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The effects of war as reflected in Francis  
Poulenc's song cycle *Banalités*

by

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Figure 1: Poulenc in uniform at Cahors in 1940 (Poulenc, 2006, following p. 136)



Figure 2: Sketch of Apollinaire after his WWI military service (Bogousslavsky, 2005, p. 6)

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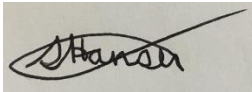
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## Declaration

**Full name:** Stéphanie-Claire Hansen  
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**Title of research project:** The effects of war as reflected in Francis Poulenc's song cycle *Banalités*

I declare that this research project is my own original work. Where secondary material is used, it has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the requirements of the University of Pretoria. This project has not been submitted for examination at any other university.

I understand what plagiarism is and I am aware of university policy and implications in this regard.



6 January 2022

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Stéphanie-Claire Hansen

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Date

## **Ethics statements**

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval.

The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for researchers and the policy guidelines for responsible research.

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how Francis Poulenc expressed the effects of war through the composition of his song cycle, *Banalités*, FP 107. Poulenc selected five poems by Guillaume Apollinaire, which he set to music for this work. The interpretation of these poems may prove challenging for a singer, due to their Surrealist nature. Apollinaire's Surrealism is characterised by unorthodox forms, and unconventional and exaggerated imagery. However, Apollinaire argued that exaggerated images must convey reality and lend themselves to intelligent interpretation. Since Poulenc lived through both world wars and Apollinaire lived through WWI, an interpretation in light of war enables a deeper insight into the poems. In order to achieve this understanding, the impact of WWI, WWII and the German occupation of France on Poulenc's life and work was investigated. Furthermore, the socio-historical context of Apollinaire's poems that comprise *Banalités*, and the way in which these poems reflect the effects of war were explored. These insights were gained by way of a hermeneutic reading of the poems and the music of *Banalités*. The close reading is supported by a literature review, concerning the lives and works of Poulenc and Apollinaire, and elements of a music analysis. Themes such as escapism, loyalty to France, the physical and emotional effects of living through war, as well as scenes of war, were identified. It became apparent that Poulenc used various compositional devices in *Banalités* to reflect these themes. Following the example of French classicism, Poulenc favoured simplicity in his music and emulated the popular Parisian music tradition to convey nostalgia and patriotism, which is apparent in *Banalités*. Furthermore, he preferred setting poems of poets that he had met to music, such as Apollinaire, since this enabled him to better understand the meaning of the poetry and to convey it in his music.

*Keywords:* Poulenc, Apollinaire, *Banalités*, song cycle, Surrealism, war, WWI, WWII, interpretation, hermeneutics, close reading.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

### 1.1. Background to the study and research problem

I first became acquainted with Francis Poulenc's (1899–1963) song cycle, *Banalités* (Banalities), FP 107, during the preparation for my BMus recital in 2020. The cycle drew my attention because of my deep interest in the French culture and language, and also because of Poulenc's beautiful melodies, which range from soothing to exciting. *Banalités* consists of five songs: *Chanson d'Orkenise* (Song of Orkenise), *Hôtel* (Hotel), *Fagnes de Wallonie* (Walloon Moorlands), *Voyage à Paris* (Trip to Paris) and *Sanglots* (Sobs), based on poems by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918).

At first glance, I found that the words of the poems seemed random and, in some instances, even nonsensical. This is possibly because of the fact that the poet, Apollinaire, was one of the precursors to Surrealism<sup>1</sup> (Bohn, 1977). However, Poulenc's choice of poems made more sense when viewed in the light of World War I (1914–1918) (WWI) and World War II (1939–1945) (WWII). Apollinaire wrote *Sanglots* during WWI and Poulenc composed *Banalités* in 1940, the same year that Germany occupied France (Adéma & Décaudin, 1965; Poulenc, 1942). Therefore, one could argue that, due to his own experience of war, Poulenc understood Apollinaire's experience of war, and could identify elements thereof within his choice of poetry. Low (2013) suggests that *Banalités* can be seen as Poulenc's reaction to WWII and the occupation of France. This is evident in *Sanglots*, because of the anguish that it expresses, and in *Voyage à Paris*, which paints a patriotic portrait of Paris before the war. The fact that Poulenc included the other poems in his cycle suggests that they likewise touched a nerve in his patriotic French self. Viewing the cycle through the lens of Poulenc's reaction to WWII and the occupation adds additional layers of insight into the underlying meaning and possibilities of the music for both performers and listeners (Low, 2013). From my own reading of the poems, I observed reflections of war in *Chanson d'Orkenise* in the reference to policemen at the city gates who question people when they enter or leave the city. Furthermore, *Hôtel* seems to express lethargy and a feeling of escapism, and in *Sanglots* a sense of a soldier displaced after war can be detected.

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<sup>1</sup> The current school of Surrealism developed into something quite different from that which Apollinaire created, as discussed in section 2.4.2. However, both styles exemplify unorthodox structure and contrasting imagery (Block, 1959; Bohn, 1977).

Throughout history, music has been an important tool for composers to express their views on their social and historical contexts and to reflect the effects of war and conflict (Sumner, 2016). Compositions that have been created as a result of war or conflict include Vivaldi's *Juditha Triumphans* (1716), Haydn's *Mass in time of war* (1796), Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* (1880) and Ullmann's *Drei Jiddische Lieder* (1944), to name but a few (Classic FM, 2020; Goglia, 2018). During the course of WWII, Poulenc wrote several compositions that showed his outlook on the war and occupation, including *Figure Humaine* (1943) and *Deux poèmes de Louis Aragon* (1943) (Daniel, 1980).

WWII and the German occupation had a traumatic impact on the French, manifesting in emotions such as fear, insecurity, humiliation, anger, depression and nostalgia (Daniel, 1980; Smith, 2010; St-Aubin, 2008). This led me to ask which emotions Poulenc could have felt during the war and occupation, how the poems reflect these emotions and how he expressed them in his music. Through these questions I seek to better understand the meaning of the poetry, Poulenc's life during the war and occupation, and his compositional language. These are all elements that need to be investigated and understood to add depth and nuance to the interpretation of *Banalités*.

## **1.2. Aims of the study**

In this study, the main aim is to understand how the effects of war are expressed in Poulenc's *Banalités*. In order to gain this understanding, the impact of WWI, WWII and the German occupation of France on Poulenc's life and work were investigated, as well as the socio-historical context of Apollinaire's poems that comprise *Banalités* and the way in which these poems reflect the effects of war.

## **1.3. Research questions**

Main research question:

How are the effects of war expressed in Poulenc's *Banalités*?

Secondary research questions:

- What was the impact of WWI, WWII and the German occupation of France on Poulenc's life and work?
- What is the socio-historical context of the poems that comprise *Banalités*?
- In what way do Apollinaire's poems that comprise *Banalités* reflect the effects of war?

#### **1.4. Limitations and delimitations of the study**

The study is a hermeneutic reading of Poulenc's song cycle, *Banalités*, with regard to how the poems and the music express the effects of war. The primary focus is on the interpretation of the cycle, rather than the technical challenges thereof. It is not a biographical study of Poulenc or Apollinaire; however, some biographical details are mentioned to contextualise and substantiate my observations. It is also not a traditional music analysis of *Banalités*, although certain aspects of a music analysis are included to enhance the interpretation.

#### **1.5. Chapter outline**

In Chapter 1, I offer an introduction to the proposed study, explaining the aims and research questions.

Chapter 2 entails a review of the literature. This chapter contains a discussion of the relationship between music and war, the lives and works of Poulenc and Apollinaire, as well as their experiences of war. A brief discussion of the song cycle genre and Poulenc's *Banalités* is also presented.

The methodological approach used in the study is explained in Chapter 3. This includes the research approach and design, as well as methods used for data collection and analysis. Additionally, research quality is discussed.

Chapter 4 consists of the close reading of Poulenc's *Banalités*. Focus is placed on how he treated the poems in order to express his perspective on war through the composition of this piece. The close reading was informed by Apollinaire's and Poulenc's experiences of war.

The findings that resulted from the study are discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter also contains concluding remarks and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature consulted during the research process. The role of music as an outlet during wartime is explored, and a discussion of Poulenc's life with regard to his background, his compositional style and his perception of war is presented. Investigating Poulenc's life and work helped to understand his feelings towards France, especially during the world wars, and how he used his work to reflect these sentiments. Furthermore, Apollinaire's life with regard to his poetic style and his experience of WWI is detailed, which leads to an enriched understanding of Poulenc's treatment of the poems used in *Banalités*. Finally, scholarly contributions regarding *Banalités* in particular, as well as how this work fits in the song cycle genre, are discussed.

### 2.2. Music as an outlet during wartime

Music has often played an important role during wars. Nickerson (1946) explains the relationship between music and war in the United States during WWII, stating that the music of that time was a reflection of the war and the strain and change it caused. He opines that music served as a distraction and helped to boost the morale of people, especially of the soldiers and factory workers. Additionally, music, particularly singing, has served as an expression of resistance to oppression for many groups of people, such as the Afrikaans people during the Second Boer War; the Jews, who continued to write and sing songs amidst persecution during the Holocaust; and the African Americans, whose songs helped motivate them to escape slavery (Adler, 2006; Gray, 2004).

Sumner (2016) adds that musicians and composers started to use their work as a powerful way of expressing their thoughts and views during WWII. Not only composers used music to voice their opinions, but governments also used it as a tool to influence the values of their peoples and to spread propaganda (Sumner, 2016). Furthermore, Fulcher (1999) argues that it is necessary to understand music within its historical context, because the politics of the time will affect the music, which in turn will comment on the current political climate. This means that aspects of a piece, which previously would have been regarded purely as elements of the music style, could also be symbols of the political context and of the composer's ideology (Fulcher, 1999). Sprout (2013) further explains the relationship of music and politics through the following statement:

... in addition to the ways in which political circumstances shape music composition and music in turn shapes politics, politics can continue to influence our perception of musical favourites, and vice versa, long after the sounds of their initial performances have faded. (Sprout, 2013, p. xxi)

## **2.3. Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)**

### **2.3.1. Poulenc's life and influences**

According to Poulenc's long-standing friend and colleague, baritone Pierre Bernac (1899–1979), the composer was born into a wealthy bourgeois family where the arts, including music, literature and theatre, were appreciated and enjoyed (Bernac, 1977). The family lived in Paris and summered in Nogent-sur-Marne<sup>2</sup>, leading Poulenc to identify himself as a sincere *parigot*<sup>3</sup>. Growing up in this family, his enthusiasm for music and his loyalty to France, especially Paris, were ignited (St-Aubin, 2008). Recognising this affection for France is significant in order to understand what he might have felt during the world wars and the German occupation of France. The contrast between his religious father and his agnostic mother played an important role in shaping his dual nature, that of monk and rascal, something that is mentioned in almost all the literature on Poulenc (Nichols, 2020). This duality spread to his taste in music and his compositional style. He also expressed a love for both serious and popular genres and, from a young age, he started to critique performances and to build his knowledge as a musician (St-Aubin, 2008).

Poulenc's mother, an amateur pianist, instilled in him a love for Mozart, Chopin, Schubert and Schumann. When she realised her son was interested in music, she started to teach him to play the piano (Bernac, 1977). However, he soon required a more experienced teacher and was eventually sent to the celebrated Catalan pianist, Ricardo Viñes (1875–1943) (Mellers, 1993). Viñes was known for his extraordinary technique and extensive repertoire. He befriended modern composers, such as Claude Debussy (1862–1918), Erik Satie (1866–1925), Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) and Enrique Granados (1867–1916), some of whom dedicated works to him (Timbrell & Berrocal, 2001). In return, he premiered many of their compositions and pioneered the new techniques that were necessary to obtain the right timbre, sharp rhythm and flowing pedalling in these pieces (Mellers, 1993; Timbrell & Berrocal, 2001). Under the guidance of Viñes, Poulenc became an exceptional pianist and

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<sup>2</sup> Nogent-sur-Marne is a Parisian suburb to the east of the city centre (Bernac, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> A *parigot* is someone who naturally feels content and at ease in, and close to, Paris (St-Aubin, 2008).

subsequently met Satie, who was to greatly influence the compositional style of the young Poulenc (Bernac, 1977; Mellers, 1993).

Satie had an innovative and witty compositional style, known for its simplicity, which embodied the patriotic spirit of early 20th-century France (Orledge & Potter, 2020). It was through him that Poulenc befriended other, like-minded composers: Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983), Georges Auric (1899–1983) and Louis Durey (1888–1979). Coined *Les Six* by the journalist Henri Collet (in *Comœdia*, 1920), these composers were inspired to create a distinct French music tradition through the use of Neoclassicism, and French popular music and jazz. Poulenc and Milhaud resisted the label *Les Six*, arguing that all the composers had unique and independent music styles. Nevertheless, these six composers were unified in their desire for a simpler and purely French style of writing and followed the example set by Satie. Poulenc’s place among *Les Six* helped to establish his career as a composer (Dawson, 1991).

His circle of friends grew to include Adrienne Monnier (1892–1955), the owner of a bookshop and library named *La maison des amis des livres*. This bookshop was a haven for lovers of the newest avant-garde<sup>4</sup> writing. The store had a jovial atmosphere where poets and authors read their works aloud and engaged in conversation about literature. Poulenc found these exchanges truly inspiring and used many works by these poets for his art songs. It is here that he met Apollinaire and became acquainted with his poetry (St-Aubin, 2008). Poulenc’s interaction with contemporary poets led him to favour their works for the composition of his art songs, because he felt “more comfortable with poets whom he had personally known and heard rather than the ‘classical’ ones” (St-Aubin, 2008, p. 29).

Unfortunately for Poulenc, his budding career was interrupted when he had to serve in the military from 1918 to 1921<sup>5</sup>. Until this point, WWI had not severely affected him. Thanks to the family’s wealth, his life during the war continued as before and he only noticed that Paris entered “a lethargic state” (St-Aubin, 2008, p. 26). However, during his military service he admitted to feeling lonely, bored and filled with despair. He found his separation from Paris and his friends particularly harsh and his spirits lifted remarkably when he was eventually stationed in the French capital (Nichols, 2020; St-Aubin, 2008).

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<sup>4</sup>Avant-garde refers to new and innovative movements in the arts (Oxford, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> Poulenc served in artillery regiments and then in air defence batteries, where he was exposed to very little danger, before being moved to a secretarial post in Paris, in 1919 (Nichols, 2020).



In 1921, Poulenc was finally at liberty to focus all his attention on composition, having previously been hindered in this desire, initially by his father's insistence that he complete his secondary education and later by his military service (St-Aubin, 2008). Since he was too old to study at the Paris Conservatoire, he started taking private lessons with Charles Koechlin (1867–1950) (Minneman, 2019). Koechlin was a French composer and musicologist who was greatly influenced by the celebrated French composer, Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924). According to Orledge (2001), Koechlin supported varied musical ideologies, which led him to allow his students to use whichever compositional systems they preferred (Minneman, 2019). This freedom enabled Poulenc to discover his own style, which was heavily influenced by French classicism, popular Parisian entertainment and the French *mélodie* tradition (St-Aubin, 2008). His affection and respect for French music was such that he embraced a wide range of musical styles and genres, including sacred music, opera and popular music, that conveyed French qualities, such as the combination of elegance and humour with the ability to touch an audience (Nichols, 2020; St-Aubin, 2008).

### **2.3.2. Poulenc's compositional style**

Poulenc did not identify with a specific compositional style, but rather claimed to write instinctively, reflecting whatever might have inspired him at the time (Bernac, 1977). Even when discussing inspiration, he was elusive, suggesting that inspiration is too mysterious to explain (Minneman, 2019). However, in his general survey of Poulenc's body of work, Daniel (1980) posits that he did have a recognisable compositional style, characterised by distinct individuality. Daniel (1980) not only examines defining features of Poulenc's compositional style, but also features that set his approach to different music genres apart. Poulenc's upbringing, friendships with musicians and poets, personal views and faith are all considered as they shaped the composer and his music (Daniel, 1980). His style is best described as an individual combination of traditional techniques with a modern aesthetic, and of nostalgia with avant-garde (Daniel, 1980; St-Aubin, 2008). According to Chimènes and Nichols (2001), melody was of primary importance to him and he became known for lyrical, mostly diatonic melodies with occasional chromaticism (Daniel, 1980). Most of Poulenc's melodies convey sincere emotion through the aforementioned lyricism and chromaticism, as well as through his rhythms and use of appoggiaturas (Daniel, 1980). The texture, rhythm and harmony in his music are quite traditional, despite his regular use of diminished sevenths that result in passing chromaticism (Chimènes & Nichols, 2001). In fact, Poulenc stated, "I do think there is a place for new music that is content with using other people's chords" (Heetderks, 2011, p. 202).

