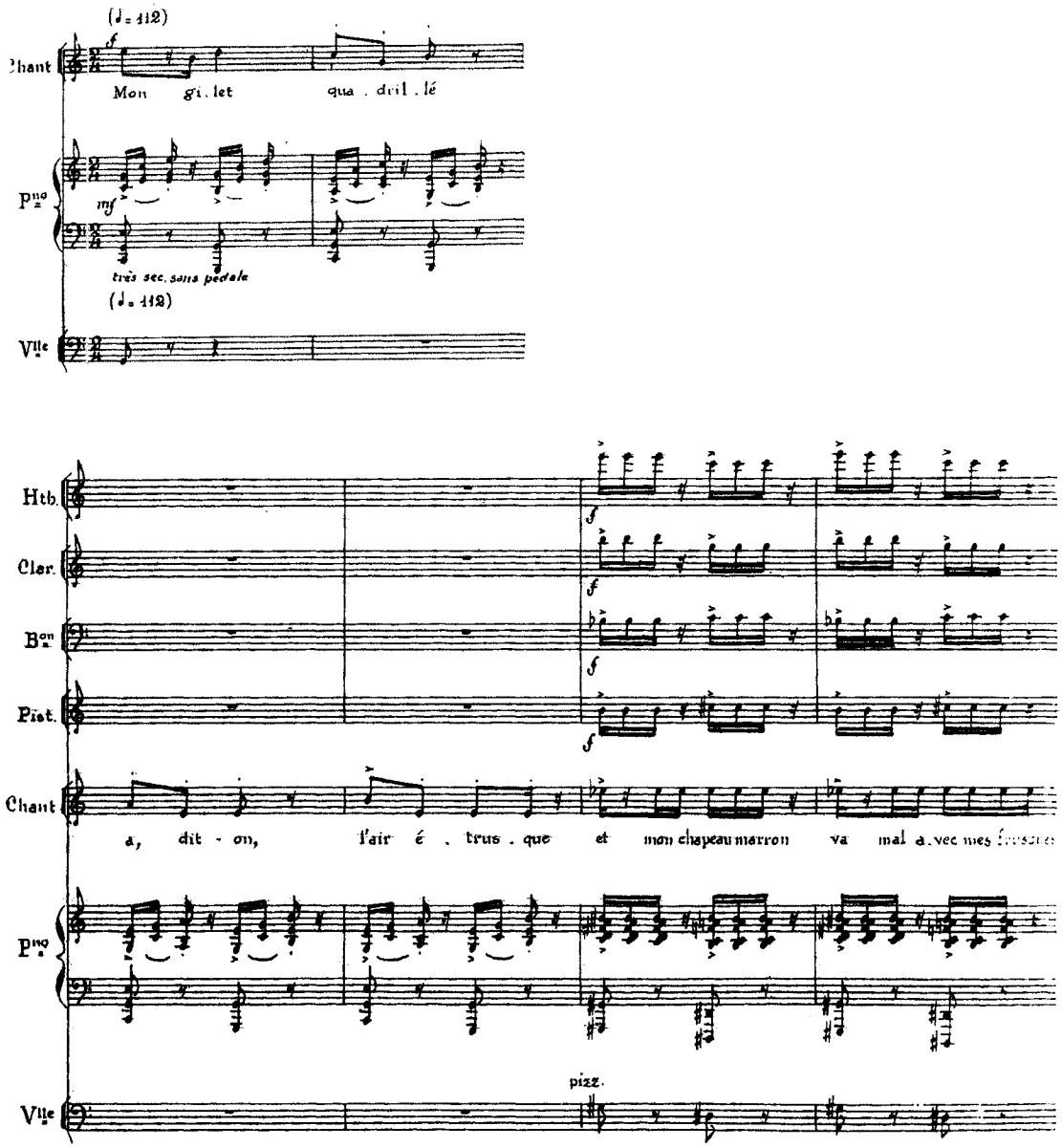
[218] According to *The New Harvard Dictionnary of Music*, 1986 ed., the tango features "abrupt rhythmic and dynamic contrasts" and "sharply accentuated" beats. The habanera, conversely, is "in slow to moderate tempo and duple meter" and characterized by a rhythmic ostinato in the accompaniment consisting of a dotted eighth-note followed by a sixteenth note and then two eighth-notes. In the "Habanera" article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* the slow tempo and lilting ostinato figure are also emphasized. However, as explained in the "Tango" article, the term "tango" was often used to refer to the habanera in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Frances Barulich, "Habanera," and Gerard Béhaguer "Tango," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 18 April 2005), http://www.grovemusic.com.) Perhaps this may be the reason why Poulenc provides the "mouvement de Tango" indication in this passage.

