

OPERA AT THE THRESHOLD OF A REVOLUTION: FRANCIS POULENC'S

DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES (1953-1956)

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Francis Poulenc's three-act opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1953-1956) depicts the struggles of the novice nun Blanche de la Force during the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution. The use of Latin liturgical music at critical points in the opera conveys the ritualistic nature of Catholic worship. The spiritual message of mystical substitution, along with the closely related notion of vicarious suffering, imbue the opera with a spirituality that offers a sharp contrast to earlier operatic settings of Catholic texts, particularly during the age of grand opera. Marian devotion also plays an important role in the opera. The final tableau of the opera stages the execution of Blanche and her sisters, complete with the sound of a guillotine, with the nuns singing the *Salve Regina* as they proceed to the scaffold. The multivalence of the final tableau highlights the importance of voice and its absence. While the nuns, onstage spectators, and the guillotine are audibly present in the scene, the priest participates solely through gesture. The surfacing of the Lacanian Real in the silent moment of traumatic shock that follows the guillotine's first fall allows for intertextual references to the opera in Poulenc's *Sonate pour Flûte et Piano* (1957) to function as a work of remembrance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recent operatic studies have challenged how we discuss sung musical drama in its many incarnations. While traditional opera readings focused on text-music relationships, scholars lately have expanded the scope of analysis to include such issues as staging, performance, audience reception, and cultural implications. The impetus for this dissertation is my longstanding fascination with Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* and a desire to understand it more fully, both within the context of recent approaches to opera analysis generally and the merits of this particular opera. Poulenc's opera challenges how we interpret and experience opera by foregrounding Catholic liturgical music that would have been banned from the French stage in the nineteenth century.¹ *Dialogues des Carmélites* also provides a glimpse into the intricacies of what it meant to be a Catholic woman both in the eighteenth century and in mid twentieth-century France.² The final tableau, in particular, presents religious worship in such a way that any distinction between staged drama and spiritual devotion blurs.

This religious performativity through music makes this opera a compelling work that has appealed to audiences since its premiere. I make the case that *Dialogues des Carmélites* is significant due to its unusual blending of the sacred and the secular on an

¹ The use of the word "Catholic" throughout this dissertation refers to the Roman Catholic Church unless otherwise noted.

² I use the term "liturgical" to mean pertaining to the Eucharist and other instances of Catholic worship, including the Liturgy of the Hours, or the Divine Office. According to *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, the Office is as much of a public manifestation of the Church as is the Eucharist, in that all members of the Catholic body are affected by the communal worship at the monastic hours. See Pierre Salmon, Patrick Regan, and John A. Gurrieri, "Liturgy of the Hours," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed, vol. 1 (Detroit and New York: Thomson Gale, 2003), 729-36.

opera stage and, more important, because it ultimately figures into a larger historical narrative. Through the centuries, opera has often drawn on historical subjects and events for its plots, but as I explore in these chapters, Poulenc's opera is the culmination of a trajectory of violence in France that begins with the French Revolution and continues through the German occupation during World War II.³ In this way, *Dialogues des Carmélites* actively participates in the historical narrative that it seeks to depict on the opera stage.

Topics Raised by *Dialogues des Carmélites*

The opera culminates in the execution of a group of Carmelite nuns who refused to disband during the Revolution, as depicted through the vantage point of the fictional heroine Blanche de la Force. In the last tableau, the nuns proceed to the guillotine, singing the *Salve Regina* text, to which Blanche adds the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* text immediately before her own execution, as a crowd looks on.⁴ Through this public spectacle, the opera audience can experience both the religious devotion of the nuns and the perspective of the crowd that witnessed the event.

This opera also invites us to think more generally about the relationship of women to the church and to Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment French society as a whole. Although the nuns are placed historically in the Revolution, they also represent a twentieth-century interpretation of late eighteenth-century women.

³ For a discussion of this historical trajectory, see Richard D. E. Burton, *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789-1945* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁴ The differences between historical fact and Poulenc's representation of the execution are explored in Chapter 2.

This study of this *Dialogues des Carmélites* also explores the ways in which the character of Blanche de la Force emerges and asserts her voice through musical dramaturgy.⁵ She does this in dialogue with her sisters as well as within her own mind as she moves to overcome the anxiety that has motivated her throughout her life. To take “dialogue” one step further in a frequently used critical approach, the opera is situated in a dialogic web of intertextual references to its predecessors in the well-established Bakhtinian sense of the term.⁶

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation is organized into four chapters, moving from the background for the opera (Chapter 2) and gender considerations (Chapter 3) to a discussion of liturgical music in the opera (Chapter 4) and close reading of the final tableau (Chapter 5). My methodology draws on gender theory, intertextuality, and musicological models for staged drama. In the Conclusion (Chapter 6), I apply Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to the work. These approaches, while familiar, serve as a means to understand how the opera is constructed and the messages that it conveys.

⁵ Lydia Goehr situates the emergence of the work-concept as occurring around 1800. This proximal point serves as a useful marker in defining the modern subject in relation to musical works. See *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 118-19.

⁶ I draw from Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on dialogism, as laid out in Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422 and Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60-102. Bakhtin’s model for intertextuality investigates the ways that an author participates in a dialogue with previous works, specifically but not limited to the genre of the novel. In his later essay “The Problems of Speech Genres,” he expanded his study to include spoken language in addition to written genres.

Chapter 2 examines the narrative history of the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne and how that history is transformed in the literary treatments that culminate in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. The trajectory from the historical event to Poulenc's opera began with an account of the actual French Revolutionary event, in which sixteen Carmelite nuns were executed at the guillotine. This event inspired a novella that later became a source for Georges Bernanos' play and Poulenc's opera.

A historical account of the nuns appears in Sister Marie of the Incarnation's *Histoire des Religieuses Carmélites de Compiègne conduites à l'échafaud le 17 juillet 1794*.⁷ Gertrud von le Fort published her novella *Die Letzte am Schafott*, with the invented heroine Blanche de la Force, in 1931.⁸ This novella inspired Father Raymond Bruckberger to write a film scenario that mapped out the basic plot of the drama. Georges Bernanos then followed the scenario to write the dialogue for the script.⁹ Although Bernanos' text was deemed inappropriate for the medium of film by those who edited the dialogues after the author's death, the drama was presented posthumously on the stage, both in French and German.¹⁰ Poulenc's own interpretation of the

⁷ Sister Marie of the Incarnation was a member of the convent who was away on business at the time of the trial and execution. See her *Histoire des Religieuses Carmélites de Compiègne conduites à l'échafaud le 17 juillet 1794* (Sens, n.p.: 1836).

⁸ Gertrud von le Fort, *Die Letzte am Schafott* (Munich: Kösel and Pustel, 1931), published in English as *The Song at the Scaffold*, trans. Olga Marx (New York: Henry Holt, 1933).

⁹ Published posthumously as Georges Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière and Paris: Seuil, 1949).

¹⁰ Claude Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites: The Historical Background, Literary Destiny and Genesis of the Opera," in *Francis Poulenc: Music, Arts, and Literature*, ed. Sidney Buckland and Myriam Chimènes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 287.

Carmelite story is an adaptation of Bernanos' dialogues that followed spoken stage productions of the play.¹¹

Chapter 3 situates the characters of Poulenc's opera in both historical and mid twentieth-century contexts while applying Bakhtin's intertextual model. The intersection of historical past and mid twentieth-century "present" generates a network of relationships between the factual Carmelite nuns and the authors who recreate the story.¹² Because Blanche de la Force was a semi-autobiographical invention of Le Fort, the story of the nuns takes on a perspective that moves beyond their eighteenth-century biographical origin.¹³ By the time that Poulenc composed his opera, the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir had published her groundbreaking work *The Second Sex*, arguing that "woman" is a cultural construction rather than an identity that a person acquires at birth.¹⁴ Blanche's development as a character can be contextualized in the framework of de Beauvoir's writing. Both Bernanos and Poulenc also modified the mostly female characters to reflect their own spiritual worldviews, which were informed

¹¹ Denis Waleckx has written on Poulenc's modifications and condensation of the Bernanos text in *La Musique dramatique de Francis Poulenc (les ballets et le théâtre lyrique)*, 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Université Paris IV, 1996). Waleckx has argued that the transference of grace is the singular theme of Poulenc's opera, with the Revolution serving as a psychological background, rather than a historical context. See also Waleckx, "In Search of a Libretto," in *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Sidney Buckland and Myriam Chimènes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 252-271.

¹² My understanding of the history of European women is informed by Karen Offen's *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Offen has argued that the history of feminism in Europe is based on politics instead of philosophy.

¹³ Gertrud von le Fort claimed that Blanche reflected the author's own anxieties as a Catholic convert in pre-World War II Europe. See *Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen* (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1958), 93-95.

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. Howard M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 267. The two-volume French work was published as *Le deuxième sexe*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). De Beauvoir considered biological, historical, and mythical components that contributed to the construction of the notion of "woman" before tracing how identity formation was developed throughout female childhood.

by the increased church involvement by Catholic laity in the interwar period.¹⁵

Bernanos emphasized his Catholic belief in vicarious suffering, especially with his addition of the novice nun Constance.¹⁶ One of the most quoted lines from the opera, from the first interlude of Act II, is: “We do not die every man for himself, but one for the others, or even one in the place of others, who knows?”¹⁷

Poulenc’s impetus for the few changes to Bernanos’ play, including his selections of liturgical musical texts, coincides with a significant European historical event that is explored in Chapter 3 as well. Early in Poulenc’s compositional process, Pope Pius XII proclaimed a Marian Year to celebrate the centenary of the Immaculate Conception doctrine. Poulenc’s choice of Marian texts and the personal agency asserted by the heroine Blanche are considered in the context of this celebratory year, which extended from late 1953 through 1954. Most significant, Poulenc altered the ending of Bernanos’ play to give Blanche a power that she lacked in the play as well as in le Fort’s novella. This alteration, which culminates in Blanche’s willing ascension to the scaffold, reflects both Poulenc’s identification with the character and the Blessed Virgin Mary’s role as “Queen of Martyrs.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, *Priests, Prelates and People: A History of European Catholicism Since 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 232-37. Much of the renewal of Catholicism among laity was prompted by Catholic Action, a movement that promoted involvement in social causes and institutions. This included a campaign to encourage the working class to seek solutions to class struggles through organizations that would not sanction communism or socialism.

¹⁶ Richard D. E. Burton, *Francis Poulenc* (Bath, England: Absolute Press, 2002), 94-96.

¹⁷ In the original French: “On ne meurt pas chacun pour soi, mais les uns pour les autres, ou même les uns à la place des autres, qui sait?” Unless otherwise indicated, all translations throughout this dissertation are my own.

¹⁸ Richard D. E. Burton, *Francis Poulenc* (Bath, England: Absolute Press, 2002), 94-96.

Chapter 4 investigates liturgical music in the opera within the context of earlier operatic treatments of religious topics, especially in French grand opera. Settings of the *Ave Maria*, the *Ave Verum Corpus*, and a portion of the Office of the Dead for the elderly Prioress who dies at the end of Act I, imbue *Dialogues des Carmélites* with a religiosity that is unusual for its inclusion of liturgical music onstage. Considerations of earlier settings of these texts contextualize the treatments in Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Furthermore, Poulenc's own earlier choral compositions *Ave Verum Corpus* (1952) and *Salve Regina* (1941) are compared to the operatic uses of the same texts.

The textual selections relate directly to the drama of the opera and the spiritual message that both Bernanos and Poulenc infused into *Dialogues des Carmélites*. The short selection from the Office of the Dead in the second act is the most plot-driven religious reference in that it commemorates the death of the Prioress, but the other religious texts are central to the opera. The *Ave Maria* stresses the importance of the Virgin Mary for women and requests an interceding prayer "at the hour of our death" while hinting at the nuns' impending doom.¹⁹ The *Ave Verum Corpus*, which ends with "Thou who hast died with such suffering / For the sins of all mankind," emphasizes Bernanos' and Poulenc's themes of vicarious suffering and death.²⁰

Chapter 5 considers the final tableau of *Dialogues des Carmélites* more fully. Using Sergio Durante's work on Mozart operas as a starting point, the tableau is plotted

¹⁹ In the original Latin: "in hora mortis nostrae." Trans. by Herbert Thurston, "Hail Mary," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 110.

²⁰ In the original Latin: "vere passum immolatum / in cruce pro homine." Trans. in Francis Poulenc, *Ave Verum Corpus* (Paris: Editions Salabert, 1973).

in such a way as to illustrate its multivalence, taking into consideration the various factors that contribute to the scene, especially the use and absence of the human voice.²¹ The staging is especially important in understanding this tableau, as the priest who had earlier led the nuns in worship observes the executions in disguise, while silently absolving the sisters of their sins. Another component of the tableau that must be taken into account is the fall of the guillotine. Poulenc carefully considered the placement of each guillotine sound in his attempt to make the occurrences seem as metrically irregular as possible.²² A graph that plots the final tableau from the standpoints of staging, action, music, and text reinforces ^{the} significance that each of these elements contributes to the experience of the audience witnessing the nuns' execution.

The analysis of the final tableau provides us with a better understanding of the circumstances that surrounded the creation of these fictional nuns and the staged re-creation of the Carmelites' execution. At the time Gertrud von le Fort wrote *Die Letzte am Schafott*, a new violent regime was on the horizon. Le Fort saw her novella as an indictment against totalitarianism, with Blanche as the central figure. In fact, she had already conceived the main character when she discovered the story of the martyred Carmelites, inspiring her to situate her narrative during the French Revolution.²³ By the time Poulenc composed his opera, he had experienced the German occupation of

²¹ Sergio Durante has devised a graphing method to represent character interactions, plot developments, key schemes, and sectional divisions in late eighteenth-century opera. See Durante, "Analysis and Dramaturgy: Reflections Towards a Theory of Opera," in *Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 311-39, especially 328-38.

²² Poulenc to Pierre Bernac, September 1955, in *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source": Selected Correspondence 1915-1963*, trans. and ed. Sidney Buckland (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), 232.

²³ Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites," 279.

France, as well as personal tragedies.²⁴ This historical context establishes the framework for the various renditions of the Carmelite story that are explored in the following chapters.

My musical focus is on the Latin liturgical text settings that were still prevalent in Catholic worship services prior to the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965. The religious music in *Dialogues des Carmélites* points back toward the historical origins of the nuns and distinguishes those ritual scenes from the French dialogues that the sisters engage in as they live in community prior to their execution. Bernanos' message of vicarious suffering also permeates throughout the liturgical scenes, creating an opera that functions as spiritual devotion.

²⁴ Poulenc attributed his renewed Catholic faith to his attempt to overcome grief caused by a friend's death. See Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2001), 231.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORIGINS OF *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*

The path from French Revolutionary historical event to Poulenc's opera spans more than 150 years and traces the spiritual beliefs of the various authors who re-imagined the nuns' martyrdom. Although early writings about the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne preserved the factual details of these women, by the twentieth century, the story captivated authors of fiction. Gertrud von le Fort envisioned a contemporary social commentary with the eighteenth-century Revolution as its backdrop. Father Raymond Bruckberger drew from le Fort's novella to map out a film scenario that was then scripted by French writer Georges Bernanos. The drama posed problems for the medium of film and instead became a famous staged play, which in a condensed form served as the libretto for Poulenc's opera.

This chapter begins with a synopsis, genesis, and reception study of Poulenc's musical drama before tracing the origins of the nuns' account from its historical roots through Bernanos' spoken play. In every phase of the story's evolution, the actions of the nuns in response to the violence of the Revolution serve as a source of inspiration for their interpreters.

Brief Synopsis of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*

The plot centers on Blanche de la Force, a young aristocrat who joins the sisterhood of the Carmelite order as a means of escaping the anxiety that she feels in her daily existence around the start of the French Revolution.²⁵ Once she enters the

²⁵ See the Appendix for an outline of Poulenc's opera, in comparison to le Fort's and Bernanos' treatments of this subject matter.

convent in Act I, Blanche befriends fellow postulant Sister Constance (they later become novice nuns together), who has an extremely optimistic outlook on life. Constance predicts that she and Blanche will die together at a young age, and soon thereafter, the old Prioress named Madame de Croissy dies in a traumatic episode. Mother Marie of the Incarnation is entrusted with the guidance of Blanche, who has taken the religious name Blanche of the Agony of Christ, in spite of Mother Marie's concerns that Blanche is not prepared for life as a nun.

At the beginning of Act II, Blanche and Constance keep watch over Madame de Croissy's body and sing from the Office of the Dead. The Father Confessor, who oversees the convent, prays with the sisters, and then Revolutionaries enter the convent to order the nuns to evacuate.

Although Madame Lidoine (the new Prioress) had implored the sisters to avoid the "easy" route of martyrdom, Mother Marie encourages the nuns to take this vow in Act III. A secret vote results in one dissenter to this proposal, but when Constance realizes that Blanche was the objector, she claims responsibility and requests another vote. Blanche flees the convent and moves back home; her father is executed by guillotine. Mother Marie visits Blanche to encourage the novice to rejoin her sisters who have been ordered to disband. The Carmelites are arrested and prepare for their execution, but Mother Marie's absence from the convent results in her exclusion from the trial.