However, he created variety and reflected different aspects of his personality by borrowing from a diverse range of music styles. These included 16th- and 17th-century French popular songs, the piano music of Mozart, Chopin and others, as well as the popular Parisian music of his own time, which he voiced and added embellishments to in his own distinct way (Daniel, 1980; Heetderks, 2011).

Poulenc's compositions from his youth reflect the compositional practices that were at the forefront during this time (St-Aubin, 2008). One of the predominant trends of the day was Neoclassicism, which is the use of Classical genres, styles, tonality and harmony (Dawson, 1991; Schumann, 2015). Elements of Neoclassicism in Poulenc's music include the importance of tuneful melodies, the borrowing of various music styles, a Classical structure and a mostly thin texture (Daniel, 1980). His ballet *Les Biches* (1923), which was one of his first successes, shows these influences (St-Aubin, 2008). Although there were French composers who embraced counterpoint, Poulenc avoided it and rather adopted the use of chordal accompaniment and homophonic texture, in accordance with the French tradition. This is seen in most of his works, such as his song *Montparnasse* (1945) (Daniel, 1980). Additionally, St-Aubin's (2008) study illustrates how popular Parisian entertainment formed an integral part of Poulenc's musical language. He assimilated the styles and techniques of these genres, such as lilting melodies, dance-like rhythms and phrasing that mirrors the Parisian accent, the last two of which are apparent in *Voyage à Paris*. Through his use of the popular Parisian aesthetic, he relived his childhood in Nogent-sur-Marne and expressed nostalgia and patriotism (St-Aubin, 2008).

There is a similarity between Poulenc's compositional style and the writing style of Surrealist poets<sup>6</sup> (Chimènes & Nichols, 2001). His mere reluctance to describe his method corroborates this correlation with Surrealism, as both are seen as "intuitive and spontaneous" (Minneman, 2019, p. 24). Additionally, Poulenc's music is characterised by an idiosyncratic way of reconciling consonance and dissonance through the use of the hexatonic pole-infused authentic cadence<sup>7</sup>, as seen in the song *Tu vois le feu du soir* (1938). This unifying device shows how Poulenc adopted the Surrealist poets' concept of juxtaposing opposite images to challenge the reader (Heetderks, 2015). Furthermore, he regularly chose Surrealist poems as the subject for

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<sup>6</sup> Surrealism is discussed in section 2.4.2.

<sup>7</sup> The HxP-infused AC is the association of the hexatonic pole (a major chord moving only by semitones to a minor chord, or vice versa, without sharing any common notes, e.g.: F1 to C-sharp i) with a perfect cadence (V-I) (Heetderks, 2015).

his *mélodies*, and his unique use of harmony reflects the sentiment of his poetic choices (Minneman, 2019).

Poulenc's preference for setting the poems of poets whom he had met becomes clear when we see that he wanted his music to convey the unique subtleties in these poets' voices, which he was able to hear when they recited their own poems. As mentioned, Poulenc and Apollinaire met in *La maison des amis des livres*, and Poulenc managed to express Apollinaire's low and melodic voice in his first setting of the poet's work, *Le Bestiaire ou le cortège d'Orphée* (1919) (Minneman, 2019). The composition of this cycle won him the praise of Apollinaire's partner and expanded his understanding of and affection for the poet (Minneman, 2019). When writing songs, Poulenc took great care to understand the rhythms and intonation of the poems by reciting them to himself. This allowed him to compose melodies which convey the inflections inherent in the text. He only decided what the music should sound like once he understood the poem's prosody. He further sought to use poetry that could be clarified or lyrically expanded by his music (Daniel, 1980).

### **2.3.3. The effects of war on Poulenc**

Music in France had been deeply affected by politics from the late 1800s onward because of events such as the Franco-Prussian war<sup>8</sup> and WWI, which created a sense of opposition to Germany (Fulcher, 1999; Fulcher, 2005). WWI broke out in Europe but went on to involve many other nations and was unprecedented in the damage that it caused. It was fought between the Allies (including the French) and the Axis powers (with Germany at the forefront) (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-d). The anti-German feeling in France pressured French composers into creating a nationalist style, which culminated in the use of Neoclassicism. This movement originated as an opposition to excessive German Romanticism (Dawson, 1991). In addition to Poulenc's use of Neoclassicism in his music, he also adopted popular music to a great extent, which he saw as an essential part of French culture. As previously mentioned, from Poulenc's point of view, WWI created a sense of lethargy among Parisians, but apart from this he was not greatly affected by the war. Only once he was drafted for military service (1918–1921) did he start to feel the impact of the war, mainly because of his separation from Paris and his friends. This filled him with feelings of isolation, boredom and sadness (St-Aubin, 2008).

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<sup>8</sup> The Franco-Prussian war (1870–1871) was fought between France and the German states, and ended in victory for the Germans and their annexation of the French territories, Alsace and Lorraine (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-c).

Years later he had to live through another war, this time WWII, which was one of the deadliest wars in history, resulting in tens of millions of deaths<sup>9</sup>. In June 1940, the German forces (generally referred to as the Nazis) defeated and subsequently invaded France, marking the beginning of the occupation (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-e). According to Yardley (2014), the occupation created an environment of fear, poverty and humiliation for the French. This environment was worsened by a separation among the French population, between the new Vichy regime that collaborated with the Nazis and those who wanted to resist them – a separation that spread through musicians as well (Simeone, 2006; Yardley, 2014). The various political groups saw music as a powerful tool in the furtherance of their separate causes. The occupying forces sought to establish German music alongside the French repertoire. The Vichy regime had to cooperate with them, while they also tried to promote new compositions in a traditional French idiom. On the other hand, the Resistance was encouraging the French, including musicians, to oppose German influence. This placed enormous pressure on French composers, and Poulenc was able to achieve what few composers could during the war. His new compositions attracted favourable attention, while his subtle references of sympathy with the Resistance ensured that he emerged from the war as an esteemed patriotic composer. Throughout this tumultuous period, Poulenc held recitals and made recordings of mostly French *mélodies*. In addition to composing and performing, he wrote articles that encapsulated what he saw as pure French music and celebrated the composers that made it so.

Before the occupation, in early 1940, the Administration of Fine Arts sent Poulenc on a goodwill tour with Pierre Bernac. Later in the year, on 2 June, Poulenc joined an anti-aircraft unit in Bordeaux, where they were relatively safe. However, a few days later, with the German invasion, they fled to a village near Cahors. Poulenc stayed in the countryside until he was demobilised. During this stay, he expressed hope for the future and he was inspired to create more music, stating, “I have come up with a thousand melodies and the overall color of my ballet” (Sprout, 2013, p. 2). The ballet that he was referring to grew into the successful work, *Les animaux modèles* (1942) (Sprout, 2013). Conversely, Daniel (1980) and St-Aubin (2008) assert that Poulenc became depressed, not only due to the oppression during the occupation, but also because of the loss of his friends who emigrated or who were deported. It seems possible that Poulenc did not fully realise the impact of the occupation, until he returned home and resumed his work, before entering a state of depression. His turmoil over WWII is

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<sup>9</sup> The statistics of the death toll due to WWII are inaccurate, because of the amount of people that were displaced and the varying causes of death (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-e).

described in the American composer Jake Heggie's (b. 1961) song *Paul Éluard* from *Friendly persuasions: Homage to Poulenc* (2008). Heggie's song portrays the havoc of the war, including the explosion of bombs and the occupation of France. It also reflects Poulenc's fear during the war and his hesitation to make his views on the war known. Éluard (1895–1952), a Surrealist poet and one of his friends, was publicly anti-war and inspired Poulenc to admit his support for the Resistance (Stein, 2019).

Some musicians, such as Alfred Cortot and Germaine Lubin, allowed the Germans to impose their ideals on the French music scene, while others, such as Poulenc, resisted German influence (Simeone, 2006). Support for the Nazis was shown by performing German operas at the Opéra Garnier in Paris, especially those of Wagner, whose music and politics influenced Hitler (1889–1945) (Simeone, 2006; Ticker, 2016). However, resistance came from the *Front national des musiciens* (FNM), of which Poulenc was a member. The FNM criticised collaborators in their journal *Musiciens d'Aujourd'hui*, arranged protests and concerts of music that was banned, and played patriotic songs such as the *Marseillaise* in the presence of German soldiers (Simeone, 2006). Poulenc expressed his loyalty to the French Resistance by choosing patriotic subjects and by returning to the use of contemporary Parisian popular music (Daniel, 1980; Moore, 2011). His renewed use of elements from the popular Parisian tradition was sparked by the onset of WWII, after a period of time wherein he mainly focussed on sacred music and the development of his canon of *mélodies*. The influence of popular music on Poulenc's compositions took on a new dimension during the war, reminding his audience of pre-war Parisian life (St-Aubin, 2008).

The premiere of *Les animaux modèles*, at the Opéra Garnier, was a climax for Poulenc during WWII. It was a subtle, yet public, celebration of French identity (Sprout, 2013). Ironically, one of the lead dancers, Serge Lifar, was a collaborator, while the conductor, Roger Désormière, was an avid resistor (Simeone, 2006). Furthermore, the Vichy regime viewed it as exactly the type of new music that they wanted, something that expressed rustic France, whereas the Resistance saw it as an act of rebellion against the Germans (Sprout, 2013). It seems that Poulenc intended to create a quintessentially French ballet, in order to exclude the Germans who would be attending. This was achieved by basing the ballet on *Fables* (1668) by Jean de la Fontaine (1621–1695), a poet whose works are ingrained in French culture (Simeone, 2006). Poulenc even wrote in the programme that “[t]here is no need to summarize fables that everyone knows” (Sprout, 2013, p. 4), being fully aware that the Germans did not know the *Fables*. He further added many quotes to *Les animaux modèles* from the song *Alsace et*

*Lorraine* (1871), which expresses objection to France's losses<sup>10</sup> during the Franco-Prussian war. *Les animaux modèles* also includes references to the time of Louis XIV's reign and the damaging of French pride.

Following the example of *Les animaux modèles*, Poulenc wrote three more compositions that reflected his sympathy with the Resistance. His *Sonate pour violon et piano* (1942) was dedicated to the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), who was killed and whose writings were banned in Spain under Francisco Franco's (1892–1975) dictatorship. Poulenc even wrote a commentary on the piece, likening Lorca to Éluard, a known poet of the Resistance. Through the song cycle, *Deux poèmes de Louis Aragon* (1943), Poulenc depicts the heroic act of French soldiers as they tried to protect France from the invading German forces. In this cycle, he also evokes the terrible life lead during the occupation. The cantata *Figure humaine* (1943) was based on poetry by Éluard, including the poem *Liberté* – the words of which appeared on pamphlets that were dropped over Paris by Allied planes and reprinted in publications of the Resistance. Although he wrote the cantata during the war, he intended its premiere to take place at a later date, once France was liberated. The creation of this cantata also solidified Poulenc's emerging reputation as a composer capable of writing music that dealt with more serious subjects. As the war progressed, Poulenc's defiance through his work became more intense (Sprout, 2013). Therefore, it can be suggested that *Banalités*, written in the early years of the war, foreshadows these works that are more forthright in their resistance.

## **2.4. Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) and Surrealism**

### **2.4.1. Apollinaire's life**

Guillaume Apollinaire was one of the forefathers of Surrealism and is best known for the collections *Alcools* (1913) and *Calligrammes* (1918). Born as an illegitimate son to a Polish-Russian mother in Rome, his childhood was spent in Italy until he went to school in Monaco and Cannes (Brunel, 1977; Hoagland, 2014). He went to Paris at the age of 19, where he carved out a living for himself doing various jobs (Brunel, 1977). One of these was that of tutor to the daughter of a wealthy family, which provided him with the opportunity to travel with them to the Rhineland. Here he fell in love and was able to discover Central Europe, both experiences that inspired many poems, now known as the Rhenish poems (Brown, 1989). Eventually, he started to gain attention with the publication of his poems and commentaries on modern art (Brunel, 1977). This tentative success was interrupted when he was falsely accused of stealing

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<sup>10</sup> The French regained Alsace and Lorraine in 1919 after WWI. Although the Germans re-annexed it during WWII, they surrendered it to France after the war in 1945 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-a).

the Mona Lisa and was sent to prison for a week. However, the incident turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as he was suddenly the object of worldwide curiosity (Bohn, 1997). His time in prison inspired a group of poems which appeared in his first notable collection, *Alcools* (Brunel, 1977). Although he was an immigrant in Paris, he became attached to French ideals and identity, and his life in Paris was a bohemian one, spent in cafés with other poets and painters, most notably Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) (Hoagland, 2014). Together with Picasso, he started to define the key principles of the cubist<sup>11</sup> movement in poetry and painting (Genova, 2003). Throughout his life, Apollinaire was an enthusiastic writer for the media, through which he became a herald of the avant-garde (Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018). Genova (2003) further states that he was stimulated by the chaos and unpredictability of his time, which he wanted to convey in his writings.

Apollinaire demonstrated his deep love for France by voluntarily enlisting in the army during WWI (Sienaert, Lederlin & Ravel, 1996). At the age of 35, he was too old to be called up for military service and, being an immigrant, he would not have had to fight for France. Despite these circumstances, he became a French citizen, enlisted in 1914, and fought in WWI. His voluntary service to France shocked and horrified his peers, but Apollinaire discovered that he enjoyed the training for war. He found satisfaction in the physicality and fellowship of the life of a soldier (Hoagland, 2014). He started his military career in the artillery and then moved to the infantry in order to work on the front lines. In 1915, he was promoted to second lieutenant (Bogousslavsky, 2005).

Life in the trenches also afforded him time to write poetry. He was involved in creating trench journals, which were magazines that soldiers wrote and distributed among themselves as a coping mechanism. These journals further expressed the soldiers' desperate environment, as well as their emotions, such as fear, boredom, anxiety or distress, and affection for family and friends at home. Other coping mechanisms, which were reflected in his poems, included drinking, smoking and creating trinkets for loved ones out of old enemy shells (Goutierre, 2017; Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018). In addition to writing new poetry, Apollinaire also entertained his fellow soldiers by testing his new writings on them and by reading some of his older works out loud. These included the poem that Poulenc used for *Chanson d'Orkenise* (Roark, 2005; Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018). Apollinaire's poetry from this

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<sup>11</sup> Cubism was a visual arts movement, characterised by its angular shapes and two-dimensional pictures, causing the paintings to appear as if they consist of cubes (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.-b). Cubist influences in Apollinaire's poetry are exemplified by fragmented structure, contrary to the conventional poetry of his time (Genova, 2003).

time conveys the perplexing excitement and terror of war (Hoagland, 2014). He wrote *Sanglots*, which Poulenc set to music for the concluding song of *Banalités*, during WWI (Adéma & Décaudin, 1965). Therefore, when Poulenc chose to set this poem to music in 1940, he may have been able to identify with Apollinaire's experience of WWI and, as a result, used it to express his personal reaction to WWI, WWII and the occupation of France. After sustaining a head injury in 1916, Apollinaire was sent back to Paris. He continued writing until he died of Spanish flu in 1918, shortly before the war ended (Hoagland, 2014).

#### **2.4.2. Apollinaire's style and the unfolding of Surrealist poetry**

Apollinaire presented his aesthetic in the manifesto *L'esprit et les poètes* (1917). Rather than being a revolutionary new approach, his aesthetic grew gradually from some of his earlier writings (Bohn, 1977). He continued to develop this style throughout his military service, even reporting on it in an army magazine, the *Bulletin des écrivains* (Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018). In order to identify his aesthetic, he invented the term "Surrealism". Apollinaire's Surrealism is characterised by the concept of surprise, which for him embodied imagination, novelty and invention. He was inspired by the modern scientific advancements of his time and felt that artistic invention should match and encourage scientific inventions (Bohn, 1977). According to Hoagland (2014), his hope in the future and in modern discovery was such that WWI, instead of dashing this hope, became a symbol of a new era and anticipated freedom for him. However, he also acknowledged the inhumanity of the war (Hoagland, 2014). He believed that new art had to flow from the imagination, which is the basis of creativity. However, imaginative creations had to be underpinned by reality. In fact, his aesthetic was one of superior realism (from there the name Surrealism). Within the framework of surprise was the conveyance of truth and reality, which he saw as supreme concepts, albeit relative to age and culture. He defined beauty as the surprising representation of truth and reality, and viewed all three concepts to be on equal footing (Bohn, 1977). During WWI in particular, Apollinaire turned his focus to finding the beauty in the day-to-day life of the trenches, which is apparent in the war poems of his collection *Calligrammes* (1918) (Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018).