abruptly clipped short phrases. The last line of this section ("l'angle de tes maisons m'entre dans les chevilles") is marked "crié" and simply alternates between two semitones over a highly dissonant accompaniment. Also striking is the dizzyingly rapid and somewhat farcical alternation between light-hearted setting of the line "Mon gilet quadrillé a, dit-on, l'air étrusque" (in C major) and the impetuous, almost derisively brusque delivery of the next line "Et mon chapeau marron va mal avec mes frusques" (in G minor—these lines are repeated in Poulenc's setting). Here, this rapid alternation of extremely contrasting affects and vocal styles seems to vividly exemplify Poulenc's comment in the introduction to the piano-vocal score that the cantata must be sung "with a mixture of violence and charm" (ex. 14). On the line "Dans ce logis tout sent la peau de chèvre morte," Poulenc briefly recalls the slowly declaimed opening (one the few "thematic" returns in the cantata), yet a sense of volatility is retained through the end of the movement through curt, unpredictable vocal outbursts, culminating in the nine repetitions of "son nid" which bring the cantata to an impertinent close.[219]

[219] As opposed to the other vocal movements, the "Finale" features much text repetition, and particularly the immediate repetition of certain words. Poulenc may have been inspired by Jacob's tendency to repeat words and phonemes in his poetry (as, for instance, in the poem Poulenc chose for the opening of the cantata)—or the frequent word repetition in this movement may help to convey the repairman's anger and obsessive mania.

Ex. 14 Abrupt change in texture and affect in the vocal section of the "Final"



Because of its unfaltering momentum, the first movement ("Préambule et air de bravoure") seems less fragmented than the other vocal movements (even though the poem Poulenc chose for this movement features the most disorienting juxtapositions of images based on free associations of words). Yet although the prevailingly constant eighth-note pulse in the vocal section creates a semblance of continuity and cohesion, Poulenc's

setting also vividly depicts rapidly shifting imagery of the text. Thus the "air de bravoure" traverses a variety of moods and musical textures at break-neck speed. Here again, Poulenc shifts abruptly between disparate vocal styles: near the beginning of the movement, for instance, the patter-like delivery of "Madame la Dauphine, fine, fine.." (sung in short, disjointed phrases) is immediately contrasted with the passage beginning on "car on l'a mené en terre..." which is sung in a more lyrical style (marked "très lié"). In response to the line "Quand un paysan de chine..." the character of the music also suddenly changes. Poulenc employs various musical clichés to evoke the Orient, such as running pentatonic ostinato patterns in the winds and pizzicato chords in the strings (possibly to evoke Asian string instruments). But this clichéd evocation of oriental music is extremely brief (four bars), after which the impertinent mood quickly returns (on "il va chez l'imprimeur...") replete with dry, staccato accompaniment and highly dissonant harmonization often featuring minor seconds or tritones against the vocal line. A gentler mood intrudes once more on "Monsieur le Comte d'Artois est monté sur le toit....", as the vocal line becomes slightly more expansive, accompanied by running legato figures in the strings and gentle, triadic piano writing. But this passage is quickly followed by the brash declamation of "toi, toi, toi, toi" on accented half notes over a dissonant accompaniment. Another jarring contrast occurs near the end of the movement, when an unexpected switch to a fuller texture and an abrupt onset of rapid sixteenth-note figurations in the piano on "Un vapeur et sa cargaison..." may be an attempt to depict the sudden emergence of the steamship image in the text.

Even the purely instrumental movements, in which Poulenc is obviously not directly responding to textual cues, display a compositional approach which seems to mirror the unpredictable dislocations of Jacob's poetry. In the "Intermède," for instance,

not only is the folk-like opening theme regularly interrupted by brief intrusions of passages borrowed from *The Nutcracker* (as described above) and interjections of dissonant scalar passages, but a dramatic change in character occurs two thirds of the way into the movement (at r.27). As the rustic opening theme takes on a more vigorous quality with a heavily accented melodic line in the bassoon and cornet, and continuous rhythmic ostinati in the piano accompaniment and percussion, it is unexpectedly cut short by the intrusion of a solo scalar passage in the cello that leads into an intimately expressive (and "refined") passage with an expansive melody first presented in the clarinet and then echoed in the cello and violin, bringing the movement to a gentle close.

