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Les songes pleureurs de Poulenc: Lorca, a queer Jondo and le Surréalisme in the “Intermezzo” of Francis Poulenc’s Sonate pour violon et piano

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Abstract: Francis Poulenc’s *Sonate pour violon et piano* exists as something of a hybrid work. Dedicated to the memory of Spanish resistant poet Federico García Lorca, the sonata’s slow movement, the “Intermezzo”, is prepped with the opening line of Lorca’s “Las Seis Cuerdas”. As a consequence, the movement is imbued with a programmatic quality that causes it to sit somewhere inbetween Poulenc’s instrumental and vocal works. In this essay, I take advantage of this hermeneutic quality to explore the composer’s relation to Lorca and surrealism more generally, and how this manifests in the “Intermezzo”. Ultimately, I argue that the movement is more than simply a lament over Lorca’s tragic death, and is in fact a broader expression of Poulenc’s despair towards a political and social climate that seeks to marginalize on the basis of sexual identity.

Subjects: 20th Century Music; Composers and Musicians; Music; Queer Theory

Keywords: Poulenc; violin; surrealism; Lorca; queer; homosexuality; Paris

1. Introduction

2013 saw the 50th anniversary of the death of Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) pass by with little recognition. Whilst musicological momentum got behind Poulenc,¹ broader commemoration was largely absent. Admittedly, Poulenc was competing with the anniversaries of colossal figures such as Britten, Verdi and Wagner, but it is more than likely that such a paucity of recognition can be chalked up, as Ivan Hewett puts it, to an apparent lack of seriousness in Poulenc (Hewett, XXXX). It is true that Poulenc has a reputation as a musical lightweight; he did not subscribe to Schoenberg’s modernist agenda, content to claim that “the Carmelites, poor things, can only sing in tune” (Poulenc, 1991, p. 215), and is thus often held in musicological estimate as of less importance than even his pseudo-revolutionary contemporary and fellow member of *Les Six*, Milhaud. But the value of

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Oliver Charles Edward Smith graduated from Birmingham Conservatoire with first-class honours, and has completed his MA with distinction at the University of Birmingham, for which he was awarded a scholarship by the Board of the College of Arts and Law Graduate School, University of Birmingham. Alongside his research interests in *fin de siècle* Paris, in particular the work of Francis Poulenc, and theories of gender and sexuality, Oliver has also written on aspects of popular musicology, including Lady Gaga and Rufus Wainwright.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The study of the music of Francis Poulenc has seen much crucial development through contextualization in relation to the composer’s sexual identity. This essay takes the *Sonate pour violon et piano*, a work not yet afforded comprehensive study, and explores how Poulenc draws on his relationship with surrealism and the work of the Spanish resistant poet Federico García Lorca in the slow movement. Written during a time when the social and political climate is at odds with the composer’s own identity, this essay reads Poulenc’s “Intermezzo” as a musical articulation of discontent.

Poulenc's music derives precisely from its inimitable, if conservative, style that "an integrated and adult musical personality would never have committed [...] to paper" (Drew, 1961, p. 279). The posthumous "outing" of Poulenc in the publication of his correspondence by Sidney Buckland (1991) and Myriam Chimènes (1994), the issue of the composer's sexuality having been carefully expunged from all previous scholarly attention as required by the Poulenc family in return for sanctioning the use of private materials, has allowed for various subsequent studies (Burton, 2002; Clifton, 2002; Ivry, 1996; Lacombe, 2013; Moore, 2012a, pp. 299–342; Purvis, 2013, pp. 236–254; Schmidt, 2001; Walker, 2005) to demonstrate how the critical issue of Poulenc's sexuality can offer important insight into how we might understand the work of perhaps "the most frank [...] of composers (Drew, 1961, p. 279)". In the wake of such musicological re-evaluation, the binary of Claude Rostand's description of Poulenc as "le moine et la voyou" (Rostand, 1950), terms which have "dominated critical discussion of his music to this day" (Burton, 2002, p. 15)—the clichéd Janus-Poulenc—has begun to be eroded, leaving a much broader discussion in its wake.

Having said that, the limited musicological scrutiny that Poulenc has recently enjoyed has declared itself very much in favour of unravelling the works for stage, its narrow gaze passing over both the composer's prolific instrumental output and *mélodies*. Undoubtedly, such a lacuna will come to be addressed as the benefits of analysing this underappreciated body of work are realized. In the meantime, however, and towards such an end, this essay will explore the "Intermezzo" from Poulenc's *Sonate pour violon et piano*, which exists as part of a body of later instrumental works hitherto neglected by scholarship.

David Drew writes that "Poulenc does not achieve mature expression unless he is setting words or writing ballet music" (Drew, 1961, p. 279). If this can be considered accurate—and if pressed I would to argue to the contrary—the violin sonata, completed in 1943, provides an interesting example of hybridity in that it is simultaneously a wordless instrumental work with a close relationship to text. Written "à la mémoire de Federico García Lorca" (Poulenc, 1944), Poulenc inscribed the "Intermezzo" with the opening words from Lorca's "Las seis cuerdas" ["The Six Strings"], words which resonate throughout a movement that becomes as much a *mélodie*, indeed a lament, as an instrumental work. This essay makes use of the hermeneutic window to explore this second movement. By unpicking Poulenc's relationship to surrealism, both musical and otherwise, I seek to demonstrate how the "Intermezzo" might be legitimately read as lamenting the climate of homophobia that resulted in the marginalization of both Poulenc and Lorca's identities rather than simply a lament over the poet's death itself. This becomes increasingly pertinent given that homophobia is considered likely to have contributed to Lorca's execution at the hands of nationalist militia in 1936. I will argue that by means of his surrealistic musical style, one that affords opportunity for queer subversion, Poulenc's "Intermezzo" attempts to imagine what might have been had the reality of political tumult not demanded the poet's death.

2. Poulenc and le violon prima donna

The monster is now ready. [Francis Poulenc to André Schaeffener, 1942 (Poulenc, 1991, p. 130)]

Poulenc never demonstrated an affinity for stringed instruments. Indeed, he remarked that, although not extending his prejudice to the plural, "frankly, I do not like the violin in the singular!" (Poulenc, 1954, pp. 119–120). Given that Poulenc is often considered first and foremost a composer of *mélodies*, this seems justified when considering Isabelle Battioni's assertion that "nothing is further from the human breath than the bow-stroke" (Battioni, 2000, p. 3). As a consequence, the violin sonata occupies a unique position within Poulenc's oeuvre, which is brimming with works for wind or keyboard instruments and the stage. The sonata represents a concerted effort on the part of a composer whose music, with all its capricious fluency, only ever seems to conceal any compositional pains: Poulenc had already made two previous attempts at writing for violin and piano, the first of which was performed by Hélène Jourdan-Morhange in the 1917–1918 concert season at the Salle

Huyghens. Morhange recalled that “Poulenc did not have time to complete the piano part [and so they] played only the first two movements which were extremely beautiful”.² The composer, however, destroyed the manuscript in his dissatisfaction with the work. Poulenc’s second violin sonata was written for Jelly d’Arányi in 1924, but, just like the string quartet that in 1947 found its way into a drain in the Place Péreire, Poulenc saw fit to “[wring] its neck rather than deliver it to the public” (Poulenc, 1954, p. 121). The third, and published, attempt was written at the request of Ginette Neveu, a *virtuosa* violinist who would not be denied,³ and a request from whom represented something of a compositional coup for Poulenc, “mai pouvais-je resister à une suggestion de Ginette Neveu!” [but how could I resist a suggestion by Ginette Neveu!] (Schmidt, 1995, p. 332):

In 1942–43, it was the debut of her stunning career. Deprived, because of the war, of violinists like Menuhin, Heifetz, Francescati, we had the undreamed luck to have their equal here in our own country. Ginette had asked me to write her a Sonata, and I accepted it. (Schmidt, 1995, p. 332)

Stylistically, Poulenc found himself at odds with many of the violin sonatas in the French repertoire with the exception of that of Debussy, who “succeeded in turning [his sonata] into a masterpiece by sheer instrumental tact” (Poulenc, 1991, p. 130). Poulenc wrote of his own “monstre” (Schmidt, 2001, p. 282) that

[i]t is not too bad, I believe, and in any case very different from the endless *violin-melodic lines* sonatas written in France in the nineteenth century. How beautiful Brahms’ sonatas are! [...] One cannot achieve a proper balance between two such different instruments as the piano and the violin unless one treats them absolutely equally. The prima donna violin above an arpeggio piano accompaniment makes me vomit. (Poulenc, 1991, p. 130; emphasis in original)

Yet, such was Poulenc’s anguish over the failings he perceived in his own violin sonata that he returned to the work in Poulenc (1949) to make revisions,⁴ six years after its initial completion and after Neveu’s untimely death. Regardless of his reworkings, the composer remained unhappy with this particular work, which, “despite some delectable violinistic details due entirely to Ginette Neveu who helped [him] a great deal with the instrumentation” (Poulenc, 1954, pp. 119–120), he considered a failure “mainly because of its artificial pathos” (Poulenc, 1954, p. 120). Interestingly, the composer does not elucidate upon the artificiality he perceives, but there seems no reason to consider Poulenc’s dedication to Lorca in any way insincere. As a consequence, one supposes that this perception derives from Poulenc’s own concerns about his ability to do musical justice to the deceased poet; perhaps he felt unable to sufficiently embody the somberness of circumstances by the way in which he was writing. In fact, the composer later spoke of the difficulty he had in “proving musically [his] passion for Lorca!” (Poulenc, 1985, p. 91) when referring to the *Trois Chansons de F. Garcia Lorca*: he considered the *Trois Chansons* of little importance in his vocal output, and further described the violin sonata as “very mediocre Poulenc” (Poulenc, 1985, p. 91). Nevertheless, the work was well received at its premiere at the Salle Gaveau in June 1943. Carl Schmidt quotes a review which recalls that this was “an occasion of real triumph for the composer [...] The Sonata, the aesthetic of which corresponds entirely to the current trend, is superbly colored, alive and all submerged in sensibility[, ...] produc[ing] a great effect on the elite audience who was there in the hall” (Schmidt, 1995, p. 331).

Poulenc dedicated his violin sonata to the memory of Federico García Lorca, a Spanish poet “whom [he] love[d] equally with Apollinaire and Eluard” (Schmidt, 2001, p. 282). Of the work’s three movements, “Allegro con fuoco”, “Intermezzo” and “Presto tragico”, it is clear that the second enjoys a particular importance around which the remainder of the work pivots. One would normally anticipate any programmatic references or dedications to feature in the first movement, but Poulenc instead prepends the opening text of Lorca’s “Las seis suerdas” (“The Six Strings”) to the “Intermezzo”, resulting in hints of a programmatic quality that is exclusive of the remaining movements.

Furthermore, this “melancholic improvisation” (Schmidt, 2001, p. 282) was the first music of the sonata to be conceived by Poulenc:

Having always wished to dedicate a work to the memory of Lorca, [...] I was inspired by one of his most celebrated verses: ‘The guitar makes dreams cry’ (even in translation it is pretty). At first I composed a sort of vaguely Spanish *Andante-cantilène*. Then, I imagined as a finale, a *Presto tragico* of which the rhythmic and vital spirit would suddenly be broken by a slow and tragic coda. An impetuous first movement must set the mood.⁵

Interestingly, given the affection Poulenc had for Lorca and his work, it can be assumed that the two men never actually met. It is known that both had been in attendance at Madrid’s Residencia de Estudiantes, Lorca as a student boarder and Poulenc as a visiting recitalist in 1930 (Hess, 2005, p. 90) and that Poulenc enjoyed telling somewhat intimate stories of the young poet to friends, which might imply he had known Lorca personally. For example, Louis Kaufman recalls a rehearsal of the violin sonata during which Poulenc describes how Lorca often sang his verses whilst accompanying himself on the guitar (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2003, pp. 188–197, 191). Yet, despite this, the conspicuous absence of references—totalling only four, and almost exclusively in connection with the violin sonata—Poulenc makes to Lorca in his correspondence, interviews and other sources would indicate that a meeting never took place. Poulenc’s rather helpful inclination towards social snobbery means that, had it been the case that the composer had met Lorca, he would have undoubtedly written to one of the many recipients of his letters about such an event, as he did upon meeting other important figures (Philip Purvis and Nicolas Southon, personal communication, 2014). Despite this, Richard Burton writes that, importantly, and at least after Lorca’s death in 1936, Poulenc “would have known by then that [...] García Lorca was gay” (Burton, 2002, p. 65).