Through poetry, Apollinaire found that he and his peers had more freedom to comment on a variety of matters in the world, similar to the freedom of speech that journalists enjoyed (Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018). He expressed truths through paradoxes and comparisons with reality. There are two types of paradoxes in his works. The first is hidden truth, wherein a seemingly absurd image is created, but which, after further examination, reveals a surprising truth about reality. The second is a hypothetical truth or an analogical parallel, which serves as



a commentary on reality or human nature, such as the reversal of a married couple's gender roles in his play *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (1917). Although Apollinaire encouraged the use of outrageous exaggerations, he argued that they must be rooted in basic principles and that one must be able to intelligently interpret them. This is referred to as *le bon sens*, or common sense, something that later Surrealists renounced (Bohn, 1977). *Le bon sens* may be the reason Mellers (1993) warns singers not to emphasise the absurdity of some phrases in Poulenc's *Banalités*.

Apollinaire acted as a bridge between traditional poetry and modernism with his combination of lyricism and revolutionary new forms. Initially, his work was written in standard metre and focussed on age-old themes such as love, death and a search for meaning. However, he discarded the use of punctuation and embraced free form in order to fully express himself. His assimilation of Cubism is exemplified by fragmented structure and unexpected juxtaposition (Genova, 2003). Other forms that he championed include simultanism and ideograms. The former refers to the use of fragmented and contradictory words that eventually create cohesion in the poem, and the latter refers to the placing of verses in such a way that the poem forms a picture (Brunel, 1977; Genova, 2003). Poems from this time display a wide range of subjects with regard to scale, from large crowds and monumental scenes depicting nature to small, everyday objects. Most writings concerning WWI were generally described in vast sweeping images; however, Apollinaire mostly focussed on smaller details when writing poems about the war (Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018).

Surrealism continued evolving from that of Apollinaire to the established movement it is now. In fact, André Breton (1896–1966), the founder of modern Surrealism, had a very different outlook from Apollinaire (Bohn, 1977). However, it is still worthwhile to consider the journey of Surrealism, since Poulenc's interest in literature means that he would have been aware of these transformations. Additionally, his compositional style could have been informed by these developments, as suggested by Heetderks (2015) and Minneman (2019).

Surrealism emerged in reaction to WWI, which had a devastating effect on the soldiers, including the artists and poets amongst them (Nadeau, 1989). At the heart of Surrealism was the desire for mystery and for an escape from war and disease. In the poets' attempt to escape their terrible reality, they turned inward to study dreams and the unconscious (Block, 1959; Minneman, 2019). They sought to reconcile the conscious with the unconscious, and dreams and fantasy with reality, thus creating a surreality. The creation of this surreality, along with new writing techniques such as using contrasting images and forming illogical phrases,

expressed the inner feelings of the poets (Block, 1959; Nadeau, 1989). According to Minneman (2019), Surrealist poets intended the illogical patterns of words to prompt the imagination of readers to find their own meaning in the text. This shows Surrealist poetry as “an act of cooperation between writer and public” (Dawson, 1991, p. 16). While modern Surrealism became a system of passivity, allowing the unconscious to reveal additions to reality, Apollinaire made a conscious and intuitive effort to faithfully express reality. However, both aesthetics hold the use of imagination and its ability to create reality in high regard (Bohn, 1977).

## **2.5. Poulenc’s *Banalités***

*Banalités* consists of five songs: *Chanson d’Orkenise*, *Hôtel*, *Fagnes de Wallonie*, *Voyage à Paris* and *Sanglots* (Poulenc, 1942). On 14 December 1940, Poulenc and Bernac debuted *Banalités*, which featured in a recital in occupied Paris (Nichols, 2020). Earlier that same year, according to Bernac (1977), Poulenc happened upon the poems *Fagnes de Wallonie* and *Sanglots*, which he had already intended to feature in a cycle. Looking further through old literary reviews, he found *Hôtel* and *Voyage à Paris* among a group of poems called *Banalités*. Having decided to use these poems in a cycle, he searched for a suitable poem to use as the opening song, one that would be energetic enough to offset the grave concluding song, *Sanglots*. To this end, he remembered a poem, which he renamed *Chanson d’Orkenise*, that Apollinaire had written as part of the prose piece, *Onirocritique* (Bernac, 1977).

In *Chanson d’Orkenise*, a tale is told of a carter entering the gates of a fictitious town called Orkenise to get married, a tramp exiting the gates and leaving his love behind, and the guards questioning them both. For the second song, *Hôtel*, Poulenc moves from Orkenise to a hotel room in Paris. Here, the speaker wants only to laze the day away and smoke (Bernac, 1977). With *Fagnes de Wallonie*, Poulenc departs from the city, as the poem paints the picture of its poet wandering in the Walloon moorlands in Belgium, trying to escape his adolescent worries. Two opposites of the wilderness are represented: the windswept moors and the calmer woodlands. *Voyage à Paris* provides some relief before the serious song *Sanglots* and is a description of the beauty and charm of Paris, in contrast with the duller countryside as depicted in the third song. The cycle is concluded with *Sanglots*, which can be seen as a continuation of the sadness evoked in *Fagnes de Wallonie*, but with stronger intensity (Mellers, 1993). When setting these poems to music, Poulenc was inspired by the popular music tradition of Paris for *Chanson d’Orkenise*, *Hôtel* and *Voyage à Paris* (Mellers, 1993; St-Aubin, 2008).

Poulenc's decision to group these heartfelt songs under the title *Banalités* could well be questioned. Apart from the fact that *Hôtel* and *Voyage à Paris* were already grouped under this title<sup>12</sup> by Apollinaire, the answer lies in the composer's dual nature of solemnity and humour. Allen (1968) suggests that Poulenc did this intentionally to balance the light-heartedness of banality with the more serious nature of these poems, thereby imbuing the title with an element of irony. Apart from *Voyage à Paris*, Apollinaire expresses a sense of melancholy in each poem, which is covered by a cheerful banality (Allen, 1968). Poulenc further defended the concept of banality in an article, *Éloge de la banalité* (1935) (In praise of banality), wherein he praises music that clearly expresses its intentions, even if it resorts to vulgarity, as long as it is heartfelt and there is honest intent (Nichols, 2020). These poems certainly succeeded in touching Poulenc, since Bernac (1977) and Mellers (1993) both describe him as being filled with emotion when he found them. Both authors also mention that Poulenc cried when reading *Hôtel* and *Voyage à Paris*.

There is some debate as to whether *Banalités* can be classified as a song cycle. According to Youens (2001), a song cycle is generally defined as a group of songs performed as a coherent unit and should not be confused with a song collection, which does not have continuity among the songs. There are many diverse devices found in the words or the music that may provide coherence in a song cycle, but these also make it more difficult to distinguish between a cycle and a collection (Youens, 2001). According to Bernac (1977), *Banalités* cannot be seen as a song cycle, because neither the music nor the poems display pronounced characteristics of coherence. However, in his thesis, *Unifying devices in Poulenc: A study of the cycles Banalités and Tel jour telle nuit*, Dawson (1991) makes a case for unity in *Banalités*, stating that themes of love and fantasy are expressed in the poems, while Low (2013) mentions travel as another apparent theme. Low (2013) also mentions the interpretation of *Banalités* as Poulenc's reaction to WWII and the occupation. I agree with this and see it as another binding factor to create a unified song cycle. Furthermore, Poulenc was careful in planning the structure of the work to achieve contrast and balance, therefore creating a coherent song cycle (Dawson, 1991).

A great deal of research has been devoted to the study of Poulenc and his music, including *Banalités*. In his book, *Francis Poulenc: The man and his songs*, Bernac (1977) supplies detailed accounts of Poulenc, his approach to song-writing and the relationships with his favoured poets. Most importantly for performers of Poulenc's songs, the book provides the

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<sup>12</sup> The group of poems titled *Banalités* is further discussed in section 4.2.2.

background to each song, along with performance notes and directions for pronunciation. Bernac (1977) does not analyse Poulenc's music but shares his experience as an interpreter who knew the composer and even worked with him to create songs. In his discussion of each song, the scene is set, and specific performance notes are given, such as where to breathe, slow down, or change dynamics. Mellers (1993) takes a broader approach to Poulenc in his book, *Francis Poulenc*, which is part of the series, Oxford studies of composers. This book provides an overview of every genre of Poulenc's music. It is based on a selection of representative works by Poulenc, which includes an analysis of *Banalités*. Through his commentary on these works, Mellers (1993) aims to express the motivation that drove Poulenc to create. Within his Apollinaire songs, Poulenc sought to convey the poet's voice, a mixture of melancholy and joy. Both Bernac (1977) and Mellers (1993) were informed by Poulenc's publication *Diary of my songs [Journal de mes mélodies]*, translated to English by Winifred Radford (Poulenc, 2006). Here, Poulenc provides personal insights into his songs, describing his inspiration, how ideas were formed for the music and the pictures he wished to convey.

Dawson's (1991) focus is on *Banalités* and *Tel jour telle nuit* as song cycles. Low's (2013) article, *Far from Banal – Poulenc's Banalités*, describes Poulenc's compositional style and his partiality for using the works of contemporary poets for his art songs. Low (2013) further provides an analysis of *Banalités* along with details of the context in which it was written, that of WWII. He explains how *Sanglots* might express this time in history and that the first four songs might also contain references to the war, but he does not elaborate. Other analyses of *Banalités* were done by Allen (1968) and Grant (1969).

St-Aubin's (2008) thesis, *Francis Poulenc, nostalgia and Parisian popular culture*, sheds light on Poulenc's use of elements of popular Parisian music. It is apparent that nostalgia and patriotism are expressed in *Chanson d'Orkenise*, *Hôtel* and *Voyage à Paris* through the popular Parisian music influences found within them. In Minneman's (2019) thesis, *Francis Poulenc and Surrealism*, she is concerned with elements of Surrealism within Poulenc's music. In the chapter on *Banalités*, she describes the poetic devices used by Apollinaire and touches on the context of war in which the songs were written. Her description of *Sanglots* particularly focusses on Apollinaire's experience of WWI. The poem and its musical treatment reflect Apollinaire's spirit at the time. She further describes this as the spirit of a man who was wounded and changed during the war, making him fearful of the future and causing him to wish to return to a simpler past. There is a sense of desperation in her account of a broken-

hearted man who still searches for hope and joy, but who realises that this specific suffering is a universal experience (Minneman, 2019).

## **2.6. Conclusion**

In this literature review, I described the role of music as an outlet during wartime. This was followed by an exploration of Poulenc's life with regard to his background, his compositional style and his experience of war. Furthermore, Apollinaire's life was discussed with regard to his poetic style and his exposure to WWI. The literature review concluded with an explanation of the song cycle genre and a discussion of the literature concerning Poulenc's *Banalités* with references to some themes apparent in the text. If one takes into account the reason for the birth of Surrealism, then the choice of these poems may suggest Poulenc's desire to return to the innocence of pre-war Paris. The desire to escape is further reflected in the influence of popular genres within *Chanson d'Orkenise*, *Hôtel* and *Voyage à Paris*. Poulenc's use of such genres expresses loyalty to France and longing for life in Paris before the war. Additionally, *Fagnes de Wallonie* and *Sanglots* may express the despair felt during war. The literature review shows how the two world wars had a significant impact on Apollinaire's and Poulenc's careers, an aspect which needs further exploration regarding how it extends to Poulenc's song cycle, *Banalités*.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1. Introduction

In the following section I briefly explain the methodology that underpinned this study, as well as its suitability. The research approach and design are described, followed by an outline of the way in which data was collected and analysed. Lastly, there is a discussion regarding research quality and ethical considerations.

### 3.2. Research approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. Characteristics of a qualitative study include a focus on gaining a holistic understanding of a specific phenomenon. In the case of this study, the phenomenon is the composition of *Banalités* during WWII. Furthermore, the researcher's background and perspective help to shape the study, particularly with regard to the interpretation of results (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is mostly inductive, although Creswell (2014) explains that deductive thinking may also be used throughout the process. He posits that qualitative research is both inductive and deductive, since data is gathered into categories or themes, which are then compared to more data, in order to determine if each theme is supported by sufficient evidence (Creswell, 2014). The comparison of data from different sources was applied by comparing themes that were identified from the literature review with the findings emerging from the close reading. These themes may broadly be grouped under the hardships of living through a war and the desire to escape these hardships. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), qualitative research has a narrow focus and leads to descriptive, complex and in-depth findings (De Vos et al., 2005).

Qualitative research was the most appropriate approach for this study because it allowed for reflection on my part, which deepened my understanding of the poems and music. It further helped to gain a more detailed and holistic understanding of a topic in relation to many facets. In this case, *Banalités* was understood in relation to the poetry, the composer and his compositional style, as well as the experience and perception of war, especially as it pertains to Apollinaire and Poulenc.

### 3.3. Research design

This is a hermeneutic study within an interpretive paradigm. An interpretive paradigm flows from the desire to understand a person's life and environment (De Vos et al., 2005). Hermeneutics is situated within interpretivism, since it is defined as the process of understanding and interpreting a text (Wernet, 2013) through an in-depth reading thereof (De

Vos et al., 2005). According to Wernet (2013), hermeneutics originated as a way to understand the true meaning of religious and ancient texts, because readers wanted to know whether their interpretations aligned with the authors' intentions. Since then, hermeneutics has been further implemented in philosophy, art history and linguistics (De Vos et al., 2005). As other fields started to embrace hermeneutics, the focus shifted from finding the true meaning of a text to understanding different meanings within certain contexts (Wernet, 2013). Kramer (2010) describes the well-suited relationship between hermeneutics and music, stating that a musician must interpret music in order to perform it successfully and with insight.

One of the foremost features of a hermeneutic analysis is the presence and influence of subjectivity. The reader's subjective experience influences his or her understanding and interpretation of the text (De Vos et al., 2005). Kramer (2010) goes as far as saying that the merging of the reader's background with that of the text leads to a better understanding thereof. However, Kinsella (2006) warns that one must be vigilant, and that the subjective reader must still be aware that others might have a different understanding of the text. This is because a subjective interpretation is influenced both by the specific, historical context of the text (Kramer, 2010) and by the reader's preconceptions, which are shaped by his or her personal history (Kinsella, 2006). In order to understand a text, the reader must acknowledge preconceptions and be open to the possibility that they will change when met with the text itself (Kinsella, 2006; Kramer, 2010).

A hermeneutic analysis is done by way of a close reading. Beehler (1988) describes a close reading as the process of reading a text so carefully that the reader discovers its every detail, interpreting meanings that can be supported by evidence found in the text itself. However, she adds that the interpretation of a text is influenced by the reader's background and that readers emphasise different aspects of a text. Thus, there is not only one true meaning to be found. Brown (2013) posits that, in a close reading, one must consider the text from various perspectives. The reader must attempt to think as critically as the author would, in order to interpret and fully understand the text (Brown, 2013). Patterson and Higgs (2005) further explain that new insights are gained every time the reader reads the text which, in turn, informs the next reading. This process of reading and re-reading the text is called the hermeneutic circle, and is essential in order to understand the whole text in relation to its parts. In other words, the whole serves to contextualise the parts, while the parts help to define the whole (Patterson & Higgs, 2005). Through the close reading of *Banalités*, the concept of war brought together the identified themes; escapism, loyalty to France, the effects of living through war and scenes of

war, making them more easily understandable. In return, these themes provided insight into what life during war entails. The literature review and close reading revealed that *Banalités*, along with works such as *Figure Humaine* and *Deux Poèmes de Louis Aragon*, contributes to Poulenc's body of work that comments on war. Awareness of this body of work contextualises *Banalités* as one of the first steps the composer takes to resist war through his music.

Kinsella (2006) mentions three steps of reading a text, allowing new insights to be gained with each reading, in order to interpret and understand the text. The first is the preliminary reading, which provides the reader with a first impression. During the second step, the reader looks more closely at grammar, the meaning of words, correlation among words, and contradictions in the text. For the third step, the reader explores the context in more detail to see whether his or her preconceptions are affirmed or contradicted. Wernet (2013) adds that the reader needs to respect the literal meaning of the text, as well as the sequence of ideas or sentences and whether these are presented logically. By using the hermeneutic circle, as explained by Patterson and Higgs (2005), the reader will eventually start to identify ideas, themes or concepts in the text. These must be compared with the research questions, as well as with existing literature (Patterson & Higgs, 2005). The themes that were identified in *Banalités* from the close reading and the literature review are escapism, loyalty to France and the hardships of living through war. This agrees with Creswell's (2014) statement that qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process, and that data is interpreted through a comparison with previous literature.