4.2.4 Individual "voice" and originality

In his discussion of Poulenc and surrealism, Daniel Albright argues that Poulenc flouts traditional notions of authenticity and originality through his pervasive borrowings from the works of other composers.[220] As we have seen, *Le Bal masqué* not only refers extensively to pre-existent works and musical styles, but also privileges fragmentation and dislocation over cohesion and continuity, and thus seems to further undermine our sense of the work as the expression of the composer's unified "voice." Most surrealist art, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, seems to destabilize conventional notions of authorial presence—and surrealist artists and writers themselves frequently called into question the Romantic concept of art as assertion of the ego. Critics have also often commented on how Jacob's work seems strongly to resist conventional views of poetry as the expression of the author's unified subjectivity: the prevalence of parody in his work

[220] Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 291.

has led to his reputation as a "ventriloquist" or "pasticheur" whose poetry consists of a "cacophony of discourses."[221] This is obviously analogous to Albright's characterization of Poulenc as a "human gramophone" who simply plays back pre-existent music with "heightened artificiality."[222] Yet like Jacob and other surrealist artists and poets, the imprint of Poulenc's original voice can still be traced in the unique way in which he combines commonplace or pre-existent elements, and through distinctive characteristics of his style. That said, however, through his compositional approach in *Le Bal masqué*, as well as in his previously-quoted article focusing on this work, "Éloge de la banalité" (1935), Poulenc seems to reconsider conventional notions of creative originality.

"Éloge de la banalité" is one of Poulenc's few aesthetic statements and provides much insight into his aesthetic philosophy.[223] While responding to trends in avant-garde composition towards the pursuit of intellectualism and innovation at all costs, Poulenc also expresses his particular views on musical originality. After extolling Mozart and Schubert as examples of composers who were able to assemble in their own unique way already existing elements of musical syntax, Poulenc goes on to say that "avoir peur du déjà entendu est bien souvent la preuve de l'impuissance."[224] He contends that it is actually in borrowing from others that an artist can truly display "originality": "J'admire sans réserve cette phrase de Picasso: 'L'artiste véritablement original est celui qui

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[221] Oxenhandler, *Looking for Heroes in Postwar France*, p. 122.

[222] Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 291.

[223] *Présence* III, no.8 (October 1935): pp. 24-25. This important essay has not been discussed extensively in the Poulenc literature. Robert Orledge translates short passages and briefly comments on the article in his essay "Poulenc and Koechlin: 58 lessons and a friendship" in Buckland and Chimènes eds., *Francis Poulenc*, pp. 32-33. Schmidt devotes only a short paragraph to this article. See Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, p. 218.

[224] Poulenc, "Éloge de la banalité," p. 25.

n'arrive jamais à copier exactement.'"[225] Poulenc expounds a positive notion of musical banality, which encompasses both the use of commonplace (or banal) musical materials as well as compositional eclecticism, and he describes *Le Bal masqué* as "mon tribut le plus spontané à la banalité."[226] In particular, he associates his concept of "banality" with the combination of "high" and "low" musical elements: "J'ai pris depuis longtemps mon parti de mettre dans le même sac l'harmonie rare et la cadence vulgaire." And he defies the pejorative meaning of the term "banality" by stating that it is not evidence of a lack of authenticity or individuality, but quite the opposite: "Je loue la banalité, eh 'oui pourquoi pas' si elle est voulue, sentie, truculente, et non pas une preuve de déficience."

Of course, one could ask how banality can be "truculente," not to mention "sentie."[227] In "À propos de 'Banalité'," Ernst Krenek responds to Poulenc's article and critiques his argument that one can be original while using pre-existent or "banal" materials. Ironically, Krenek seems to contradict the claims he makes in his discussions of surrealism and music, which I mention in chapter three, concerning how novel combinations of pre-existent musical elements can be as startling as the use of a completely innovative musical idiom. Here, Krenek critiques Poulenc by suggesting that after the advent of atonality recycling the past can only lead to artistic sterility.[228] But

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[225] *Ibid.*, p. 24. Later in the article, Poulenc mentions two of Max Jacob's own statements about his accessible and eclectic poetic style, and how these influenced his compositional approach in *Le Bal masqué*: "Dans son *Art poétique*, Max Jacob a écrit: « Les auteurs qui se font obscurs pour forcer l'estime obtiennent ce qu'ils veulent et pas autre chose », plus loin : « Il y a une pureté du ventre qui est rare et excellente. » C'est en me référent à ces deux maximes que j'ai composé le *Bal masqué*, cantate profane sur des poèmes du même Max Jacob." *Ibid.*, p. 25.

[226] Poulenc, "Éloge de la banalité," p. 25.