The final tableau stages the execution of the nuns one by one as they sing the *Salve Regina*, with a crowd of onlookers witnessing the event. When only Constance remains, Blanche emerges from the crowd and begins to sing the *Veni, Creator Spiritus*.

The two novices exchange glances before Constance faces the guillotine. Blanche then ascends the scaffold to join her sisters in their martyrdom before the crowd scatters.

Genesis of the Opera

Dialogues des Carmélites had a complicated journey from its inception to its first performance almost four years later. During a tour of Italy in the spring of 1953, Poulenc discussed possible stage projects with Guido Valcarengi, the director of editions for the Ricordi publishing firm.²⁶ The initial plan was for a ballet about St. Margaret of Cortona, but Valcarengi instead suggested *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1947-1951), a play by Georges Bernanos. Poulenc's initial concerns about the lack of a romantic love interest in the subject matter dissipated when he encountered a copy of the play at a bookstore and revisited the mystical story. He felt drawn to the play and enthusiastically agreed to write the opera.²⁷ As Poulenc explained to singer and close friend Pierre Bernac, "I said yes, and can think of nothing else."²⁸

In August of 1953, Poulenc began work on the opera. He corresponded regularly with Bernac during the compositional process and responded to the suggestions of his friend. Poulenc's main concern seemed to be the union of music and the spiritual message of Bernanos' text. He explained to Bernac that "I want it to be more than vocal," and later in the same paragraph pondered, "If I am to succeed with this work it

²⁶ For a detailed chronology of the work's genesis, see Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," 274-319.

²⁷ See Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," 294-95. This account is also mentioned in Henri Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, trans. Edward Lockspeiser (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 78-79, and Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, 380-81.

²⁸ Poulenc to Pierre Bernac, [March 1953], in Francis Poulenc "*Echo and Source*," 205.

will only be through the music identifying absolutely with the Bernanos *spirit* [emphasis in original]. Very light orchestration to allow the text to come through.”²⁹

At the same time, both Poulenc and Bernac considered the tessituras and vocal qualities of the characters in addition to the dramatic impact of the text.³⁰ One of Poulenc’s letters even included handwritten staff notations of the ranges for the First Prioress and Blanche.³¹ Both men also discussed the characters, especially those who would interact directly with each other in the opera. Bernac responded to a question from Poulenc by advising the composer to “Refer back to your scores of *Aïda* and *Il Trovatore* and look closely at the roles of Amneris and Azucena: you will find the possibilities of a true Italian contralto quite edifying.”³² He later warned, in contemplation of a lack of contrasting vocal ranges in the ensembles after the First Prioress’ death, “I am sure you will find that you lack a full-bodied voice in the middle register for your second act if you decide on three lyric sopranos. Bear in mind that you will not always be able to choose the voices yourself and that it is the tessitura of the roles that will determine the cast.”³³

Upon Bernac’s advice, Poulenc considered the way that the different characters’ tessituras would sound in combination throughout the opera as well as the dramatic aspects of those ranges. In thinking about the roles of Mother Marie and the First

²⁹ Poulenc to Bernac on 22 August [1953] in *Francis Poulenc “Echo and Source”*, 206.

³⁰ See *La Musique dramatique de Francis Poulenc (les ballets et le théâtre lyrique)*, vol. 2, 356-57, for an outline of the different tessituras in *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

³¹ Poulenc to Bernac on 1 September [1953], in *Francis Poulenc: “Echo and Source”*, 207.

³² Poulenc to Bernac on 1 September [1953], in *Francis Poulenc: “Echo and Source”*, 207.

³³ Bernac to Poulenc on 5 September [1953], in *Francis Poulenc: “Echo and Source”*, 209. Parentheses in the original.

Prioress, Poulenc replied, “As usual (and it gets to be quite irritating) you are right. Of course ‘Mother Marie’ must be written for a mezzo.”³⁴ Poulenc’s rationale for his original plan focused on the dramatic relationship of the characters: “What confused me at first was scene 4 (death of the Prioress) where contralto and mezzo come face to face. Apart from this scene – the only one where the two women confront each other – Mother Marie only has responses.”³⁵ Two months later, Poulenc had composed the death scene, and he once again had the dramatic impact of the tessituras in mind: “While the Prioress is in her death-throes, there is a small phrase of Mother Marie’s (I use ‘small’ in the worst sense of the word) from which I am expecting quite a lot. The final note of the Prioress is a high A, fortissimo and very dry. Then it is all over.”³⁶ This statement reflects Poulenc’s consciousness of the quality of the high A in the Prioress’ contralto voice.

As the last quotation indicates, Poulenc often described the opera in narrative terms, which corresponds to his process of composing the tableaux sequentially from beginning to end. His original plan was that the drama would be divided into two acts, but by 1955, he had decided on a three-act structure.³⁷ By the time that Poulenc

³⁴ Poulenc to Bernac on Friday [11 September 1953], in *Francis Poulenc: “Echo and Source”*, 210.

³⁵ Poulenc to Bernac on Friday [11 September 1953], in *Francis Poulenc: “Echo and Source”*, 210.

³⁶ Poulenc to Bernac on 19 December [1953] in *Francis Poulenc: “Echo and Source”*, 214.

³⁷ Claude Gendre, “*Dialogues des Carmélites*,” 295.

completed a draft of the opera in the autumn of 1955, he had experienced two major crises that he associated with the tragic fate of the nuns.³⁸

Even after Poulenc had finished the composition of the opera and turned to other projects, he demonstrated his dedication for the opera by working on it further. Revisions were made in November of 1956, when the opera was in rehearsals in preparation for the La Scala premiere. This first performance, in Italian instead of French, was on 26 January 1957 and featured Virginia Zeani as Blanche.³⁹ Despite critical success at the French premiere on 21 June 1957, with Denise Duval as the heroine, the composer continued to modify the opera, adding three orchestral interludes to the first act and an orchestral preface to the final tableau.⁴⁰ This introduction to the last tableau presents the opening melody that the nuns subsequently sing and prepares the audience for the solemnity of the nuns' ascent to the scaffold.

Reception of the Opera and Notable Performances

The successful premiere of *Dialogues des Carmélites* on 26 January 1957 at La Scala in Milan set the stage for many subsequent productions in spite of the occasional

³⁸ Poulenc's health declined due to the stress of a tenuous romantic relationship with a younger man named Lucien Roubert, whom Poulenc claimed had died at the same moment that the composer penned the final measures of the opera. Poulenc recounts Roubert's death in a letter to Simone Girard on 31 October [1955] in *Francis Poulenc: "Echo and Source"*, 236.

³⁹ The Italian translation was provided by Z. Testi. Poulenc believed that his operas should be performed in the language of the people in attendance. For instance, he indicated that he preferred a Metropolitan Opera production to be sung in English. See Poulenc to Rose Dercourt-Plaut on 1 May [1957] in *Francis Poulenc: "Echo and Source"*, 245. It should be emphasized, however, that Poulenc's setting of Bernanos' text followed the classical French tradition, which results in meter changes to fit the prosody of the French language.

⁴⁰ Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites," 309.

mixed reception. One critic speculated that the opera would become a familiar repertory item because:

First of all, the story, which is told clearly, is likely to arouse the sympathy of almost anyone who hears it, for it is the story of ordinary human beings grappling with doubt and fear in believable crises. Secondly, the musical fabric clothing the story offers no listening problems whatsoever. Essentially uncomplicated, the score has a kind of voluptuousness that can exert an immediate effect on even the most unprepared auditor. Finally, there is the splendor of the vocal writing itself, which must inevitably excite the senses of all who hear it.⁴¹

While this review focused on the opera as a compositional object, another critique of the production commented on the “first-class singing and impressive staging.”⁴² The audience was so affected that attendees lengthily applauded the production, and by the time Poulenc appeared on stage, the composer was in tears from the sheer excitement of the reception.⁴³

Although Poulenc was satisfied with the production in Milan, he considered the French premiere to be his pinnacle achievement with *Dialogues des Carmélites*. According to a letter that he wrote to a friend, singer Rose Dercourt-Plaut, before the premiere in Paris,

Here I am in the throes of final preparations for my grand première, for as far as I am concerned, this is truly ‘my’ [sic] première. In Milan they worked for me. In Paris *Les Carmélites* will be *exactly what I imagined*. Everything pleases me: sets, music, production, cast. Denise is sublime. What an actress!⁴⁴

Poulenc’s reference to Denise Duval indicates his preference for the singer who had

⁴¹ Allen Hughes, “Poulenc’s ‘Dialogues’ at La Scala,” in *Saturday Review* 40 (February 23, 1957): 54-55.

⁴² Peter Dragadze, “New Poulenc Opera Proves Exciting in Milan,” in *Musical America* 77 (March 1957): 3.

⁴³ Ernest de Weerth, “The Carmelites Fire La Scala,” in *Opera News* 21 (11 March 1957): 11.

⁴⁴ Poulenc to Rose Dercourt-Plaut dated 9 June [1957], in *Francis Poulenc: “Echo and Source”*, 246.

inspired the vocal treatment of Blanche's text, which has received considerable attention since then.⁴⁵ With regard to the actual production, one critic described the performance as "practically a miracle of impressionistic, controlled musical nuances" and wrote about Poulenc's "characteristic ecstasy of expression and subtlety of harmony."⁴⁶

Dialogues des Carmélites received attention in the United States for a variety of reasons, including musical aspects of the opera itself as well as unusual productions of the work. The Music Critics Circle gave *Dialogues des Carmélites* the award for best new opera of the year in 1957 over another nominee, Poulenc's earlier opera *Les Mamelles des Tirésias* (1944-1945), which had recently been premiered in New York.⁴⁷ *Dialogues des Carmélites* perhaps made a more memorable impression on the voters because of a television broadcast of the NBC Opera Company production on 8 December 1957 following the United States premiere on 20 September 1957 in San Francisco.⁴⁸ Unlike a stage production, the close-up filming technique of the television broadcast "permitted vivid affinity with the torments of the protagonists and startling delight in the savor of their triumphs over the flesh."⁴⁹

Other American performances emphasized the music over the theatrical aspects

⁴⁵ Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, 309.

⁴⁶ Janet Flanner, "Letter from Paris," in *New Yorker* 33 (July 20, 1957): 62-68.

⁴⁷ "Critics Give Prize to Smit Symphony: 'Carmelites' by Poulenc and Stravinsky's 'Agon' Are Other Top Scores of '57," in *New York Times* (January 15, 1958): 23.

⁴⁸ For a review of the San Francisco production, see Ronald Eyer, "American Premiere of Poulenc Opera Presented by San Francisco Opera in Opening Week," in *Musical America* 77 (October 1957): 3.

⁴⁹ Charles A. Matz, "...and Coast-to-Coast," in *Opera News* 22 (6 January 1958): 29-30.

of the work. For instance, the American Opera Society performed the opera in a concert setting without scenery or costumes at Carnegie Hall in 1964. A reviewer focused on compositional invention with this observation: “It is a work of mood, passion, and invincible conviction, made into an artistic whole by the embracing craftsmanship of its creator.”⁵⁰ Another concert performance challenged the innate Catholicism of the subject matter by featuring the opera at the venue of an American Baptist Church. One critic had a mixed opinion of both the music and drama:

Poulenc’s rather banal but melodious opera came to life remarkably well, thanks to a large, generally able cast that had been intensively rehearsed....The chromatic wanderings of Poulenc’s score and the comic-strip predictability of his characters might strain the resources of more renowned artists.⁵¹

Perhaps the location of the performance affected this review, given that the music is more frequently described by other critics as tonal rather than full of “chromatic wanderings.” At the same time, the critic still recognized the “melodious” style of the music.

Other reviews discussed the traditional musical language of Poulenc’s compositional style, but usually with the assessment that the music enhanced the drama. For instance, a review of the Paris premiere argued, “To criticize him for not following Schoenberg and Berg, that is not to be aware that the *Dialogues des Carmélites* is valued at first by its sincerity, then its emotion, finally by its beauty of

⁵⁰ Irving Kolodin, “Music to My Ears: Poulenc’s Carmelites,” in *Saturday Review* 47 (1 February 1964): 24-25.

⁵¹ Donal Henahan, “Poulenc’s ‘Dialogues of the Carmelites’ Sung at Madison Ave. Baptist Church,” in *New York Times* (15 May 1973): 28. The American Baptist Church is a different denomination from the more familiar Southern Baptist Church.

musical expression.”⁵² Another critic noted that “there are more common chords, dominant sevenths and diminished sevenths than in any other contemporary score I have ever seen or heard of. In consequence, musical archaism is the most characteristic element...both the main constituent of its style and the mainspring of its success.”⁵³ Both of these reviews emphasize the way that Poulenc diverged from contemporary musical currents and that the tonal language suited the opera’s emotional impact on audiences.

At the Covent Garden production on 18 January 1958, however, a reviewer complained, “It doesn’t really need the music at all.”⁵⁴ This preference for Bernanos’ spoken play highlights the challenge that Poulenc faced in writing music for a story that had such a compelling plot on its own. In Germany, audiences responded enthusiastically to the combination of Poulenc’s music with Bernanos’ text, but Poulenc was disappointed with the reception. The composer told Nadia Boulanger, “My poor women were not showered on by the critics of Cologne (the public, they responded very well: 17 curtain calls) divided between the dodecaphons and the old guard (very decimated by Hindemith.)”⁵⁵

Dialogues des Carmélites has continued to be a mainstay of the opera repertoire,

⁵² Marcel Schneider, Review in *Combat* (24 June 1957), reprinted in *Poulenc: Dialogues des Carmélites, L’avant Scène opéra*, no. 52 (May 1983), 123. The original French reads: “Lui reprocher de ne pas suivre Schoenberg et Berg, c’est ne pas sentir que les *Dialogues* valent d’abord par leur sincérité, ensuite leur émotion, enfin par la beauté de l’expression musicale.”

⁵³ Frederick Goldbeck, “Poulenc’s ‘*Dialogues des Carmélites*: Paris Première,” in *Musical Times* 98 (1957): 448-49.

⁵⁴ William Mann, “Opera Diary,” in *Opera* 9 (March 1958): 189-92.

⁵⁵ Francis Poulenc to Nadia Boulanger, 26 August 1957, in *Francis Poulenc: Correspondance 1910-1963*, ed. Myriam Chimènes (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 77. The original French is: “Mes pauvres dames n’ont pas plu aux critiques de Cologne (le public, lui, a très bien réagi: 17 rappels) partagés entre les dodécas et la vieille gard (très décimée d’Hindemith.)”

both because of the unconventional subject matter and the musical-dramatic intensity of the ending. When I attended a Fort Worth Opera production on 8 January 2006, the audience watched the last tableau in sheer silence with no sounds of coughing or shifting chair seats, pausing after the opera finished to process the finality of the conclusion before thunderously applauding the performance. A production at the University of North Texas in October 1999 elicited a similar response.

Recent productions have staged the famous conclusion in different ways, such as Strasbourg's Opéra National du Rhin video performance in which the nuns stand on a barren stage during the *Salve Regina*.⁵⁶ Instead of proceeding to a scaffold on the side of the stage, each nun falls down where she was standing to signify the execution, but the sound of the guillotine still pervades throughout the scene. A more traditional production by Opera Australia features Joan Sutherland as the Prioress, which illustrates *Dialogue's* appeal to operatic celebrities.⁵⁷ The performance that best captures Poulenc's own aesthetic ideals is a January 1958 sound recording by the Paris Opéra with Denise Duval in the role that the composer crafted specifically for her.⁵⁸ Poulenc oversaw the performance for the recording, and as a result, this offers the closest sense of how the Parisian premiere sounded.

⁵⁶ Francis Poulenc, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Opéra National du Rhin, prod. François Duplat, 149 min., Arthaus Music, 1999, DVD.

⁵⁷ Francis Poulenc, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Opera Australia, prod. Elijah Moshinsky, 157 min., Kultur, 1984, DVD.

⁵⁸ Francis Poulenc, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Théâtre national de l'Opéra de Paris, dir. Pierre Dervaux, EMI Classics 7243 5 67135 2, 1999. Compact disc.

Scholarship on *Dialogues des Carmélites*

In addition to reviews of the opera and recorded performances, material on *Dialogues des Carmélites* can be divided into the categories of primary and secondary sources that are referenced to varying degrees throughout this dissertation. The following sections of this chapter situates Poulenc's opera within existing scholarship and clarify how the opera differs from earlier renditions of the Carmelite story. Both the primary and secondary sources that address *Dialogues des Carmélites* help to contextualize the significance of the opera.

The primary sources include letters between Poulenc and his friends that provide essential understanding of the opera's early phases. Three editions of correspondence have been published, with the first appearing a mere four years after Poulenc's death.⁵⁹ Although the 1967 collection edited by Hélène de Wendel was endorsed by some of the composer's closest friends, the publication was highly selective and individual letters were abridged, with no editorial indications of cuts.⁶⁰ Sidney Buckland's English edition expands the scope of published letters while also restoring previously known letters in their entirety.⁶¹ In 1994, a new French volume edited by Myriam Chimènes appeared, providing the largest number of letters to date, in the original language.⁶² The two correspondence editions from the 1990s reveal Poulenc's preoccupation with *Dialogues des Carmélites* between 1953 and 1957 and the way he conflated the plight of the

⁵⁹ *Francis Poulenc—Correspondance (1915-1963)*, ed. Hélène de Wendel (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967).