Aspects of a traditional music analysis were used to strengthen the close reading. The postmodern influence on musicology from the 1980s caused a shift in our thinking and understanding of music (Scott, 2011). Thus, the lines between a traditional music analysis and a hermeneutic reading may be obscured. Within this study, the guidelines for music analysis were taken from Kimball's (2006) *Song: A guide to art song style and literature*. Here she posits that in order to understand an art song and its style, one must study each compositional element: the melody, harmony, rhythm, accompaniment and form, of a song. Influences on the composer and his choice of poetry are also taken into account. One then continues to examine how the composer used these elements to work together to express himself (Kimball, 2006). Therefore, in conjunction with the close reading, I examined these compositional elements to investigate the cycle. This strengthened the study's credibility and helped to reveal meaning in the music and how it enhances expression in the poems (Kramer, 2010).



Hermeneutics was a suitable choice for this study, because it enabled me to interpret and understand Poulenc's *Banalités* by reading the poems and music, and to express my perspective as understood through the specific, historical context of the world wars and the German occupation of France during WWII.

### **3.4. Data collection**

In order to conduct the close reading, I used the poems and music that form *Banalités* as primary sources. According to De Vos et al. (2005), the use of reliable documents allows for an in-depth investigation of people or events. Therefore, the reading was supported by secondary sources, such as academic works (dissertations and theses), articles and books. The secondary sources provided background information on Apollinaire, Poulenc, their bodies of work and their exposure to war. These documents also offered insight into other interpretations of *Banalités* that informed my perspective.

The literature was consulted in order to explore Poulenc's life and work, as well as the impact that WWI and WWII had on him and his compositional style. Furthermore, the socio-historical context of the poetry that Poulenc chose for *Banalités* was mentioned in the literature review and was studied more comprehensively in the close reading. Effects of war, such as fear, boredom, insecurity, humiliation, anger, depression and nostalgia were identified in the literature review. Most of these effects were also apparent in the close reading, along with others, such as despair, solidarity, moral injury, regret or guilt, and the suppression of sadness. Finally, the ways in which the poems reflect these effects and how the music enhances these reflections were determined during the close reading.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

In order to analyse the collected data, I started with the admission of preconceptions I had regarding the text of *Banalités*, as advised by Kinsella (2006) and Kramer (2010). This is corroborated by Patterson and Higgs (2005), who add that the researcher needs to admit what a certain phenomenon means to him or her. In this study, the phenomenon is the song cycle *Banalités*, composed in 1940, and my preconception was that Poulenc used the composition of this piece to express his reaction to the world wars and the German occupation of France during WWII. This preconception was proven through a hermeneutic analysis of the poems and music of *Banalités*. As stated, Wernet (2013) advises that a text should be read with respect for the sequential order of ideas and their literal meaning. Therefore, the songs of *Banalités* were

analysed sequentially and both the literal and figurative forms of the imagery in the poetry were contemplated.

Kinsella's (2006) three steps for interpreting and understanding a text provided a good guideline for the close reading; however, in practice it seemed best to change the order of the steps she suggests. Similar to Kinsella (2006), I started with the preliminary reading of the poems and music of *Banalités*, which led to the impression that the effects of war are reflected in certain songs. These include the policemen in *Chanson d'Orkenise*, the sense of listlessness and escapism in *Hôtel*, and the feeling of loss experienced by displaced soldiers after war in *Sanglots*. This was followed by a general overview of compositional elements, such as melody, rhythm and harmony, within each song, as suggested by Kimball (2006). This helped to create an awareness of the compositional devices used by Poulenc and understand the underlying meaning in the text.

During the second step, instead of looking more closely at poetic and compositional devices in *Banalités*, I researched the origins of the poems and considered significant events in the poet's life, especially while writing these poems. I then made deductions as to how the composer could have used this in conjunction with his own knowledge and experience of the wars to express the effects of war in the music. The literature review informed the observations made during the second step of the close reading by providing background knowledge. This knowledge concerns the world wars, the German occupation of France and the effects of war, particularly on Apollinaire and Poulenc. Lastly, during the third step, an analysis of the poems and music allowed for insight into how Poulenc used melody, harmony, rhythm or any other element in the music to express the effects of war through *Banalités*. The translation of the poems was my own, however they were compared with existing sources to gain a fuller picture. The emerging findings and themes from these data sources were used to reach the conclusions of this study. Appendix A serves as an example of the analysis and interpretation process.

Since Beehler (1988) and Kinsella (2006) advise one to be aware that researchers will have different interpretations of a text, I foresaw that my interpretation of *Banalités* might be challenged. However, the process of reading the text and researching the literature on the cycle complemented my perspective and allowed me to gain new knowledge of Apollinaire's and Poulenc's experiences of war and the effect it had on their bodies of work.

### **3.6. Trustworthiness of the study**

It is impossible to attain complete impartiality in qualitative research; however, a qualitative study may be trusted on the grounds of validity (the accuracy of the researcher's findings) and reliability (consistency in the researcher's procedures) (Creswell, 2014). Strategies to guarantee validity included triangulation, using detailed descriptions, and admitting bias and contrasting evidence. Triangulation is the creation of themes based on different data sources that support the theme. Therefore, themes identified from the hermeneutic reading were strengthened with aspects of a traditional music analysis, as suggested by Kramer (2010), and with existing literature. The research process led to the discovery of themes such as escapism, patriotism, as well as scenes of war and the emotional and physical effects of living through wartime. Detailed descriptions with rich language and the inclusion of a variety of perspectives ensured a more realistic and clearer report. Lastly, admitting bias and contrasting evidence established honesty and realism in the study. Reliability was guaranteed through the documentation of the procedures that I followed, as well as through continuously ensuring that all information was relevant to the research questions and that the meaning of definitions remained the same throughout the study (Creswell, 2014).

According to Patterson and Higgs (2005), the two aspects of research quality concerning hermeneutics are credibility and rigour. They explain that credibility refers to the authenticity, plausibility and trustworthiness of a study, which are guaranteed through the hermeneutic circle and the interaction between the reader and the text. Furthermore, the rigorous process of hermeneutics contributes to a study's credibility (Patterson & Higgs, 2005). Wernet (2013) adds that the reliance on the text for meaning in hermeneutics ensures validity. During the process of the close reading, the text of *Banalités* was read and re-read multiple times. This led to a deeper understanding of the text, which was strengthened by knowledge of the context in which Apollinaire's poems were written, gained through the literature review. This insight, in conjunction with research on Poulenc and his experience of war, supported my opinion that *Banalités* was written as a reflection of the effects of war.

### **3.7. Ethical considerations**

This hermeneutic study did not include any human participants. I endeavoured to present my findings in a transparent and honest manner by carefully following the hermeneutic process. I declare that this is my own work and that I acknowledged all sources mentioned in the study according to the necessary requirements.

## Chapter 4: Close reading

### 4.1. Introduction

The following chapter entails a close reading of Poulenc's *Banalités*. The purpose of the close reading is to identify themes in the cycle that reflect the effects of living through a war. Each song is discussed separately, and a translation of each poem is included. A summary of the context in which each song was written is provided. Furthermore, possible interpretations of the poems by Poulenc are suggested, supported by elements of a music analysis and background knowledge of the poems of *Banalités*.

### 4.2. Close reading

#### 4.2.1. *Chanson d'Orkenise*

##### Chanson d'Orkenise<sup>13</sup>

Par les portes d'Orkenise  
Veut entrer un charretier.  
Par les portes d'Orkenise  
Veut sortir un vanupieds.

Et les gardes de la ville  
Courant sus au vanupieds:  
"Qu'emportes-tu de la ville?"  
"J'y laisse mon coeur entier."

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

"Que de coeurs dans Orkenise!"  
Les gardes riaient, riaient,  
"Vanupieds, la route est grise,  
L'amour grise, ô charretier."

##### Song of Orkenise

At the gates of Orkenise  
A carter wants to enter.  
At the gates of Orkenise  
A tramp wants to leave.

And the guards of the town  
Run up to the tramp:  
"What are you taking out of the town?"  
"I'm leaving my whole heart behind."

And the guards of the town  
Run up to the carter:  
"What are you bringing into the town?"  
"My heart to get married."

"What a lot of hearts in Orkenise!"  
The guards laughed, laughed,  
"Oh tramp, the road is grey,  
Love is grey, oh carter."

<sup>13</sup> The translation is my own; however, the translations of Winifred Radford and Richard Stokes were used as guidelines (Bernac, 1977; Stokes, 2021).

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

The handsome guards of the town  
Knitted superbly;  
Then the gates of the town  
Slowly swung shut.

The opening song of Poulenc's *Banalités*, *Chanson d'Orkenise*, takes us to the gates of the town, Orkenise. Here, a carter is entering to be married, which implies the presence of love. Meanwhile, a vagabond is not only leaving the town, but leaving behind his whole heart, implying the loss of love. Why love is lost is not clear; it could be unrequited love, the end of a relationship, or simply a scenario in which the vagabond is leaving his loved one behind, trusting that she will remain faithful. As the guards question the travellers, they laugh at their optimism and hope, and warn them that love and life do not necessarily lead to happiness. Whether the carter and vagabond are allowed to enter and leave as they planned is not mentioned. Instead, we are informed that the guards are knitting superbly, before the gates are slowly closed.

*Chanson d'Orkenise* is taken from the prose poem *Onirocritique* (1908) that Apollinaire initially wrote for the literary review *La Phalange* (The Phalanx). He later inserted it into his work *L'enchanteur pourrissant* (1909) (The rotting enchanter), a reinterpretation of the tale of the medieval magician Merlin (Roark, 2005). A sense of the exotic is created through the setting of Orkenise, since it is an imaginary place associated with the medieval times of Merlin (Grant, 1969). For his created town, Apollinaire was possibly inspired by the northern parts of Scotland, specifically the Orkney Islands (Allen, 1968). Roark (2005) explains that, through his chosen title, Apollinaire refers to Charles Baudelaire's (1821–1867)<sup>14</sup> practice of *oneirocritie* – conveying dreams in poetry – thus furthering the feeling of exoticism. Poulenc evokes this exotic place through the use of the F Dorian mode (Allen, 1968) and the lilting piano introduction, which seems to simulate the ringing of bells as a welcome to the new and mystical location (Figure 3). This expression of exoticism and mystery may serve as a mental escape to a dream-like world of a few hundred years earlier, both for the composer and the listener in occupied France.

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<sup>14</sup> Baudelaire was one of the French Symbolist poets, whose works helped shape modern poetry (Wanner, 1996).

Figure 3: *Chanson d'Orkenise, Banalités*, mm. 1–4



A sense of escape is further provided by the indication that this song is both written and intended to be performed in the style of a popular song (Poulenc, 1942). Poulenc's assimilation of the popular Parisian aesthetic could be seen as an attempt to relive his youth and the carefree environment that Paris had been (St-Aubin, 2008). Elements that exemplify the popular aesthetic are the indication to perform it briskly; the unwavering tempo and regular metre; the four-measure introductory *ritornello* (Figure 3), which later indicates different sections; and the wandering to the minor mediant, specifically from the Dorian mode on F to A-flat in mm. 37–40 (Figure 7) (St-Aubin, 2008).

According to a description by Poulenc (2006), the inspiration for the music of *Chanson d'Orkenise* came to him while marching to Cahors during his WWII military service. All of a sudden, he started whistling *Par les portes d'Orkenise* (At the gates of Orkenise) (Poulenc, 2006). Ultimately, he chose a folk-song style for the first song; however, Minneman (2019) posits that march elements are audible in the music. The questioning by the guards may be seen as one of the first hints of the context of war. During times of war, border crossing becomes increasingly difficult (Dimmel, 2014; Fuchs, 2010). One can imagine the carter and vagabond approaching the gates and hoping that their travel plans will not be thwarted. The scepticism with which the guards view the love felt by the travellers, along with the authority that they have by deciding who may or may not enter or leave the town, further reinforces this notion. Additionally, the appearance of the guards is accompanied by a chordal piano part (Figure 4), arranged in such a way that it evokes aggression (Allen, 1968).

Figure 4: *Chanson d'Orkenise, Banalités*, mm. 21–23

Et les gar - des de la vil - le Courant sus au

The accompaniment also grows denser (Figure 5) as it becomes apparent that the guards are mocking the travellers for their lovestruck hearts. The aggressive chordal arrangement contributes to a sense of restlessness that permeates the whole song.

Figure 5: *Chanson d'Orkenise, Banalités*, mm. 29–37

Que de cœurs dans

Or - ke - ni - se Les gar - des ri - aient, ri - ai - ent Va - nu-pieds la

Restlessness may also be detected in the short melodic motifs and the repetitive rhythm of two quavers and two crotchets throughout the piece. Other indications of restlessness are the fast

tempo, occasional dissonance and the sometimes-fluid piano part combined with the relentless repetition of crotchets on F in the left hand (Figure 6).

Figure 6: *Chanson d’Orkenise, Banalités*, mm. 5–8



The restlessness could be interpreted in two ways. It could portray the anxiety felt by people in their day-to-day life during traumatic times such as war. Conversely, the composer could have chosen to convey restlessness in a desperate attempt to create an energetic show of the stimulating life Paris offers during peacetime. This may suggest optimism for the future of Paris after WWII or a longing to return to pre-war Paris. This restlessness brings to mind the remarkable similarity between *Chanson d’Orkenise* and Poulenc’s later song, *Fêtes galantes* (1943). Both songs are written in the style of a popular Parisian song, to be sung at a rapid tempo. However, the words of *Fêtes galantes*, written by the poet Louis Aragon (1897–1982), portray the horrors of life during the occupation, therefore creating a sense of irony (Sprout, 2013). This is possibly foreshadowed in *Chanson d’Orkenise*.

The overarching atmosphere of the song is slightly disrupted in measures 37 to 40 (Figure 7), as the guards bitterly reveal their thoughts about love to the travellers with the words: “Vagabond, the road is grey; love is grey, oh carter”.

Figure 7: *Chanson d’Orkenise, Banalités*, mm. 37–40





This melancholic response is conveyed through the indication to use softer dynamics, the aforementioned modulation from F to A-flat Dorian and the use of a higher register in the accompaniment that creates a gentler feeling (Poulenc, 1942). This feeling of melancholy and gentleness is somewhat surprising, since for the first time, the guards are portrayed in a more sympathetic light. It is possible that they are warning the travellers from their own disappointing experiences of love. Poulenc might have chosen to convey this melancholy because of the depression he felt at losing his dear friends during times of war. He may also be referring to the fact that not all Germans, and indeed, not all Nazis agreed with Hitler’s ideology. Some of them treated their enemies with respect, and even in Germany there were resisters against Hitler’s regime (Clay, 2021; Duckett, 2015).

The ambiguous words, *les beaux gardes de la ville tricotaient superbement* (the handsome guards of the town knitted superbly<sup>15</sup>), are more difficult to interpret. These words are embodied by large intervals in the melodic line (Figure 8), which potentially pose a challenge for the singer, as it requires quick adjustments in the vocal mechanism (McKinney, 1994).

Figure 8: *Chanson d’Orkenise, Banalités*, mm. 41–44



These large intervals add to the increasing confusion created by the words of the song. It could be that this phrase simply defies understanding as an example of irony in keeping with the Surrealist tradition. According to Minneman (2019), this expression can be translated to “being tied up in knots” (Minneman, 2019, p. 11), in other words being confused or anxious, although she emphasises that it is up to the reader or listener to use their imagination and create their

<sup>15</sup> Some translate this sentence to “walked together proudly” (Allen, 1968, p.27; Grant, 1969, p. 51), possibly referring to the secondary meaning of *tricoter*, to prance (Collins Robert, 2010). Most other sources, including that of Winifred Radford in Bernac (1977), provide the translation of “knitted superbly” (Bernac, 1977, p. 71).

own meaning. What came to mind was that knitting is a metaphor for the travellers' plans. The guards can weave the carter and vagabond in and out of the town, just as wool is knitted into a garment. Another possibility is that this is a reference to the Thirty Years' War<sup>16</sup> and the lives of mercenaries that were stationed at the gates of Cologne to guard the city. These soldiers knitted as part of extra work they took on in order to survive, and Apollinaire would have seen engravings of them during his tour of Central Europe, while working as a tutor (Lafleche, n.d.). Through this image, one is made aware of poverty experienced during times of war. Although *Onirocritique* is not one of the Rhenish poems, this knowledge could still have informed Apollinaire's writing of the poem. This reference to the German soldiers' struggle for survival during the Thirty Years' War is the second indication of their sympathetic side. It is puzzling then, why Poulenc embraces this view in *Chanson d'Orkenise*. Was he trying to communicate that not all Germans supported Hitler and that not all the Nazi soldiers agreed with the occupation of European countries such as France? Or was he perhaps trying to ridicule them by recalling this memory of their history? The ambiguous poetry and Poulenc's energetic music setting of *Chanson d'Orkenise* result in a mysterious blend of anxiety and aggression with escapism and melancholy.