3. *Le Surréalisme*

If musical greatness, as Rimbaud claimed, is exclusive of innovation, then Francis Poulenc was a genius. If real artists, as Radiguet claimed, have their own voice and so need only copy to prove their individuality, then Poulenc dignified the crime of plagiarism. (Rorem, 1988, p. 144)

If I were a singing teacher I would insist on my pupils reading the poems attentively before working at a song. Most of the time these ladies and gentlemen do not understand a word of what they are singing. (Poulenc, 1985, p. 91)

3.1. *Poulenc and the surrealists*

Poulenc exhibited a lifelong fascination with contemporary art and literature, the early introduction to which might rightly be attributed to Ricardo Viñes whom the composer met in 1915 (Ivry, 1996, p. 17). Viñes was an ardent supporter of not just the work of contemporary French music, but also of the arts more broadly. Often affectionately referred to by Poulenc as “mon bien cher Maître” (Poulenc, 1991), or some variant thereof, Viñes’ influence on his young piano student was profound. Poulenc acknowledges his debt to the Catalan pianist, which Henri Hell considers “incalculable” (Hell, 1959, p. 4), and is quoted as saying:

I admired him madly, because, at this time, in 1914, he was the only virtuoso who played Debussy and Ravel [...] I owe him everything [...] In reality it is to Viñes that I owe my fledgling efforts in music and everything I know about the piano. (Poulenc, 1978, pp. 42–43)

Whilst Viñes’ piano instruction was crucial to Poulenc’s musical development,⁶ it was through his contacts that the composer came to be introduced to the likes of Satie, Stravinsky and Cocteau. Moreover, this provided Poulenc with an introduction to the world of the Parisian café, which “for almost a century [...] was, in its various forms, the pivotal institution of Parisian artistic and intellectual life” (Burton, 2002, p. 28), and proved such an integral component of the composer’s life and music; as the Irish novelist George Moore writes, “I did not go to Oxford or Cambridge, I went to the

Café Nouvelles Athènes” (Moore, 1972, p. 102). Cocteau further expanded Poulenc’s artistic circle, undoubtedly helped along by the composer’s own gregarious disposition and social aspirations. From 1917, as a member of *Les nouveaux jeunes*, later referred to as simply *Les six*, Poulenc enjoyed valuable artistic exchanges at the premieres of his own work and that of his fellow composers.⁷ Held at a studio known as the “Salle Huyghens” owned by the Swiss painter Émile Lejeune, musical performances there were interspersed with poetry readings from the likes of Cocteau, Max Jacob and Blaise Cendrars, and complemented by the exhibition of work by artists such as Picasso, Amadeo Modigliani and Juan Gris (Schmidt, 2001, p. 55). In addition, Poulenc discovered the international bookshop of Adrienne Monnier, “La Maison des Amis du Livre”, courtesy of his friendship with Raymonde Linossier. The bookshop was a favourite haunt for many of Paris’ literary avant-garde (Machart, 1995, p. 13). Frequenters of the bookshop included Joyce, Pound, Apollinaire, Aragon, Breton, Valéry, Claudel, Larbaud, Soupault, Desnos and Éluard. and it was in this “[shrine] of Parisian modernism” (Burton, 2002, p. 33) that Poulenc was granted access to a further network of vibrant artists and writers:

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 Éluard 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. (Poulenc, 1978, pp. 98–99)

The artistic crucible that Paris became from the *fin de siècle* onwards must have proven intoxicating to Poulenc; Pierre Bernac writes of the indelible marks left on the composer by “the extraordinary euphoria, the prodigious artistic vitality of Paris [...] that] remained for Poulenc the Golden Age” (Bernac, 1977, p. 25). Yet, despite this and a burgeoning circle of poetic acquaintances, Poulenc can be seen to express a clear affinity for the works of two poets in particular: Apollinaire and Éluard.⁸ This is shown not only by the overwhelming preference for setting these poets’ texts in Poulenc’s *mélodies*,⁹ but also by the affection the composer exhibits for the two men in his writings: “If on my tomb could be inscribed: Here lies Francis Poulenc, the musician of Apollinaire and Éluard, I would consider this my greatest claim to fame” (Poulenc, 1985, p. 69). And the “affective equivalences” (Daniel, 1982, p. 250) Poulenc shared with Apollinaire and Éluard were bolstered further still by fast friendships. It was through the works of these two surrealists that Poulenc “learnt how to express the most secret part of [himself] and especially [his] vocal lyricism”,¹⁰ drawn in part by what he considered the “sheer musical vibration” (Poulenc, 1954, p. 93) of the poems. It is somewhat unsurprising that Poulenc, a composer for whom his (sexual) identity proved marginalizing in French society and whose attempts to articulate his true self might be understood through his music, should find himself attracted to the work of surrealists, and, in turn, to that of Lorca; poets whose central impulse Carl Cobb describes as “toward freedom, freedom to throw off all the shackles binding total expression of the personality, including even scatological and sexual taboos” (Cobb, 1967, p. 3).

3.2. Surrealism, art and music

As Franklin Rosemont explains, surrealism “refuses the rigid boundaries and definitions assigned by conventional rationality” (Rosemont, 1978, as quoted in Haynes, 2007, p. 24), and is concerned instead with the exploration of spaces beyond the reality that is reflected in realism. Coined by Apollinaire in the 1917 programme for Cocteau and Satie’s *Parade*, the term, “surréalisme”, is an amalgam of the French “sur”—in itself fused from the Latin “sub” [under; beneath; behind] and “super” [above; over; beyond]—and “réalisme” [actually existing or present]. These parallels of reality, which can run everywhere but in the space occupied by the reality inscribed by rational thought, were, for Apollinaire, a “question of translation, of shifting reality from one plane to another” (Bohn, 2002, p. 128). Surrealism, therefore, seeks to deconstruct—or reconstruct—reality and the “‘rational’ illusion of security and unity” (Haynes, 2007, p. 24) offered by realism. Breton concludes his first manifesto on the subject by writing that

Surrealism, such as I conceive it, asserts our complete *nonconformism* clearly enough so that there can be no question of translating it, at the trial of the real world, as evidence for the defense. [...] Surrealism is the ‘invisible ray’ which will one day enable us to win out over our opponents. [...] This summer the roses are blue; the wood is of glass. The earth, draped in its verdant cloak, makes as little impression upon me as a ghost. It is living and ceasing to live that are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere. (Breton, 1969, p. 47)

This unrelenting nonconformism, one that “exploits the tensions between reality and the imagination that oppositional binaries normatively sever” (Haynes, 2007, p. 25), is thus the search for a freedom from the obscuring patina of the familiar via contradiction. Such perversion of reality, one that opposes art as mere mimesis of aesthetic or natural coherence where, being only a copy, “[the art work] must lean for support on the entity in the world of experience on which it is modeled” (Albright, 2000, p. 12), was limited only by human imagination so far as Apollinaire was concerned. The notions of *le scandale* and *le merveilleux* were thus key to his concept of surrealism: the “cultivation of the unexpected and the absurd” (Ehman, 2005, p. 36), which can essentially be understood as “surprise”, emerged as an important aesthetic principle for Apollinaire (Bohn, 2002, pp. 124–125), who anticipated perpetual novelty as playing a key role in the future of surrealism.

In 1924, the inaugural issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* was published, in the preface of which Éluard, together with Jacques-André Boiffard and Roger Vitrac, advocated dreams as a means to harness the unconscious mind in order to realize surrealist goals of “thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation” (Albright, 2004a, pp. 309–336, 310). Undoubtedly influenced by Freud’s seminal work of 1900, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the surrealists viewed the dreaming unconscious as a realm unfettered by the stringent boundaries of human subjectivity, and thus a possible “route towards the emancipation of the human subject from restrictive bourgeois rationalism” (Haynes, 2007, p. 31): “Le processus de la connaissance n’étant plus à faire, l’intelligence n’entrant plus en ligne de compte, le rêve seul laisse à l’homme tous ces droits à la liberté”.¹¹ For example, Freud writes:

Thoughts which are mutually contradictory make no attempt to do away with each other, but persist side by side. [...] In waking life the suppressed material in the mind is prevented from finding expression and is cut off from internal perceptions owing to the fact that *the contradictions present in it are eliminated—one side being disposed of in favour of the other*, but during the night [...] this suppressed material finds methods and means of forcing its way into consciousness. (Freud, 1991, pp. IV, 755, 768–769)

In dreams, the dualist taxonomies that restrain rational consciousness lose their efficacy, rendering oppositional binaries free to coexist, any ostensible contradiction nullified. And it is this coexistence that surrealist expression seeks to emulate so that it can “unmask, critique and renew the perception of utilitarian reality and modes of representation and expression. Disrupting the accepted order of reality, [surrealism] constitutes a critique of artistic and social codes” (Adamowicz, 1998, p. 11).

Despite this shared interest in somnolence and the permeation of reality by the unconscious dream world, there remain distinctions within the surrealist movement; whilst for Breton surrealism was “a method for escaping from the oppressiveness of reality—a sort of irrealism” (Albright, 2000, p. 267), the purpose of Apollinaire’s surrealism was instead to “[explore] the realness of reality” (Albright, 2000, p. 267), and in doing so gain critical understanding enough to transcend the paradoxes and inconsistencies immanent of reality and human nature.¹²

That such an artistic movement was spawned in Paris is unsurprising, given the city’s unrivalled magnetism at the time, as “[it] was above all a place of idle wandering, and it was during one’s wandering that one might discover the city’s magical or ‘magnetic’ places [...]; the city offered a wealth of incongruous encounters and pretensions for hallucinations or premonitions” (Durozoi, 2002, p. 173). Whilst Paris’ role as facilitator to the development of surrealism is clear, one might go further

still to consider the city itself a legitimate constituent of the surrealist circle, not merely a location but a fully fledged entity, the contribution of which—whom?—is further emphasized by Nadeau: “the important thing was to discover life under the thick carapace of centuries of culture—life, pure, naked, raw, lacerated. The important thing was to bring the unconscious of a city into unison with the unconscious of man” (Nadeau, 1987, p. 98). Poulenc was very much in touch with this Parisian underbelly. Given the relative anonymity and freedom afforded by Paris, the city often bore witness to Poulenc’s “most intimate thoughts” (Poulenc, 1999, p. 130) and deeds; Poulenc’s correspondence reveals that the composer often delighted in recalling to friends the ribald details of his latest sexual exploits in the “secret temples” of Parisian gay subculture.¹³ Poulenc further extends his place/sexuality matrix to make the distinction between the sacred and profane, writing that “all my religious music turns its back on the style that is inspired in me by Paris and its outskirts [Nogent]” (Poulenc, 1985, p. 49). This is not difficult to understand given Poulenc’s Catholicism, which would imply a natural desire to segregate his faith from the places at which he might freely indulge his sexual appetite. Nadeau’s work, and Poulenc’s sensibilities, also serve to remind one of the notion of the *flâneur*, a mode of masculinity that emerged from the urban landscape of the nineteenth century and developed in aesthetic opposition to the dandy: the latter having developed the art of being observed, the former that of observing. As a well-connected and opinionated character, “the *flâneur* stands apart from the city even as he appears to ‘fuse’ with it; he interprets each of its component parts in isolation in order [...] to attain to an intellectual understanding of the whole as a complex system of meaning” (Burton, 1994, p. 1). Subsequent to the infamous legal battles of Oscar Wilde in 1895, this trope of masculinity came to be strongly identified with gay men, and given Poulenc’s proclivity towards a very urban style of sophistication and love affair with Paris, albeit a tumultuous one, he is easily read as this particular *l’homme hieroglyphe*.¹⁴