⁶⁰ Sidney Buckland, Introduction to *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source": Selected Correspondence 1915-1963*, trans. and ed. Sidney Buckland (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), 10-11.

⁶¹ *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source."*

⁶² *Francis Poulenc: Correspondance 1910-1963*, ed. Myriam Chimènes (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

opera's characters with the turmoil in his personal life, a topic that are explored in Chapter 3.

Secondary literature on *Dialogues des Carmélites* ranges from commentaries that are injected with contextual and biographical information to dissertations that place *Dialogues des Carmélites* in Poulenc's œuvre or twentieth-century opera more generally. Keith W. Daniel's *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* provides a thorough biography before treating the issue of compositional style and music by genre.⁶³ He considered the influences of Claude Debussy, Claudio Monteverdi, Giuseppe Verdi, and Modest Musorgsky, all whom Poulenc named in his dedication of the opera, as well as Igor Stravinsky. Harmonic language is one connection between Poulenc and earlier possible models, but Daniel also addressed text setting and self-borrowing.⁶⁴ Larry Fox analyzed *Dialogues des Carmélites* in relation to Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* and Robert Ward's *The Crucible*, with a focus on the libretto and the contention that the music supports the dramaturgy, particularly in the final tableau.⁶⁵ Then a more recent French dissertation by Denis Waleckx explored the

⁶³ Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1980), 49-51 and 299-306.

⁶⁴ On harmonic language, Daniel observed a generalized connection between harmonic progressions in *Dialogues des Carmélites* and passages of *Boris Godunov*. He quoted Alan Rich, who wrote a review of a production of Poulenc's opera, suggesting a "strong modal cast in harmony and melody," as well as ostinatos, which Daniel also links to Stravinsky. See Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, 301-2, and Alan Rich, "Dialogues des Carmélites," in *Musical Quarterly* 44 (1958): 93. The connection to Monteverdi and Verdi can be traced to Poulenc's emphasis of lyricism, which he felt was significant in both of those composers' operas. Furthermore, Poulenc knew Monteverdi's sacred music from his time in 1936 studying with Nadia Boulanger. Debussy's *Pelléas et Méisande* provided a model for French prosody, especially with the lengthy use of arioso that is present in both Debussy's opera and *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Poulenc was extremely aware of the importance of prosody so that the text could be understood in order to bring out Bernanos' spiritual message. See pages 300-302 of Daniel's book.

⁶⁵ Larry Fox, *A Comparative Analysis of Selected Dramatic Works and Their Twentieth Century Operatic Adaptations* (Ph.D., University of South Carolina, 1992), 52-71.

entirety of Poulenc's theatrical works in two extensive volumes.⁶⁶ The chapter on *Dialogues des Carmélites* includes a comparative outline of Bernanos' play and Poulenc's opera. Waleckx also wrote a chapter called "In Search of a Libretto" for the book *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*.⁶⁷ Claude Gendre's chapter "Dialogues des Carmélites: The Historical Background, Literary Destiny and Genesis of the Opera," in the same book, provides a thorough account of the Carmelite martyrs' transformation from historical narrative to musical drama.⁶⁸

Biographical surveys of Poulenc recognize the significance of *Dialogues des Carmélites* in the composer's output, but the treatment of the opera varies depending on each book's overall focus. Wilfrid Mellers mapped out the entire opera from beginning to end in great detail, with close attention to recurring motives and harmonic progressions.⁶⁹ Benjamin Ivry, on the other hand, located the work within the framework of Poulenc's romantic relationship with Lucien Roubert.⁷⁰ The most illuminating study from the standpoint of religious themes in the opera is a concise monograph by Richard D. E. Burton.⁷¹ The author explicated the concept of mystical substitution and the implications of this philosophy on the Carmelite characters.

⁶⁶ Waleckx, *La Musique dramatique de Francis Poulenc (les ballets et le théâtre lyrique)*, 2 vols. Like Daniel, Waleckx also addressed the issue of French prosody in connection with Debussy. See pages 384-86 of volume 2.

⁶⁷ Denis Waleckx, "In Search of a Libretto," in *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*, 252-73.

⁶⁸ Claude Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites," 274-319.

⁶⁹ Wilfrid Mellers, *Francis Poulenc*, Oxford Studies of Composers (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102-28. Poulenc employed the same motivic technique in his last opera *La voix humaine*.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Ivry, *Francis Poulenc, 20th-Century Composers* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 169-92.

⁷¹ Burton, *Francis Poulenc*, 90-111.

The Carmelites of Compiègne

The trajectory from historical event to opera began with an account of the French Revolutionary event forty-two years after the nuns' deaths. The sixteen nuns were executed on 17 July 1794 for counter-Revolutionary activities, including illegal gatherings, just ten days before the end of the Reign of Terror. First documented by Sister Marie of the Incarnation in her *Histoire des Religieuses Carmélites de Compiègne conduites à l'échafaud le 17 juillet 1794*, the story of these martyred nuns was preserved in the memory of the Carmelite order through the nineteenth century.⁷²

In addition to Sister Marie's history of the nuns, several other sources have provided additional details about the Carmelites of Compiègne. A Benedictine convent at the Stanbrook Abbey in England has preserved the martyred nuns' relics and historical details that the Stanbrook sisters acquired when they were imprisoned alongside the Carmelites in 1794. The Benedictines escaped execution, and the Stanbrook Abbey assisted with the information that was needed for the Carmelite nuns' beatification on 27 May 1906.⁷³ Father Bruno de Jésus Marie undertook a major research project to document the story of the nuns, which culminated in the publication of *Le Sang du Carmel* in 1954, while Poulenc was writing his opera.⁷⁴ More recently, William Bush published an edition of Sister Marie's manuscript as well as a detailed

⁷² Sister Marie of the Incarnation, *Histoire des Religieuses Carmélites*.

⁷³ William Bush, *To Quell the Terror: The Mystery of the Vocation of the Sixteen Carmelites of Compiègne Guillotined July 17, 1794* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1999).xiv-xvi. For information on the Benedictine nuns of the Stanbrook Abbey, see Ann Teresa Partington, *A Brief Narrative of the Seizure of the Benedictine Dames of Cambray, of their Suffering while in the hands of the French Republicans, and of their arrival in England by one of the religious, who was an eyewitness to the events She relates* (Archives of Stanbrook Abbey, c. 1796-97).

⁷⁴ Father Bruno de Jésus-Marie, *Le sang du Carmel ou la véritable passion des seize Carmélites de Compiègne* (Paris: Cerf, 1954, reprinted in 1992).

history of the nuns that includes biographies of the individual sisters and an assessment of their position as targets of the Republic.⁷⁵ Central to Bush's scholarship is the argument that the French Revolution was not a "good" cause turned "bad" in 1793, but that the Revolution was tainted from 1789 because of its assault on the Catholic Church. Within this context, he framed the nuns' profession of faith above earthly life.⁷⁶ Other documents pertaining to the history of the nuns include their declaration to the Revolutionary authorities that was used to convict the sisters as well as a late nineteenth-century Carmelite publication about the nuns' execution.⁷⁷ All of these sources offer a means of distinguishing between historical fact and the literary fiction of Gertrud von le Fort.

Several of the nuns named in le Fort's novella were based on historical personages from the Revolution. The prioresses Madame de Croissy (Mother Henriette of Jesus) and Madame Lidoine (Mother Teresa of Saint-Augustine) both existed, but unlike the angst-filled death of Madame de Croissy that ends the first act of Poulenc's opera, Croissy actually died at the guillotine along with the other nuns.⁷⁸ The reason that Madame Lidoine followed Madame de Croissy as prioress was that prioresses served limited terms before the election of a successor. Therefore, both of them were

⁷⁵ William Bush, *Marie de l'Incarnation: La Relation du martyre des seize Carmélites de Compiègne. Aux sources de Bernanos et de Gertrud von le Fort* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), and *To Quell the Terror*.

⁷⁶ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, xvii-xix.

⁷⁷ *Declaration of the Carmelites to the District authorities*, Department Archives of the Oise. Series Q: "Fonds des Domaines Nationaux, and Alexandre Sorel, *Les Carmélites de Compiègne devant le Tribunal Révolutionnaire* (Compiègne: Imprimerie H. Lefebvre, 1878).

⁷⁸ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 10-11.

still members of the convent at the time of the execution in 1794.⁷⁹

Sister Constance, who immediately bonds with Blanche in the literary treatments of the Carmelite story, also traced back to the Revolution. Her birth name was Marie Geneviève Meunier, and she was the novice whose brother visited the convent in hopes of convincing her to return to her family home, even though Blanche's brother is the one to appear at the convent in Bernanos' fictional account.⁸⁰ Sister Constance remained a novice, instead of becoming a full-fledged nun, because the entire convent would have been dissolved if she had broken a law that had been passed on 28 October 1789 to suspend the proclamation of religious vows.⁸¹ She finally professed her vows at the scaffold before kissing a miniature clay Mary and baby Jesus figure. Then as she approached the guillotine, she intoned the first line of Psalm 117, *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes* (Praise the Lord, all you nations).⁸² Contrary to the fictional exchange between Constance and Blanche at the end of Poulenc's opera, the youngest member of the convent actually preceded her sisters in death.⁸³ Her fervent commitment to martyrdom in Bernanos' and Poulenc's renditions of the story also differs from fact in that Constance experienced a fleeting fear of the guillotine before the execution sentence was imposed.⁸⁴

The last historical nun whose name appears in the fictitious versions of the

⁷⁹ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 55-57.

⁸⁰ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 68-71.

⁸¹ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 68-69.

⁸² Translation from the New International Version of the Bible.

⁸³ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 210-213.

⁸⁴ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 70-72.

Carmelite story is Sister Marie of the Incarnation, who was indeed spared from execution. Born Françoise-Geneviève Philippe, she was the illegitimate daughter of the Prince of Conti, and her royal heritage caused her to be away from the convent on business at the time that her sisters were arrested. Because she could not rejoin her fellow nuns, she instead evacuated to an area near the Swiss border, perhaps in a deliberate attempt to escape execution, and she later wrote the first account of the martyred Carmelites that would preserve their memory.⁸⁵ William Bush has suggested that the historical personage Sister Marie actually bears a closer resemblance to Blanche due to her instinctual flight away from the center of the Revolution.⁸⁶

According to Sister Marie's account of the execution, the nuns sang as they approached the scaffold. They first chanted the *Te Deum*, a hymn of praise that defied the grimness of their fate.⁸⁷ Their remaining texts followed the traditions of a Carmelite nun's preparation for death, including the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* that calls for protection from the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸ Although Poulenc's execution scene focuses primarily on the *Salve Regina*, the nuns sang the *Salve Regina* before moving on to another text. The nuns then took up Sister Constance's singing of *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes*, a Psalm that was traditionally associated with the initiation of a new Carmelite convent, as a crowd of onlookers watched silently.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 12-13.

⁸⁶ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 13.

⁸⁷ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 204-6.

⁸⁸ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 208.

⁸⁹ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 14-15 and 214.

Die Letzte am Schafott

The nuns of Compiègne received further attention when Gertrud von le Fort decided to write a novella about the nuns' execution, with a fictional character named Blanche de la Force (a play on the author's own name) in the foreground of the drama. *Die Letzte am Schafott* was published in 1931 and, according to le Fort, represented not only the horror of the Revolution but also post-World War I Germany.⁹⁰

Le Fort's conversion to Catholicism had a major effect on her literary output.⁹¹ In fact, she was considered to be one of the main contributors to twentieth-century Catholic religious literature, with a focus on historical fiction. Her notable impact on the literary world included a nomination for the Nobel Prize in literature by her friend Hermann Hesse.⁹² But *Die Letzte am Schafott's* significance transcended le Fort's individual biographical accomplishments in that the novella served as the foundation for George Bernanos' famous play and Poulenc's opera.

Although le Fort's narrative about the Carmelite nuns inspired later authors, the French Revolutionary setting for the novella was only one of several that le Fort considered as she developed the story. For instance, she thought about situating her allegorical tale of religious oppression in the time of the St. Bartholomew massacre of Parisian Protestants.⁹³ Ultimately, she chose the martyred Carmelites as her subject

⁹⁰ Gertrud von le Fort, *Die Letzte am Schafott*, and *Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen*, 93-95.

⁹¹ Le Fort converted to Catholicism in 1926. Later in life, she became publicly critical of Adolph Hitler and the Nazi regime. See Josef Schmidt, "Gertrud von le Fort [1876-1971]," in *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Mary R. Reichardt (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 423-24.

⁹² Schmidt, "Gertrud von le Fort," 424.

⁹³ Eleonore von La Chevallerie, "Gertrud von le Fort and the Fear of Blanche de la Force," in *Renascence* 48 (Fall 1995), 13.

because of a footnote about them that she came across while she was pondering various scenarios.⁹⁴ Religion was always at the center of her literary thoughts for this story, as indicated by her statement: “The book was conceived when we in Germany, and probably people throughout the world, became aware that the earth was trembling beneath our feet. I had realized that Russian Communism would endanger not only our culture but also the roots of our religion.”⁹⁵

After deciding on the historical locus for her novella, le Fort researched the time period in order to represent it accurately. Eleonore von La Chevallerie cited two main sources that le Fort consulted: Hippolyte Taine’s *L’Histoire de la révolution française* and Jean François La Harpe’s *La prophétie de Cazotte*.⁹⁶ In addition, le Fort consulted Sister Marie of the Incarnation’s history of the Carmelite nuns. As has been mentioned, four of the nuns’ names in le Fort’s novella trace back to this source.⁹⁷

Although other details of the story changed over time, le Fort planned for the fictitious protagonist Blanche to drive the plot even before the Revolutionary time period had been chosen. Blanche’s character represents the fright that many Catholics like le Fort were feeling in the interwar period. Eleonore von La Chevallerie has even suggested that Blanche’s name might derive from the term “blanke Angst,” or “naked

⁹⁴ La Chevallerie, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 13. See also Claude Gendre, “*Dialogues des Carmélites*,” 279.

⁹⁵ Quoted in La Chevallerie, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 13. Le Fort provided this explanation in 1934 while delivering a lecture in Heidelberg.

⁹⁶ The latter work was published posthumously in 1806 as part of the *Œuvres choisies et posthumes de m. de La Harpe*. La Harpe’s satiric story tells of a dinner party for a number of philosophes who criticized the “superstitious” influence of the Church. Jacques Cazotte, who had been quiet until the others encouraged him to speak up, predicted gruesome fates for his dinner companions (including the guillotine for most of them), save for the narrator La Harpe. See Christopher Todd, *Voltaire’s Disciple: Jean-François de La Harpe* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1972), 200.

⁹⁷ La Chevallerie, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 13.

fear” in German.⁹⁸ Pervasive apprehension was certainly fundamental to Blanche’s identity, which le Fort noted in a manuscript outline of the story: “At the beginning her fear is absolutely justified and is something very profound, disguising the sacredness of her destiny.”⁹⁹ Blanche’s character is explored in greater depth in Chapter 3, but one other important aspect of the character that deserves attention here is her surname. Le Fort originally referred to Blanche’s family with the family name “de Beau,” rather than “de la Force.”¹⁰⁰ “Beau” most obviously suggests physical beauty, but the word can also imply pleasantries or moral actions. Ultimately, the change to “de la Force” most notably functions as a play on the author’s own name while also emphasizing that Blanche’s strength comes from God and not her own inner will.¹⁰¹

Just as Blanche’s name has an allegorical meaning, the structure of the novella allows for a social and political commentary. By framing the story within a letter written by Monsieur de Villeroi to an exiled aristocrat in Germany, le Fort could allow her narrator to comment on both the fate of the nuns and that of aristocrats such as the Marquis de la Force, father of the heroine Blanche. Yet, le Fort considered having a former nun of royal heritage who had become the mistress of “the Jacobin X” tell the

⁹⁸ La Chevallerie, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 13. This use of the term “fear” differs from Sigmund Freud’s notion that fear must be associated with a definite object of which the person is afraid. See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C. J. M. Hubback, 2nd ed. (London: International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922). I use the term “fear” when speaking of a specific relationship between a subject and an object and use Freud’s term “apprehension” when referring to a more generalized anticipation of impending danger. The stage directions of Poulenc’s opera, drawn from Bernanos’ play, do include the term “fear,” and when that is the case, I retain the authors’ use of the word.

⁹⁹ La Chevallerie, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 14. La Chevallerie cited unpublished manuscripts that she studied in le Fort’s archives.

¹⁰⁰ La Chevallerie, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 15.

¹⁰¹ Claude Gendre, “*Dialogues des Carmélites*,” 283.

story in the same manner that the historical Marie of the Incarnation had done.¹⁰² The rejection of a past Carmelite as the narrator and replacement by a layperson opened up the opportunity for le Fort to explore her intellectual questions about societal and religious upheaval. In the notes that le Fort wrote as she developed *Die Letzte am Schafott*, she pondered,

To be considered: The relation between social and religious revolution? The revolution had a purely political and economic character at its beginning. Blanche joins Carmel while the first storms are erupting, finding shelter from them in Carmel. But the deeper significance is a religious one—the revolution turns against the church and she is now more endangered within Carmel than outside it. Revolution always means a profound opposition to God. Worldly thinking.¹⁰³

Monsieur de Villeroi became the voice of “worldly thinking” that le Fort juxtaposed with religious unrest.