#### 4.2.2. *Hôtel*

##### **Hôtel**

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

##### **Hotel**

My room has the form of a cage,  
 The sun passes its arm in through the  
 window.  
 But I, who want to smoke to make mirages,  
 I light my cigarette on the fire of the day.  
 I do not want to work – I want to smoke.

After the events at the gates of Orkenise, we now find ourselves in a Parisian hotel room. Poulenc (2006) specified that he envisioned the hotel room in Montparnasse. Its inhabitant describes his surroundings and expresses the desire only to smoke and lounge the day away. Firstly, the room is described only through its likeness to a cage. Outside, the sun is shining, but instead of rays, it extends its arms through the window. This creates the idea of an embrace,

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<sup>16</sup> The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) grew from contention between the Catholics and the Protestants, causing great damage to the German people (Cramer, 2007).

rather than of someone basking in the sunlight. The speaker, while smoking, wants to create mirages from the smoke and lights his cigarette on the fire of the day, further evoking a sense of intimacy with the sun. His concluding wish is only to keep on smoking.

The poem was first published in 1914/1915, when Apollinaire hosted fellow poets from Italy. They were interested in publishing some of his poetry in their journal, *Lacerba*. While browsing through his work, they decided on a selection of short poems, including *Hôtel*. They grouped these under the title *Banalités*, but renamed it when Apollinaire suggested *Quelconqueries* (Whatnots). The title embodies the sentiment of the poems, in the sense that even the most everyday object can be glorified into a work of art, if the artist chooses to treat it as such. It also relates to Apollinaire's view that beauty is a representation of everyday reality (Bohn, 2010). This view into a normal day free of war may embody Poulenc's longing to return to peacetime in Paris. This suggestion is reinforced by the knowledge that Poulenc was moved to tears when he discovered *Hôtel* in his library. The music enhances the normality in the poem through the use of the low register and the mostly declamatory melody, thus approximating everyday speech (Figure 9). Additionally, *Hôtel* bears a resemblance to a café-concert song (Mellers, 1993), further enabling Poulenc to express nostalgia and patriotism.

The poem further has an autobiographical sense about it, as we are allowed into Apollinaire's thoughts while he observes his environment, becomes frustrated with his work and smokes. The fact that he spent time in jail in 1911, when he was thought to have stolen the Mona Lisa, may have contributed to his experience of the room as a cage (Bohn, 1997). *Cage* (cage) is the first word to grab the listener's attention in Poulenc's setting of *Hôtel*, and this is achieved through the shape of the melodic line. The melody starts relatively low and only moves in step-wise motion until it ascends with a fifth to the word *cage*, thus placing particular emphasis on the word (Figure 9).

Figure 9: *Hôtel, Banalités*, mm. 2–4

*p très lié et expressif*

Ma chambre a la for - me

d' u - ne ca - ge

The mention of a cage could also be interpreted as the capture of prisoners of war. Even though Poulenc was not arrested during the war, he must have felt confined in German-governed Paris, as suggested by the words “Locked in the dark, dirty shadows. Waiting” (Stein, 2019, p. 78), from Heggie’s song *Éluard* about the occupation of Paris. Additionally, prisoners of war often experience boredom (Imperial War Museum, 2021). Therefore, a sense of imprisonment could also result from feeling bored, which Poulenc already associated with WWI (Daniel, 1980). He usually composed at his country house in Noizay, and the composition of *Banalités* during WWII was no exception. As in WWI, his removal from Paris created feelings of boredom, which led to a sense of restriction, as he stated, “I have always worked here as if I were in prison, dreaming of fairy-tale countries: Monte-Carlo, Nogent, the Boulevard de la Chapelle [Paris]” (Daniel, 1980, p. 65). The boredom and the lethargy he experienced is conveyed through the atmosphere of laziness in *Hôtel*. This feeling is first indicated by the slow tempo, soft dynamics and the performance note *Très calme et paresseux* (very calm and lazy) (Poulenc, 1942).

The feeling of laziness extends to the image of the sunlight shining through the window, which evokes the image of someone on his summer holiday. The speaker’s wish to rest in the sunlight is conveyed through the frequent dissonance in the harmony that provides warmth to the music. Apart from reluctance to work, the poem also portrays a reluctance to face reality, achieved either by enjoying sunny weather or by smoking. The gentle and continuous chordal accompaniment evokes puffs of smoke, especially in the concluding bar, where the chords disappear softly into the air (Figure 10).

Figure 10: *Hôtel, Banalités*, mm. 23–24



Smoking is commonly seen as an escape mechanism, particularly in times of war (Dean, 2010). During WWI, cigarettes became a currency and a source of consolation for soldiers. They were also often given as gifts to men on the front. In 1914, Princess Mary, the only daughter of King George V (Denis, 2012), sent the British soldiers decorated boxes filled with cigarettes, tobacco and other smoking paraphernalia as Christmas gifts (Pimlott, 2016). Similarly, in 1916, the French government sent gratuitous snuff and tobacco to its convalescing soldiers in an effort to improve their morale (Dean, 2010). Apollinaire, who was already an enthusiastic smoker, wrote to his girlfriend and also to his war-godmother<sup>17</sup> to thank them for cigars and cigarettes that they sent during his military service (Goutierre, 2017).

Apollinaire's yearning to create mirages from the cigarette smoke could mean that he was planning future projects, since he sometimes referred to his works as mirages. Ironically, his complaint about working, as expressed here, results in a completed work (or mirage) – the poem *Hôtel* (Bohn, 2010). However, the word mirage is defined as something that is elusive or unattainable (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Within the context of war, this points to the probability that Poulenc craved the stability of peacetime, an unattainable wish during the war period.

In the climax of the song, the imagery of sunlight and smoking blend into one, creating a dream-like quality with the phrase *j'allume au feu du jour ma cigarette* (I light my cigarette on the fire of the day). The music accentuates this illusion through the modulation to the parallel minor key, the use of the relatively high register and the sudden use of softer dynamics (Figure 11).

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<sup>17</sup> During WWI, France created a system of correspondence between soldiers and war-godmothers. These women volunteered to send letters and parcels, initially to soldiers without families, but ultimately to any soldiers who wanted to be part of the scheme (Vidal-Naquet, 2016).

Figure 11: *Hôtel, Banalités*, mm. 11–14

Figure 11 shows a musical score for measures 11–14 of *Hôtel, Banalités*. The top system contains the vocal line, which begins with the lyrics "Pour fai - re des mi -" and continues with "- ra - ges j'al - lume au feu du jour". The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment. The score includes performance markings such as *p subito très doux* and *p très doux*. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Instead of escaping to a routine day, we now have the idea of escaping into a fantasy world, where the “fire of the day”, presumably the sun, has the ability to light a cigarette. Apollinaire attributes human qualities to the sun through the image of the sun’s arms reaching through the window or lighting a cigarette. Since the sun already provides comfort by being a source of heat, this comparison with a human being may suggest the desire to be close to a person whose presence also acts as a solace. For a soldier this could be a loved one at home, for Poulenc it could signify the friends from whom he was cut off during the world wars. The sentiment of the song is cemented by the last words, *je ne veux pas travailler, je veux fumer* (I do not want to work, I want to smoke). The word *pas* (not) is emphasised through the melodic jump of a major seventh, before gradually returning to the predominantly low, step-wise melody (Figure 12).

Figure 12: *Hôtel, Banalités*, mm. 17–19

Figure 12 shows a musical score for measures 17–19 of *Hôtel, Banalités*. The top system contains the vocal line, which begins with the lyrics "Je ne veux pas" and continues with "tra - vail - ler". The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment. The score includes performance markings such as *p*. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

The wish to escape from a tumultuous reality is evident throughout the song, whether it be into an ordinary, yet peaceful day, a lazy holiday or an evocative dream.

#### 4.2.3. *Fagnes de Wallonie*

##### **Fagnes de Wallonie**

Tant de tristesses plénières  
Prirent mon coeur aux fagnes désolées  
Quand las j'ai reposé dans les sapinières  
Le poids des kilomètres pendant que râlait  
Le vent d'ouest.

J'avais quitté le joli bois  
Les écureuils y sont restés  
Ma pipe essayait de faire des nuages  
Au ciel  
Qui restait pur obstinément.

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

Les bruyères fleurant le miel  
Attiraient les abeilles  
Et mes pieds endoloris  
Foulaient les myrtilles et les airelles.

Tendrement mariée  
Nord  
Nord  
La vie s'y tord  
En arbres forts et tors.  
La vie y mord la mort  
À belles dents  
Quand bruit le vent.

##### **Walloon Moorlands**

So much utter sadness  
Seizes my heart on the desolate moorlands  
While weary I set down among the fir trees  
The weight of kilometres to the roar  
Of the west wind.

I had left the pretty wood  
The squirrels stayed there  
My pipe tried to make clouds  
In the sky  
Which obstinately remained clear.

I confessed no secret  
Except an enigmatic song  
To the peat bog.

The heather, smelling of honey  
Was attracting the bees  
And my aching feet  
Trode blueberries and cranberries.

Tenderly married  
North  
North  
There life twists  
In trees that are strong and gnarled.  
There life bites death  
Greedily  
While the wind blows.

With the third song, *Fagnes de Wallonie*, we accompany a traveller (Apollinaire) through the moorlands of Wallonia in Belgium (Brown, 1989). The poem predominantly describes the various landscapes of this vast environment, while hints of Apollinaire's unhappy state are planted throughout. Exhausted from both gnawing sadness and his walk through the moorlands, he rests for a moment among the fir trees, while the wind rages. The weather perfectly complements the stormy emotions he is experiencing. After resting, he leaves the pretty woods where the squirrels stay and continues his journey. On the way, he smokes his pipe, but the smoke is immediately carried off by the wind and the air remains pure. Arriving in the wetlands, he confesses a secret in a song, which is not heard by anybody, only by the surrounding nature. Later, he tries to deny that he spoke these words (Figure 15). His thoughts flit back to the moors where the bees flock to the honey-fragranced heather and his sore feet trample berries. The poem becomes increasingly obscure as the poet creates the image of a marriage, but who or what come together in this union is not clear. It could be the gale that bends the shape of the trees in the forest, although the concept of the wind becomes blurred with the concept of life, as life twists in the trees. Another possibility is that the gnarled trees are a representation of twisting life, or that the trees teem with life, being home to birds and insects. In contrast to the marriage, the poem ends with the juxtaposition of life and death, as life bites voraciously into death while the wind howls.

Some authors suggest that this puzzling poem is a portrayal of Apollinaire's military service during WWI (Allen, 1968; Grant, 1969). The unsheltered environment, as well as the physical and emotional exhaustion, match his experiences in the trenches. However, this could not have been Apollinaire's intention, since he wrote *Fagnes de Wallonie* as part of the work *La Forêt* in 1899, well before his enlistment. In fact, the poem was inspired by a stay in Stavelot in Wallonia before he settled in Paris. Here, he became acquainted with the torment of young passion when he fell in love with a girl named Maria. Nature mirrored his emotions as he went for long nightly walks in the rugged nature of the Ardennes (Brown, 1989). Nevertheless, by the time Poulenc set it to music, he would have been aware that Apollinaire fought in the trenches. He would further have been able to recall his own military service of 1918 to 1921, along with the dreary surroundings and the depressed feelings he associated with this time. In other words, Poulenc could well have read his own experiences in this poem.

The poem mainly distinguishes between harsh and calmer elements of nature. Phrases such as *fagnes desolées* (desolate uplands), *tourbières humides* (damp bogs), *arbres forts et tors*, (strong and gnarled trees) and *bruit le vent* (the wind howls) starkly contrast with gentler



images such as *joli bois* (pretty wood), *écureuils y sont restés* (squirrels stayed there) and *bruyères fleurant le miel* (heather smelling of honey). The difference between these surroundings expresses the opposition of a dream with reality (Allen, 1968). Since the harsher images bring Poulenc's military service to mind, the sweeter images could well have reminded the composer of the nature in and around his childhood holiday destination, Nogent-sur-Marne. Through *Fagnes de Wallonie*, Poulenc chooses a poem with elements that serve as an escape from his current reality, that of WWII and occupied Paris.

In his musical treatment of the poem, the wind can be heard blustering throughout, due to the rapid tempo; the simple, continuous rhythm of quavers in the accompaniment, which provide momentum; and the relatively agitated melody (Figure 13). The restless tempo and melody further convey the tumultuous emotions expressed at the beginning of the song with the words *tant de tristesses plenières* (so much utter sadness).

Figure 13: *Fagnes de Wallonie, Banalités*, mm. 1–3

The image shows a musical score for the first three measures of 'Fagnes de Wallonie, Banalités'. It consists of two staves: a vocal line (CHANT) and a piano accompaniment (PIANO). Both are in F-sharp major (three sharps) and 3/8 time. The tempo is 'Très vite, d'un seul élan' with a quarter note equal to 92 beats per minute. The vocal line starts with a half note followed by eighth notes. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in both hands. The lyrics are: 'Tant de tris-tes - ses - plé - ni - è - res Pri - rent mon cœur aux'.

Poulenc uses flowing melodies and major tonalities to represent the woods where the squirrels are playing (F-sharp major) and the honey scented heather where the bees gather (A major), as opposed to the introductory F-sharp natural minor (Poulenc, 1942). As in *Hôtel*, smoking comes into play, this time from a pipe. For a second time this acts as a coping mechanism, although to a smaller extent. Allen (1968) suggests that the air (which stubbornly remains pure despite the smoke) is a metaphor for an inescapable reality, such as war, facing the poet (Allen, 1968) and the composer (Nichols, 2020; Sprout, 2013). The attempt to shroud the air in smoke suggests an effort to escape, but unfortunately, the endeavour is futile. The image of smoke is conveyed through chromaticism (mm. 17–20) and changing metres, thus creating obscurity (Figure 14).

Figure 14: *Fagnes de Wallonie, Banalités*, mm. 16–20

The musical score for Figure 14 consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 16-18. The vocal line has lyrics: "-tés Ma pipe es.say - ait de fai.rè des nu.a - ges". The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with frequent rests and dynamic markings of *mf*. The second system shows measures 19-20. The vocal line has lyrics: "Au ciel Qui res.tait pur obs - ti - né - ment". The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic complexity and dynamic markings.

The sense of mystery continues into the speaker's revelation of a secret through an enigmatic song (*chanson énigmatique*). One can detect his reluctance in admitting that he revealed this information, as the melodic line is broken into five smaller phrases by rests. This delays the utterance of the sentence and creates a sense of hesitancy (Figure 15).

Figure 15: *Fagnes de Wallonie, Banalités*, mm. 21–23

The musical score for Figure 15 shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 21-23. The vocal line has lyrics: "Je n'ai con - fi - é au.cun se.cret si - non u -". The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with frequent rests and dynamic markings of *mf*. The melody is characterized by a descending octave jump from *et* (and) to *mes pieds endoloris* (my aching feet).

The speaker's explanation that he did not confess a secret and his subsequent admission that he did reveal something, brings to mind the explanations and interrogations that take place during war. For Poulenc, in 1940, this could have been a reference to the Resistance, with whom he was starting to form a sympathetic relationship (Sprout, 2013; Stein, 2019). The physical hardships of war are hinted at through the speaker's hurting feet, which is reflected in the melody that echoes a cry of pain through the descending octave jump from *et* (and) to *mes pieds endoloris* (my aching feet) (Figure 16).

Figure 16: *Fagnes de Wallonie, Banalités*, mm. 33–34

The musical score for Figure 16 consists of two systems. The top system is the vocal line in F-sharp major, marked *mf*. The lyrics are "Et mes pieds en - do - lo - ris". The bottom system is the piano accompaniment, also marked *mf*, in F-sharp major. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a more rhythmic, harmonic line in the left hand.

Ambiguity increases towards the end of the song, by the succeeding images of marriage, the wind blowing through the trees, and life biting into death. An added element of confusion is the similar pronunciation of the words *mord* (bite) and *mort* (death) (Figure 17) (Minneman, 2019).