Surrealist art is, ultimately, comprised of juxtaposition. Both surrealist poetry and visual art attempt to disorientate by means of unique combinations of what is ordinary and banal, drawing on the disconcert resulting from the “rapprochement inattendu” (Ernst, 1970, p. 262) of that which is familiar yet incongruous. Breton likens the surrealist technique of estrangement, or “dépaysement”, to a spark, considering this to be how the movement exacts its true artistic power; the more disparate and incoherent the juxtaposed images, the greater their combinational efficacy: “The value of the image depends upon the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors. When the difference exists only slightly, as in a comparison, the spark is lacking” (Breton, 1969, p. 37). In doing this, art can give new meaning to the worn-out, the shoddy, the cliché, or, as Cocteau puts it when writing the preface to his surrealist spectacle, *Les mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, “rehabilitate the commonplace” (Albright, 2000, p. 280). Surrealist poetry thus resists any reading that might be considered straightforward. By appropriating common maxims, bromides and offering them in new combinatory possibilities, any sense of platitude or quotidian conjunctions is abandoned in favour of new meaning. Groupe MU writes that “Le syntagme domaine de la combinaison, devient alors celui de la liberté, d’un certain chaos, ou mieux, d’une connaissance encore future”.¹⁵ This same process of supposedly indiscriminate assemblage characterizes surrealist visual art, in which “monstrous” entities are inserted into clichéd settings (Ehman, 2005, p. 39). Given that such a transgressive process inevitably results in the dismantling of aesthetic hegemonies and hierarchies, it comes as little surprise that, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the literary tropes of “carnival” and “grotesque realism”, surrealist practice has been considered carnivalesque. Elza Adamowicz writes, in particularly Bakhtinian style, that

Surrealist collages are liberated forms, masks in a perpetual carnival, the irruption of the other in the midst of outmoded images or hackneyed phrases. In these limbs, [...] aggressivity and eroticism are unleashed, along with the licence of the fantastic and the vitality of the marvellous. With the emergence of the monster hierarchies are overturned, taboos are transgressed in the joyous collision of limbs: collage-monsters are a manifestation of *jouissance*. (Adamowicz, 1998, p. 97)

Surrealism and carnival share a politically motivated desire to see life inside-out, utilizing a process of unification that reverses the social order and “is not limited to predetermined representations and significations” (Ruffolo, 2009, p. 78). Whilst there is assuredly scope to discuss Poulenc’s work through Bakhtin’s carnivalesque lens, this strikes me as a decidedly queer mode of expression, and one which I will explore in such terms later. The cutting up and assembling of disparate elements, the principal practice of surrealist collage which deals in semantics through the manipulation of preexisting signs, and is distinct to the “formal and aesthetic considerations of cubist *papier collé*” (LeBaron, 2002, pp. 27–74, 28), is a tenet to which surrealist art irrespective of media continued to subscribe: “Pour qu’il y ait surréalisme, il faut qu’il y ait réalisme, il faut qu’il y ait une réalité à manipuler” [For there to be surrealism, there needs to be realism, there must be a reality to manipulate] (Leiris, 1992, p. 16).

Music, however, was not afforded the same privileged standing by the surrealists as other artistic media, and arguably as a consequence of this, music’s relationship with surrealism has been afforded little scholarly exploration until only recently. In fact, to say that the surrealists—by which I mean Breton’s official circle, none of whom were musicians themselves—were actively anti-music would not be exaggeration. For example, Breton wrote:

To these varying degrees of sensation correspond spiritual realizations sufficiently precise and distinct to allow me to grant to plastic expression a value that on the other hand I shall never cease to refuse to musical expression [...] Auditive images, in fact, are inferior to visual images not only in clarity but also in strictness, and, with all due respect to a few melomaniacs, they are not destined to strengthen the idea of human greatness. So may night continue to descend upon the orchestra [...]. (Breton, 2002, p. 1)

Simple ignorance towards music contributed in no small way to the group’s denunciation of the medium, Breton later having candidly admitted as much (Albright, 2000, p. 274); he is also known to have described music as “the most deeply confusing of all forms”.¹⁶ Having said that, Breton later relaxed his stance on music, coming to theorize the value of music in respect of its potential, when fused with poetry,¹⁷ to “reach [the] supreme point of incandescence” (LeBaron, 2002, pp. 30) that is the expression of love-filled passion. In a rather amusing anecdote, Virgil Thomson makes the point that Breton’s surrealism, whilst championing poetry over music, is in fact founded on fundamentals of musical composition:

I got myself into a lovely little—shall we say controversy—with André Breton, by pointing out that the discipline of spontaneity, which he was asking his surrealist neophytes to adopt, was new for language but something that composers had been practicing for centuries. (Thomson, 1981, p. 548)

Poulenc was well aware of this anti-music stance, writing that “[the surrealists] all detested music. For Breton, for example, music had no meaning, it was useless and cumbersome[, ...] and Aragon listens to it willingly, but without any great pleasure” (Poulenc, 1978, p. 101). The composer’s friendship with, and inclination towards the work of, Apollinaire and Éluard is, therefore, of little surprise, given that neither exhibited the same distaste for music as the other surrealists: Apollinaire “dreamed of a new kind of theatre, in which the arts were *coextensive but multiplanar*: in which music, dance, and painting coexisted in a condition of inter-regarding independence” (Albright, 2000, p. 246; emphasis in original), and Poulenc wrote that he immediately took to Éluard “firstly, because he was the only Surrealist who tolerated my music and then because his entire poetic output is sheer musical vibration” (Poulenc, 1954, p. 93).

In 1930, Adorno was amongst the first to consider surrealism in music, a train of thought instigated by Weill’s collaboration with Brecht, and he thus describes *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1927) as the first surrealist opera (Hinton, 1986, pp. 61–82, 67). It was Weill’s “incorporation of dance music and jazz by way of a montage effect” (Hinton, 1986, p. 69) that was evidence of a surrealist compositional technique for Adorno. Adorno saw the opera’s surrealist music as “from the

first to the last note, [...] directed at the shock produced by a head-on confrontation with the dilapidated world of the bourgeoisie”.¹⁸ In other words, social polemical impact—the enduring *promesse du bonheur* (Adorno, 2005, pp. 223–224) that “art counterposes to an antagonistic social totality” (Wolin, 1990, pp. 93–112, 41)—is achieved as a result of the composer’s manipulation of old music, which, imbued with new function, becomes critically new. This process is described by Ernst Krenek as that of “‘refunctioning’, the premise of which is a montage technique and consists of splitting up the usual unity of text and music and imposing on each half a new meaning opposed to the earlier one”.¹⁹ As a consequence, surrealist music is often surprisingly conservative: “melodies tend to move in a conjunct, singable manner; harmonies rarely grate; structures are often easily assimilated and full of predictable recurrences” (Albright, 2000, p. 288). As Daniel Albright demonstrates in his comprehensive study of surrealism in music, this becomes even more the case when surrealist works, such as Poulenc’s *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, are contextualized and compared to Schoenberg’s dodecaphonic compositions of the 1920s (Albright, 2000, p. 288).

3.3. Surrealism and Poulenc’s musical style

Poulenc’s entire compositional aesthetic might be understood as surrealist. In fact, one can argue that even his musical background—unlike other members of *Les six*, Poulenc did not enter the Paris Conservatoire to undertake study in composition²⁰—already lends itself to surrealist practice: in the absence of a formal education, Poulenc’s “window into the art of composition [was] really through the act of imitation” (Clifton, 2002, p. 26). His own predisposition towards a distinctly eclectic musical taste also means that there existed broad influences which he could, and did, flagrantly embezzle, a hallmark of both Poulencian and surrealist style. David Drew, for example, writes the following regarding Poulenc’s stylistic forefathers:

To be sure, the main influences on Poulenc’s style are not difficult to discern. The lyrical passages have origins in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century French tradition that are too obvious to require enumeration; one might start, for instance, by comparing almost any of these passages with bars eleven to eighteen of the second of Debussy’s *Chansons de Bilitis*. Most of the songs in fast tempi stem from the *opera comique* tradition, whilst the rapid keyboard pieces derive from the style of French clavecinistes. (Drew, 1961, p. 280)

Given Poulenc’s particular fondness for pilfering his musical honey from the likes of Stravinsky, that is, as Rostand notes, from composers who are themselves thieves, Albright is led aptly to cast Stravinsky in the role of Fagin, who “teach[es] his younger colleagues how to pick pockets” (Albright, 2000, p. 292). To take, for example, *Pulcinella*, Poulenc steals from Stravinsky, who in turn steals from Pergolesi, a large number of whose works having been quoted in Stravinsky’s ballet which, originally thought of as Pergolesi’s, are now additionally attributed to Domenico Gallo (born c.1730), Carlo Monza (1735–1801), Alessandro Parisotti (1853–1913), Count Unico Wilhelm von Wassenaer (1692–1766) and many others unknown (see Brook, 1988). However, Poulenc’s unabashed admiration for the genius of other composers was coupled with an eagerness to pay homage to those who had influenced him artistically (read: from those he had stolen); the composer was only too happy to acknowledge his musical debts, and wrote that “[he] shall never minimize these influences, not wishing to be the son of an unknown father” (Bernac, 1977, p. 35). Interestingly, during a 2013 lecture given at the National Gallery of Art, London, Simon Morrison points out that, rather strangely, Poulenc has also claimed to have stolen things that it has since been revealed was not actually the case:

To the extent that surrealism aimed to open up the mind to phenomena beyond regular conscious perception, it should be noted that Poulenc also confessed to stealing things that he did not in fact steal. He claimed, for example, that he found the text for the three choruses for the ballet [*Les biches*] in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, but he just made them up. He made them up in order to serve his own subversive purposes. (Morrison, 2013)

In terms of the surrealist leanings of these literary compositions, Morrison goes on further to say:

The mock-choruses have contextually witty titles like ‘Say What Is Love’ and ‘My Daughters Must Be Married Soon’. The iteration of certain syllables in these choruses suggest the kind of semantic de-coupling that is not only characteristic of surrealism, but the sister art known as dadaism. (Morrison, 2013)

Scholars have frequently attempted to articulate the essence of Poulenc’s style through compositional consistency, one such example being Mary Stringer, who argues that “throughout [Poulenc’s] entire canon one finds a seemingly effortless abundance of beautiful melody” (Stringer, 1986, p. 30), and that, in the supposed absence of any other unifying musical trait, this might therefore be thought of as the overriding stylistic characteristic—the sine qua non—that “binds together all the disparate musical elements and seals them with the stamp of Poulenc” (Stringer, 1986, p. 30). I would argue against this particular assessment, which strikes me as somewhat unhelpful and naïve when bearing in mind that, although a tunesmith of the highest order, such an argument does not serve to differentiate Poulenc from, say, Ravel or Gershwin, nor help to elucidate more than one aspect of a characterfully manifold style. Furthermore, I would instead posit that it is the very disparate bindings of musical styles, quotations and allusions themselves—those that have so adeptly defied musicological compartmentalization—that betray the “Poulenc” in Poulenc; one should not look for consistency but instead for inconsistency.