The surface level of *Die Letzte am Schafott* primarily raises questions about religion’s role in society. In the novella, le Fort emphasized that spirituality is at the crux of the nuns’ commitment to the Carmelite order, and their execution stands as a testament to the brutality that can be imposed upon the religiously steadfast. Le Fort subscribed to the belief that one person’s suffering can free another person from experiencing that same fate.¹⁰⁴ The doctrine of “vicarious suffering” or “mystical substitution” would become one of the defining features of Georges Bernanos’ play, but even in le Fort’s novella, Blanche’s death at the hands of a mob (and not by the blade of the guillotine) becomes an act of sacrifice when the fictional Marie of the Incarnation

¹⁰² La Chevalliere, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 13.

¹⁰³ Quoted in La Chevalliere, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 18.

¹⁰⁴ La Chevallerie, “Gertrud von le Fort,” 21.

relinquishes her own chance for martyrdom and quietly escapes execution.¹⁰⁵

The Film Scenario for *Dialogues des Carmélites*

This novella inspired Father Raymond Bruckberger, with assistance from Philippe Agostini, to write a film scenario based on *Die Letzte am Schafott*. The scenario would have a profound impact on how the story of the Carmelite nuns would be depicted on stage, both in spoken and sung form.

Bruckberger pursued his vision for a film based on le Fort's novella after the end of World War II and the German occupation of Paris. On 7 December 1946, he and le Fort contractually agreed that he would write the scenario, with help from Agostini, and he designated Georges Bernanos as the author who would supply the dialogue. He intended for the film producer to be Gaspard de Cugnac, and he wrote the scenario less than a year later in October of 1947.¹⁰⁶

The scenario mapped out how Bruckberger planned to adapt the narrative form of le Fort's novella to the screen, with both a specific organizational structure and also some changes to the content itself. Bruckberger identified fifty-two sequences (typically one or two sentences) for his scenario that spanned thirty-five pages.¹⁰⁷ S. Meredith Murray, in his thorough study of the genesis of Bernanos' play, identified two main types of modifications to le Fort's story. The first category was Bruckberger's increased

¹⁰⁵ La Chevalerie, "Gertrud von le Fort," 20.

¹⁰⁶ Claude Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," 284. Bruckberger and Agostini eventually released a film in 1960, but they did not use Bernanos' text. The fact that they titled their film *Dialogue des Carmélites* (singular "dialogue" instead of "dialogues") led to ongoing litigation with the Bernanos estate. See Gendre, 315-16, footnote 75.

¹⁰⁷ S. Meredith Murray, *La genèse de Dialogues des Carmélites* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963), 84. A copy of the scenario is stored in the archives of the Société des Amis de Georges Bernanos.

emphasis on Blanche's character, even beyond her protagonist role in le Fort's novella, in order to create a central focus for the drama. Beyond the concentration of the drama on one main character, the other significant change involved shifting aspects of the story from historical commentary and analysis to the external conflicts that were better suited for the medium of film.¹⁰⁸ The consequence of these revisions was that several characters were omitted, including governess Madame de Chalais, the lawyer who represented Sister Marie of the Incarnation, and other minor figures who appeared briefly in the novella. Furthermore, the actress Rose Ducor, while mentioned in conversation, did not appear as an onstage character.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, Bruckberger's invention of Blanche's brother, the Chevalier de la Force, served to foreground Blanche's apprehension and subsequent retreat into the convent, away from the secular world that included her family.¹¹⁰ In the play, the Chevalier visited Blanche at the convent in an attempt to pull Blanche back into the world outside of the convent. In the realm of moving the drama from interior to exterior, the *Petit Roi de Gloire*, a statue that symbolized the Revolutionary assault on religion in le Fort's novella, had a reduced significance in the scenario.¹¹¹ Finally, there was an expansion of the First Prioress' death scene, and the subsequent conflict between the second Prioress, Madame Lidoine, and the Subprioress (Marie of the Incarnation) intensified in relation to their stance on Blanche.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Murray, *La genèse*, 86.

¹⁰⁹ Murray, *La genèse*, 87-88.

¹¹⁰ Claude Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites," 284.

¹¹¹ Murray, *La genèse*, 87.

¹¹² Murray, *La genèse*, 86-87.

Georges Bernanos' *Dialogues des Carmélites*, and Mystical Substitution

Although Bernanos' original agreement with Bruckberger, dated 15 October 1947, indicated that the dialogues would be presented on the cinematic screen, the end product almost failed to reach any audience due to Bernanos' death. Those who worked with the unpublished text became concerned with the uncinematic style of the writing. Bernanos had read *Die Letzte am Schafott* more than once, but he generated the text exclusively from the scenario because he did not have a copy of the novella with him in Tunisia, where he wrote the dialogues during his final battle with cancer.¹¹³ Producer Gaspard de Cugnac's reaction to Bernanos' initial textual submission in March of 1948 indicated that the work would not be suitable for the screen, and in fact, Cugnac informed Bruckberger that their plans for a film would need to be canceled. Bruckberger insisted on Bernanos' continued involvement, however, and the author finished his writing a month later. Before the film could proceed, Bernanos died from cancer, which had affected him during the entire time that he worked on the project.¹¹⁴

The posthumous publication of his dialogues resulted in numerous stage productions and paved the way for Poulenc's opera.¹¹⁵ The publication, directed by Bernanos' literary executor Albert Béguin, reconciled two manuscripts that had been

¹¹³ Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," 285-86.

¹¹⁴ Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," 286.

¹¹⁵ *Dialogues des Carmélites* was involved in extensive litigation from the publication of Bernanos' work until the premiere of Poulenc's opera. An attorney and writer named Emmet Lavery convinced Gertrud von le Fort to authorize him to write a play based on the novella, and le Fort unwittingly signed a contract granting Lavery exclusive rights to staged productions of the story, even though she had previously given Bernanos' literary executor, Albert Béguin, permission to proceed with publication. Lavery then sued the Bernanos estate to block a performance of Bernanos' play, and later copyright disputes almost caused Poulenc to abandon his operatic project. Eventually the involved parties settled with an agreement that all publications and performances would include the statement recognizing that Lavery had authorized the production. See Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," 286 and 301-6.

typed by the author's secretary, Madame Armelle Guerne, with minimal changes from the way that Bernanos had written the text.¹¹⁶ Because Bernanos had not separated the text into scenes, Béguin divided the work into five tableaux as well as an unspoken prologue. He also made some minor directions regarding the *mise en scène*.

This edition received praise from critics and was translated into other languages. A noteworthy performance on 14 June 1951 in German at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich, Switzerland, ended with the audience standing to sing the *Salve Regina* at the end of the play. In spite of the play's popularity, a copyright dispute between the Bernanos estate and film scenario authors Father Bruckberger and Philippe Agostoni almost derailed future productions of the play. A judicial arbitrator, who also considered Gertrud von le Fort's involvement with the story of the nuns, determined that "the spiritual significance of the work belonged to Bernanos."¹¹⁷ This "spiritual significance" would also shape Poulenc's treatment of the subject matter.

One of the most profound changes that Bernanos instituted was the emphasis on the concept of "mystical substitution," which are traced in this section within the context of the Christian Bible, Catholic teachings, and literary sources that preceded Bernanos. Bernanos infused the nuns' drama with the concept of "vicarious suffering" (a notion that is briefly hinted at in le Fort's novella and related to mystical substitution), which was significant to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century French Catholic writers.¹¹⁸ This philosophy hinges on the belief that all Christians coexist in an infinite

¹¹⁶ Clarifications included grammatical corrections and indications of scenes without dialogue, but Béguin adhered to Bernanos' words as much as possible. See Murray, *La genèse*, 36-37.

¹¹⁷ Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," 287.

¹¹⁸ For an explanation of "vicarious suffering," especially in relation to *Dialogues des Carmélites*, see Burton, *Francis Poulenc*, 94-96. Burton has argued that the presentation of this concept in *Dialogues*

Communion of Saints throughout the world. When the First Prioress dies in lengthy agony, she frees Blanche to die quickly and resolutely through a mystical substitution. As Constance speculates to Blanche in Tableau 3, Scene 1 of the play, one person can die for, or instead of, another (in Poulenc's opera, the conversation occurs in Act II, tableau 1).

For those Catholics who subscribe to the mystical belief, vicarious suffering is rooted in their understanding of the New Testament of the Christian Bible. The concept is an extension of the teaching that the death of Christ was a sacrificial act to save humankind from eternal damnation. According to this teaching, Christ offered redemption through his death to followers who believed they would otherwise suffer for their sins.¹¹⁹ The scriptural foundation for this belief is located in multiple places in the Christian Bible. The potential for Christ's sacrificial death was prophesied in the Old Testament, specifically in Isaiah 9:6, with the prediction, "For to us a child is born, to us a child is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."¹²⁰ Isaiah's message is that the child will carry the burden of governing and He will rule humankind in peace. Then in verses 3:16-17 of the Gospel of John, Jesus is quoted as fulfilling this prophesy when he explained: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only

is the last major literary treatment of the concept. Also see Burton, *Blood in the City*, 311-19, for further historical context. Among the various examples that he discussed, one actual incident of sacrificial deaths involved a massive fire that killed over one hundred people. The writer Léon Bloy viewed the immolation as a means for innocent victims to offer salvation for others. In fact, he lamented that more people were not trapped in the fire. See pages 313-14 of *Blood in the City*.

¹¹⁹ This doctrine, sometimes referred to as "substitutionary atonement," is not universally accepted by Christian theologians. For a different interpretation of Jesus' death, see Roger Wolsey, *Kissing Fish: Christianity for People Who Don't Like Christianity* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corp., 2011), 162-63.

¹²⁰ Isa. 9:6 (New International Version).

Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”¹²¹

Whereas Isaiah emphasized the leadership responsibilities of this holy child, John taught about salvation *through* Christ. The message of the Gospel is that Jesus died to save others from experiencing the fate of eternal damnation. Although earthly death could not be escaped, those who followed the teachings of Christ believed they could experience spiritual salvation.

From the central tenet of Christianity that Jesus died for the sins of humankind, a broader implication for the faithful is that those who suffer on earth can take solace and gain spiritual strength through Christ’s sacrifice. Pope John Paul II addressed this issue by explaining: “the *Redemption* was accomplished *through the Cross of Christ*, that is, *through his suffering* [emphasis in original].”¹²² After arguing that suffering is inherent in the human condition, he further asserted, “Suffering must serve *for conversion*, that is, *for the rebuilding of goodness* in the subject, who can recognize the divine mercy in this call to repentance.”¹²³ Salvation becomes the means through which man escapes “definitive suffering,” or eternal damnation, which is different from suffering in the world. Therefore, Christ’s suffering on the cross—as well as through the miracles throughout his life on earth that were targeted at helping those who suffered—emphasized redemption through his own sacrifice. As humans experience suffering in their own

¹²¹ Jn. 3:16-17. The connection between the verses in Isaiah and John is pointed out in a textual commentary in *The NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 1595.

¹²² Pope John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter: *Salvifici Doloris*: On the Christian Meaning of Suffering,” (Saint Peter’s Basilica, Vatican, Italy, 11 February 1984), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html; (accessed 28 September 2011).

¹²³ Pope John Paul II, “*Salvifici Doloris*.”

lives, they are drawn closer to Christ, who voluntarily offered his life to save others. As John Paul II continued, “Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that *in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ*, a special grace.” In other words, a mystical spirituality bridges the distance between the ultimate sacrificial figure and those who benefit from this redemption.

Once the connection between Christ and those who suffer has been made, a further step is necessary in order to understand the way that the Communion of Saints contributes to the mysticism of vicarious suffering. At the end of his address, John Paul II observed this Catholic tradition: “We invoke all *the Saints*, who down through the centuries in a special way shared in the suffering of Christ. We ask them to support us.” The Communion of Saints, however, broadens beyond the named saints to include the entire ecumenical community of the past, present, and future. As the English translation of the Catholic Catechism explains, “The term ‘communion of saints’ therefore has two closely linked meanings: communion in holy things (*sancta*) and among holy persons (*sancti*).”¹²⁴ In extending this communion to include not only the living but also those who have moved beyond the earthly world, the Catechism specifies,

We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers.¹²⁵

The saints in heaven intercede on others’ behalf “as they proffer the merits which they

¹²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 948.

¹²⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 962. “The dead who are being purified” refers to Purgatory.

acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.”¹²⁶

Those on earth benefit from this relationship “so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom as from its fountain and head issues all grace, and the life of the People of God itself.”¹²⁷ The key to understanding the Communion of Saints, then, is to define “communion” not exclusively as the Eucharist and its perpetual reenactment of the Last Supper in which Christ and his disciples partook, but more generally as the shared “community” of Christianity beyond the temporality of a given moment.

In literature that was influential for Catholics like Bernanos, Joris-Karl Huysmans was one of the most prominent authors to embrace the concept of vicarious suffering, as evidenced in his novel *The Cathedral* (1898), along with the writers Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain.¹²⁸ *The Cathedral*, which tells the adventures of a man named Durtal who found his way to Chartres in France, also includes the anecdote of a Carmelite nun named Mother Van Valckenissen (Mary Margaret of the Angels). The narrator recounts,

She held out; she endured all the tortures of the Mystical Substitution, bearing the most painful and repulsive diseases to save souls. The Lord vouchsafed at last to intermit the penitential task of suffering. He allowed her to breathe, and the Devil took advantage of this lull to come upon the scene.¹²⁹

Although she momentarily allowed her own wishes to dictate her actions, the Lord then commanded her once again to offer herself for others. As the tale continues, “She had

¹²⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 956.

¹²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 957.

¹²⁸ On Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain, see Joseph Amato, *Mounier and Maritain: A French Catholic Understanding of the Modern World* (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press, 1975), 48. Bloy believed that, in an attempt to reconcile the problems of the modern world, people could better prepare for Christ's return (the Second Coming) by relating their own suffering to God. Burton mentioned the theology of Bloy and Maritain alongside that of Huysmans, in terms of influencing Bernanos' view of vicarious suffering. See Burton, *Francis Poulenc*, 95.

¹²⁹ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *The Cathedral*, trans. Clara Bell (Cambs: Dedalus, 1989), 97.

the gift of bilocation, appearing in several places at the same time, shedding a trail of delicious fragrance wherever she passed, curing the sick with the Sign of the Cross....”¹³⁰

This description of her powers emphasizes the multiple senses that revealed her miraculous abilities, but her mystical gifts also caused extreme physical pain related to the specific nature of Christ’s crucifixion. The narrator explains that, as her health deteriorated,

The Sisters who nursed her now discovered a secret which she had always kept, out of humility; they perceived that her hands were pierced with red holes surrounded by a blue halo, and that her feet, also pierced, lay of their own accord, unless they were held down, one above the other, in the position of Christ’s feet on the cross. At last she confessed that many years before Jesus had marked her with the stigmata of the Passion, and that the wounds burnt night and day like red hot iron.¹³¹

When she realized that she was dying, she regretted that she could not continue to live, in spite of her intense pain, in order to atone others’ sins for a longer period of time. Then she pondered how she could continue to help others even after her death:

She had so loved the Holy Eucharist, she had so longed to kneel at His feet and atone for the outrages inflicted on Him by the sins of mankind, that she waxed faint at the thought that after her death what would remain of her could no longer worship him.¹³²

She insisted that she should not be buried but that her body should remain unpreserved in the chapel until it produced a potent oil that could be used in a lamp near the altar of the nuns’ chapel. Over the weeks following her death, her body did not follow the typical decomposition process, and finally when surgeons examined the body,

¹³⁰ Huysmans, 98.

¹³¹ Huysmans, 99.

¹³² Huysmans, 99.

they discovered three nails (recalling the nails that pierced Christ's body at his crucifixion) in her gallbladder. She eventually produced two hundred ounces of oil, and some were kept as relics at a Carmelite convent.¹³³

Huysmans' austere fictional Carmelite character offers a broader understanding of the concept of mystical substitution that is relevant for the way that Bernanos applies the philosophy. The description of Mother Van Valckenissen is extremely detailed and somewhat gruesome at times, but the story serves as a clear example of how Catholic mystics in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century contemplated the notion of one person suffering on behalf of others. In the instance of the character in *The Cathedral*, vicarious suffering was not a singular act but one that could continue in perpetuity, maximizing the impact of the three nails and the marks on Mother Van Valckenissen's appendages.

In contrast to Huysmans' narrative treatment of mystical substitution, Bernanos focused on the uniqueness of the First Prioress' painful death in relationship to Blanche's quick execution (following her sisters) at the end of the play. Whereas vicarious suffering represented an ongoing sacrifice for Huysmans' Carmelite nun, Bernanos made a direct connection between two specific characters in his drama. As Sister Constance speculated, "One does not die each for oneself, but one for others, or even one in the place of others, who knows."¹³⁴ In Bernanos' play, the First Prioress, Madame Lidoine, experiences an anxious death in place of Blanche, freeing the young

¹³³ See Huysmans, 99-100, for the account of the nun's death.