Figure 17: *Fagnes de Wallonie, Banalités*, mm. 42–43

The musical score for Figure 17 consists of two systems. The top system is the vocal line in F-sharp major, marked *ff*. The lyrics are "La vie y mord La mort". The bottom system is the piano accompaniment, marked *ff* and *violent*, in F-sharp major. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a more rhythmic, harmonic line in the left hand. The score includes a *port.* marking and a *rit.* marking.

This is the first song in the cycle to contain a direct reference to death, which is the highest cost of war. Similarly, the music becomes more violent with the modulation back to F-sharp minor, the expanded range for both voice and piano, bigger intervals and the *portamento* to the words *la mort* (death) (Figure 17). However, the song ends in F-sharp major, on the positive note of life defeating death (Poulenc, 1942). Nevertheless, as Dawson (1991) states, this song introduces pertinent anguish and mournfulness into the cycle and serves as an indication of growing intensity, which will be consummated in the final song, *Sanglots*.

#### 4.2.4. *Voyage à Paris*

##### **Voyage à Paris**

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

##### **Trip to Paris**

Ah! how charming  
To leave a dismal place  
For Paris  
Beautiful Paris  
Which one day Love had to create.

*Voyage à Paris*, in its brevity and simplicity, acts as a chink of light between the more sombre songs *Fagnes de Wallonie* and *Sanglots*. Written during peacetime, the poem is a description of the superior beauty of Paris. The speaker finds it charming to leave the dreary countryside for the pretty city of Paris – a city that must have been created by love. It clearly shows Apollinaire's affection for Paris where, in 1906, he was starting to move in artistic circles with the likes of Picasso and Gertrude Stein (1874–1946). His need of money to sustain his new lifestyle prompted him to focus more on prose (Brown, 1989). One of the resulting works was a musical, *Le marchand d'anchois* (The anchovy merchant) (1906), a collaboration with André Salmon (1881–1969) (Maras, 2021). It consists of more than 30 popular songs, one of which is *Voyage à Paris* (Bohn, 2010). Given its origin, it is fitting that Poulenc set the song in a popular Parisian style. The popular influence is seen in the simple rhythm and melody and the 3/4 waltz time. It is further apparent in the music's imitation of the lilting Parisian intonation, specifically that of Maurice Chevalier who, for Poulenc, embodied an elegant Parisian sentimentality (Bernac, 1977; Nichols, 2020). Once again, through the song's embodiment of singing and dancing, Poulenc escapes dark times by reminiscing about his carefree childhood and adolescence. The joyful atmosphere is reinforced by the E-flat major key, the fast tempo, the oom-pah-pah rhythm from the piano and the accompaniment's light texture (Poulenc, 1942).

After the dismal description of nature in *Fagnes de Wallonie*, a voyage to the vibrant city of Paris is a welcome thought. The song opens with an exclamation of excitement on the word *Ah!*, which indicates contentment on arriving in Paris. The music modulates to the minor mediant, G-flat major, on the phrase *Qu'un jour du créer l'Amour* (that one day must have been created by Love), another characteristic of popular Parisian music (Figure 18) (St-Aubin, 2008).

Figure 18: *Voyage à Paris, Banalités*, mm. 26–28



Apollinaire's sentiment that Paris was created by love must have filled Poulenc with sorrow, as he saw how the city became home to fear and dissension. When we hear the word *Ah!* again, it appears as a sigh (Allen, 1968). This is perhaps a melancholic sigh, since Poulenc fondly remembers what his city was like before WWII. The singing style of popular musicians is further mirrored in the playful use of *falsetto*<sup>18</sup> in measure 53 (Figure 19).

Figure 19: *Voyage à Paris, Banalités*, mm. 50–53



Through the occasional use of chromaticism, and the dissonance apparent in measure 63, with an A-flat in the voice and an A in the piano (Figure 20), a pang of sadness interjects the joyful song. However, it ends optimistically on a *fortissimo* E-flat major chord.

<sup>18</sup> When singing high pitches in the *falsetto* register, the vocal folds only vibrate partially, as opposed to fully, as when singing in the modal voice. It results in softer dynamics, less resonant timbre and is often used by singers to create a change in tonal colour, thus evoking a new sentiment. Since only male singers have a *falsetto* register, female singers would execute this note by using the head voice (McKinney, 1994).

Figure 20: *Voyage à Paris, Banalités*, mm. 62–65



According to Johnson (1985), Poulenc and Bernac often performed this song as an encore on concert tours in France. It was a comfort for them to know that they would soon be returning to the city they called home. At its premiere in occupied Paris on 14 December 1940 (Nichols, 2020), this sense of comfort would have been communicated to the audience as well. *Voyage à Paris* is dedicated to Paul Éluard (Poulenc, 1942), the man who encouraged Poulenc to be more vocal in his opposition to the war. This suggests that, with the composition of *Banalités*, he was taking his first steps to overcome fear and voice his opinion. Within the context of the occupation, his homage to Paris and its rich tradition of popular music becomes a symbol of loyalty to France.

#### 4.2.5. *Sanglots*

##### **Sanglots**<sup>19</sup>

Notre amour est réglé par les calmes  
étoiles  
Or nous savons qu'en nous  
beaucoup d'hommes respirent  
Qui vinrent de très loin et sont un  
sous nos fronts

##### **Sobs**

Our love is ruled by the calm stars  
  
Now we know that in us many men  
breathe  
Who came from afar and are one  
beneath our brows

<sup>19</sup> As discussed below, *Sanglots* is a combination of two poems. In this translation, the two poems are distinguished by the indentation of the first poem, as opposed to the second poem, which is not indented.

C'est la chanson des rêveurs  
Qui s'étaient arraché le coeur  
Et le portaient dans la main droite

Souviens-t'en cher orgueil de tous  
ces souvenirs  
Des marins qui chantaient comme  
des conquérants  
Des gouffres de Thulé des tendres  
cieux d'Ophir  
Des malades maudits de ceux qui  
furent leur ombre  
Et du retour joyeux des heureux  
émigrants

De ce coeur il coulait du sang  
Et le rêveur allait pensant  
A sa blessure délicate

Tu ne briseras pas la chaîne de ces  
causes

Et douloureuse et nous disait

Qui sont les effets d'autres causes

Mon pauvre coeur mon coeur brisé  
Pareil au coeur de tous les hommes

Voici, voici nos mains que la vie fit  
esclaves

Est mort d'amour ou c'est tout comme

This is the song of the dreamers  
Who tore out their heart  
And carried it in the right hand

Do you remember dear pride, all  
these memories  
The sailors who sang like  
conquerors  
The chasms of Thule the gentle skies  
of Ophir  
The accursed sick, those who flee  
their shadows  
And the joyous return of happy  
emigrants

From this heart there ran blood  
And the dreamer went on thinking  
Of his wound which was delicate

You will not break the chain of these  
causes

And painful and said to us

Which are the effects of other causes

My poor heart my broken heart  
Similar to the heart of all men

Here, here are our hands that life  
enslaved

Has died of love or so it seems

Est mort d'amour et le voici  
Ainsi vont toutes choses,  
Arrachez donc le vôtre aussi

Et rien ne sera libre jusqu'à la fin  
des temps  
Laissons tout aux morts  
Et cachons nos sanglots

Has died of love and there it is  
Such is the way of all things  
So tear out yours too

And nothing will be free until the  
end of time  
Let us leave everything to the dead  
And conceal our sobs

Concluding the cycle is the perplexing song *Sanglots*, which has caused many interpreters to scratch their heads. The complexity arises from the amalgamation of two poems in one. Written on the back of a weather report for 9 April 1917, Apollinaire penned one poem, filling the page. However, he then inserted additional verses which, given that there was no more room left on the page, he squeezed into the margins (Figure 21) (Cameron, 1953).





Given the date of the weather prediction on which the original manuscript is written, one can deduce that Apollinaire wrote *Sanglots* in 1917, after having suffered the head wound that led to his discharge from the military (Bogousslavsky, 2005; Cameron, 1953). It was on 17 March 1916 that, as he read a literary magazine, he was struck in the head by an enemy bullet, but his helmet prevented his death. While his mental capabilities seemed unaffected, he displayed a noticeable change in personality and avoided emotional stimuli. This is reflected in the fact that he coolly broke off with his fiancée, with whom he had been passionately in love (Bogousslavsky, 2005). This passion, which also manifested in his previous relationships with women, was completely lost. This is evident, since he eventually married a woman named Jacqueline, with whom he merely shared a temperate bond. The emotional change spilled over into his work and new poems conveyed an empty and sorrowful tone (Bogousslavsky, 2005). This is apparent in *Sanglots* and clarifies Minneman's (2019) observation of the painful change that WWI caused in Apollinaire.

Poulenc presents the dreamer's song with a slow, soft piano introduction in F-sharp minor, similar in melodic shape to the opening of *Chanson d'Orkenise* (Dawson, 1991), thus bringing the music full-circle, as is fitting for a song cycle (Youens, 2001). This further creates a sense of reflection and sets a calm and mournful tone for the poem. The bassline features a continuous repetition of crotchets on F-sharp, offsetting the crotchets in the middle voice in such a way that a heartbeat may be discerned (Figure 22).

Figure 22: *Sanglots, Banalités*, mm. 1–3

Très calme (♩ = 66)

PIANO

*mp clair*

*Durant toute cette mélodie, se servir beaucoup des pédales*

The semblance of peace is reiterated in the words *Notre amour est réglé par les calmes étoiles* (Our love is ruled by the calm stars). The idea that rule is exerted over love evokes Apollinaire's change from a spirited lover to a quiet companion. With the words *or nous savons qu'en nous beaucoup d'hommes respirent/ Qui vinrent de très loin et sont un sous nos fronts* (now we know that in us, many men breathe/ Who come from faraway and are one beneath our brows), the dreamer goes on to express that his sentiments are relevant to all people. This unity in

humanity could be a reference to the oneness that Apollinaire experienced with his comrades in arms during WWI.

According to the original manuscript, it is here that the second poem, written in the margin, becomes intertwined with the first, through the appearance of the narrator who describes the dreamer (Cameron, 1953). Bernac (1977) claims that the second poem only starts later. However, it seems that, perhaps at an unconscious level, Poulenc was able to discern the change in *Sanglots*. This is not surprising, given his preference to set the poems of poets that he had met and his careful study of prosody and implied meanings in a poem. He indicates the new section through the modulation to E-flat minor, the change from a fluid line to a denser and chordal accompaniment, and a more animated tempo (Figure 23). As the narrator explains to the listener that, until now, we have heard the dreamer's song, the use of rolled chords creates an appropriate dream-like sense. However, this is soon replaced with the image of the dreamer ripping out his heart and carrying it with him, complemented by the intensity arising from the faster tempo (Poulenc, 1942). In a literal sense, a heart wound would cause significant physical damage, if not death. However, within this Surrealist poem, a figurative meaning is probably intended. Thus, a hurting heart might refer to the emotional loss that war brings. For many, this means losing their loved ones, but for Apollinaire, this could well be the loss of his former self, leaving him with a sense of emptiness.

Figure 23: *Sanglots*, *Banalités*, mm. 14–19

et sont un sous nos fronts

*p* *m.d.* *très estompé*

Animer un peu mais très progressivement *p* *mp*

C'est la chan-son des rê-veurs Qui s'étaient ar-ra-ché le

Animer un peu mais très progressivement *p* *mp*

Fin.

The shift back to the dreamer's song, where Bernac (1977) reasons the second poem starts, is more subtle. In fact, one can only depend on the poetry here to show the change in tone, where the dreamer asks his pride whether it remembers all his memories. However, the phrase does end with a preparation to modulate to B-flat minor, thus showing the move from the second poem back to the first one, as various recollections flash by (Allen, 1968; Poulenc, 1942). These memories, both painful and joyful, can be interpreted as memories from the trenches. The dreamer is in a state of agitation, due to flashbacks that come and go. This is reflected in the gradually increasing tempo and the use of minor and diminished chords (Figure 24) (Allen, 1968).

Figure 24: *Sanglots, Banalités*, mm. 27–35

The musical score for Figure 24 is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat minor (three flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system (mm. 27-30) begins with the vocal line: "Animer encore un peu" (mf) followed by "Des ma-rins qui chan-taient com-me des con-qué-rants" (mf). The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line. The second system (mm. 31-34) continues with the vocal line: "Des gouf-fres de Thu-lé des ten-dres cieux d'O-phir" (mf). The piano accompaniment maintains its rhythmic pattern. The third system (mm. 35) concludes with the vocal line: "Des ma-la-des mau-dits de ceux qui fuient leur om-bre" (p). The piano accompaniment ends with a final chord in the right hand and a sustained bass note in the left hand, marked with a *pp* dynamic.

The dreamer reflects on sailors' songs of victory, which could signify Apollinaire's reminiscence of victories he shared with fellow soldiers. An element of mystery is incorporated by some memories set in the mythological land of Thule and the Biblical country, Ophir

(Stefansson, 2021; 1 Kings 9:28, Amplified Bible). Thule was once regarded as the northernmost part of the world, practically where it ended. Similar to Orkenise, the Orkney Islands have been considered as the location for Thule (Stefansson, 2021). Ophir is described in the Bible as a land rich with gold (1 Kings 9:28, Amplified Bible). Possible modern locations are thought to be the Middle East, other parts of Arabia or of Africa, even as far south as today's Zimbabwe (Footnote to 1 Kings 9:28, Amplified Bible). The reference to these places could indicate another wish to escape; however, the mention of Thule has a secondary, more sinister meaning. Shortly after WWI, an occult group named the Thule Society was formed in Munich. This group worked closely with the early Nazi party and were responsible for racist ideologies such as anti-Semitism and Aryan superiority, which are associated with the Nazi party (Kurlander, 2012; Lührssen, 2012). Within the context of recollections of war and French anger towards the Germans during the early 1900s, this reference to Thule could be seen as a memory of fighting the enemy. As the flashbacks continue, the song grows even more intense as the use of triplets causes the music to move faster (Figure 25), heightening the thought of sick and fearful people that flee, even from their own shadows. These people could be refugees or perhaps soldiers returning home, having to navigate the lasting effects of trauma. The last of these flashbacks is surprisingly optimistic, because it depicts the joy of emigrants returning to their home and, for the first time in *Sanglots*, a major key, first E-flat then E, is used to convey this (Poulenc, 1942). This might be likened to soldiers returning to their countries or prisoners of war being released or escaping.

Figure 25: *Sanglots*, *Banalités*, m. 33





On the words *heureux émigrants* (happy emigrants), the music starts to slow down to the first tempo as the poem switches back to the narrator's commentary. The piano also returns to the pulse-like movement which, along with the fluid line, highlights the image of blood flowing from the dreamer's torn heart. The heart wound is described as delicate, which is heard in the accompaniment through the use of appoggiaturas functioning as a rolled chord (Figure 26).

Figure 26: *Sanglots, Banalités*, mm. 44–46

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system is a vocal line on a single staff with the lyrics "A sa bles-su-re dé-li-ca-te". The second system shows the piano accompaniment on two staves. The piano part features a pulse-like movement with appoggiaturas, and the tempo marking "à l'aise" is visible above the staff.

Before, the narrator is able to finish the description of the heart wound, the dreamer interrupts him. From this point on, for the next few phrases, the narrator's and dreamer's speeches succeed each other immediately, so that they can only utter a half-sentence at a time (translation and Figure 21). The dreamer's words become more urgent as they constantly interrupt the narrator's description of his heart wound. To add to the confusion, the narrator starts to relay the words of the dreamer. This means that everything is ultimately said by the dreamer, either directly or indirectly through the narrator.

The dreamer addresses the listener in measures 47 to 48 (Figure 27), and declares, *tu ne briseras pas la chaîne de ces causes* (you will not break the chain of these causes). In measures 49 to 50, the narrator speaks again, saying, *et douloureuse et nous disait* (and painful and said to us). The dreamer interjects a second time in measures 51 to 52, with the words, *qui sont les effets d'autres causes* (which are the effects of other causes). In measures 53 to 56, the narrator has a chance to speak again, explaining that the dreamer said to him, *Mon pauvre coeur, mon coeur brisé/ Pareil au coeur de tous les hommes* (My poor heart, my broken heart/ Similar to the heart of all men). Measures 57 to 59 present more words directly from the dreamer, saying, *Voici, voici nos mains que la vie fit esclaves* (Here, here are our hands that life enslaved) (Figure 27).