[227] Ernst Krenek "À propos de 'Banalité'," *Présence* III, no. 10 (December, 1935): pp. 34-36.

[228] He goes as far as to say that relying on pre-existent materials is not only facile but "ignoble dans le domaine de l'esprit." *Ibid.*, p. 35. Although he claims that surrealist montage techniques can have merit if

Poulenc would probably answer this argument by stating that pre-existent elements can be combined and re-combined in subversive and ever-changing ways. Like Jacob and other surrealists, Poulenc sought to re-energize the banal and the clichéd through new and surprising combinations. And we have seen that jarring juxtapositions of popular idioms with allusions to concert music, as well as conspicuous and disruptive intrusions of passages devoid of melodic interest, abound in *Le Bal masqué*.[229]

But Krenek's strongest point of contention with Poulenc seems to revolve not only around the issue of originality, but also that of subjective integrity. For Krenek, the individual, authentic "voice" of the composer cannot be expressed through the assemblage of banal materials since "(la banalité) n'est pas une expression émanant du plein centre de la personnalité de l'artiste mais elle vient d'une zone secondaire."[230] Krenek's position clearly stems from the Romantic notion that artistic expression should spring directly from the artist's individual ego. Poulenc, however, in stating that one can combine pre-existent and even banal materials in a way that is "sentie" and "spontanée" shows that he has a very different view of how individual voice can be expressed.[231] Like the surrealists, Poulenc demonstrates that the act of selecting and assembling pre-existent materials can be an authentic form of self-expression, though the presence of the artist's original voice may not seem all-pervasive. Furthermore, the craft of combining disparate

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they serve a polemical function, Krenek feels that they must only be undertaken as a "special" activity, subordinate to the more important quest to elaborate a completely new musical language. *Ibid.*

[229] As mentioned above, the dissonant scalar passages which disrupt the continuity of the "Intermède" are particularly conspicuous, as well as the intrusions of speech-like passages in the vocal movements.

[230] Krenek, "À propos de 'Banalité'," p. 35.

[231] Poulenc, "Éloge de la banalité," p. 25.

("vulgar" and "refined"[232]) elements which Poulenc extols is obviously a critique of the Romantic emphasis on organicism clearly implicit in Krenek's position.

But, paradoxically, like Jacob and other surrealist poets and artists, Poulenc's use of pre-existent or commonplace elements does not preclude the presence of individual stylistic tendencies. Despite its extreme eclecticism, *Le Bal masqué* is not a simple assemblage or pastiche of pre-existent fragments: all the disparate elements seem to filtered through Poulenc's unique musical personality. Even throughout the most blatant quotations and allusions, the imprint of Poulenc's distinctive compositional style is apparent. Many of the characteristic features that Keith W. Daniel observes in his major study of Poulenc's style are ubiquitous throughout the cantata.[233] Daniel shows that while Poulenc's harmonic language is basically diatonic and functional, Poulenc uses seventh chords as frequently as triads, and he also has a predilection for ninth and thirteenth chords.[234] These types of chords are featured prevalently throughout *Le Bal masqué*, even in passages which allude to works by other composers. For instance, as mentioned above, Poulenc harmonizes his allusion to the "Waltz of the Flowers" from *The Nutcracker* in the "Intermède" with highly dissonant ninth and thirteenth chords which would obviously not be normative for Tchaikovsky. And the occasional intrusions of seventh and thirteenth chords add Poulenc's distinctive harmonic stamp to the popular-flavored tunes in the instrumental introductions of the first and last movements.

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[232] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

[233] Although Daniel describes stylistic characteristics of Poulenc's music throughout his book, he also devotes an entire chapter to general features of Poulenc's style. See Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, chapter 6 ("Style"), pp. 57-99.

[234] *Ibid.*, pp. 74-76.

Another characteristic type of dissonance is created through the substitution of one or more notes that are a semitone "out of tune" with their conventional, diatonic context. Daniel describes this as "wrong-note" dissonance, and remarks that although this often occurs in Poulenc's early works, it is actually most prominent in *Le Bal masqué*.[235] This playful approach to dissonance is particularly conspicuous in the scalar passages played at the interval of a minor second throughout the "Intermède" and in "La dame aveugle" (just before r.52). But Poulenc also creates impertinently dissonant chords with this approach, such as in the brief popular-inspired passages which interrupt the Paganini allusion in the "Bagatelle" (for instance at r.39, where an F-sharp and E-flat in the cello clash with the C-major triad in the piano and cello).