¹³⁴ Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, tableau 3, scene 1. This statement has been quoted frequently, for example in Burton, *Francis Poulenc*, 95-96. The original French is: "On ne meurt pas chacun pour soi, mais les uns pour les autres, ou même les uns à la place des autres, qui sait."

novice to die quickly and with a relatively small amount of pain.

The impact of Bernanos' emphasis on vicarious suffering is explored further in Chapter 3, along with the ways that Poulenc advanced Bernanos' ideas. In particular, the connections between the character of Blanche (and her religious name "the Agony of Christ") and others offer an optimistic interpretation of mystical substitution that also comforted Poulenc at a time when he experienced grief in his personal life, as indicated in the composer's correspondence. The origins of the Carmelite story in the late eighteenth century and the stages of the story's retelling from the historical event to le Fort's and Bernanos' literary treatments provide a foundation for Poulenc's opera. The next chapter focuses on how those various written depictions of the Carmelite nuns engage in an intertextual dialogue that confront issues of gender to reveal understandings of how the Virgin Mary functions in the context of the opera.

CHAPTER 3

GENDER, THE MARIAN YEAR, AND *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*: AN INTERTEXTUAL DIALOGUE

The title *Dialogues des Carmélites* is suggestive of the nature in which conversational exchanges occur in and among the opera, its literary sources, and historical events and people who served as models for the fictional characters. This chapter contextualizes the characters in Poulenc's opera within the broader scope of women's roles in the French Revolution, the composer's contemporary milieu, and the Catholic Church.¹³⁵ With regard to the Church, I explore the significance of the Blessed Virgin Mary before considering the ways in which gendered constructions provide a basis for Poulenc's intertextual dialogue with his characters and his literary and historical models.

My application of the term "dialogism" stems from Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on intertextuality, which emphasize the ways that different literary works participate in an ongoing dialogue with each other. In his analysis of the genre of the novel, Bakhtin noticed a type of speech that he called "double-voiced discourse."¹³⁶ He used this term to explain the manner in which a narrative story could exist simultaneously in two modes: on the one hand, that of the characters' actions and speech, and on the other, the "refracted intention" of the author whose involvement with the text extends beyond

¹³⁵ The process of situating Poulenc's opera in the context of women's histories is in the same spirit as Mary Ann Smart's observation about the exploration of female operatic roles during a September 1995 conference on "Representation of Gender and Sexuality in Opera" at the State University of New York at Stony Brook: "the cumulative effect is of a view of opera as embedded in history." See *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11. This publication compiles essays that were first developed as presentations for the conference.

¹³⁶ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 324.

the narrative. As Bakhtin explained:

It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings, and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they—as it were—know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized.¹³⁷

In this way, the author can make connections between his or her own novel and preexisting works. At the same time, the earlier literary work also actively participates in the dialogue by soliciting the later author's response. The nature of this dialogue is open-ended because future authors may join the discussion at a later date. As Bakhtin explained elsewhere, the author's relationship to his work (the refracted intention) is not neutral because of this conversation with previous novels.¹³⁸

Bakhtin's ideas have long been applied to genres beyond the novel and even to other types of artistic expression, including music and painting. His late essay "The Problem of Speech Genres" expands on his earlier focus on the novel by exploring the connections between "everyday oral speech" and written genres. Bakhtin argued that the Saussurian tradition focused on spoken linguistic structures (what he called "primary" or "simple" genres), whereas his own inquiry recognized that "secondary" or "complex" genres, such as novels and other written works, "absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communication."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 324.

¹³⁸ Bakhtin, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 46.

¹³⁹ Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," 61-2. Ferdinand de Saussure is typically credited with introducing the field of semiotics through his studies on language. He argued that spoken language involves an interaction between a "signifier" (the sound-image) and a "signified" (a concept that is attached to the signifier). Saussure also distinguished between *parole* (individual words) and *langue* (the

The complexity of secondary genres necessitates that dialogue occurs over an extended period of time, rather than with immediate responses. Central to his theory of intertextuality is the notion that a “listener” and “understander” can become a “speaker” at another time. The response might be delayed, and its manifestation could be behavioral instead of verbal or written speech.¹⁴⁰ In the case of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, dialogism offers a way to trace the responses by authors such as Gertrud von le Fort, Georges Bernanos, and Poulenc.

I begin with the historical context of how women participated in the French Revolution and then move on to the ways in which various authors have related to and commented on the execution of the Carmelite nuns. Due to the religious nature of this subject matter, I draw upon Catholic writings on the role of women in the Church.

Context for the Carmelite Nuns: Women During the French Revolution

During the Revolution, women had diverse goals that at times were in conflict with men’s attempts to control these women. While many women desired the opportunity to participate actively in Revolutionary events, others such as the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne resisted the new leaders’ attempts to sever the sisters’ relationship with the Catholic Church. The result for those who sought inclusion as well as those

larger system of language). In spite of challenges to his approach, his contributions have continued to serve as a starting point for the field of semiotics. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (London: G. Duckworth, 1983). Originally published in French as *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1922).

¹⁴⁰ Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” 68-69.

who strived for exclusion was similar in that those diverse voices were silenced under the directive of the Republic.¹⁴¹

At the outset of the Revolution, women participated in the opposition of the old regime. One of the most famous early events of the Revolution was led by market women, especially the *poissardes* who sold fish, when they decided to protest the high cost of bread. These women marched to Versailles on 5 October 1789 and stormed the king's quarters to demand that the royal family return to Paris in order to address the common people's needs.¹⁴²

In spite of this early insurgence by women, men discouraged their female counterparts from active participation in Revolutionary proceedings, especially as the years wore on. Jacobin leaders, for instance, argued that women should remain in the domestic rather than public sphere.¹⁴³ This became a contentious issue when authorities of the emergent Republic stripped women of their ability to serve in the army or congregate in female political clubs in 1793.¹⁴⁴ Leading up to the ban on women's clubs, the journalist Louis-Marie Prudhomme argued,

In the name of the *patrie*, the love of which these women carry in their hearts, in the name of nature, from which one must never stray, in the name of good

¹⁴¹ Detailed studies of specific women during the Revolution have emerged in recent years. Lucy Moore investigated six *citoyennes* (women citizens of the republic) in *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). Marilyn Yalom has traced women's recollections of the Revolution in *Blood Sisters: The French Revolution in Women's Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

¹⁴² See, for example, Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 238-45.

¹⁴³ Elisabeth G. Sledziewski, "The French Revolution as the Turning Point," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *A History of Women in the West*, IV. Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War, ed. Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge and London: Belknap, 1993), 39.

¹⁴⁴ Karen Offen, *European Feminisms*, 63-64.

domestic morals, of which women's clubs are a plague because of the dissipation that follows in their wake, we conjure the good *citoyennes* of Lyon to stay at home, to watch over their households. . . .¹⁴⁵

The invocation of “nature” and “morality” suggests that women were expected to preserve the nuclear familial social unit while grand societal upheaval was simultaneously taking place in France. Although Blandine Demoulin, who led the Dijon Société des Amies de la République, countered that the paradox of Prudhomme's reasoning was “as despotic toward women as was aristocracy toward the people,” the male leadership of the Republic prevailed.¹⁴⁶

Women challenged the new order—or, at times, disorder—by demanding inclusion in a political movement that men dominated. Their banishment from the public realm extended beyond the regulation of their daily activities to the specific denial of citizenship rights (even though they retained the label of *citoyennes*) in June 1793, followed by the disbandment of women's clubs.¹⁴⁷ Involvement by women during the French Revolution differed from previous attempts by women to participate more fully in the public sphere in that the agenda of the Revolution initially seemed to include women in the move toward universal human rights before eventually denying women the rights that they sought. Common men, on the other hand, were able to claim rights they had previously been denied.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Louis-Marie Prudhomme, “Club de femmes à Lyon,” in *Les Révolutions de Paris* 19, no. 185 (19-26 January 1793), 234-35, trans. Karen Offen, quoted in Offen, *European Feminisms*, 61-62.

¹⁴⁶ Blandine Demoulin, Rejoinder, *Les Révolutions de Paris* 19, no. 189 (16-23 February 1793), 367-71, trans. Karen Offen, quoted in Offen, *European Feminisms*, 62.

¹⁴⁷ Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine, Introduction, *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, ed. Melzer and Rabine (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

¹⁴⁸ Melzer and Rabine, Introduction, 1.

One reason for the suppression of women's active involvement in Revolutionary activities is that women were seen as a threat to the order of the Republic. This concern heightened after Charlotte Corday murdered Jacobin journalist Jean-Paul Marat, whom she believed would kill thousands of her compatriots otherwise, on 9 July 1793.¹⁴⁹ Four days later, Corday faced her own death at the guillotine, but more women marched to the scaffold during the Reign of Terror that lasted from the fall of 1793 to the following July. Marie Antoinette and the Girondist sympathizer Madame Roland also faced death at the scaffold, and of course, so did the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne.¹⁵⁰

Discussions about women in the Revolution tend to focus on the relationship of females to the male Revolutionary leadership. Yet, women also voiced their opposition to the rejection of Catholic values and authority during the 1790s.¹⁵¹ The Carmelite nuns resisted demands that they abandon their cloistered community for a more worldly society, and their refusal to disband led to their execution. They were not alone in their objection to the secularization of French society and seizure of church land and property. When priests were mandated in January 1791 to proclaim an oath of allegiance to the nation of France, including the law, the king, and the new Constitution, women were among those who objected to the decree. In fact, some contemporary accounts suggest that rural women were the predominant voices in opposition of the

¹⁴⁹ Offen, *European Feminisms*, 64.

¹⁵⁰ See Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 124-52, for a detailed exploration of the historical fascination with Madame Roland.

¹⁵¹ Burton has argued that an assault on the Catholic Church was at the core of the Revolution from the outset in 1789. See *Blood in the City*, 9-10.

oath, in part because they disliked the notion of Parisian men controlling religious practice outside of the capital.¹⁵² Between the Revolution and the beginning stages of Poulenc's composition of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, attitudes about women's roles in society changed significantly. The next section examines how women in Poulenc's time asserted themselves in ways that would not have been possible when the nuns of Compiègne were executed.

Contemporary Context for the Opera: French Women in the Mid Twentieth Century

Poulenc composed his opera about Catholic nuns around the same time that women in France were beginning to assert their voices in areas where they had previously been marginalized, if not outright denied the right to participate. Two of the most obvious ways that women increased their stature were through equal rights (both voter and worker) as well as feminist writings. In this section of the chapter, my application of feminist discourse centers on the contemporary gendered identity politics of Poulenc's time, specifically through the work of Simone de Beauvoir.

Women in early twentieth-century France struggled to gain anything remotely resembling gender equality, and in some ways, they were far behind their counterparts in the United States. France did not grant women the right to vote, for instance, until March 1944, more than two decades after women's suffrage was constitutionally mandated in the United States. Furthermore, the rationale for voting rights had less to do with a social concern for equality than with the desire to prevent a communist

¹⁵² Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 172-77.

takeover of the government. While previous arguments against women's suffrage had emphasized that women (who comprised a larger percentage of the population than men) would vote conservatively, this same reasoning finally convinced members of the Resistance to allow women to participate in elections. Women, for their part, upheld this theory by favoring conservative candidates.¹⁵³ By 1946, the undisputable right to work and to receive equal pay on the job reached France, promoted by a resurgence of the same communist party (the Parti communiste français, or PCF) that had been banished prior to the end of World War II.¹⁵⁴

A few years later, one of the most well-known feminist books of the twentieth century emerged from France, challenging women to rethink their roles as individuals, in society, and as a member of a family unit. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir famously declared, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."¹⁵⁵ Throughout her extensive survey of historical and contemporary issues regarding the process of how gendered identity formation occurs, de Beauvoir considered how women could gain parity, concluding that employment rights were not sufficient but that women should also explore sexual pleasure, a domain that had typically been restricted to men.¹⁵⁶

Although de Beauvoir criticized the power of Catholicism over women, she also came close to romanticizing the ability of women to eschew men in favor of religion. At one point, she argued that "the cult of the Virgin, confession, and the rest lead them

¹⁵³ Offen, *European Feminisms*, 381-82.

¹⁵⁴ Offen, *European Feminisms*, 382.

¹⁵⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 301.

¹⁵⁶ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 686.

toward masochism.”¹⁵⁷ Later on, however, she described low-salaried workers who might be victims of sexual and economic politics in this way: “Virtuous people preach asceticism to her, and, indeed, her dietary regime is often as austere as that of a Carmelite. Unfortunately, not everyone can take God as a lover: she has to please men if she is to succeed in her life as a woman.”¹⁵⁸ The reference to the rigid Carmelite order is entirely coincidental to Poulenc’s opera, but her argument still highlights the fact that nuns who have taken a vow of celibacy have no need to make their bodies sexually available to men. In this way, those who devote their lives to God are able to transcend the problem that women face when attempting to liberate themselves from the sexual power of men.

The Virgin Mary, the Marian Year, and *Dialogues des Carmélites*

While de Beauvoir concentrated on the plight of contemporary women in general, the Catholic Church at that time continued to focus its energy on a singular woman above all others. In fact, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who had been the subject of devotion throughout the history of the Church, received increased attention during the mid twentieth century, when both de Beauvoir and Poulenc were addressing gender issues in their own ways. Although Mary does not appear on stage as a character in Poulenc’s opera, her presence is suggested in the musical dramaturgy and the spiritual meaning of Bernanos’ text. Musical devotions to Mary in *Dialogues des Carmélites* are examined in Chapters 3 and 4, but for now, the important point is that the nuns invoke her

¹⁵⁷ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 290, footnote 6.

¹⁵⁸ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 681.

intercessory assistance when they articulate the “Ave Maria” and “Salve Regina.” The text of the final tableau of the opera, in which the nuns sing the “Salve Regina,” focuses on Mary’s role as an advocate for them in their dying moments.

A brief explanation of the Catholic Church’s major Marian beliefs is important in order to understand why she is central to the message of *Dialogues des Carmélites*. I address four key tenets: the Immaculate Conception, Mary’s perpetual virginity, her Assumption into heaven, and her role as co-redemptrix and co-mediatrix with her son Jesus. These doctrinal teachings all contribute to the way that Mary operates within the fictional space of Bernanos’ and Poulenc’s *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Throughout this discussion, distinctions between male and female refer specifically to the way that Catholic doctrine treats these genders, rather than in the ways that de Beauvoir or other feminist writers view the topic. Another key consideration is that the views on Mary are specific to the Catholic Church and not necessarily other Christian faith communities.

The term Immaculate Conception refers to Mary’s uniqueness compared to all other mortals, with the exception of her divine son, in that she was conceived free of original sin. Mary was exempt from this stain, whereas other humans inherit the sin of Adam and Eve and are destined to sin throughout their lives. The Catholic Catechism has addressed Mary’s unique conception with this explanation: “Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, ‘full of grace’ through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception.”¹⁵⁹

Mary’s Immaculate Conception was necessary for her to become the mother of Christ because the perfect Son of God could not be born of a flawed human. As such,

¹⁵⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 491.

she becomes a “new Eve” and the *Theotokos* (Mother of God) who offers life to all of mankind with the birth of her divine son.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, the Church carefully notes that Mary was preserved from sin *because* of her son and not due to any effort on her part.¹⁶¹ The doctrine has been described as a “Preredemption” in that Christ was able to preserve his mother from sin.¹⁶² This mystery involves a temporal retroactivity because the conception of Mary preceded her conception of Jesus. The Immaculate Conception exists both as a solitary event and also in a spiritual realm that transcends the actual moment of its occurrence.

Although many within the Catholic faith prior to the nineteenth century believed in the Immaculate Conception, the doctrine did not receive full papal support until 1854, when Pope Pius IX elevated the teaching to the level of dogma.¹⁶³ This particular action served a purpose beyond the demand that all Catholics must acknowledge Mary’s exemption from original sin. Pius IX indicated that this particular Papal Bull also enjoyed a singular privilege as the first instance in the history of the Church that a pope had declared *Ineffabilis Deus*, or papal infallibility. In other words, not only did he require Catholics to accept the belief as dogma, but he also made it impossible for a future pope to challenge his authority on the matter. His powerful proclamation came at a crucial point for the Church as Rome had been struggling to maintain its control over Catholics throughout Europe and the world. He subsequently reaffirmed the

¹⁶⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 494-95.

¹⁶¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 139, 492.

¹⁶² Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 242.

¹⁶³ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 242.

significance of the 1854 dogma with another declaration that required that all Catholics observe papal infallibility.¹⁶⁴

While the dogma of the Immaculate Conception refers to Mary's exemption from original sin at the moment of conception, the doctrine of perpetual virginity accounts for her untainted status throughout her lifetime. This belief moves beyond the biblical teaching that Mary was a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception and birth to argue that she never engaged in sexual intercourse even after the miraculous birth.

The foundation for Mary's virginity is laid out in both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible. Prior to Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), and the Gospel of Matthew recounted how Mary's fiancé Joseph honored the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Matthew 1:18-24). In the Gospel of Luke's version, Mary's own perspective was emphasized. When Mary learned from the angel Gabriel that she would give birth to the Christ child, she questioned how this was possible given her virginity. Gabriel informed her that she would conceive the Son of God through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:34-38).