Figure 27: *Sanglots, Banalités*, mm. 47–59

*mf* intense

Tu ne bri-se-ras pas la chaîne de ces cau - ses Et douloureu - se

et nous di - sait Qui sont les ef-fets d'autres cau - ses

*p* très doux

Mon pau-vre cœur mon cœur bri - sé Pa - reil au cœur de

*mf*

tous les hom - mes Voi-ci voi-ci nos mains que la vie fit es-cla - ves

Céder un peu

*tenu* Céder un peu

*m. g. en dehors*

Figure 27 further illustrates how Poulenc uses contrasting tonalities in the music to distinguish between the dreamer and the narrator in this section. By distinguishing the words of the dreamer from those of the narrator, one can understand the thread of their individual discourses more easily.

By combining the dreamer's first two half-sentences, one realises that he states, "You will not break the chain of these causes, which are the effects of other causes". The chain of causes is possibly another way of referring to the series of events that he remembered from war (Figure 24). He defiantly tells the listener that this chain or series cannot be broken. Apollinaire does not want to forget these events. Conversely, these events are perhaps those that led to his weakened state after the war; thus, he would like to forget them, but cannot. The fact that this chain cannot be broken further creates a sense that something inevitable is about to happen. By adding that the chain, or series, of events are the effects of other events, Apollinaire reinforced the idea that he was the victim of inevitable and unstoppable events.

When the dreamer speaks again, he looks at his hands and exclaims that life has made them slaves. Few, if any, soldiers enter a war with the knowledge of the moral injury that they will suffer, and many end up experiencing trauma due to feelings of guilt and of responsibility for damaged or lost lives (Puniewska, 2015). Therefore, the image of his enslaved hands hints at a feeling of guilt that Apollinaire experienced because of his role in WWI, or because of bitterness towards those responsible for the start of the war, which forced him into a compromised situation. The dreamer's words (Figure 27) are set to music that conveys a tone of aggression. It features a loud, declamatory melody in the low register, sounding more like speech than singing, and is accompanied by accented chords in the piano part (Figure 27).

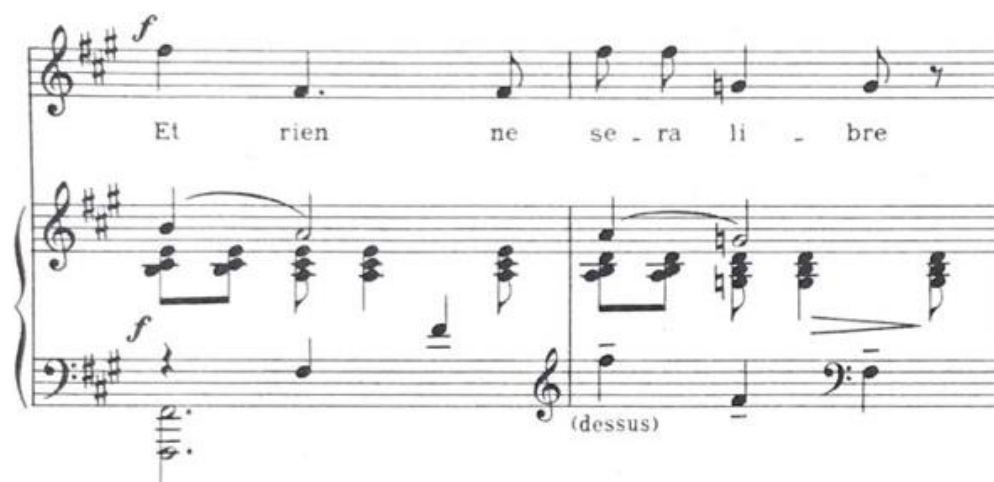
Throughout the dreamer's speech, the words of the narrator, "and painful; and said to us: 'My poor heart, my broken heart, similar to the heart of all men'", are scattered. Continuing after having described the dreamer's heart wound as delicate (Figure 26), with these words he adds that it is also painful. In contrast to the dreamer's music, the music of the narrator is identified through a softer, more lyrical melody and longer note values, i.e., quavers as opposed to semiquavers (Figure 27). The listener further learns that the dreamer told the narrator that he is lamenting his broken heart, but simultaneously realises that all men alike suffer from a broken heart. This is presented through a gradually ascending melodic line in E-flat minor (Poulenc, 1942).



Following the intersecting speeches of the dreamer and the narrator, the tempo slows down as the latter is allowed to finish his tale. The narrator explains that the dreamer told him that his heart had died of love, or rather was destroyed by love, but that such is the course of all things. In Apollinaire's life this can be understood to mean that, because of his love for France, he fought in WWI, which led to the bullet wound in his head. This is particularly compelling, given the fact that he died the year after writing *Sanglots*, at the tender age of 38. Alternatively, this could be seen as a reference to the change in his personality and the death of his love for his former fiancée. The narrator concludes by advising the listener to tear out his heart too, perhaps in an attempt to obtain sympathy for the dreamer.

*Sanglots* ends with the dreamer continuing the speech about his memories and enslaved hands. In a melodic line reminiscent of the reference to aching feet in *Fagnes de Wallonie* (Figure 28), he states that nothing will be free until the end of time. The use of these words creates a sense of relentlessness, thus revealing that the dreamer has suffered permanent loss due to the war.

Figure 28: *Sanglots*, *Banalités*, mm. 68–69



Finally, he tells the audience that they should leave everything to the dead and hide their sobs. The desire to leave something for the dead evokes the feeling of survivor's guilt. It could be argued that Apollinaire felt unworthy to carry on with his life and all that it had to offer. Conversely, he might have felt that his sobs needed to be suppressed, because he had the opportunity to live his life and should have been grateful. This restrained sadness is echoed in the modulation in the last few bars from A major to F-sharp minor, and uncertainty is caused through the delayed root of the final chord (Figure 29) (Dawson, 1991). The listener is left with an inescapable feeling of loss and regret.

Figure 29: *Sanglots, Banalités*, mm. 76–77

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Céder à peine" from the song cycle "Sanglots, Banalités" by Francis Poulenc. The score is written for voice and piano. The top staff is a vocal line with a fermata. The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a crescendo leading to a pianissimo (*ppp*) dynamic. The bottom staff is a second vocal line, also with a fermata. The score includes the lyrics "Céder à peine" and "(dessus)" above the second vocal line. At the bottom, there are two "Ped." markings with asterisks, and the text "Paris Novembre 1940".

Despite the confusing arrangement of the two poems, they both serve to describe the thoughts and emotions of Apollinaire after his service in WWI, along with the physical effects with which he was left. Poulenc's emotionally intense setting perfectly complements Apollinaire's experience and further proves his insight into the life and work of this great poet.

### 4.3. Conclusion

This chapter consists of a close reading of the poetry and music of Poulenc's song cycle, *Banalités*. The context in which the poems were written is summarised and how they reflect the effects of war explored. This is accompanied by a description of Poulenc's musical treatment of the poetry and the manner in which his chosen compositional devices highlight the meaning of the poems. Some themes that came to light are loyalty to France, evocation of traumatic events, the physical and emotional effects caused by living through wartime, and escape from traumatic events. Escapism may be seen in the influence of popular Parisian music, which is exuded in *Chanson d'Orkenise*, to an extent in *Hôtel* and especially in *Voyage à Paris*. This popular influence also indicates loyalty to France, thus highlighting Poulenc's love and the sacrifices that Apollinaire made for the country. Various images hint at the context of war, such as the guards questioning the travellers in *Chanson d'Orkenise*, the mention of a cage in *Hôtel* and the sombre depiction of nature in *Fagnes de Wallonie*. *Sanglots* paints a pertinent picture of Apollinaire's experience of WWI, which is heightened by Poulenc's fervent musical setting. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of these themes in relation to existing literature.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion**

### **5.1. Introduction**

In this study, the elements of war as reflected in Poulenc's song cycle, *Banalités*, were explored. The research process led to an understanding of the context of *Banalités* and the minds behind its poetry and music. In Chapter 1, the background to the study is explained and the research goals outlined. Chapter 2 is an exploration of the lives and works of Poulenc and Apollinaire, with special concern for their experiences of war, and includes a discussion of the literature on Poulenc's *Banalités*. The chosen research approach and methodology are presented in Chapter 3, whilst Chapter 4 consists of the close reading of *Banalités*. The following and final chapter is a discussion of the research findings. In Chapter 5, the experiences of war through the perspectives of Apollinaire and Poulenc are summarised and the themes that were apparent in the close reading are discussed. Suggestions for further research conclude the chapter.

### **5.2. The effects of war on Apollinaire and Poulenc**

Apollinaire and Poulenc both expressed a love for France, especially for its capital, Paris (Brown, 1989; St-Aubin, 2008). They were both affected by war and conveyed their experiences through their work (Hoagland, 2014; Sprout, 2013). For Poulenc, WWI initially only caused a perception of listlessness in Parisians until he was drafted for military service (1918–1921). Whilst not in danger, the forced separation from his beloved city, growing circle of friends and budding career resulted in feelings of depression, boredom and loneliness (Daniel, 1980). In Apollinaire's life, WWI had more serious consequences. Unlike Poulenc, he willingly enlisted in the army, demonstrating his loyalty to his adopted country by becoming a French citizen and fighting in the trenches. He chronicled the good and bad experiences of war in his collection *Calligrammes* (1918) and became involved in the trench journals, which the soldiers created and distributed for distraction from their circumstances (Hoagland, 2014; Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018). Ultimately, this act of loyalty to France led to him being shot in the head. Thankfully, his helmet prevented his death, but the head wound resulted in brain injury, causing a change in his personality and creating within him a sense of emptiness. Before the end of the war, he died of the Spanish flu (Bogousslavsky, 2005).

During WWII, in 1940, Poulenc embarked on a goodwill tour of France, leading to his absence from Paris when the city was occupied by the Germans. In the same year, he was also part of an anti-aircraft unit for a few days, before having to flee to a village outside Cahors when the

French surrendered to the Germans. Although short-lived, his time in the country filled him with hope and new ideas for compositions (Sprout, 2013). However, on his return to occupied Paris and finding that many of his friends had emigrated or been deported, he was filled with despair similar to that which he experienced while serving in the army during WWI (Daniel, 1980). As indicated in Heggie's song, *Éluard*, which mentions that "the Germans have taken Paris" (Stein, 2019, p. 71), it was during this time that Poulenc was fearful of making his sentiments regarding war known and that Éluard encouraged him to take a more vocal stance. His dedication of *Voyage à Paris* to Éluard (Poulenc, 1942) indicates that, with the composition of *Banalités*, he was starting to take a stand against the occupying forces. He showed increasing sympathy with the Resistance through later compositions throughout the war, such as *Les animaux modèles* and *Figure Humaine*; however, he displayed this sympathy subtly so as to avoid unwelcome attention from censors or German soldiers (Sprout, 2013).

When setting *Banalités* to music, Poulenc could amalgamate his own experience of the world wars with his knowledge of Apollinaire's service in WWI to identify elements of war in the poems. Since Apollinaire did not live to see WWII, any obvious reflection of war in the poetry would be a reference to WWI rather than WWII, although many of these images could also be seen as a reflection of WWII and thus, of war in general. Even though the first four poems Poulenc used for the cycle were written before WWI, they may still be interpreted in light of the war. These poems suggest a desire to escape, loyalty to France and even a few images that might have triggered memories of war for Poulenc. The only poem written after Apollinaire's time as a soldier is *Sanglots* (1917), which exhibits reminiscences of war and eerily foreshadows his death the following year (Bogousslavsky, 2005).

### **5.3. Themes identified in the close reading**

#### **5.3.1. Escapism**

A sense of irony pervades the whole of Poulenc's *Banalités*. This is first indicated by the title, which implies a mundane subject. However, the expectation is subverted with the beautiful piano introduction (Figure 3) of *Chanson d'Orkenise* and the ambiguous poem that follows. This sets the tone for the rest of the cycle, in the sense that it is mostly a balance of melancholy (especially since it was written during WWII) and buoyancy (probably a symbol of escape from circumstances). This balance is well suited to the irony of Apollinaire's poetry (Bohn, 2010) and functions as an extension of the duality in Poulenc's personality, that of the monk and the rascal (Nichols, 2020). In this sense, the monk is mourning the devastating effects that the war

has on France, while the rascal is attempting to escape this reality through dreaming or reliving Parisian life from before the war.

Various images are created in the poetry that serve to convey an escape from the reality of living in times of war. Far-off countries are named in both *Chanson d'Orkenise* and *Sanglots* to which the poet, composer, and eventually the performer and listener can be transported. These places are the imaginary town of Orkenise from Apollinaire's *Onirocritique*, the mythological land of Thule whence many legends arose and the Biblical country of Ophir, a place rich in gold. *Chanson d'Orkenise* and *Sanglots* are linked to each other, since both Orkenise and Thule could be traced to the Orkney Islands. Another fantastical place is hinted at in *Hôtel* through the personification of the sun. This characterisation creates a dream world where the sun has the ability to light a cigarette and to embrace someone. Poulenc brought these places to life with his use of harmony, through the modal tonality of *Chanson d'Orkenise* that evokes the setting of Orkenise (Figure 3), and chromaticism to create warmth in the music of *Hôtel* (Figure 9), thus alluding to the sun. In *Hôtel*, the humanity that is mirrored in the sun can also suggest a more realistic escape, the desire to be with a loved one. By recalling these characteristics and comparing the sun with a person, an escape into the comforting presence of a lover or friend is brought to mind. The music embodies this feeling through the modulation from major to minor, a higher melodic line and softer dynamics (Figure 11). Apollinaire and Poulenc would both have longed for this company during WWI, while they were separated from their loved ones, and again during WWII, by Poulenc, when his friends emigrated or were deported (Daniel, 1980; Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018).

Other scenes of escape are less mystical and could even be seen as a desperate attempt to cope with circumstances. This can be detected in *Chanson d'Orkenise*, where a sense of anxiety underlies the sense of mystery. Agitation is derived from the restless melody and piano part, along with the steadfast rhythm and the large intervals in the vocal line towards the end of the song (Figures 5, 6 and 8). The combination of whimsical words with restless music suggests a need to deny the inescapable reality of life during war. However, people do have their methods of remaining calm in the face of tribulations. The mention of smoking in *Hôtel* and *Fagnes de Wallonie* refers to a coping mechanism that is often turned to during times of trauma, such as war. Apollinaire himself enjoyed cigarettes and cigars to alleviate the stress of fighting in WWI (Goutierre, 2017). A sense of haziness is created in the music, thus mirroring smoke wafting through the air. This is achieved through the chromaticism in both songs, the softly

disappearing chords in the accompaniment of *Hôtel* and the changing metres in *Fagnes de Wallonie* (Figures 9 and 14).

Additionally, memories of normal life in France during peacetime provides another escape. The hustle and bustle of a day in Paris is represented in the energetic music of *Chanson d'Orkenise* (Figure 6). In *Hôtel*, ordinary experiences such as going on holiday or having to work are mentioned. The feeling of everyday life is created through the predominantly speech-like melody employed throughout the song (Figure 9). Furthermore, the idea of taking a holiday is immediately brought to mind through the title and is reinforced by a lazy desire to smoke and lounge in the sun. Poulenc conveys the scene through a slow tempo and soft dynamics (Figure 9). The relaxing atmosphere is embodied through the poetry and music evoking sunlight and smoke. Other elements of a holiday can be identified throughout the song cycle, mostly through Poulenc's use of popular French music. The popular Parisian aesthetic is already apparent in the lilting introduction to *Chanson d'Orkenise* (Figure 3) and throughout the rest of the song. Elements thereof are identified in *Hôtel* and it is used again in *Voyage à Paris* to a great extent. This suggests nostalgia for Poulenc's youth and creates a mental escape to an evening of music and dancing in Nogent-sur-Marne or Paris. Poulenc's childhood holidays, just outside Paris, are further evoked in *Fagnes de Wallonie*, where scenes of calm woodlands, flowers and animals playing may be identified. These scenes are represented by lyrical melodies in a major key, as opposed to the predominantly agitated song in F-sharp natural minor. In contrast to *Fagnes de Wallonie*, *Voyage à Paris* acts as a comforting balm for the French listener of 1940, since in this song, a glorious picture of Paris during peacetime is painted. The elements of popular music create a sense of joy reminiscent of dance halls in Paris and Nogent-sur-Marne.