Poulenc’s surrealist musical collages tend to be born of the composer’s own musical penchants, and thus extend from the works of Claude Gervaise (1525–1583) to Poulenc’s own contemporaries, such as Satie (1866–1925) and Stravinsky (1882–1971).²¹ In fact, there are few composers who do not receive mention in scholarly sources as either having a musical influence on Poulenc or with whom, at some point, the composer enjoyed an artistic love affair—the reality being that no such two distinctions can truly be made.²² Poulenc writes, fully aware that he is no harmonic innovator, that “there is a place for new music which is happy to use the chords of others. Wasn’t that the case with Mozart and Schubert?”²³

Poulenc’s musical taste, however, does not discriminate. With the composer’s love of urban Paris comes an appreciation of popular French culture, one that transcends the boundaries imposed between rarefied art and the popular, and which generously leaks café-concert, music hall atmosphere into his music:

I’ve often been reproached about my ‘street music’ side. Its genuineness has been suspected, and yet there’s nothing more genuine to me. Our two families ran their business houses in the Marais district, full of lovely old houses, a few yards from the Bastille. From childhood onwards I’ve associated café tunes with the Couperin Suites in a common love without distinguishing between them.²⁴

Whilst Poulenc’s drawing of inspiration from popular musical styles represented a modern aesthetic that Cocteau strongly endorsed, the composer’s concurrent looking to higher culture proved much to his contemporary’s chagrin—Poulenc subverted the dichotomy of “high” versus “low” (see Perloff, 1991). For Cocteau, who valorized the low cultural styles of the circus, dance halls and jazz, in other words, the sounds of everyday Paris, the evils of music which he considered academic or highbrow, such as that of Wagner and Stravinsky who are the subjects of his diatribe quoted below, required nothing short of warding against:

How can we defend ourselves? We set our teeth. We feel cramps like those of a tree which grows in jerks with all its branches. There is even in the very speed of this sublime growth something theatrical. I do not know if I make myself clear; Wagner cooks us slowly; Stravinsky does not give us time to say ‘Ouch!’; but both of them upset our nerves. This is music which comes from the bowels; an octopus from which you must flee or else it will devour you. (Crosland, 1972, p. 319)

As Clifton points out, Cocteau has also made use of the rhetorical trope “escaping from Germany” in his manifesto *Le Coq et l’Arlequin*, which can be readily understood as “representing an escape from high culture, especially Germanic music of the late 19th century” (Clifton, 2002, p. 96). To achieve Poulenc’s harmonic style, Ned Rorem wrote the following musical recipe:

Take Chopin’s dominant sevenths, Ravel’s major sevenths, Fauré’s straight triads, Debussy’s minor ninths, Mussorgsky’s augmented fourths. Filter them, as Satie did, through the added sixth chords of vaudeville (which the French call *le music-hall*), blend in a pint of Couperin to a quart Stravinsky, and you get the harmony of Poulenc. (Rorem (1988, p. 135)

As a consequence, Poulenc is best understood as a “composer of surrealizing misquotations” (Albright, 2000, p. 287). It is through his indiscriminate aligning of seemingly incongruous musical elements—the marrying of the quotidian and the rarefied, the embracing of both common Parisian parlance and the languages of composers of high art—that Poulenc articulates his unique, surrealist perspective. Poulenc’s music does not seek to fashion a new language of music, but instead simply “[tilt] the semantic planes of the old language of music” (Albright, 2000, p. 289). The drawing on the sounds of other composers and those of Paris loads Poulenc’s music with historical and social meaning, which he refashions through juxtaposition newly wrought meaning, assaulting or discrediting that of convention. Albright explains that

Surrealist music [...] is often rather conservative in harmony and melody. There is a simple explanation for this: [...] Surrealist music [aspired] to mean wrong; and in order to mean wrong, music must mean something. Thus Surrealist music depended on semantic cues interpretable by traditional means. (Albright, 2000, p. 312)

Poulenc’s musical thievery was, therefore, a surrealist necessity; in order to dislocate original meanings, Poulenc had to first steal to establish a context of aural familiarity from which to work to miscontextualize his appropriated sounds and thus redevelop a system of meaning. As Samuel Wilson puts it, “past material is drawn on as a source of significance, whilst at the same time the significance of these materials in the present goes beyond their past usage” (Wilson, 2013, p. 8), thus rendering a dialectical relationship between the simultaneously preserved yet superseded sources. Poulenc’s music privileges reinvention in a typically surrealist sense, which, as Adorno would have it, confronts and critiques the older musical styles and clichés of the bourgeoisie.

3.4. Poulenc, identity and a queer surrealism

Jane Fulcher writes that,

for Poulenc, as opposed to Stravinsky, the past was not a foreign object to appropriate, or a challenging technical construct, but rather a part of his own identity. Poulenc deftly captured the eighteenth century’s ironic, cutting humour in order, incisively, to criticize his culture, often evoking the eighteenth century’s greater freedom in sexual mores as a commentary on his own day. (Fulcher, 2005, p. 189)

In one sense, Poulenc was fairly candid when it came to elucidating the relationship between his music and his life. For example, the composer frequently spent leisure time in the early part of his life in Nogent-Sur-Marne. A short distance from Paris and with a “stale odour of French fries, riverboats and pom-poms” (Hell, 1959, p. 14), Nogent—a “place to let your guard down” (Ivry, 1996, p. 17)—gave rise to what Poulenc called the “naughty-boy side” (Poulenc, 1954, pp. 17–18) and “erotic aspect” (Hell, 1959, p. 14) of his early works:

I am writing to you from Nogent [...] Nothing is as melancholy as this sort of introspection into the past; however, I can never resist it. [...] An important aspect of my music can be explained by my suburban past, this aspect of ‘tickling in the right places’ which can be found in ‘Hotel’. (Poulenc, 1991, pp. 241–242)

The extent to which Poulenc's music is concerned with articulating issues surrounding the composer's complex personal identity, one which, as a homosexual, was socially fraught, is becoming increasingly clear thanks to recent scholarship (see e.g. Burton, 2002; Clifton, 2002; Ivry, 1996; Lacombe, 2013; Purvis, 2011; Schmidt, 2001). Philip Purvis considers Poulenc's remarks about Nogent as constituting a "creative alibi", realistically used to obscure the fundamental associations of the composer's music with Paris, replacing its ties with the city, which allowed Poulenc to sate his (homo) sexual desires,²⁵ with ones to Nogent, where its "assuredly heterosexual and youthful eroticism [...] would have been familiar to many".²⁶ Keith Clifton goes as far as to assert that, concerning Poulenc's *La Voix humaine*, "when we view Elle on stage we are actually observing Poulenc himself".²⁷ After all, "[his] music is [his] portrait" (Poulenc, 1994, p. 24). According to Poulenc's own aphorism, although, in retrospect, a reference instead to a musical mosaic would have been more apt.

Poulenc's homosexuality, his "anomalie",²⁸ was a source of great distress to the composer. It was an open secret,²⁹ and one that, then having fallen in love with Richard Chanlaire, in 1929, the composer confides to Valentine Hugo, telling of the great anguish caused by "mon gros secret, mon grave secret" (Poulenc, 1994, p. 304). Eventually, coupled with doubts about his work and legacy as a composer, this anguish would lead to severe depression, insomnia and hospitalization in Evian, where Poulenc would recover (see Burton, 2002, pp. 97–101). In this same correspondence, Poulenc promises to take Hugo's advice and leave for Venice with Chanlaire to escape the climate of fear and harassment that permeated Paris for gay men, and thus inevitably served to sculpt queer cultural activity at the time.

Whilst the Code Napoléon (1804) did not legislate against same-sex sexual relationships, the French police sought instead to dissuade homosexual behaviour, which they associated with violence and criminal behaviour. By instead relying on laws against public indecency, the police wielded the power to expose homosexuals, thus rendering gay men fearful of public disgrace or possible imprisonment, despite a lack of any true legal basis for doing so (see Barbedette & Carassou, 1981, p. 14; Dean, 2000, pp. 143–161; Murat, 2006, p. 22). Laure Murat has argued that the absence of explicitly anti-gay legislation served to undermine any need for the establishment of politically motivated groups seeking the amelioration of homosexuality in the public perception, given that there was simply no legal incentive to do so. Public homophobia in France derived in part from the popular and xenophobic belief that homosexuality was a foreign aberration, a "German vice",³⁰ and also the natalistic fear that a declining birthrate, the result of the supposed degeneration of traditional family life, continued to sap France of its strength.³¹ There exists a widely reproduced cartoon from 1941 that depicts a pair of French peasants being mocked for their moralistic explanations for 1940: "How can you be surprised [about the defeat]? You gorged yourselves on the works of Proust, Gide and Cocteau" (Jackson, 2003, p. 4). These writers were, of course, all homosexual.

Subsequent to France's early defeat in the Second World War, thought by many the result of its inability to repopulate, the Vichy regime endorsed a *Code de la famille*,³² seeking to reverse the Republic's supposed moral laxity and reinstate traditional gender roles, which homosexuality by its very definition was thought to undermine, and persuade the population that "sexual reproduction was the patriotic obligation of all adult citizens" (Hanna, 1996, p. 204). Consequently, French homosexuals were encouraged towards a particular type of discretion, described by Murat as "the obligatory dissimulation of a sexual orientation which, though authorized, was compelled to remain shameful and hidden, fearing the light of day" (Murat, 2006, p. 22; as quoted in Moore, 2012a, p. 301).

Given this environment that compelled homosexuality to remain unseen, Poulenc's decision to openly dedicate his violin sonata to Lorca's memory represents nothing short of an act of defiance against both occupying Germanic forces and popular homophobic attitudes. Lorca was executed by nationalist militia at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, and his works banned in Franco's Spain. Whilst there remains substantial controversy surrounding the motives for Lorca's execution, scholars allege that his sexual orientation³³ and open political leanings (Gibson, 1989) were likely causes. The sonata's

Lorquian affiliation was not only known by those attending the work's premiere, but also disseminated in the weekly arts newspaper *Comœdia* prior to the concert, for which Poulenc had written an article on his upcoming premieres, those of the violin sonata and the *Chansons villageoises*. The composer not only referred to his sonata's dedication and the line of poetry that appends the "Intermezzo", in doing so publicly allying himself with the controversial poet, but he also placed Lorca's name next to that of Resistance poet Éluard, who was then living and publishing in secret (see Moore, 2012b, pp. 211–217; Sprout, 2013, pp. 26–27). Leslie Sprout, who has written on examples of Poulenc's wartime musical resistances, considers the effect of the composer's reference to Lorca subtly efficacious: one that was "easy to miss for those who weren't paying attention, but unmistakable in its intent for those who were" (Sprout, 2013, p. 27). Those paying attention were the initiated, or those the composer considered similarly "corrupt": when recounting the sordidness of *Les biches*, Morrison quotes Poulenc as describing the work as "suffused with an atmosphere of wantonness, which is something only to be perceived by those who have already been corrupted".³⁴ He goes on to conclude acutely that

Poulenc's surrealism thus supposes a kind of postlapsarian *savoir-faire*; surrealism whose adherence cheerfully swaps sexual partners and plumbs the depths of human sexuality, sweeps away shame, and deconstructs desire. Adam and Eve did not know they were naked so they did not know to cover up until they were made aware of the body as a site of sin; they were not ignorant, just innocent. Once they had internalized a supposedly Godless drive to physical lust, represented of course by the serpent, they were compelled to cover up their passion. Poulenc dresses up his score in this kind of deception. (Morrison, 2013)

To further elucidate the subversive value of Poulenc's music, it strikes me that a consideration of his work from an alternate angle might prove germane, and given the arguably close relationship between Poulencian style and the paraphrase, an outline of the form may provide a useful parallel to my discussion. In his article titled "Transcription, Transgression, and the (Pro)Creative Urge", Ivan Raykoff discusses the queerness—or lack thereof—of the arrangement, transcription and the paraphrase, the latter being the most queerly potent. Although Raykoff positions his argument mostly within the context of piano works, its value is not diminished when considered in relation to Poulenc's varied output or the violin sonata.