Although the Bible does not explicitly discuss whether Mary remained a virgin after this miraculous event, the Catholic Church maintains that her perpetual virginity is implicit. The birth of the Christ "sanctified" her virginity, preserving her status as *Aeiparthenos* (ever virgin). Furthermore, the Church asserts that references to Jesus' brothers and sisters in the Bible alluded to non-sibling relatives and "spiritual" brothers.¹⁶⁵ In order for Mary to remain a virgin after childbirth, she avoided

¹⁶⁴ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 237.

¹⁶⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 499-501.

consummation of her marriage with Joseph, and in the most extreme interpretation of the doctrine, her hymen mystically remained intact during childbirth and *post partum*.¹⁶⁶ Mary's defiance of the laws of biology also extended beyond her natural life, as articulated in the next Marian doctrine.

In the same way that Mary was exempt from original sin, she also avoided bodily decay. This Catholic belief is known as the Assumption, when Mary's body and soul rose into heaven.¹⁶⁷ Mary's Assumption is the necessary fulfillment of her role as the Mother of God, and her body remains intact as the "ever virgin" for all time.¹⁶⁸ As the Catechism has explained:

The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son's Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of his Body.¹⁶⁹

Again, Mary's relationship with her son receives emphasis, and His function as the Redeemer allows her to share in his glory.

Although the doctrine of the Assumption traces back to the early Church, the belief did not gain the status of dogma until 1950.¹⁷⁰ Pope Pius XII, who was especially reverent of the Blessed Virgin Mary, declared the dogma a few years before his proclamation of a Marian Year, an event that is discussed later in this chapter. His

¹⁶⁶ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 43-45.

¹⁶⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 966.

¹⁶⁸ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 94.

¹⁶⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 974.

¹⁷⁰ See Warner, 81-102, for the evolution of Catholic ideas on Mary's Assumption, including the influential Eastern Orthodox belief that Mary rested in a passive state of Dormition until Jesus returned to raise her into heaven.

Munificentissimus Deus (1950) described the nature of Mary's Assumption but did not clarify whether Mary died before being raised into heaven.¹⁷¹

After Mary's Assumption into heaven, she has continued to serve in a special capacity as Co-redemptrix and Co-mediatrix for Catholics. These two titles refer to her salvic role alongside her Son in a fulfillment of both her and Christ's sinless natures beyond their human lifetimes. They interact with the faithful on a daily basis and are never truly absent from the world. Although the Church has been careful to qualify that Mary is fully human (unlike Christ), her unique character that designated her to be conceived without original sin also prepared her to be the "new Eve" and serve as the eternal mother of all Christians.¹⁷²

The various honors that Mary received by the Church (Immaculate Conception, perpetual virginity, and Assumption) allow her to interact intimately with Catholics who would otherwise feel distant from her. Leonardo Boff has offered one of the most detailed explanations of this mystical trajectory:

Mary is still in the world, still at the heart of the Church, with the living presence of someone alive. She may be invisible to the eyes of the body, but she is not absent. She is present, in a real, however ineffable, way, still active among us despite her phenomenological imperceptibility. The faithful achieve their relationship with her not only through the memory of her person and her deeds, but by immediate contact with her living, risen person. Only the pure of heart can comprehend how intimate, tender, maternal, and embracing our relationship with our Most Holy Mother, the Virgin Mary, can be.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Pope Pius XII, "*Munificentissimus Deus*, Defining the Dogma of the Assumption," (speech, St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican, Italy, 1 November 1950), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus_en.html (accessed 29 September 2011).

¹⁷² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 967-970.

¹⁷³ Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and Its Religious Expressions*, trans. Robert R. Barr and John W. Diercksmeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 175.

In other words, Mary simultaneously ascended into heaven and remained here on earth where she can serve alongside her Son on a daily basis as a co-mediatrix and co-redemptrix for her children. This is her “afterlife,” in the sense that she continues to fulfill her role as the Mother of God by partnering with her Son in order to bridge the distance between a perfect Trinitarian God and imperfect mankind. She would not be able to function in this capacity if it were not for her own pre-redemption by Jesus, but in addition, she provides a feminine balance (in the Catholic sense) to an otherwise paternal redemptive experience. As Boff explained, “Thus, all salvation—as we have seen—has a feminine, a virginal, and a maternal dimension. Jesus’ mediation includes the feminine with the masculine, just as Mary’s includes the masculine with the feminine.”¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, Mary’s involvement with this process points to her role as the pre-eminent saint among the Communion of Saints that was explored in Chapter 2.¹⁷⁵ If all the saints advocate on behalf of those who have not yet achieved salvation, Mary leads this process as the “new Eve” in tandem with her Son, the “new Adam.”

Mary’s complex historical and contemporary roles in the Church are manifest in liturgical practices such as the musical devotions to her as well as the shrines that honor her miraculous appearances. Through ritual and pilgrimage, devotees request the Blessed Virgin’s assistance in the acts of redemption from sin and salvation from eternal damnation.

Perhaps the most familiar prayer to Mary is the *Ave Maria*, or Hail Mary, which acknowledges her distinctive role as the Mother of God and then requests assistance

¹⁷⁴ Boff, *The Maternal Face of God*, 181. See also Warner, 323, and McBrien, 1088.

¹⁷⁵ Boff, *The Maternal Face of God*, 181.

both in the present time and in the future. The prayer is commonly recited in this manner:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.¹⁷⁶

This prayer encapsulates the belief that Mary serves as a co-mediatrix and co-redemptrix for humankind, but it also points toward the ritualistic nature of Catholic tributes to the Blessed Virgin. Chapter 4 explores the specific instances of Marian music that occur in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, but for now, the important thing to note is that Marian devotion plays a huge role in Catholic faith, including musical tributes.

In addition to prayers and music that can take place in any location, another type of Marian devotion involves the pilgrimage to specific shrines where her miracles have been recognized by the faithful. One of the most famous sites is at Lourdes in southwest France, where a fourteen-year old illiterate girl named Bernadette Soubirous claimed to experience multiple visions involving an apparition who eventually revealed herself in 1858 to be the Immaculate Conception. Soubirous uncovered a spring that is still believed to be imbued with healing powers, and a statue representing Our Lady of Lourdes now stands in a grotto where the girl encountered the mystical representation of the Virgin.¹⁷⁷ Other locations throughout Europe have served as places where religious devotees travel to seek spiritual and physical healing.

One of these pilgrimage sites exists at Rocamadour, also in southwest France.

¹⁷⁶ The Vatican has provided instructions on how to pray the Rosary. See: http://www.vatican.va/special/rosary/documents/misteri_luminosi_en.html (Accessed 29 September 2011). Warner has argued that the Hail Mary offers comfort to those who fear death because of the reassurance that Mary will pray for the redemption of sinners at the hour of death. See Warner, 331.

¹⁷⁷ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 249-51.

Prior to and during the composition of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Poulenc was drawn to that location. Unlike the typical European representation of her as a white mother of Christ, the statue at Rocamadour is a Black Virgin. There are hundreds of Black Virgin statues and paintings, in some cases deliberately colored black, throughout Europe and the Americas. Many of these darkened Marian representations are credited with miraculous powers, both because their origins are mysterious and due to the healing associations with goddess figures that preceded Christianity.¹⁷⁸ Rocamadour, the site of one of the most revered Black Madonnas, had a profound impact on Poulenc, and *Dialogues des Carmélites* serves as a testament to his mystical experiences.

From the time that Poulenc first visited Rocamadour in 1936, he viewed the shrine as a place to renew his faith and receive inspiration for his artistic endeavors. The initial trip, following the death of his friend Pierre-Octave Ferroud, was the impetus for his female choral and organ work *Les Litanies à la Vierge Noire* (Litanies to the Black Virgin) (1936).¹⁷⁹ When Poulenc was immersed in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, he wrote to Marthe Bosredon, “I shall offer a ciborium to Roc. as an act of thanks, once *Les Carmélites* is finished.”¹⁸⁰ Indeed, he donated a goblet to Rocamadour in 1957, and this item later became part of the Musée-Trésor Francis Poulenc that opened on 4 May

¹⁷⁸ See Jean Markale, *Cathedral of the Black Madonna: The Druids and the Mysteries of Chartres* trans. Jon Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2004), 170-75, and Marie-France Boyer, *The Cult of the Virgin: Offerings, Ornaments and Festivals*, trans. Jane Brenton (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 34-42. This topic has received recent attention in the writings of Sue Monk Kidd, including her novel *The Secret Life of Bees* (New York: Viking, 2002), and her autobiographical travelogue with her daughter Ann Kidd, *Traveling with Pomegranates: A Mother-Daughter Story* (New York: Viking, 2009).

¹⁷⁹ See Burton, *Francis Poulenc*, 62-76, for a description of Poulenc’s relationship to Rocamadour.

¹⁸⁰ Poulenc to Marthe Bosredon, 27 August [1955], in *Francis Poulenc: “Echo and Source”*, 220.

1969 at the religious site.¹⁸¹ This tribute indicates the special role that Rocamadour played with regard to *Dialogues des Carmélites* and Poulenc's life in general.

More specifically than Poulenc's ongoing fascination with Rocamadour, *Dialogues des Carmélites* evokes the Marian Year that Pope Pius XII proclaimed from 8 December 1953 to 8 December 1954, during the first stages of Poulenc's composition.¹⁸² At that time, the pope encouraged priests to deliver sermons on the importance of Mary, religious devotees to make pilgrimages to Marian shrines, and a surge in scholarship on the Blessed Virgin.

Toward the end of the Marian Year, Pope Pius XII delivered a speech that recognized the historical and contemporary importance of music devoted to Mary. He argued:

Furthermore, the sacred liturgy, which acts as a faithful reflection of traditional doctrine believed by the Christian people through the course of all the ages both in the East and in the West, has sung the praises of the heavenly Queen and continues to sing them.¹⁸³

In addition to the liturgy, this declaration also described sacred music sung in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, specifically the *Salve Regina* and the *Ave Maria*. The dramaturgical context for these two Marian devotions are explored further in Chapters 3 and 4.

Mary's significance in the Catholic Church extends beyond tributes to her role as Jesus' mother. Pius XII argued: "But the Blessed Virgin Mary should be called Queen,

¹⁸¹ See Letter 266, note 2 in *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source"*, 395.

¹⁸² Richard P. McBrien briefly discusses the significance of the Marian Year in his tome *Catholicism*, New Edition (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 1094.

¹⁸³ Pope Pius XII, "Ad Caeli Reginam Encyclical Proclaiming the Queenship of Mary" (speech, St. Peters Basilica, Vatican, Italy, 11 October 1954), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_11101954_ad-caeli-reginam_en.html (accessed 29 September 2011).

not only because of her Divine Motherhood, but also because God has willed her to have an exceptional role in the work of our eternal salvation.”¹⁸⁴ The Marian music in *Dialogues des Carmélites* served a larger purpose beyond the dramaturgy by assisting with the salvation of those who experienced the opera, as well as the entire ecumenical community through the Communion of Saints. The Catholic Church’s observance of the Marian Year reaffirmed this perspective on the Blessed Virgin Mary’s singular importance.

Although Poulenc might have encountered the content of the pope’s speeches only indirectly, he interacted with religious devotees who would have been familiar with the purposes of the Marian Year. In particular, Poulenc wrote about two Marian shrines and the more general significance of the Virgin in a letter to Pierre Bernac in the summer of 1954. He speculated about his spiritual advisor Father Carré’s comparison between Poulenc and the Massenet opera *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*, whose protagonist became a devotee of Mary and received a miraculous blessing from a Marian statue at the moment of his death.¹⁸⁵ Then after this passing reference, Poulenc discussed the spiritual impact of witnessing a pilgrimage to Lourdes, one of the Marian shrines that the pope had specifically promoted during the Marian Year. Poulenc recounted,

Did I tell you how overcome I was by Lourdes the other day? I had never seen a pilgrimage before. It was at once atrocious and sublime. What moved me most was seeing all those young people, boys and girls, devoting themselves to the

¹⁸⁴ Pope Pius XII, *Ad Caeli Reginam*.

¹⁸⁵ See Letter 250, note 5 in *Francis Poulenc “Echo and Source”*, 392, for the context of Poulenc’s reference to Father Carré.

sick. Yes, you are right, charity should be something more than mere cheques.¹⁸⁶

In this description, Poulenc differentiated between a collective pilgrimage and his own visits to holy shrines, which were personal rather than communal. The actions of the youth served as indications both of the charity of the Church and also the devotion to the mystical Our Lady of Lourdes. Poulenc also mentioned his favorite Marian site in the letter, indicating that he would travel with his doctor “to visit my beloved Rocamadour, where they are expecting me,” before arriving at his home in Noizay on 8 August.¹⁸⁷

If Mary is everywhere, including the shrines that Poulenc visited during the Marian Year, then she is also invisibly present on the operatic stage throughout *Dialogues des Carmélites*. This opens up the possibility that, in addition to the nuns’ supplication at the hour of their death, Mary engages in a dialogue with them. Although we do not hear her response to the *Salve Regina*, we know from the Catholic Catechism that she serves as an intercessory mediatrix and redemptrix, alongside her son, for the nuns. She protects the nuns and gives them peace, which in turn emboldens Blanche to join her sisters at the scaffold. Blanche, who had fled the convent when her sisters took the vow of martyrdom, is able to reunite with them at the hour of their death because of the protection provided by the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Blanche as the Central Figure

Whereas Mary’s role in the opera is implicit due to her singular significance in the

¹⁸⁶ Poulenc to Bernac, July [1954] in *Francis Poulenc “Echo and Source”*, 220.

¹⁸⁷ Poulenc to Bernac July [1954] in *Francis Poulenc “Echo and Source”*, 220.

Catholic Church, the nuns are the explicit characters who actualize the issues of gender and religion that thread through the various versions of the Carmelite story. In all of the fictional depictions of the martyred nuns, Blanche de la Force functions as the main protagonist around whom the other characters interact. Her central figure often compels the dramatic intensification, with the exception of a few instances when she responds to other characters, such as during the First Prioress' death scene. Although this first critical peak in the drama focuses on the Prioress' anxiety, the scene also establishes the groundwork for Bernanos' and Poulenc's spiritual belief in mystical substitution and vicarious suffering, as discussed in Chapter 2. Even beyond the central plot, Blanche is the most developed of the characters from her creation by le Fort to her operatic treatment by Poulenc. Because the genre of novella is the most verbose of the literary treatments, with the lengthiest account of the heroine's childhood, I draw primarily from le Fort's work in this section while including observations from the others for further illumination of Blanche's character. Bernanos' version briefly references lengthier events from le Fort's narrative, and the impetus for Blanche's behavior in adulthood in both Bernanos' and Poulenc's treatments of the story can be traced to these childhood anecdotes in the novella. When differences among the versions are substantive, I address the significance of those conflicts.

The circumstances of Blanche's childhood establish the context for how she struggles with apprehension during adulthood. These early events serve as a foundation for the heroine's character as depicted in all three versions of the story. I focus on those aspects of Blanche that reveal the reasons for her anxiety both before and after she enters the convent. This unsettledness motivates her behavior throughout

her life. From the outset, Blanche's struggle with her aristocratic heritage, coupled with her mother's tragic death when Blanche was an infant, contributes to the personal nature of her character. In le Fort's story, the letter-writer describes Blanche as feeling safe in the convent, where she is protected from the outside world. Her father, the Marquis de la Force, referred to her as a "poor timid child" due to the speculation that "the sad circumstances of her birth apparently determined her whole attitude toward life."¹⁸⁸ A gruesome episode during an uprising that anticipated the Revolution caused the Marquise de la Force to give birth prematurely and then leave Blanche as a motherless infant. The narrator assures us that even "qualified physicians" had evaluated Blanche and believed that these traumas had impacted Blanche's temperament.¹⁸⁹

The novella's letter writer situated Blanche's adult tendencies in accounts of influential events from the heroine's childhood. For instance, the letter writer explained that the name Blanche suited "her little face that paled so easily." Then Blanche also acquired the nickname "Rabbit," or as the servants mockingly referred to her, "Rabbit-Heart," which was meant to describe her tendency to be startled by seemingly small things.¹⁹⁰ Stories from Blanche's early childhood reveal that she feared everything from her small dog's sudden bark to the possibility of the stairs collapsing underneath her. Her father finally hired a governess, Madame de Chalais (not mentioned in Bernanos' play or Poulenc's opera), to help Blanche overcome her timidity, and this governess

¹⁸⁸ Gertrud von le Fort, *The Song at the Scaffold*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 11-12.

took on the role of spiritual advisor for the child who had previously been deprived of religious education due to her father's "liberal tendencies."¹⁹¹

As a way to nurture Blanche's religious growth, Madame de Chalais introduced the child to the figure of *le petit Roi de Gloire* (the petite King of Glory), a crowned Christ statuette belonging to the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne that shielded the French king and people from harm. The governess assured Blanche that reverence of *le petit Roi*, "by prayers and little acts of love, obedience and worship," would protect Blanche from the things that she feared. When Blanche challenged Madame de Chalais by questioning whether the figure's loss of his crown would negate His ability to watch over the people of France, the governess assured Blanche that prayer and devotion would always protect the girl. Immediately after this conversation, the stairway banister broke as Blanche clutched it on her way upstairs. This frightful episode served as a temporary setback in the heroine's maturation.¹⁹²

Shortly after this incident, at the age of sixteen, Blanche summoned her courage to determine her own fate by entering the convent instead of acquiescing to the Marquis' desire for his daughter to be married. Madame de Chalais' connections to the convent, plus a positive encounter with the invalid Prioress Croissy, expedited Blanche's admission as a novice, even though "it is not altogether usual that such a religious order as severe as that of the Carmelites should have admitted so frail a young girl." Blanche accepted the rigid rules of the convent, but at the same time, "She was amiable, eager, obedient, and—this must be emphasized particularly—she was happy

¹⁹¹ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 12.