As outlined by Daniel, other characteristics of Poulenc's colorful tonal idiom are his propensity for modal mixture and his tendency to incorporate chromaticism near the end of diatonic melodies.[236] There are several instances of modal mixture throughout the cantata, but the most conspicuous occurs in the opening of the "Intermède," where the folk-like theme constantly wavers between D major and D minor. Throughout the cantata, phrases often become increasingly chromatic and harmonically unstable before cadences (for instance, this occurs in the lyrical melody at the end of the "Intermède"). Even in the popular-flavored opening of the "Finale," Poulenc inserts a highly chromatic two-bar passage, replete with dissonant ninth and major seventh chords, before the flippant cadential gesture which punctuates the first statement of the tune.

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[235] Daniel observes that Poulenc's use of "wrong-note" dissonance may show the influence of Stravinsky. He also claims that after the mid 1930s, Poulenc abandons this particular approach to dissonance. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

[236] *Ibid.*, pp. 85 and 72.

Thus, although Poulenc takes the eclectic tendencies of his compositional approach to great extremes in *Le Bal masqué*, the unmistakable presence of his individual voice is felt throughout. This clearly mirrors the paradoxical nature of Jacob's poetry, and most surrealist art, where the use of "borrowed" elements does not preclude the assertion of the subject, especially since a certain degree of subjective engagement is involved in selecting and combining materials.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explores how Poulenc's special affinity with Max Jacob's surrealist poetic aesthetic is manifested in *Le Bal masqué*. The cantata not only mirrors many of the subversive features of Jacob's distinctive poetic style, but also some of the essential characteristics of surrealist art in general.

In response to the intermingling of irreconcilable "low" and "elevated" approaches to language in Jacob's poetry, Poulenc seems to emphasize stylistic clashes in his setting. Instead of attempting to absorb popular elements within a sophisticated, "high art" musical idiom, Poulenc blatantly juxtaposes brash evocations of Parisian popular music with passages of a markedly more "refined" character. Of course, this combination of disparate musical styles is a central theme in most previous discussions of surrealist influences in music.

Le Bal masqué contains several clearly recognizable allusions to the works of other composers. The pervasiveness of borrowed materials in *Le Bal masqué* can be correlated with surrealist collage, particularly since Poulenc almost always places quotations of familiar works in highly incongruous surroundings, in a manner akin to the surrealist technique of "dépaysement." Furthermore, Poulenc's allusions to a diverse selection of musical works and styles in *Le Bal masqué* also seems to parallel Jacob's tendency to frequently insert parodies of various types of discourse and literary styles in his poetry.

Like most surrealist literature, Jacob's poetry abounds in startling juxtapositions of imagery and abrupt changes in tone. Poulenc's setting is similarly unpredictable, with frequent disorienting shifts in texture and affect. The two central vocal movements of *Le*

Bal masqué, "Malvina" and "La dame aveugle," are especially fragmented and disjointed, and waver continuously between extremely contrasting moods. By constantly thwarting expectations, Poulenc's setting takes on the profoundly unsettling quality of surrealist art, which seeks to reveal the fundamentally fractured and paradoxical nature of our experience of reality itself.

Through his compositional approach in *Le Bal masqué*, which he defends in "Éloge de la banalité," Poulenc seems to challenge conventional notions of artistic originality and subjective integrity in a manner comparable to Jacob and other surrealists. Like the surrealists, Poulenc critiques all-pervasive organicism, and proposes that commonplace elements can be combined in original and even subversive ways. And although one can say that various different "voices" intermingle in *Le Bal masqué* because of the numerous allusions to pre-existent works and musical styles, Poulenc's individual voice still prevails, much like the imprint of Jacob's unique personality remains apparent even though his poetry brings together disparate forms of discourse.

Le Bal masqué clearly displays Poulenc's extraordinary receptiveness and sensitivity to Jacob's surrealist poetry. But although critics often praise Poulenc's uncanny ability to enter into a poet's world and fully capture the spirit of their work, his most compelling settings of contemporary poetry are always highly personal works.[237] And despite the striking influence of Jacob's surrealist aesthetic throughout *Le Bal masqué*, Poulenc obviously found that the poet's artistic vision meshed perfectly with his own, since he could candidly assert that the cantata was "du Poulenc cent pour cent."[238]

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[237] See Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, p. 250.

[238] Francis Poulenc, *Diary of My Songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, p. 58.

Although surrealism is one of the most influential artistic movements of the twentieth century, its relationship to music remains widely unexplored. Further studies into the musical ramifications of surrealism may bring to light more of the subversive modernist tendencies that Poulenc, and perhaps other twentieth-century composers working within an accessible tonal idiom, espoused.

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