Alan Walker defines the paraphrase as "a free variation on the original" (Walker, 1981, pp. 50–63, 52), which eschews reproduction in favour of metamorphosis: "In a paraphrase", he writes, "the arranger is free to vary the original, to weave his own fantasies around it, to go where he wills" (Walker, 1981, p. 59). Just as Poulenc's surrealistic "arranging" of stolen musics rewrites meaning, the perverse paraphrase similarly privileges the "reconce[ption of] musical material" (Raykoff, 2002, pp. 150–176, 159) by means of its unabashed infidelity to the original score: its queer transgressions. Queerness, according to Moe Meyer, indicates

an ontological challenge that displaces bourgeois notions of the Self as unique, abiding, and continuous whilst substituting instead a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous, and processually constituted by repetitive and stylized acts. (Meyer, 1994, pp. 1–22, 2–3)

Raykoff establishes his distinction between transcription and paraphrase precisely on Meyer's *précis*, writing that

[t]he transcription, charged with fidelity to the patrilinear composer-progenitor's text/work/body, maintains the 'unique, abiding, and continuous' identity of a musical work despite surface alterations of color and medium. The paraphrase, on the other hand, is idiosyncratic and unpredictable: it is performative in that it enacts a self-conscious display of technique, style, and personality; improvisational in that it veers off unexpectedly from the original score with flights of fantasy; and discontinuous because the arranger steps into the accepted reproductive progression, displacing to a significant extent the original ancestral forebear. In short, the paraphrase is *queerly and transgressively reproductive*. (Raykoff, 2002, p. 161; emphasis in original)

One such reproductive transgression the paraphrase commits, according to Raykoff, is that “it oversteps the boundary of a work’s unique and original content in pursuit of a newly configured outward expression” (Raykoff, 2002, p. 161). The form becomes a mode of queer expression when “the marginalized and disenfranchised advance their own interests by entering alternative signifying codes into discourse by attaching them to existing structures of signification”.³⁵ Whilst of course Poulenc does not compose paraphrases as such—and he is most certainly a composer, not an arranger—there exists a strong resemblance between the composer’s surrealist style of promiscuous recycling and a musical form established similarly on the rewriting of an original musical work.³⁶

Albright is ultimately inclined to define Poulenc’s music in terms of its “semantic dissonance”. He argues that, just as fiercely as Schoenberg who attacked the conventions of harmonic syntax, Poulenc “attacked musical conventions [...] on the level of semantics” (Albright, 2000, p. 288; emphasis in original), rightly concluding that “Poulenc was original not in the way that his music sounds, but in the way that his music means” (Albright, 2000, p. 288). By means of his unique and surrealist matching of the “polite with the *risqué*, the courtly with the plebeian, the tender with the grotesque” (Drew, 1961, p. 281), Poulenc’s music is characterized by an inimitable charm, one that further “arises from [the composer’s] unusual adeptness at working out fluid systems of musical meaning while bobbling [*sic*] along on rivers of disabled textual systems” (Albright, 2000, p. 305). Drew further explains that

Clearly there is something profoundly equivocal about the originality of music which *at no single point* gives any sign of originality; music which, moreover, harbours discrepancies of style that one would only expect in the work of a first-year-composition student. The fact is that Poulenc’s uniqueness lies solely in the nature of his sensibility. Possessing, as he does, the ability to juxtapose incongruous elements in such a way that a consistently ironic light is shed upon them, he produces by means of this irony the impression of a unified idea. During the course of this imaginative and musical process, ideas that are basically undistinguished acquire a certain poetic refinement, for the irony admits of a certain pathos, and the pathos is an outcome of true feeling. (Drew, 1961, p. 281)

Raykoff also refers to problems of (in)authenticity that arise as a result of questions of originality, reminding us that transgressive treatment of an original might only serve to prove that “the composer’s authenticity may be as much an illusion as the virtuoso’s spectacle” (Raykoff, 2002, p. 167). This all chimes nicely with Albright’s metaphor of Poulenc as “a kind of human gramophone, a device for recording old music and playing it back with a heightened artificiality” (Albright, 2000, p. 291), but his positioning of Poulenc is almost that of a negative counterpart to Schoenberg, or, as Richard Taruskin puts it, an “anti-Schoenberg” (Taruskin, 2009, p. 147), all the whilst based on the argument that whilst Schoenberg emancipated dissonance, Poulenc emancipated semantic dissonance. Whilst I would argue that semantic play across culturally imposed frontiers of ostensibly distinct and irreconcilable stylistic derivatives—as I understand Albright’s notion of semantic dissonance—clearly constitutes an important, if not the most important, aspect of Poulencian style, such fetishisation of forms of dissonance relegates crucial aspects of personality which provide a counterpoint to Albright’s “semantic dissonance”. As Ned Rorem wrote,

[Poulenc’s] very lack of originality became the unabashed signature of unique glories. The premise of unoriginality, it seems to me, must smooth the ground for any ‘original’ assessment of Poulenc’s current value. That ground, fertilized by music’s five variables—melody, harmony, counterpoint, rhythm (the only component to exist by itself), and instrumentation—was plowed by the composer in his way, the way of pastiche that bloomed into personality. (Rorem, 1988, p. 134)

To consider Poulenc in such a light risks elevating him to some high modernist tower or ascribing him with an intellectual agenda that would undermine the quality of his music: “Above all do not analyse my music—love it!” (Bernac, 1977, p. 13). Whilst surrealist innovation abounds in Poulenc’s work, these vivisections of semantic tropes in his music remain a highly personal endeavour; indeed,

Poulenc's self-absorption is described by Rorem as nothing short of stupefying (Rorem, 1988, p. 128). He composed instead to celebrate, revel and agonize as his personal experiences dictated, be they pleasures, happinesses, difficulties or tragedies.

4. Lorca and "Las seis cuerdas"

El cante no es alegría
el cante es decir las penas
que se llevan escondías. (Anon.³⁷)

As previously mentioned, Poulenc prepends the second movement, the "Intermezzo", of his violin sonata with the words of Federico García Lorca's "Las seis cuerdas" ["The Six Strings"]:

La guitarra,
hace llorar a los sueños.
El sollozo de las almas
perdidas,
se escapa por su boca
redonda.
Y como la tarántula
teje una gran estrella
para cazar suspiros,
que flotan en su negro
aljibe de madera.

[The guitar / makes dreams weep. / The whimpering of lost / souls / escapes from its round / mouth. / And like the tarantula / it spins a great star / hunting the sighs / that float in its black / wooden well.]

Poulenc's reference to the poem does not extend further than its first sentence, which in French reads "La guitare fait pleurer les songes",³⁸ and was considered by the composer not to have lost in translation any of the appeal of the original Spanish (Schmidt, 2001, pp. 282–283.) Lorca's poem was part of his larger work, *Poema del cante jondo*, that was published in 1931, despite being written in 1921–1924, and, as its title indicates, was inspired by the Andalusian song form *cante jondo*. Lorca's musicality is well known; indeed, music is often considered the most important artistic activity in Lorca's life besides literature, given that he originally yearned to be a musician above all else (Johnston, 1998, p. 41). Lorca also enjoyed a close friendship with composer Manuel de Falla, which developed into a profound mutual influence, despite their immediate differences: Lorca was gay, liberal and belonged to the avant-garde, unlike Falla who was a devout Catholic (see Orringer, 2014). The poet enjoyed exposure to Andalusian music and folklore from an early age, from which his pre-occupation with the guitar is said to have stemmed.³⁹ The *Poema del cante jondo* is often described as particularly musical. Edward Stanton, for example, writes that it "penetrates our ear with the subtlety and intimacy of music for the guitar".⁴⁰

Cante jondo, or "deep song", was the song of the Spanish gypsies of Andalusia. The product of the "smoldering amalgam of conquered races of the barbarous European Castilian feudalism" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 1), *cante jondo* had established its form by the mid-eighteenth century. Two of Lorca's lectures reveal his affinity for and knowledge of this music,⁴¹ and in 1922, he and Manuel de Falla together organized the "Concurso del Cante Jondo". As indicated by the quote that begins this chapter, *cante jondo* was not intended as entertainment, but as an intense outward expression of deep-seated grief or pain, originally the plight of the outcast gypsy people relegated to living on outskirts of many Andalusian cities (Hobbs, 2004, pp. 1–17). The song itself is performed by a *cantaor*, and

traditionally accompanied by the guitar or *toque*. In his presentation at the “Concurso”, Lorca speaks of Andalusian song as the lifeblood of the Spanish region:

Cultivated since time immemorial, the deep song’s profound psalmody has moved every illustrious traveler who ever ventured across our strange, varied landscapes. From the peaks of the Sierra Nevada to the thirsty olive groves of Cordoba [...], deep song has traversed and defined our unique, complicated land of Andalusia.⁴²

He further described the spirit of the *cante jondo* as follows: “In these poems Pain is made flesh, takes human form, and shows her profile; she is a dark woman wanting to catch birds in her net of wind” (Lorca, 1975, p. 34). And it is clear that Lorca articulated his own anguish by means of the principle of *cante jondo* in his own surrealist poetry.⁴³ As with Poulenc, Lorca was faced with dealing with his own (homo)sexuality that had no place in traditional and provincial Spanish society. The poet, or “el maricón de la pajarita” [the Queer with the Bow-Tie] as Lorca was known amongst the local bourgeoisie (Gibson, 1989, p. 408), thus turned to surrealism, which, although originating in France, had swiftly spread through Spain’s artistic and intellectual communities, representing an “explosion of a society beneath the repressive anguish of an antiquated morality” (Morris, 1972, p. 4.). Such moral rectitude, including strictures on sexual expression, was expounded by the Catholic Church, an extant power structure supported by the “anachronistic and moribund nobility” (Blackwell, 2003, pp. 31–46, 33), which included the dictator General Miguel Primo de Rivera. The appeal of surrealism to Lorca, not unlike Poulenc’s surrealist inclinations, was therefore as an act of rebellion against the repression of Spanish society, championing liberty without limits and the stringencies of reality (Castro, 1993, p. 63): Lorca presents a “*hidden polemic*, an implied disagreement with the dominant social system” (Blackwell, 2003, p. 42).

“Las seis cuerdas” is the second poem of three within the *Poema del cante jondo* in which the guitar, a recurrent motif throughout Lorca’s works, is the explicit focus: the first, “La guitarra” [The Guitar], and the last, “Adivinanza de la guitarra” [Riddle of the Guitar]. Lorca uses the music of “guitarras dolientes” [mourning guitars] to conjure evocations of the distant sounds of the Albaicín, Grenada’s gypsy quarter, suggesting the noises of love and passion: “[the guitar’s] association with love and sorrow [...] flow[s] like a pair of rivulets from a common stream throughout Lorca’s writings” (Stanton, 1978, p. 37). “The Six Strings” sees Lorca turn his attention specifically to the strings of the guitar. This short, introspective poem, the first half consisting of a prose-like irregularity, and the remainder of metrically regular hexasyllables, depicts the power of the elegiac guitar to express otherwise hidden feelings (Debicki, 1994, p. 26). The death of a flamenco singer has inspired the instrument to “[lament] unsung songs, desires of an artist lost to the world” (Orringer, 2014, p. 68). These sorrows, given life by the profundity of the guitar’s sound, flee through the “round mouth” of the instrument, hunted by the hand of the guitarist which has been transformed into a web-weaving tarantula. Edward Stanton argues that in this, and other similar works, Lorca “seems to be portraying the climate of vice that formed a real part of the Andalusian demimonde at the turn of the century, with its seedy taverns and the *café cantante*” (Stanton, 1975, pp. 52–58, 54), thus considering the poem decidedly anti-flamenco.

Given such an understanding of “Las seis cuerdas”, it becomes a decidedly apposite text for Poulenc to use as a basis for a work written in Lorca’s memory, an artist similarly lost prematurely to the world as a result of an oppressive, political reality which condemned his identity.

5. The “Intermezzo”

This intermezzo is a melancholic improvisation in memory of a poet whom I love equally with Apollinaire or Eluard. [Poulenc (Schmidt, 2001, p. 283)]

5.1. Stylistic diversity and a foreign accent

Pierre Bernac famously quipped that, being too typically French, Poulenc “could never adopt a foreign accent, neither in speaking (!) nor in composing” (Bernac, 1977, p. 198). Whether or not this might be considered justified, the “Intermezzo” from the violin sonata has most assuredly as un-Parisian, or as foreign, a flavour as might be found in Poulenc’s oeuvre.