¹⁹² Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 13-16.

and grateful too.”¹⁹³ Indeed, Blanche seemed to feel more comfortable in the convent than she ever had in the outside world.

Once Blanche became a novice nun, she shifted between security and instability, which in a way, was an improvement over her constant anxiety as a child. On the one hand, Blanche was part of a community in which she participated, but she also appeared to be isolated from the other nuns due to her bouts with apprehension and anxiety. For instance, Blanche reacted with horror when inspectors from the Revolutionary government encountered her while searching for nuns in the convent who might have been held captive against their will. The letter-writer in Le Fort’s novella recounted:

For as soon as this absurd little fellow opened the door of her cell and peeped through the crack with a grin, she uttered a piercing scream. (Sister Marie de l’Incarnation told me that in the worst days of the subsequent revolution she never again heard such a cry.) At the same time she retreated toward the wall of her cell with outstretched hands as if she were warding off unspeakable horror and when she could go no further she stopped as if she were awaiting death.¹⁹⁴

Blanche’s perplexing response to the inspectors led them to believe that she was indeed a prisoner in the convent, but after she ran to Sister Marie for protection, they realized that the novice nun wanted to remain cloistered. Her behavior in this episode illustrates her effort to connect with the other nuns, even when her panicked instincts set her apart from her calmer sisters, and she required several days to recover from the traumatic encounter.

Other examples of Blanche’s difference from her sisters are discussed below, but one more incident—barely addressed in Bernanos’ play—reinforces the protagonist’s

¹⁹³ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 19.

¹⁹⁴ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 36.

conflicted nature. *Le petit Roi de Gloire*, whom Madame de Chalais elevated to mystical status in the le Force household, resurfaces in the convent in Chapter 6 of the novella, this time as the actual object that the Carmelite nuns revere. Due to a raid by the national assembly, the little king no longer had His crown and scepter when he visited the cells of the nuns on Christmas night, as tradition dictated. Blanche failed to notice the absent crown until she prepared to kiss the figure—just as the Revolutionary hymn *Carmagnole* began to sound from outside—and her startled reaction to the coincidence caused the little king to fall to the floor, severing his head and foreshadowing the nuns' own decapitation. While her sisters had enthusiastically accepted the simpler statue as a return to the poverty that surrounded the Christ's birth, Blanche proclaimed, "Oh, *le petit Roi* is dead."¹⁹⁵ She then observed that they had "only the living Christ" before retreating into an even weaker emotional state, leading her superiors to contemplate sending her home from the convent. Yet, in defense of her anxiety, Blanche implored the Prioress to "consider the secret of my name," after modifying the end of the hymn of Saint Teresa while praying with the Prioress.¹⁹⁶ Blanche asserted her significance in the convent both with her words and with her changes to the hymn.

Blanche was referring to her religious name "the Agony of the Christ," which she had assumed upon entering the convent. This "secret" name had moved Prioress Croissy (now deceased in the narrative), but also conveyed something distinctive about Blanche compared to her sisters. Mother Marie of the Incarnation raises this question in

¹⁹⁵ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 53.

¹⁹⁶ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 57.

prayer before concluding that Blanche should remain in the convent: “Was it Thy will, O Jesus, to choose the timid temperament of this poor child, so that while others are preparing to exult in the dying of Thy death, Thou hast communicated to her Thy mortal fear?”¹⁹⁷ This difficult question actually traces back to the Gospel of Mark, which takes on a more agonized tone than the other synoptic gospels.¹⁹⁸ As He anticipated His crucifixion, Jesus became distressed, declaring, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”¹⁹⁹ Then immediately before his death, he cried out: “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”²⁰⁰

In light of this scriptural connection to Blanche’s own agony, Mother Marie acknowledged that Blanche might understand the secrets of Jesus’ crucifixion (and, by extension, the nuns’ plight) in a way that the others could not. To extend this argument further, Mark might be read as depicting the pain and detachment that Jesus felt upon his death (analogous on some level with Blanche’s plight), while the other nuns were more closely connected to the passion story as found in Luke, which is a “story of Jesus’ martyrdom.”²⁰¹ Given that the story of the Carmelites is ultimately one of martyrdom, we might expect to find an emphasis on Luke’s gospel instead of Mark’s, but Blanche as an individual (representing, to a certain extent, post-War Europe) fits

¹⁹⁷ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 59.

¹⁹⁸ For a compelling, if controversial, discussion of Christ’s agony in the Gospel of Mark, see Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 172-73.

¹⁹⁹ Mk 14:34.

²⁰⁰ Mk 15:34.

²⁰¹ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 141.

better with Mark's message of Jesus' implicit quasi-separation from God around the time of His own execution.

Although le Fort used the incident with *le petit Roi* to highlight a pivotal moment in Blanche's attempts to come to terms with her inner turmoil, Bernanos focused on the symbolism of the statue itself. In Scene 3 of the fourth tableau, an impassioned mob desecrated the King, just as in le Fort's novella, but the scene is staged, rather than narrated, with the nuns as witnesses to the crowd's actions. When Blanche later dropped the statue and made her declaration about the death of the petite King, therefore, she was already aware of His impoverished appearance. Her startled response was due only to the crowd's singing and not the statue itself, but the consequence was the same in that the figure's head still shattered. Bernanos included the prayer to Saint Teresa as well, with an alteration by Blanche that bears a striking resemblance to le Fort's, considering that the playwright did not have a copy of the novella in his possession while he was writing his drama. Both authors emphasized Blanche's request for refuge from her apprehension, and as in le Fort's novella, the Prioress considered sending the young novice home from the convent. But unlike le Fort, Bernanos moved immediately from Christmas Eve to a secret observance of Good Friday, leaving Blanche's immediate status with the convent unaddressed.

Poulenc reduced the reference to *le petit Roi* even further, down to one scene compared to Bernanos' three consecutive scenes, with the effect that the Christmas Eve incident served mainly as a catalyst for the impending execution. Due to the genre, Poulenc was able to incorporate choral singing in alternation with Blanche's declaration about the death of the little King, in order to reflect the growing agitation and unrest that

characterized the Revolution; but rather than quote *Carmagnole*, he chose the popular Revolutionary song “Ça Ira,” which had recently been recorded by Edith Piaf for the 1954 film *Si Versailles m’était conté*.²⁰² The act ends in a heightened frenzy, with the sound of the offstage crowd followed by an orchestral closing, and no conversational speculation about Blanche’s future in the convent. Yet, in all three treatments of the subject matter, she eventually fled the convent for her Parisian family home because of her overriding doubts, and only at the last moment would she appear at the site of the guillotine.

Blanche’s behavior in the final scene varies among the authors, with only Poulenc allowing her to approach the scaffold of her own free will. In fact, when Blanche (who had succumbed to “complete apathy”)²⁰³ began to sing out from the crowd of women who had virtually adopted her after her father’s own execution, she was attacked by an angry mob in Le Fort’s novella. The letter-writer recalled,

I recognized the face in every feature and yet did not recognize it. It was quite without fear! She was singing! With her small, weak, childish voice she sang without a tremor, exultingly as a bird! All alone across the great terrible square she sang the *Veni Creator* of her Sisters to the very end.²⁰⁴

Both literally and metaphorically, Blanche became free of her anxieties at that instant, with her bird-like singing. The “furious women,” who had protected her after her father’s

²⁰² Le Fort actually mentioned “Ça Ira,” in another scene, when the narrator recalled the nuns praying a silent Mass as Revolutionary crowds sang outside, but not in the specific instance where the statuette broke. See Le Fort, *Die Letzte am Schafott*, 77. “Ça Ira” was a popular choice among opera composers of the Revolutionary period, particularly around the time that the Carmelite nuns were executed. See M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, “The New Repertory at the Opéra During the Reign of Terror: Revolutionary Rhetoric and Operatic Consequences,” in *Music and the French Revolution*, ed. Malcolm Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 132. On Edith Piaf’s performance, see Margaret Crosland, *Piaf* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1985), 130.

²⁰³ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 88.

²⁰⁴ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 108.

death, attacked the former novice, and she died at their hands. In this moment, the narrator's assertion is confirmed: "Ah! my friend, do not think that these people were not capable of good impulses. The mob is always capable of good impulses! That is the very thing that makes a mob of people: that they are capable of anything at all!"²⁰⁵ Thus, the same mob that had rescued Blanche also turned on her because their actions were purely impulsive and without consistent empathy for others. Although Blanche abandoned her apprehension, she still did not have control over her own destiny according to le Fort.

While Bernanos' rendition still involved the mob pushing Blanche to her death, she at least made it to the guillotine before being murdered. The Bruckberger scenario described, "A sudden movement of the crowd. A group of women surround Blanche and push her towards the scaffold. She is lost to sight. And suddenly her voice is no longer heard, just as one by one the voices of her sisters ceased."²⁰⁶ In this moment, Blanche reunited with her sisters at the guillotine, even if due to the force of the crowd. Through this modification, Blanche's experience in Bernanos' play contrasts with le Fort's ending in that the heroine actually died by the same mechanism as her sisters. Whereas le Fort's conclusion emphasized Blanche's separation from her sisters even in manner of death, Bernanos had her sing the same prayer as the other nuns before facing the guillotine, but her separation from her sisters is due to the fact that she did not choose her death in the same way that her sisters did. On one level, she might

²⁰⁵ Le Fort, *Song at the Scaffold*, 86.

²⁰⁶ Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, tableau V, scene 17, trans. Michael Legat (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1952). The original French reads: "Brusque mouvement de foule. Un groupe de femmes entoure Blanche, la pousse vers l'échafaud, on la perd de vue. Et soudain sa voix se tait comme ont fait une à les voix de ses sœurs."

have encouraged the mob to thrust her to the guillotine by singing out from the crowd, but Blanche did not voluntarily take the ultimate initiative of walking up to the scaffold unaided.

Poulenc, on the other hand, emphasized Blanche's agency by sending her to the guillotine of her own volition. In the opera, Blanche chose her death when she appeared at the scaffold to face her execution. The composer's version of the martyrdom involved all of the nuns (including Blanche) choosing their fate. Poulenc made another alteration to both le Fort and Bernanos by providing Blanche with a different text. While le Fort's and Bernanos' nuns sang both the *Salve Regina* and *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, Blanche alone sang the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* in the operatic setting. Poulenc, then, imbued Blanche with agency over her own death, while still emphasizing her separateness from the other nuns by giving her a distinctive chant: "Incredibly calm, Blanche emerges from the crowd astounded and climbs to the torture."²⁰⁷ Blanche's calmness before her death served as a peaceful resolution of her lifelong struggles with apprehension and anxiety in the midst of the Revolution's turmoil. Through her musical difference and active election to be executed alongside her sisters, Blanche also demonstrated how one could exist in two seemingly paradoxical realms: that of separateness and also collectiveness.

Blanche and Her Relationship to Her Creators

In addition to the ways that Blanche functions within the narrative, the character served a purpose for each of the authors but in different ways. For le Fort, Blanche

²⁰⁷ Poulenc, Act III, tableau 4. The original French reads: "Incroyablement calme, Blanche emerge de la foule stupéfaite et monte au supplice."

became a symbol of the author's internal anxiety during the interwar period, whereas the heroine served as a means to convey a religious philosophy in Bernanos' play. Poulenc viewed her as a model for how to handle death and dying, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Blanche's familial circumstances took on significance for le Fort due to the expansive space dedicated to the heroine's background, but the author's invention of a nun with an aristocratic heritage can be connected to historical fact. As established in Chapter 2, le Fort spent time researching the history of the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne, and this research is evident in the details that le Fort provided in her novella. Members of the nobility did take refuge in religious convents during the pre-Revolutionary period, including most notably King Louis XV's youngest and favorite daughter, Louise-Marie (Sister Teresa of Saint Augustine).²⁰⁸

The circumstances surrounding Louise's entry into the Carmelite order at Saint-Denis included childhood education in a monastery at Fontevault and a longstanding relationship with the Carmelites at Compiègne, where her mother, Marie Leszczyńska, had sought solace on occasion from her philandering husband. Louis XV specifically forbade Louise from joining the monastery at Compiègne, but the princess maintained connections there even after her move to Saint-Denis. Specifically, Louise helped make arrangements for two of the martyred nuns, Madame Marie Madeleine Claudine Lidoine (Mother Teresa of Saint Augustine) and the aristocratic Madame Rose Crétien de Neuville (Sister Julie-Louise of Jesus), to enter into the monastery at Compiègne. The impoverished Madame Lidoine went so far as to take the same religious name as her

²⁰⁸ See Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 17-31.

royal advocate, who had persuaded Marie Antoinette to pay the nun's dowry.²⁰⁹

Beyond these three personages, the illegitimate daughter of the Prince of Conti, Françoise-Geneviève Philippe (Sister Marie of the Incarnation), has already been mentioned in Chapter 2 because of her role—after escaping execution herself—as the first author to record the history of the martyred nuns.

Although Blanche might seem to have quite a bit in common with the actual Sister Marie who fled to the Swiss border when she learned of her sisters' condemnation to death, the characters that le Fort created were indeed fictional. Sister Marie became the austere Mother Marie of the Incarnation, the sub-prioress who convinced the other nuns to take a vow of martyrdom, whereas Blanche assumed the role of unsettled aristocrat seeking religious protection from the outside world.²¹⁰

Because Le Fort invented Blanche before she had even encountered the story of the Carmelite nuns, the apprehension that motivated Blanche's actions extended, in a way, beyond the Revolutionary historical context. Le Fort viewed her heroine as stemming from the anxiety that she and others felt in the lead-up to the Nazi takeover of Germany. As le Fort explained:

The point of departure for my own creation was not primarily the destiny of the sixteen Carmelites of Compiègne, but rather the character of little Blanche. In a historical sense, she did not exist, but received the breath of her trembling being directly from my own personality, and thus can never be separated from that origin which is hers and hers alone.²¹¹

This perhaps explains why le Fort “switched” the personality of Mother Marie with that of

²⁰⁹ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 30-34.

²¹⁰ Bush, *To Quell the Terror*, 11-12.

²¹¹ Gertrud von Le Fort, *Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen*, 93, trans. in Claude Gendre, “*Dialogues des Carmélites*,” 279.

Blanche, due to the fact that the general concept of a heroine who struggled with anxiety preceded le Fort's decision to focus her narrative on the Carmelite nuns. At that point, the actual Sister Marie (who fled Paris in real life) had not yet been discovered by the author. Character sketches that pre-date the plot of *Die Letzte am Schafott* indicate that le Fort was already preoccupied by the concept of the "Agony of Christ," according to her memoir.²¹² Although she had already intended to situate Blanche in a convent, she noted,

It was purely by chance that the latter became known to me. A little note, found at the bottom of a page of a book devoted to Catholic orders, told of the Carmelites who sang as they went to the scaffold. It was this that made me decide to transpose Blanche's story from the present to the time of the French Revolution.²¹³

Ultimately for le Fort, Blanche functioned in two unsettling spheres: the French Revolution and the Weimar Republic.

Bernanos' *Dialogues des Carmélites* focused on the ways that Blanche embodied Catholic spiritual beliefs. Whereas Le Fort treated Blanche as an extension of herself, Bernanos focused on the character's function in the mystical process of vicarious suffering, as was explored in Chapter 2. Through the related doctrines of vicarious suffering and mystical substitution, Blanche stands in for every Christian.

Poulenc and His Characters

Poulenc's relationship with the nuns extended beyond the central character of

²¹² Le Fort, *Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen*, trans. in Claude Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites:," 279.

²¹³ Le Fort, *Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen*, trans. in Claude Gendre, "Dialogues des Carmélites:," 279.

Blanche to include the other Carmelites. Whereas le Fort treated Blanche as a fictional extension of herself, Poulenc viewed the characters collectively as participants in an internal dialogue with his subject matter. An understanding of how Poulenc viewed the nuns in general help to elucidate his specific relationship to Blanche. Poulenc's correspondence during the time he composed the opera reveals the ways in which he related to the nuns.

The correspondence regarding the nuns dates to the first months that Poulenc worked on the opera. For instance, he wrote to Stéphane Audel early in the development of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, "I am crazy about my subject, to the point of believing that I have actually known these women."²¹⁴ Poulenc at times suggested that he was conversing with the characters, as indicated with his introductory remark to Audel, "Just a brief line as Mother Marie will not allow me the slightest distraction," and again in the closing of this same letter, "I am going back to my piano now, under pressure from Blanche."²¹⁵ Less than a month later, Poulenc explained to his friend Pierre Bernac that, among the reasons that he would not be in Paris for a recording of his earlier opera *Les Mamelles de Tiresias*, "Mother Superior does not allow me to leave the cloister."²¹⁶ This statement comes the closest to suggesting that Poulenc directly identified with the nuns, rather than simply engaging in dialogue with them.