### **5.3.2. Loyalty to France**

Both Apollinaire and Poulenc displayed love for France. Apollinaire, who came to France as an immigrant, easily integrated into the French way of life and found kindred spirits in his new country (Brown, 1989). By becoming a French citizen and voluntarily serving in WWI (1914–1916), despite his age, he showed the depth of his loyalty to France (Hoagland, 2014). He ended up paying a high price for his adopted country, as his time in the trenches led to his head wound and personality change (Bogousslavsky, 2005). Conversely, for the *parigot*, Poulenc's military service (1918–1921) did not place him in much danger, although he felt depressed due to having been taken away from his city and friends (Daniel, 1980; Nichols, 2020). His French roots influenced his taste in music, leading him to compose music that could be seen as

distinctly French. He showed a preference for the humorous, yet tasteful, quality of French music and one can identify elements of the Parisian popular aesthetic in most of his compositions (Nichols, 2020; St-Aubin, 2008).

Poulenc's use of the popular Parisian aesthetic is mostly identifiable in *Chanson d'Orkenise* and *Voyage à Paris*, although *Hôtel* resembles a café-concert song (Mellers, 1993) and its largely low, speech-like melody and simplicity are reminiscent of Parisian *chansons*<sup>20</sup>. *Chanson d'Orkenise* is heralded with a lilting, introductory *ritornello* in the piano. As the song progresses, this same *ritornello* is used to differentiate between sections. Other elements of popular Parisian music are the brisk and unchanging tempo indication, the regular metre and the modulation to the minor mediant (Figures 6 and 7). Poulenc's use of this style hints at his pride at being part of the French music tradition and thus, these elements represent patriotism (St-Aubin, 2008).

With *Voyage à Paris*, both the poem and the music clearly display a love for France. When reading the words, one finds pure joy as Apollinaire describes a beautiful scene of Paris. Further proof of his affection for this city is provided by the fact that he wrote it as part of the music spectacle, *Le marchand d'anchois*, in order to make ends meet in Paris (Brown, 1989; Maras, 2021). Given the origin of *Voyage à Paris* as part of a musical, Poulenc's setting, which is rich with popular Parisian qualities, complements the context in which it was written. The waltz structure of this song reflects the lilt of spoken French, commonly found in popular *chansons* (Bernac, 1977). Popular influences are also evident in the simple rhythm and melody, swift tempo, lightness in the piano part and the indication to use *falsetto* for the highest note, which is G-flat (Figure 19). Similar to *Chanson d'Orkenise*, *Voyage à Paris* also includes a modulation to the minor mediant (Figure 18), another compositional device found in popular Parisian music (St-Aubin, 2008). Poulenc's choice to dedicate this song to Éluard, who urged him to make his opinion of the war known, shows that he intended not only to write a typically French song, but also to stand firm with his countrymen during WWII. Therefore, this celebration of popular music from Paris is an affirmation of his love for and loyalty to France.

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<sup>20</sup> The word *chanson* refers to popular French songs, as opposed to the French *mélodie*, which is comparable to a German *lied* (art song) (St-Aubin, 2008).

### 5.3.3. Effects of war

#### 5.3.3.1. Physical effects of war

The physical toll of war is presented in *Banalités*. Soldiers are often left with physical effects, such as wounds or illnesses, after serving in a war (Hunt & Robbins, 2001). Four manifestations of bodily harm are apparent in the cycle, namely body aches, death, heart injury and the consequences of brain injury. *Fagnes de Wallonie* is the only song to mention aches, specifically aching feet, accompanied by a melodic line that mirrors the sound of someone crying out in pain (Figure 16). Furthermore, this song introduces the concept of death. However, *Fagnes de Wallonie* ends with a modulation to the parallel major key and a reference to life triumphing over death. Tension between life and death is seen again in *Sanglots*. This is suggested by the statement that the dreamer tore out his heart, which, understood in a literal sense, means death. The imagery of a heartbeat is identified in the constant bassline of the first section of *Sanglots* (Figure 22). Further mentions of death are found later in the song, with the assertion that the dreamer's heart has died of love and the concluding instruction to leave everything to the dead. The former may be a metaphor for the fact that Apollinaire's love for France led him to fight in WWI, which resulted in brain injury and his change in personality. Apollinaire's personality change led him to break with his fiancée and, thus, metaphorically speaking, his love for her died. A device that Poulenc used in both songs to express the presence of death, is the expansion of the ranges towards the ends of *Fagnes de Wallonie* and *Sanglots*.

Brain injury and the consequences thereof can only be discerned in *Sanglots* once the history of Apollinaire's military service, his head wound and the subsequent change in his personality is known. However, once this information has been explored, one can clearly see that *Sanglots*, which has a more sorrowful tone than the works from before his injury, conveys a sense of fear and loss. Therefore, the poem itself is a manifestation of the impact that a brain injury from WWI had on the poet.

#### 5.3.3.2. Emotional effects of war

It was apparent from the literature review that living through a war can elicit emotions such as fear, boredom, insecurity, humiliation, anger, depression and nostalgia (Daniel, 1980; Smith, 2010; St-Aubin, 2008; Stein, 2019; Van Puymbroeck & Van Dijck, 2018). Most of these emotions, specifically fear or anxiety, depression or sadness, boredom, anger and nostalgia, were detected in the close reading of *Banalités*. Additional emotions that were identified are despair, a sense of unity among soldiers, moral injury, feelings of regret or guilt, as well as the suppression of sadness. The experience of nostalgia is expressed as the desire to escape from



the reality of war and is therefore part of the section on escapism. The feelings of depression that Poulenc experienced during war are reflected in *Banalités* through the prevailing sense of melancholy or anxiety in his choice of poetry and music.

He used tonality and dissonance to convey melancholy throughout the cycle. In *Chanson d'Orkenise*, *Fagnes de Wallonie* and *Sanglots*, this is reflected in modal and minor tonalities. Additionally, chromaticism and/or dissonance are present in every song, creating a feeling of sadness, even in the predominantly joyful *Voyage à Paris* (Figure 20). These devices also contribute to a sense of anxiety or fear, which is compounded by the fast tempo and relentless rhythmic movement of *Chanson d'Orkenise* and *Fagnes de Wallonie* (Figures 6 and 13). The restlessness of *Chanson d'Orkenise*, reminiscent of Poulenc's *Fêtes galantes*, which describes the terrors of the occupation, can be seen as a symbol of anxiety during war. Furthermore, Poulenc's emotions elicited by WWI are apparent in the turbulent melody of *Fagnes de Wallonie* (Figure 13), which brings alive the unpleasant depiction of nature and evokes the surroundings in which Apollinaire and Poulenc had to live during WWI.

Conversely, the prevailing calmness of *Sanglots*, due to the slow tempo and the minor key (Figure 22), cements the despair apparent in the poem and highlights the fact that *Sanglots* is a product of Apollinaire's emotional change due to his head injury. The sense of fear and loss, particularly the loss of his former self and of the love he had for his fiancée, is identifiable in the poem. Statements that the stars rule the love of people, that the dreamer ripped out his heart and that he died of love or his feelings of love died, all evoke the poet's emotional change after his brain injury. Although it opens and closes serenely, *Sanglots* still contains sections where the tempo speeds up, most notably where the dreamer has flashbacks to times of war, thereby introducing urgency and a feeling of anxiety to the music. This is intensified by a denser texture in the piano part (Figure 24). The serenity of *Sanglots* is further interrupted by declamatory interjections, wherein the dreamer describes the enduring nature of his flashbacks to war (Figure 27). These interruptions suggest anger towards those responsible for the war and moral injury or guilt, because of the part the poet played in the war. Furthermore, survivor's guilt is hinted at towards the end of the song, with the assertion that everything must be left for the dead, suggesting that Apollinaire felt guilt at having survived his military service. The song then ends with the instruction to hide our sobs, thus indicating the suppression of sadness.

Finally, boredom was commonly experienced by soldiers in the trenches, by prisoners of war and, quite keenly, by Poulenc (Daniel, 1980; Imperial War Museum, 2021; Van Puymbroeck

& Van Dijck, 2018). He was confronted with boredom during his uneventful military service, and also when he was away from Paris due to other reasons. His feelings of boredom further bred a sense of imprisonment (Daniel, 1980). This feeling is mirrored in the slow setting of *Hôtel*, along with the soft dynamics and low, speech-like melody (Figure 9). These elements, combined with soft, continuous chords (Figure 10), further contribute to the lazy atmosphere, thus evoking the lethargy from WWI that Poulenc noticed among Parisians.

#### 5.3.4. Scenes of war

Even though four of the five poems used for *Banalités* were written before Apollinaire served as a soldier, there are various images in the poetry, which are then amplified by the music, to bring scenes of war to mind. Some of these are clearly identifiable, whilst others are implied rather than stated outright. The first suggestion of war is through the guards at the gates of Orkenise. The guards are shown in contrasting ways; they sometimes appear as the antagonists in the poem and at other times as sympathetic characters. Initially, they question the travellers as to their intentions for entering or leaving the town, bringing to mind the difficulty of crossing borders during war (Dimmel, 2014; Fuchs, 2010). Additionally, they seem to mock the feelings of love felt by the travellers. Their antagonistic behaviour is supported by the accented chords in the increasingly dense accompaniment (Figure 5). However, their warnings to the travellers, underscored by gentler music, and the image of them knitting paint them in a sympathetic light.

The opposing depictions of the guards create a sense of irony suitable for a Surrealist poem<sup>21</sup> such as *Chanson d'Orkenise* (Bohn, 2010). Irony is cemented in the image of them knitting. In the close reading, it is suggested that this is a reference to the Thirty Years' War when German soldiers did extra work, such as knitting out of necessity, alluding to the poverty of wartime (Lafleche, n.d.). The music further reinforces the synthesis of guards and knitting through the jumps in the melodic line (Figure 8). These jumps are uncomfortable for the singer, who must make quick adjustments in the vocal tract in order to sing in the frequently alternating high, middle and low registers (McKinney, 1994), thus reinforcing the uncomfortable image of guards knitting. Seeing the guards in a more sympathetic light leads one to believe that Poulenc was aware that not all German soldiers were willingly intent on harming the French, or indeed furthering Hitler's agenda (Clay, 2021; Duckett, 2015). Within *Chanson d'Orkenise*, the issues of border crossing and poverty during times of war are brought to mind.

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<sup>21</sup> Irony is a characteristic of Surrealism (Alexander, 2014; Bohn, 2010).

Further scenes of war are implied in *Hôtel* and in *Fagnes de Wallonie*. In *Hôtel*, the mention of a cage reminds us of the capture of multitudes of people during war (Imperial War Museum, 2021). Additionally, interviews or interrogations, which often precede imprisonment, are apparent in *Fagnes de Wallonie*, where the speaker attempts to deny that he revealed a secret, but then admits that he did divulge something. In both of these instances, the melodic line serves to highlight the meaning of the words. With the first image, the melody ascends from the speaking range to a fifth higher, thus stressing the word *cage* (cage) (Figure 9). In the second image, the division of one phrase into smaller parts creates hesitancy (Figure 15). Additionally, the idea of soldiers smoking is suggested in both of these songs. Their environment, that of the trenches, is further illustrated through the desolate depiction of nature in the poetry of *Fagnes de Wallonie* and is intensified by its agitated music (Figure 13).

The fact that *Sanglots* was written after Apollinaire was shot during WWI, which resulted in a brain injury, indicates that not only does it contain references to scenes of war, but that the poem itself is a product of the war. This is apparent in the physical and emotional effects that are described in the song and which are discussed in previous sections. However, the particularities of war are almost immediately brought to mind, such as the camaraderie among soldiers with the declaration that all men are one. This unity is found again when the dreamer admits that his loss and brokenness due to war are the same as those experienced by all men. Furthermore, the flashbacks of the dreamer include the remembrance of victories, battles, diseased and fearful people along with emigration. The last of these memories evoke refugees fleeing from war or coming back to rest in times of peace.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

The findings from this research study point to the experience of living through war, which can be of value to singers and pianists studying *Banalités*. Many themes were identified in the poems of the cycle, illustrating this experience. These include the desire to escape from this reality, as well as loyalty and patriotism. Furthermore, particular scenes of war were apparent, along with the effects of living through such a time, which manifested both physically and emotionally. The images in the poems were highlighted through Poulenc's use of various compositional devices. He would create certain atmospheres, first and foremost through his choice of tonality. Furthermore, the contrast between major and minor keys helps to distinguish different emotions. His use of fast and slow tempos additionally specifies emotions. For example, the use of a slow tempo may convey tranquillity in a major key or sadness in a minor key. Faster tempos, along with a major key, express joy, and a minor key could contribute to a

feeling of anxiety. Rhythmic constancy further helps to maintain an atmosphere. In *Chanson d'Orkenise* and *Fagnes de Wallonie*, the steadfast rhythm or repetition of rhythmic motifs maintain the expression of agitation or anxiety, whilst it adds to a joyful dance-like atmosphere in *Voyage à Paris*. Conversely, in *Hôtel* and *Sanglots*, the rhythmic constancy in the accompaniment preserves a sense of calm. The texture of the accompaniment further conveys emotion, such as light accompaniment to evoke joy or denser, chordal accompaniment to create intensity.

However, changes in tonality, dynamics and *tessitura* evoke a different atmosphere, such as can be heard in the few bars of gentler music that were incorporated into the largely restless *Chanson d'Orkenise*. This was done by way of a key change, softer dynamics and a melody that lies higher. Generally, chromaticism was used to create warmth in the music or occasionally, similar to the use of dissonance, to express sadness. Poulenc would also expand the range of a song and use large intervals in order to convey intensifying emotions. He further used the melody to highlight images, either by contrasting lyric and declamatory melodies or by shaping a melody to embody what the accompanying words describe. Elements from the popular tradition of Parisian music were used to convey nostalgia and thus escapism and patriotism or loyalty to France.

Within this study, the loyalty towards France of both Apollinaire and Poulenc became apparent. It is clear that they were both affected by war, which they expressed in their works. Given Poulenc's patriotism during WWII, which became more forthright in later works, *Banalités* functions as an introduction to Poulenc's resistance of war.

### **5.5. Suggestions for further research**

An investigation into the vocal challenges of performing *Banalités* would be useful for prospective singers of the cycle.

Additionally, hermeneutic studies focussing on Poulenc's other works from the periods of war, such as *Les animaux modèles* or *Figure Humaine*, would help researchers to understand how he expressed his experience of war in his compositions. Comparing works from different genres that reflect the elements of war would further establish if and how he conveyed these elements differently in choral works, instrumental works and song cycles.

Close readings of other compositions of Poulenc based on works of Apollinaire, such as *Le Bestiaire ou le cortège d'Orphée* and *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, would lead to a fuller understanding of Poulenc's musical treatment of Apollinaire's writings.

Since men and women traditionally have different roles during times of war, it would be of interest to research the difference in approach to *Banalités* by male and female singers, should they choose to view it through the lens of war.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Example of analysis and interpretation process

• Simple rhythm and melody,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , D major → some modulations.  
 • Soft chordal accompaniment.  
 • Slow, like a chanson → nostalgia/escape from war?  
 • Small range → speaking range → normality → Longing for holiday (Escapism?)  
 • Some chromaticism + dissonance.  
 ↳ Warmth in music; sun II. Hôtel

*à Marthe BOSREDON*

Très calme et paresseux (♩ = 50) *p* très lié et expressif  
 Ma chambre a la forme

Très calme et paresseux (♩ = 50)  
*pp* très doux m.g.

Softly disappearing chords → smoke wafts away?

Personification of sun (a source of heat) → longing for a loved one?

Calm and lazy → Boredom? \* ← Boredom can lead to feeling confined and v.v.

du ne ca - ge Le so - leil pas se son bras par la fe -

Capture ... — Maybe A's time in jail \*

tenu

Sun's arms, not rays?

né tre mais moi qui veux fu - mer Pour fa - re des mi -

mirage: unattainable  
 like peace during war?

\* Fumer → smoking

Apollinaire smoked during WWI. (Hôtel written before WWI...)  
 P might have known of this by 1940, when he composed B?

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the song 'Hôtel' by Apollinaire. The score is written in French and includes both vocal and piano parts. The tempo is marked as 'Très calme et paresseux' with a quarter note equal to 50 beats. The key signature is D major and the time signature is 3/4. The score is annotated with various handwritten notes and arrows, including 'escape from war?', 'Longing for holiday (Escapism?)', 'Boredom can lead to feeling confined and v.v.', 'Softly disappearing chords → smoke wafts away?', 'Personification of sun (a source of heat) → longing for a loved one?', 'Calm and lazy → Boredom? \*', 'Sun's arms, not rays?', 'mirage: unattainable like peace during war?', and '\* Fumer → smoking'. The lyrics are: 'Ma chambre a la forme / du ne ca - ge / Le so - leil pas se son bras par la fe - / né tre mais moi qui veux fu - mer Pour fa - re des mi -'. The score is numbered 'N. E. 6232 (2)' at the bottom.