Although he says little about the violin sonata, and littler still about the second movement, Keith Daniel is the first to identify the song-like quality of the “Intermezzo” (Daniel, 1982, p. 122). Strangely, he also describes its form as simply “free”, which seems somewhat at odds with the implied structure of a song-like nature that he notes. As I have said, I would go further and describe the “Intermezzo” as a lament, in which case, the possibility of verses as a structural frame seems appropriate. Stringer argues simply for a ternary structure in the “Intermezzo”, whereas Hsin-Lin Tsai rather overcomplicates the issue (see Stringer, 1986, pp. 132–135; Tsai, 2009, p. 52). Ultimately, this movement can, and should, be reduced to its respective stylistic components, namely: *cante jondo*, Poulenc’s use of popular material (which can be further subdivided into verses), tango and cortège (see Table 1). As one would expect of Poulenc and his surrealist technique, this music is something of a melting pot for a variety of musical styles, which, in the case of this work, are rather clearly delineated. We begin with the sounds of *cante jondo*.

The introduction to the movement opens with a *pianissimo* double-octave figure in the piano, evoking immediately the sound of the guitar that is so closely associated with Andalusian *cante jondo* and of which Lorca was so fond. This 3-note melody that emphasizes the minor third of B to D resembles one from Falla’s *El sombrero de tres picos* (1919 published in de Falla, 1921). The increasingly aggressive intervallic ostinato, found at Figure 9 and marked “Pochissimo più mosso, ma ritmico”, swiftly propels the listener towards the final chords of the “Danza de la molinera”. Poulenc, however, replaces the energy of Falla’s ostinato with a languid maudlinism, “très doux et mélancolique” [very sweet and melancholic], as though any Spanish vitality having been extinguished by Lorca’s death.

The use of double-octave spacing for a pianistic representation of the guitar is a compositional device of which Poulenc would have been aware. Compare, for example, “Asturias (Leyenda)” from Albéniz’s *Suite Espagnole*, or “Fête-dieu à Séville” from his *Iberia*, both works for which the premise is essentially the transposition of guitar technique to the piano, and ones that an accomplished pianist such as Poulenc would almost certainly have played.⁴⁴ Here, Albéniz employs double-octave spacing as an imitation of the ringing, bare sonorities of the guitar, and in particular the sound of its open strings, which can often be found in *cante jondo* sections of his works (Mast, 1974, p. 214). Poulenc, also benefiting from a string instrument at his disposal, further bolsters this allusion with single pizzicato notes in the violin.

Table 1. Style as structural framework in the “Intermezzo”

Structure	Introduction	A	B (“Verse 1”)	B ¹ (“Verse 2”)	C	D	A ¹	Coda
Bar numbers	1–8	9–19	20–30	31–38	39–42	43–51	52–54	55–69
Style	<i>cante jondo</i>	<i>cante jondo</i>	French/popular	French/popular	tango	French/popular	<i>cante jondo</i>	cortège
Key tonal areas	D major (tonic); Phrygian on A	Dorian on A; Phrygian on A	D (tonic) major; B \flat major	B major; E \flat major	D \flat major; B major	C \flat major; E \flat major; wholetone	Phrygian on A	D minor (tonic minor); tonal-modal ambiguity

Example 1. Albéniz, “Asturias (Leyenda)” from the *Suite Espagnole*. Unión Musical Española 1918, Madrid (6310). Bars 63–9, double-octave spacing.

Example 2. Albéniz, “Fête-dieu à Séville” from *Iberia*. Edition Mutuelle 1906–1908, Paris (E. 3083–3086). Bars 338–42, double-octave spacing.

There also exists a prosodic relationship between the piano’s opening and the text from Lorca—the six syllables of “guitare fait pleurer” fit nicely onto the piano line both rhythmically and in terms of melodic contour, almost serving to impress a lyrical refrain upon Poulenc’s wordless melody, and further contributing to its song-like quality.

References to the guitar abound in the “Intermezzo”,⁴⁵ which together serve to bind the more disparate stylistic elements of the work by means of placing them on a Spanish landscape, albeit sometimes a distant one. Daniel points out the “uncharacteristic [...] solo violin writing” (Daniel, 1982, p. 122) in the work as a whole, considered as such due to the prevalence of single pizzicato notes, paucity of double stops, and the “little opportunity [the violin is given] to exhibit the lyrical quality usually associated with it” (Daniel, 1982, p. 122). With regard to the “Intermezzo” at least, this misses the point; idiomatic writing has given way to instrumental metamorphosis in that Poulenc calls upon the intimate sounds—the plucking of strings, and an absence of soaring melody—of the guitar. In an exposed passage for violin reminiscent of the solo bassoon opening of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, a work Poulenc knew intimately,⁴⁶ the double-octave spacing is followed with a further four bars that squarely place the music in the *cante jondo* style: the piano arpeggiates—or strums—a chord then left to resonate, over which the violin enters with an ornamented melodic line that benefits from the rich, darker sound of instrument’s fourth string on which Poulenc indicates it should be played. Using a Phrygian scale on A, Poulenc conjures up the exotically melancholic sound of the gypsy culture from which *cante jondo* comes. He later returns to this passage in bar 52, which is repeated almost verbatim but for a brief appropriation of the melody by the piano, after the swift deterioration of the movement’s climax in bar 51. The B \flat dissonance indicative of the Phrygian scale and *cante jondo* can also be found throughout the “Intermezzo”, infiltrating Poulenc’s other, seemingly incongruous, musical styles. For example, it serves to push the music of B 1 into E \flat major, and a flat harmonic region more generally from which the music only really emerges in the coda, and can also be heard grating against the As which are left to resonate in different registers and end the movement.

Bars 9–19 qualify as the main *cante jondo* section of the “Intermezzo”, where Poulenc shifts the tonality to Dorian on A. The piano’s ostinato of repeated semiquaver chords places harmonic emphasis on E, A and D, which constantly rise and fall in the bass, mimicking the open strings of the guitar. It is then the violin’s turn to strum, by means of an arpeggiated pizzicato chord, before returning to Phrygian on A to develop the *cante jondo* melody transposed from the introduction, whilst the piano’s accompaniment remains built on guitar tuning. What follows from bar 20 is the first departure from the Spanish *cante jondo*. Whilst I would argue that Poulenc yet again uses Falla as inspiration, this time co-opting the idea of a descending dotted sequence from Figure 43 of the “Pantomima” from *El amor brujo* (de Falla, 1924),⁴⁷ Poulenc clearly returns to a style more familiar, or at least geographically proximate, to him. Bars 20–30 I have designated as the first “verse”, and, by means of a return to the tonic, the opening oscillating between the tonic major and minor, and falling sixth chords, Poulenc’s music exhibits the popular inflections that permeate his output generally. Having said that, he seems unable to fully embrace the *joie de vivre* that is so often indicative of that Poulencian burlesque or café sound: perhaps the result of the music’s melancholic context.⁴⁸ The piano takes on a more traditional accompanimental role at this point, but retains its guitar-like repeated chords which now omit the first semiquaver in favour of a countermelody in the right hand. This departure from the Spanish sound may seem striking to the listener, but Poulenc is taking advantage of the versatility of the guitar as an instrument, one which is afforded a unique prevalence in popular music whilst maintaining a presence in the art music world—it is rather Poulencian in that sense. The second “verse” is an abbreviated repeat of the first, onto the end of which Poulenc affixes a reference to the *cante jondo* heard from bar 5 of the introduction.

The “Intermezzo” can be understood as a surrealist work within the boundaries of Poulenc’s compositional translation of this artistic style. Most obviously, Poulenc fashions this surrealist movement through the binding together of the sounds of *cante jondo*, the Parisian music hall, tango and *cor-tège*, disregarding any ostensible stylistic incongruities or cultural frontiers in doing so. Moreover, he bestows upon instruments for which sound production involves, although admittedly not exclusively, striking and bowing, the sensibilities of the guitar, an instrument that is plucked. Also given the song-like nature of the “Intermezzo”, despite having not been written for any voices, the result is clearly one of surrealist dislocation and miscontextualisation, even if it is not quite as conspicuous an effect as a “flaming tuba or a crowd of little men in bowler hats raining from the sky” such as might be expected from surrealist painter René Magritte (Albright, 2004b, p. 311).

5.2. A queer tango

At the heart of the “Intermezzo”, Poulenc places a tango. The composer openly acknowledges the importance of Neveu’s guiding hand when it came to his violin sonata,⁴⁹ and her biggest influence can be seen at this point. The “Tango” from Albéniz’s piano suite *España* (1890),⁵⁰ perhaps the most widely known tango in concert music, proved an extremely popular and versatile work. It has since been arranged for countless different solo or combinations of instruments, including further pianistic elaborations by the likes of Godowsky, but arguably none more famous than that by Segovia for solo guitar, and that for violin and piano duo. Kreisler’s arrangement for violin and piano was known to Neveu, indeed she recorded it in London in 1946 with her pianist brother, Jean-Paul Neveu, and the resemblance of Poulenc’s tango to that of Albéniz’s is difficult to ignore: both melodies are frequently ornamented and rely on a punctuating dotted-quaver figure which results in a lilting effect. The former is less clear in the “Intermezzo” due to Poulenc fully notating what could be considered melodic ornamentations as opposed to merely using grace notes. Having said that, the composer disguises the dance origins of his music by removing key elements of phrasing and articulation, and recalls echo-like the movement’s introductory melody in the upper voice of the piano’s left hand, marked “*doucement marque*”. Additionally, this section consists of unabated double-stopping in the violin part, which would further imply the influence of Neveu, given that she assisted the composer in writing for the technical abilities of her instrument.⁵¹

The surrealizing misquotation of tango, whether encouraged by Neveu or completely the result of Poulenc’s own volition, immediately conjures up a wealth of historic and cultural symbolism. Delving into the complicated and much-debated (queer) history of tango and the part it plays within gender

and sexual politics is, however, unfortunately much beyond the scope of this essay.⁵² Having said that, it is worth noting that tangos are characterized by an atmosphere of intensity and a latent and ambiguous sexuality; “difference is the staple of the tango dance: insurmountable gender differences and their sexual connotations, but also conflictive racial and class differences, [and] exoticized differences of identity and belonging” (Savigliano, 2009, pp. 243–278, 253). Jeffrey Tobin argues that the tango is a dance not between two presumable heterosexual dance partners, but rather its primary relation is instead “between the man who dances with a woman and the other men who watch” (Tobin, 1998, pp. 79–102, 90). This can be understood in Lacanian terms in that “the male lead in the tango *has* the phallus while the female follower *is* the phallus” (Tobin, 1998, p. 91; emphasis in original). As a phallic exhibition of desire, the female may be reduced to mere object, that which the onlooking men lack, and thus the tango can be understood as a homosocial display. By considering tango in the broader context of the Argentine discourse of sexuality, Jorge Salessi further posits that the dance is “a cultural expression with significant homoerotic and homosexual connotations” (Salessi, 1997, pp. 141–172, 141), and asks whether the common deterioration of the originally playful, agile and energetic tango to a dance of sentimentality and nostalgia is not in fact “a nostalgia for homosexual desire lost in the sanitization of a forbidden dance” (Salessi, 1997, p. 168). For the Parisian homosexual, the tango became a favourite in the early decades of the twentieth century. By 1910, after the debut of the Ballets Russes the previous year which had intensified Paris’ interest in all things foreign and exotic, the city had developed a taste for the “tang” of Argentine culture: “Paris went completely mad about it. ‘La Ville Lumière’ was dubbed ‘Tangoville’ [...] and for months Tango dancing, Tango dress, Tango teachers, and Tango teas [were] the only topics in the Gay city” (Knowles, 2009, p. 113). Homosexual clubs in the city similarly embraced the sexually liberal possibilities of tango, and its liquidity of gender roles (Collier, Cooper, Azzi, & Martin, 1997, p. 176). I would, therefore, argue that Poulenc has appropriated a dance that, historically, affords a re-envisioning of gender and embraces difference, and, perhaps above all, dramatizes and explores through dance the desire to love and be loved in and across difference: “tango revisits the desire for intimacy, emotional investment, encounter, and brings about the unavoidable anxieties of relationality and love” (Savigliano, 2009, p. 254), love here being that which is unlawful, considered in opposition of the socially scripted and that which has been normativized. Poulenc’s musical treatment of the tango—the removal of its characteristic and energetic buoyancy—I also see as representative of both the nostalgia for the sexually liberal and homosocial origins of the dance about which Salessi writes, and concurrently the risk of marginalization or worse that the composer and Lorca experienced in their respective countries. Poulenc perhaps obscured the tango-nature of his music as a means to obscure his own true identity position, indicative of that particular type of compulsory discretion that governed homosexual activity at the time. We might thus understand the violin’s line, entirely in parallel thirds, as a musical depiction of the dance partners, who, subdued by a ruling hegemony, dance together instead the sanitized steps of the forbidden tango.

5.3. Funereal voices

The coda to the “Intermezzo”, bars 55–69, is perhaps the most jarring element of the movement in the sense of an incongruity with the rest of the music. To end the “Intermezzo”, Poulenc writes a cortège, which despite sitting at odds stylistically with the rest of the movement, is nevertheless an apposite style to bring the movement to a close, given that it is a memorial to Lorca. Musically, this represents a distancing from the previous material, the styles of which are all fairly unambiguous, as Poulenc draws on a chromaticism derived from streams of parallel chords that lack any obvious stylistic derivative besides that of the cortège. The striking homophony of this writing conjures up a sound closer to that of a choral work, especially that of Poulenc’s own choral music which favours harmonic expressiveness and features very little counterpoint relative to other composers. Once again, the song-like nature of the “Intermezzo” comes to the fore, and one can suppose a prosodic link between Lorca’s text and Poulenc’s music. Admittedly, this may not be as explicit a relationship as that which I have posited for the opening piano figure, but it takes surprisingly little imagination to hear the text as a vocal line either over the piano, or by giving the piano its own voice. Having said that, this relationship is not restricted to the piano writing, as one can see that the rhythms and melodic contour of the violin part similarly allow the straightforward mapping of Lorca’s words onto

the music. Geographically speaking, the locus of the music is no longer Lorca's Spain or Poulenc's Paris, but rather ambiguous, perhaps even ethereal, given the choral undertones. Such a dramatic shift tests the aural perceptibility of the violin's pizzicato notes and the alternation of the piano's left and right hands which seem to want to maintain the sounds of the Spanish guitar.

The character of Poulenc's coda is decidedly funereal, a dirge that, although not quite interrupting, certainly disrupts the preceding stylistic elements with its comparatively alien sound. It is clear that this processional chorale owes a debt to the work of early Stravinsky, and more specifically *Petrushka* (1911), where one can find the coda's opening and repeated sonority, for example, in the brass after the chromatic descent at Figure 67. Furthermore, the musical texture at this point is reminiscent of the "Andante" from the composer's own *Concerto en sol mineur pour orgue, orchestre à cordes et timbales* (1938), the distant thunder of timpani having been replaced by the intimate sound of a pizzicato violin.⁵³ The piano clearly establishes the coda in the tonic (D) minor by continuously picking out the root or, less often, related pitches (the dominant or subdominant) in the bass, but the otherworldly chromaticism derived from the overlying parallel chords defies any would-be harmonic limitations this would imply. More specifically, D-Phrygian is implied by E \flat and B \flat , summoning the familiar modal sounds of Poulenc's previous *cante jondo* material, yet this is further disturbed by the inclusion of the F \sharp . The result is a tonal-modal ambiguity, given that the F \sharp , as a strong leading note, seeks to push the harmony towards that of G minor. Such a harmonic tussle is slightly unsettling, and furthers the distinction between the coda and the previous material.

Poulenc abandons any sense of rhythmic regularity for the entirety of the coda, using changing time signatures to accommodate irregular, uneven phrases that meander until the final notes of bar 67, which are then left to resonate. This irregularity further strengthens the links between Poulenc's spacious parallelisms and the perception of a vocal phrase or speech pattern. Stringer writes of the coda that "parallel chord streams and minor second relationships between violin and piano over a pedal tone (D) create grinding dissonance, bringing to fruition the bleakness implied by the opening material" (Stringer, 1986, pp. 134–135.). I would, however, argue that "bleakness" would be oversimplifying things somewhat; I read this coda as a Poulencian cortège for Lorca that, like Lorca's death, cuts short the preceding Spanish *jondo*, and, through a voiceless refrain of Lorca's text, mourns that society saw fit to demand the exorcism of the poet on the basis of the sexuality which Lorca and Poulenc both share.

6. Conclusion—weeping dreams

The "Intermezzo" is music of decidedly Poulencian surrealism. Whilst arguably not a typical example of Poulenc's compositional style, perhaps the result of the composer's aversion to solo strings or the melancholic subtext of the work, the "Intermezzo" exhibits the same characterful semantic dissonance that enables a listener to immediately discern its composer. Poulenc is very much a child of his time, and one who delights in musical collage, transforming the notion of musical boundaries by reconciling supposedly irreconcilable musical styles, and transcending artistic discrimination between high and low art. The composer's generosity with tuneful melody and music-hall cliché often tempts the listener to prematurely dismiss his work as lacking seriousness of purpose, but begin to untangle Poulenc's musical strands, and complex systems of meaning emerge.

Scholarly consideration of Poulenc's instrumental works is severely limited, and studies which concern themselves with the *Sonate pour violon et piano* are rarer still. As such, our understanding of this work has been bound by the narrow scope of these dated investigations which are preoccupied by superficial analysis of Poulenc's compositional style and the violin sonata's place within this. Moreover, by omitting any discussion of Poulenc's relationship to Lorca and the critical issue of the marginalizing sexuality shared by the two men, the violin sonata has too long been considered a work in which Poulenc simply felt impelled to explore a romantic style (see Stringer, 1986, pp. 117–138; Tsai, 2009, pp. 33–67). My analyses show that the "Intermezzo" is music with death at its heart. Of course it was the execution of Federico García Lorca that inspired Poulenc to finally complete a violin sonata, the instrumental form which had appeared in previous incarnations and caused him

so much compositional hardship. And Ginette Neveu, the violinist for whom the sonata was written and who gave Poulenc the benefit of her expertise, died tragically in a plane crash in 1949. However, I have sought to show how Poulenc articulates a broader despondency through his music, one that concerns his own identity position as a homosexual man facing an intolerant social and political climate that could prove dangerous. The “Intermezzo” is not just a lament to Lorca, but also to the disintegration of sexual freedom by a ruling hegemony, one that threatens the composer’s own welfare. Poulenc articulates himself firstly by means of *cante jondo*, a musical evocation of the Albaicín and the sound of its elegiac guitars which were so important to Lorca and the subject of his quoted poem. By also turning to a popular idiom, Poulenc integrates a Parisian air into the music, but one that is uncharacteristically lacking in high spirits. He brings the geographical locus of the music back to Paris, which similarly mourns Lorca’s death and the widespread homophobia of the composer’s own city, his own home. This is further shown by Poulenc’s non-tango; the dance that historically offered moments of relief to the social tensions of race, gender and ethnicity has lost its potency in the Paris of stringent gender roles and condemnation of homosexuality. The non-tango can thus represent the necessary disguising of queer subculture and the cultural camouflaging of a dance that has always operated “across a leaky border that separates the straight and the gay” (Tobin, 1998, p. 90). The “Intermezzo” ends with a cortège, Poulenc’s final gesture to Lorca’s memory that seems to imply a voiceless echo of the poet’s text: “la guitare fait pleurer les songs”. Poulenc’s music makes manifest the composer’s own “weeping dreams”, dreams that harbour the ever-present desire to live openly and without an oppressive hegemonic regime which stands in opposition to his sexual identity; but dreams from which Poulenc is roughly awakened by the political and social realities of the time, as exemplified by the tragic death of Lorca. I would argue that, in the case of the “Intermezzo”, the “postlapsarian *savoir-faire*” (Morrison, 2013) that Morrison observes in Poulenc’s surrealism has been supplanted by a hard reality. In the wake of Lorca’s death, Poulenc seems unable to bring himself to engage in his usual style of musical burlesque, but instead offers one of his favourite poets, and fellow homosexual, a sincere *adieu*.

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Notes

1. Lacombe (2013); conferences at the Paris Conservatoire, Opéra Bastille, and Keele University.
2. Jordan-Morhange, 1955; quoted in Poulenc, 1991, p. 321.
3. Benjamin Ivry remarks that the “manly decisiveness” of Neveu may have even reminded Poulenc of the late Raymonde Linossier (Ivry, 1996, p. 125).
4. These were to the third and final movement, “Presto tragico”: “I have reworked the finale. It is more convincing, but the whole remains artificial” (Poulenc, 1954, p. 121).
5. Schmidt (2001, pp. 282–283). Poulenc’s dissatisfaction with the work is further highlighted when he goes on to say that “all that, despite some technical innovations by Ginette Neveu, despite her genius of interpretation, did not amount to much”.
6. It is likely that Viñes is also responsible for the composer’s very particular ideas vis-à-vis pedalling, which he considered akin to “add[ing ...] butter to the sauce!”, and of which there can be no such thing as too much, lest it be considered “playing on a diet”: “As for pedal usage,

it is the great secret of my piano music (and often its true drama!). *One can never use enough pedal, you hear me! Never enough! Never enough!*” (Poulenc, 1954, pp. 119–133). Of Viñes’ mastery of the pedal, Poulenc said that “no one could teach [this essential ingredient in modern music] better than Viñes since he managed to play clearly in a wash of pedaling, which seems paradoxical. And what science he demonstrated in staccato!” (Schmidt, 2001, p. 20).

7. The other members of *Les six* were Georges Auric (1899–1983), Louis Durey (1888–1979), Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), Darius Milhaud (1892–1974) and Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983).
8. The former died in 1918 at the age of 38, a victim of the Spanish flu epidemic, allowing for just a few meetings with Poulenc, who was by then still only 18: “I will never be able to express what I owe to Apollinaire’s influence. It was a true enchantment of my first youth and it remains so in my—let’s say it bluntly—maturity” (Poulenc, 1994, p. 137; quoted in Purvis, 2011, p. 9).
9. For example, *Les mamelles de Tirésias* aside, Poulenc set 35 of Apollinaire’s poems from 1919 onwards, the majority of which (33) were from the 1925 volume *Il y a*, which contained 41 poems.
10. “Hommage à Francis Poulenc”, *Bulletin de la Phonothèque Nationale* (1963), as quoted in Poulenc, 1991, p. 303.
11. *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 1, 1925. [“The process of knowledge being no longer taking place, intelligence no longer being taken into account, only dreams allowed man all his rights to freedom.”] It was Éluard’s surrealist dream of *Les mamelles de Tirésias* that Poulenc transformed into the operatic spectacle which premiered at the Opéra-Comique in 1947.
12. Annette Levitt, for example, writes of these differences, confidently opining that, “had Apollinaire lived, with his

- explosive creativity, he would have been the inevitable leader of surrealism. How different the movement would have been” (Levitt, 1999, p. 25).
13. Poulenc (1994, p. 418). See Burton (2002), one of the first studies to seriously consider Poulenc’s Parisian sexuality.
 14. And has often been described as such—even if scholarly research into the composer’s place/sexuality matrix remains disappointingly absent in Poulenc studies, and conspicuously so given its central importance to Poulenc’s life—for example, one such memorable quote comes from page 7 of the *Sydney Morning Herald* printed on the 23rd of February 1976, in which Poulenc was described as “the cherubic playboy of French music, the rich man’s Ibert, the musical flaneur with a heart of golden syrup” (my emphasis).
 15. Groupe MU, *Rhétorique de la poésie. Lecture linéaire lecture tabulaire* (Paris, 1977), p. 138; quoted in Adamowicz, 1998, p. 46. [The syntagmatic process of [word] combination then becomes one of freedom, to a certain degree of chaos; or better yet, of a future meaning.]
 16. Breton (2002, p. 1). Interestingly, he also confessed to being tone deaf, which might go some way to help explain his impenetrability to musical sound: “Je ne sais pas reconnaître la différence entre deux sons. Pour moi, les rapports entre les sons, qui constituent la musique, m’échappent totalement” (Wangermée, 1997, pp. 75, 307–324, 310–311).
 17. After all, as Breton notes, both poetry and music are “subject to the same acoustical conditions of rhythm, pitch, intensity, and timbre” (Breton, 1995, pp. 70–74).
 18. David Drew, *Über Kurt Weill* (Frankfurt, 1975), pp. 37–38; as quoted in Hinton, 1986, p. 67. See also Wolin (1997, pp. 106–119).
 19. Krenek (1977, p. 11). Krenek makes the distinction between surrealism and neoclassicism, which “tak[es] this restorative tendency furthest” in his 1937 essay, “What Is Called the New Music, and Why?": Surrealism, he argues, being “more energetically destructive, lives in the montage of the ruins that it comes across”, as opposed to neoclassicism, which has “a significant tendency to be ahistorical, in that it would like to recover the lost *primal meaning* [Ursinn]” (see Albright, 2004b, pp. 330–336).
 20. That is not to say, however, that he did not try: upon showing Paul Vidal, distinguished teacher of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, his manuscript of *Rapsodie nègre*, Poulenc was told that “[his] work stinks, it is ludicrous, it is nothing but a load of BALLS” (Poulenc, 1991, p. 24). This particular work was later to be published by Stravinsky’s London publisher, Chester Music, at the composer’s request after having heard of Poulenc’s banishment from the Conservatoire by the reactionary professor (Ivry, 1996, p. 17).
 21. See, for example, van der Westhuizen (2007), who explores Poulenc’s musical borrowings in relation to the typology devised by J. Peter Burkholder when working on the music of Charles Ives in *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* (New Haven, 1995).
 22. An abridged list of influences would include: Beethoven, Berlioz, Chabrier, Chopin, Couperin, Debussy, Franck, Gervaise, Massenet, Mozart, Mussorgsky, Prokofiev, Rameau, Ravel, Satie, Scarlatti, Schubert, Schumann and Stravinsky. (For example, see Clifton, 2002, p. 26; Ivry, 1996, p. 35; Stringer, 1986, p. 29.)
 23. Poulenc, quoted in Daniel (1982, p. 75).
 24. Poulenc (1978, p. 31). Poulenc’s introduction to the hedonistic world of Parisian popular culture is often attributed to Marcel Royer (Poulenc’s Uncle Papoum, 1862–1945): Ivry writes that “Papoum was a frenetic theatre buff and opera fan, who loved to tell tales of his youth as an art student [...]. As with the poet W. H. Auden and his ‘Uncle Henry’, a young homosexual creative artist can learn a lot from a wealthy bachelor uncle who is mad about the arts” (Ivry, 1996, p. 12).
 25. City life affords its urban inhabitants a relative anonymity and freedom, given its transport links, and numerous private and public spaces, and thus the queer voice is most often that of the urban metropolis (see Browning, 1996; Sibalis, 1999).
 26. Philip Purvis, “Poulenc’s (Sub)Urban Camp”, *Music and Camp*, ed. Philip Purvis and Christopher Moore (forthcoming). My thanks to Phil for the chance to read an early draft of his paper.
 27. Clifton (2001, p. 78). Denise Duval, “La Diva” for whom Poulenc wrote the role of Elle, recalls in an interview with Alain Duault published in *L’Avant Scène Opéra* that “*La Voix humaine* was an astonishing experience for me. I watched Francis Poulenc write it for me, page by page, bar by bar, with his flesh, but also with my wounded heart, for we were both at that time going through an emotional crisis; we wept together, and *La Voix humaine* was like a chronicle of our torment” (Poulenc, 1991, p. 401).
 28. Poulenc (1994, p. 304). Of course such language is indicative of that of the Catholic and medial institutions which, at the time, considered anything other than heterosexuality as illness and an anomaly. See, for example, Jeffrey Merricky and Bryan T. Ragan Jr., *Homosexuality in Modern France* (New York, 1996), pp. 202–205.
 29. In Ivry’s view, the underestimation Poulenc experienced during much of his lifetime was arguably in part the result of “his open homosexuality at a time when only the most prestigious cultural figures, such as Jean Cocteau, could get away with such frankness” (Ivry, 1996, p. 9).
 30. 1923 saw the homophobic literary journal *Mercure de France* publish an essay entitled “Le Vice organisé en Allemagne”, which vilifies the homosexual subculture of Weimar Germany (see Got, 1923).
 31. The conservative *natalistes* declared abortion, contraception, feminism and homosexuality to blame for a “deterioration of traditional gender roles in French society—a loss of national virility” (Allred, 2013, pp. 44–61, 46).
 32. The symbol used by the government to embody its notion of ideal family life was that of a pregnant housewife. The *Code* included instituting new regulations on divorce, abortion and homosexuality, the latter involving raising the age of consent for homosexual relationships to 21 whilst the age of consent for heterosexual relationships remained at 13. This reflected the supposed susceptibility of young people to homosexuality, which was in turn associated with pederasty and paedophilia (see Gunther, 2009, pp. 18–21).
 33. Stainton (1999). Juan Luis Trescatro who was almost certainly amongst the assassins is reported to have boasted that he had “just helped to shoot Lorca, firing, for good measure, ‘two bullets into his arse for being a queer’” (Gibson, 1989, p. 468).
 34. Morrison (2013). I am reminded of the work of Fred Maus, who, whilst writing on popular music, identifies the potential of the double-voicedness of music and its lyrics, which can “[carry] special meanings for insiders while remaining differently meaningful for others [read: outsiders] as well” (Maus, 2001, p. 383, emphasis added).
 35. Meyer, 1994, pp. 10–11; as quoted in Raykoff, 2002, pp. 162–163.

36. Interestingly, Wanda Landowska has criticized vehemently, as she saw it, the inclination of her contemporaries, who were “scarcely fit to sharpen knives, [to] efface the effigy of the most marvelous genius on the pretext of bringing it up to date” (Landowska, 1964, p. 69). She expresses her affront at the temerity demonstrated by those who would write transcriptions, and thus “juxtapose their obscure names with those of our greatest masters. [...] What would sculptors say if some plasterer took it upon himself to shave off some marble from the Venus de Milo to give her a wasp waist or if somebody twisted Apollo’s nose to give him more character? (Landowska, 1964, p. 99). And yet she was an ardent supporter and good friend of Poulenc (who had been known to entertain guests in drag as Landowska), having commissioned his *Concert champêtre*, for example, which Landowska “adored” for it made her feel “insouciant and gay!” (Ivry, 1996, p. 69), but does little but vivify the old music she would purportedly seek to preserve.
37. Morris (1997, p. 27). This song is from an anonymous Gitano’s [gypsy] definition of *cante jondo*. [Deep song is not joyfulness / deep song is uttering the sorrows / that are hidden deep inside].
38. I have been unable to locate any reference to the source of Poulenc’s translation, assuming he did in fact have one of the entire text. It is clear, however, that the composer set the translations of Pierre Dermangeat in 1937 for his *Trois Chansons de F. García Lorca*.
39. Lorca’s father customarily organized flamenco sessions at their house in Fuentevaqueros, near Granada, and so the poet learnt to play the guitar by taking lessons from an aunt, prior to his turning to a more serious study of the piano (Stanton, 1975, p. 52).
40. Stanton (1978, p. 44). For a consideration of the musicality of *Poema del cante jondo* (see Correa, 1970, p. 34; Eich, 1958, pp. 76–78; Rio, 1941, p. 33).
41. See “El cante jondo (Primitivo canto andaluz)” and “Teoría y juego del duende” in Federico García Lorca, *Obras completas* (6th edn., Madrid, 1963).
42. Lorca (1975, p. 28). Such was the influence of *cante jondo* on foreigners that Andalusia came to represent, for them, the essential Spain, “for foreigners imitate Andalusian music when seeking the essence of Spanish music” (Orringer, 2014, p. 125).
43. See, for example, Stanton (1974, pp. 94–103); and Johnston, *Lorca*.
44. Ricardo Viñes, Poulenc’s piano teacher, could have introduced this repertoire to the composer, having himself given premieres of works by Albéniz with whom he shared Joan Baptista Pujol as a teacher. Furthermore, Poulenc had long been a devotee of Albéniz, and in 1952 contributed the preface to Gabriel Laplane’s landmark biography, *Albéniz, sa vie, son œuvre*, which was published in 1956.
45. Poulenc’s only work for guitar is the solo *Sarabande*, written in New York in 1960 and dedicated to the virtuosa Ida Presti. Eschewing the possibility of instrumental virtuosity, Poulenc wrote a short, expressive piece, marked *Molto calmo e malanconico*.
46. Poulenc, even from the age of 15, kept, amongst other works, Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du printemps* on his piano stand (Ivry, 1996, p. 16), and he has often voiced the influence Stravinsky and his work had on him: “The shock of those strange, dissonance harmonies was beyond anything I had ever dreamed of [...] The SOUND of Stravinsky’s music was something so new to me that I often ask myself: ‘if Stravinsky had not existed, would I ever have written any music?’” (Poulenc, 1978, pp. 188–190).
47. The work originated in 1915 scored for *cantaora*, actors and chamber orchestra. Falla revised the work the following year for symphony orchestra, with three songs for mezzo-soprano. Falla also arranged a suite for solo piano which was published in 1921, but it was in 1924 that he transformed the work into a single-act *ballet pantomimico*, which is its best-known incarnation. It is clear that Poulenc knew this work, as he took Falla’s 7/8 theme that follows the dotted rhythm at Figure 43, marked “Andantino tranquillo”, and wrote his third *Novelette* for piano in 1959 “sur un theme de Manuel de Falla”.
48. For a detailed study on Poulenc as *le voyou* and popular influences on his music (see St-Aubin, 2008).
49. He wrote that the sonata’s “delectable violinistic details [were] due entirely to Ginette Neveu who helped [him] a great deal with the instrumentation” (Poulenc, 1991, p. 364).
50. See the opening to ‘Preludio’, the first movement of the suite, as a further example of Albéniz’s double-octave spacing in his piano writing.
51. Whilst it would, of course, be reasonable to expect Poulenc to be familiar with the mechanics of double-stopping, there appears no other aspects of the violin part which might be considered especially technical, in which case one assumes that this might be an obvious point on which Neveu advised the composer, particularly given his penchant for writing for plural strings which would potentially alleviate any problems resulting from the idiosyncrasies of double-stopping.
52. There remains controversy surrounding the possibility of a history of male–male tango partners and whether this is either simply the result of a lack of women, dance pedagogy and practice, or the disinclination of women to engage in a dance likely performed in brothels (see, e.g. Castro, 1998, pp. 63–78; Savigliano, 1995).
53. Poulenc dated his organ concerto “April–August 1938”, but a first version was actually completed in 1936. Ivry supposes that this was to “to bring it retrospectively closer to wartime” (Ivry, 1996, p. 110), and hears in it a “clear sense of an ongoing procession to [the] doom [of war]” (Ivry, 1996, p. 112). This composition, and others post-1936 which could be described as works of “a Poulenc en route to the cloister” (Poulenc, 1991, p. 106), is often considered the result of a lasting impression on the composer by the unpleasant death of composer Pierre-Octave Ferroud in a road accident in 1936. Ferroud was, contrary to popular accounts however, not liked by the Poulenc crowd and was a rival of Poulenc, who happened to learn of his death whilst on holiday in Uzerches, not far from Rocamadour and the sanctuary of the *Vierge noire*, the visit to which that would inspire in him a more austere style (see Ivry, 1996, pp. 90–114).

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