At other times, the composer wrote about the nuns as if he was an actual participant in the drama's plot. He recounted the First Prioress' death scene to Bernac:

²¹⁴ Poulenc to Stéphane Audel, 31 August [1953], in *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source"*, 206.

²¹⁵ Poulenc to Audel, 31 August [1953], in *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source"*, 206.

²¹⁶ Poulenc to Pierre Bernac, [11 September 1953], in *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source"*, 211.

She breathed her last at seven o'clock last night, after a most horrible death-struggle! Mother Marie, more ambitious than ever, was unbelievably hard, poor Blanche completely crazed, and that great ninny of a doctor totally silent. As for me, I am exhausted but very relieved at having completed the entire scene.²¹⁷

In this statement, an event that had existed for some time in le Fort's novella and Bernanos' play suddenly seemed to be occurring in the moment, with Poulenc as an active participant.

Poulenc and Blanche

The actions of Blanche in the final tableau of the opera, when the heroine climbs to the scaffold of her own free will, had a significant impact on Poulenc. Up until this point in the opera, the composer followed Georges Bernanos' libretto almost to the letter. The significance of the alterations to Blanche's conduct in the final tableau affects not only the written *mise en scène* but also the musical dramaturgy, which are explored in Chapter 5.

Poulenc retained some of Bernanos' wording with regard to Blanche's fate, but the revisions have a profound impact on the conclusion of the opera. Even the succession of events is changed in the opera, with Blanche singing the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* after she emerges from the crowd.²¹⁸ The impact is that, in Poulenc's version, Blanche sings *after* she has approached the scaffold, whereas Bernanos used Blanche's voice as a trigger for the crowd's decision to thrust her toward her execution.

²¹⁷ Poulenc to Pierre Bernac, 19 December [1953], in *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source"*, 214.

²¹⁸ *Veni, Creator Spiritus* is considered "the most famous of hymns." It originated as a monastic hymn to be sung at Vespers and Terce during Pentecost, but the hymn now appears at solemn ceremonies throughout the year. In particular, *Veni, Creator Spiritus* is common at priest ordinations and is also featured when a new pope is installed. See Hugh Henry, "Veni Creator Spiritus," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 15 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15341a.htm> (accessed 29 September 2011).

Table 1 outlines a comparison of the significant stage directions in the two versions.²¹⁹ The table illustrates that Blanche sings before being pushed to the scaffold in Bernanos' version, whereas she sings after marching toward the scaffold in Poulenc's opera. For clarification, the sung text is in bold, and the stage directions are in plain type, with the translations immediately following the original (Latin for the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* text and French for the stage directions). I have italicized the portion of the stage directions that invites different interpretations in Bernanos' and Poulenc's versions.

Where Poulenc preserved Bernanos' wording, the composer made subtle cuts to suit the dramatic implication of Blanche's difference in the opera. Bernanos had written, "Her face seems stripped of all fear," which includes the word "seems" ("semble" in French), but Poulenc eliminated this qualifier: "Blanche, her face stripped of all fear."²²⁰ Blanche has definitely overcome her apprehension in the opera—there is no hint to the contrary—she is no longer "petite" Blanche, but just Blanche. This transformation allows her to climb to the scaffold without the force of the crowd. Her agency is further emphasized by the use of the reflexive phrase "forces her way through the crowd," removing all doubt about who controls Blanche's destiny.²²¹ She forces herself through the crowd; the witnesses do not have power over her, and their participation is that of passive spectators.

²¹⁹ The translation of Bernanos' play is taken from Georges Bernanos, *The Fearless Heart*, tableau V, scene 17, trans. Michael Legat. The translation from Poulenc's opera is my own.

²²⁰ Original French in Bernanos' play (tableau V, scene 17) reads: "Son visage semble dépouille de toute crainte." The French in Poulenc's opera (Act III, tableau 4) reads: "Blanche, le visage dépouille de toute crainte."

²²¹ The French reads: "se fraye un passage dans la foule." The reflexive construction "se fraye" indicates that she "forces herself."

Table 1. Comparison of texts at the end of *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Bernanos (French)	Bernanos (English)	Poulenc (French)	Poulenc (English)
Et on voit s'avancer vers l'échafaud, à travers la foule qui s'écarte, interdite, la petite Blanche de la Force. <i>Son visage semble dépouille de toute crainte.</i>	And towards the scaffold, through the crowd which, astounded, makes room, one sees approaching the slight figure of Blanche de la Force. <i>Her face seems stripped of all fear.</i>	<i>Blanche, le visage dépouille de toute crainte, se fraye un passage dans la foule où elle se confond.</i>	<i>Blanche, her face stripped of all fear, forces her way through the crowd where she mingles.</i>
Deo Patri sit Gloria Et Filio qui a mortuis Surrexit ac Paraclito In sæculorum sæcula.	To God the Father be glory, To the Son who is risen and to the Spirit, the Paraclete, For ages unending. ²²²	Incroyablement calme, Blanche emerge de la foule stupéfaite et monte au supplice.	Incredibly calm, Blanche emerges from the astounded crowd and climbs to the torture.
Brusque mouvement de foule. Un groupe de femmes entoure Blanche, la pousse vers l'échafaud, on la perd de vue. Et soudain sa voix se tait comme ont fait une à une les voix de ses sœurs.	A sudden movement of the crowd. A group of women surround Blanche and push her towards the scaffold. She is lost to sight. And suddenly her voice is no longer heard, just as one by one the voices of her Sisters ceased.	Deo Patri sit Gloria Et Filio qui a mortuis Surrexit ac Paraclito In sæculorum sæcula.	To God the Father be glory, To the Son who is risen and to the Spirit, the Paraclete, For ages unending.

²²² Translation of final verse of *Veni, Creator Spiritus* taken from Pope John Paul II, "Letter of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to Priests for Holy Thursday 1998," (25 March 1998), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_31031998_priests_en.html (accessed 29 September 2011).

Unlike Bernanos' play, Blanche's invocation of the spirit in song does not trigger an active response from those who surround her. Her final words in Poulenc's opera are filled with self-determined strength, a characteristic she had lacked before the final tableau. Poulenc seemed to believe that Blanche's character demonstrated a strength that he desired for himself. The composer declared, "I hope that when my time comes, I shall know how to die. . . as Blanche did."²²³ Certainly Blanche "knew" how to die in Poulenc's opera, but the same argument cannot be made for le Fort's novella and Bernanos' play, where she was either attacked by a mob or forced up to the scaffold by those who surrounded her.

Richard D. E. Burton has argued that Poulenc's motive for altering the ending was to emphasize "the properly sacrificial character of her death; she is the victim of deranged ideology and officialised [sic] paranoia rather than simply of the hysteria of the mob."²²⁴ But not only is Blanche sacrificed:

Blanche's decapitation replicates the decapitation of the 'martyred' [Pierre-Octave] Ferroud whose death was instrumental in leading Poulenc back to the Church or, as the theology of mystical substitution would put it, his death was the 'ransom' that purchased or redeemed the life of his friend.²²⁵

Here, Burton has referred to Poulenc's renewal of faith following the tragic death of a close friend. Ultimately, mystical substitution plays out infinitely among those in the Christian community, and for Poulenc, this included the fictional character of Blanche. In addition to the sacrificial nature of Blanche's death, however, we must also consider the forcefulness of the heroine's actions in her decision to climb to the scaffold.

²²³ Poulenc to Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, 17 September 1955, in *Francis Poulenc "Echo and Source"*, 236.

²²⁴ Burton, *Francis Poulenc*, 106.

²²⁵ Burton, *Francis Poulenc*, 107.

Another aspect of Poulenc's revision strengthens the interpretation that Blanche's agency results in sacrifice. Throughout the final tableau, Poulenc preserved Bernanos' word "échafaud" (scaffold), but for Blanche, he instructed that she "climbs to the torture." Then at the very end of the tableau, he chose the word "supplice" (torture), which evokes the French phrase "le supplice de la Croix" (literally "the torture of the Cross," or more broadly "the Crucifixion"). Although the word "supplice" is not articulated out loud in the opera, the rearrangement of Bernanos' sequence (which places the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* after Blanche has forced herself through the crowd) reinforces the sacrificial nature of Blanche's death and its continuation of Christ's original martyrdom through the Communion of Saints.

This revision, which is at the center of Blanche's agency in the final tableau, can be explained in the context of Bakhtin's framework for double-voiced discourse, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Blanche's intention is the "direct intention" that drives the opera's conclusion. Her climb to the scaffold is what the audience witnesses, regardless of whether they are aware of the *mise en scène*. Poulenc's biographical influence, on the other hand, is the "refracted intention." Because Poulenc's letters were published posthumously, the vast majority of audience members would not have known about the "secret heart" of the opera; in Bakhtin's schema, Poulenc refracted his intention.

Bakhtin took double-voicedness a step further, though, in arguing that the source material is aware of and in dialogue with the author's work, in the same way that the author was conscious of his or her sources. Or, in other words, if Bernanos' Blanche is aware of Poulenc, we must consider what she is saying to him. The answer might lie in

the subtle changes to her character in the opera. As has been mentioned, Bernanos labeled her “petite,” whereas Poulenc omitted this adjective. In Poulenc’s opera, Blanche’s lack of apprehension is definite as she approaches the scaffold, instead of called into question by Bernanos’ qualifier “seems.” By the time of Poulenc’s opera, Blanche has at least partially transformed into a modern woman, if only in the final moments of her life when she chooses to approach the scaffold. She “becomes” a twentieth-century woman in de Beauvoir’s sense of gendered agency, even as she remains in a late eighteenth-century historical setting.

In spite of Blanche’s transformation into a twentieth-century woman, she still dies an eighteenth-century death. For Catherine Clément, Blanche’s demise would fit into the larger narrative of women (the “jewels” of opera) being “undone” on the stage. Clément has argued, “But the role of the jewel, a decorative object, is not the deciding role; and on the opera stage women perpetually sing their eternal undoing.”²²⁶ In response, Carolyn Abbate cited Paul Robinson’s challenge that the voice continues after the plot-driven deaths of the female characters.²²⁷ Whereas Clément focused on the dramatic action of operas, Abbate has emphasized the conflict between the sonic experience of operatic genres and the plots that often murder the women. Perhaps these characters also survive their own deaths in another manner. If Bakhtin’s model of intertextuality is applied to this notion of operatic undoing, Blanche can continue to engage in a dialogic network after the guillotine blade has fallen.

²²⁶ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 5.

²²⁷ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), ix.

Blanche's Relationships with Other Characters

The relationship between Blanche and the other characters offers another way to understand the significance of the heroine. The central conflict in Bernanos' play and Poulenc's opera is between Blanche and Mother Marie, with other characters around Blanche serving to reinforce this conflict. In particular, Madame de Croissy (the old Prioress), Blanche's father and brother, and Constance all help to emphasize the relationship between Blanche and Mother Marie.

Although Mother Marie had doubts about Blanche's strength of character, the Prioress identified with Blanche. When Mother Marie observed that the Prioress was affected by Blanche's choice of the name "the Agony of the Christ," the Prioress confessed that she had selected the same name years before. The Prioress then instructed Mother Marie to watch over Blanche, saying "You will respond for her before God for me."²²⁸ This recognition of Mother Marie's strength and Blanche's timidity highlights the difference between the two characters.

Even when the Prioress was dying, she felt connected to Blanche, while Mother Marie attempted to keep Blanche out of the Prioress' chamber. Immediately before the Prioress died, Blanche was discovered outside the bedroom door, and the distraught Prioress insisted upon speaking with Blanche, counter to the advice of Mother Marie, who was concerned that the Prioress was in a state of delirium. When the Prioress addressed Blanche with "'Ask for pardon... death... fear... fear of death...'" immediately

²²⁸ Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, tableau 2, scene 7, and Poulenc, Act I, tableau 4. In the original French: "Vous me répondrez d'elle devant Dieu."

before she passed away, she was identifying with Blanche's own scared nature.²²⁹

That the Prioress would choose the youngest member of the convent to witness her agonizing death illustrates the bond between the two characters.

Mother Marie, on the other hand, remained stern with Blanche, even in light of the fact that Blanche witnessed the Prioress' death. After Blanche and Sister Constance said a requiem prayer (sung in the opera) for their departed Prioress, Blanche departed from her duty of watching over the Prioress. When Mother Marie discovered her, Blanche was reprimanded for leaving her post; Blanche, however, was too frightened to return to the chapel.

Mother Marie is certainly not the only character who provides a contrast to Blanche. Constance plays a significant structural role in Bernanos' and Poulenc's recasting of le Fort's story, serving both as a foil to Blanche and as a representation of a simple, earthly happiness that differed from the solemn nature of the other nuns at Compiègne. Although their opposition is established in Act I, when Constance happily reminisced about her brother's simple, country wedding and Blanche challenged Constance's cheerful outlook on life and death, the contrast between these two characters was greatest when Mother Marie asked the nuns to vote on whether they would agree to take a vow of martyrdom.²³⁰ When one person voted against the vow, Mother Marie declared that the nuns could not fulfill this commitment without unanimous agreement. As another sister, Mathilde, began to suggest that Blanche was the lone

²²⁹ Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, tableau 2, scene 7, and Poulenc, Act I, tableau 4. In the original French: "Demande pardon... mort... peur... peur de la mort."

²³⁰ Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, tableau 4, scene 13, and Poulenc, Act III, Interlude between tableaux 1 and 2.

dissenter, Constance interrupted and claimed responsibility for the negative vote. Instead of confronting Blanche, Constance assumed Blanche's position and then asserted that she had changed her mind, leaving Blanche to protest the martyrdom vow silently.

Unlike Constance, Mother Marie confronted Blanche's uncertainty outright, after Blanche had fled the convent. Mother Marie, who located Blanche at her father's home, where Blanche was mourning her father's recent death at the hands of revolutionaries, tried to persuade Blanche to return to the convent in order to realize her destiny.²³¹ When Blanche refused, she insisted that that her father was the only person who could keep her from feeling worthless, suggesting that the conflict between her and Mother Marie increased her already present anxiety.²³²

Blanche's father, the Marquis de la Force, and her brother, the Chevalier, are presented in such a way that their function is to highlight Blanche's anxiety, rather than being developed as individual characters. Although the first interaction between Blanche and her family occurred before she entered the convent, as Blanche was returning from a ride in the tumultuous streets of Paris, Blanche's next encounter with her brother took place under the auspices of Mother Marie.²³³ At this point, the Chevalier was attempting to convince Blanche to leave the convent; just as Blanche later refused Mother Marie's request to return to the cloister, Blanche also turned down her brother's suggestion that she should depart. After the Chevalier left, Blanche

²³¹ Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, tableau 5, scene I, and Poulenc, Act III, tableau 2.

²³² Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, tableau 5, scene 8, and Poulenc, Act III, tableau 2.

²³³ Bernanos, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, tableau 3, scene 8, and Poulenc, Act II, tableau 3.

admitted to Mother Marie that she had deceived her brother when she insisted that she felt safe in the convent. When Blanche worried that she would be punished for her pride, Mother Marie encouraged Blanche to elevate herself above this weakness.

In the end, Blanche resolved her conflict with Mother Marie. She rose above her apprehension and her pride, joining her sisters at the scaffold, where she was executed with them. Although Constance, who had shielded Blanche from revealing herself as the true dissenter in the martyrdom vote, noticed Blanche's presence at that crucial moment, Mother Marie was deprived of the opportunity to become a martyr, as she had been away from the convent when the nuns were sentenced. Therefore, in part, Blanche dies in place of Mother Marie. This allows her to participate in the Catholic doctrine of mystical substitution and fulfill the exchange that the Prioress had instigated by dying a painful death earlier in place of Blanche.

The social, cultural, and religious issues that underpin the intertextual dialogue of *Dialogues des Carmélites* manifest in specific ways throughout the opera. In particular, Poulenc's use of liturgical music reinforces the ideological framework that has been established in this chapter. In the next chapter, I explore specific instances of liturgical music in Poulenc's opera in comparison to other operas that address religion.

CHAPTER 4

STAGING RELIGION AND RITUAL IN *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*

Mid twentieth-century Catholicism is central to an understanding of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, as established in Chapters 1 and 2. The religious music in Poulenc's opera diverges, however, from similar text settings in earlier operas, particularly French grand operas.²³⁴ Unlike French grand operas where religious music reinforces the external *topos* of the drama, the liturgical music in *Dialogues des Carmélites* expresses spiritual devotion. In order to establish a historical context for the liturgical text settings in Poulenc's opera, this chapter examines the use of religious (including Catholic) music in two French grand operas, along with brief considerations of other operas, before exploring Catholic texts in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. The nineteenth-century operas *La Juive* (1835) by Fromental Halévy and Giuseppe Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes* (1854-55), both of which play out the political struggles that characterized the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century, provide a stark contrast to Poulenc's mid twentieth-century depiction of religious devotion and ritual that is at the heart of his opera.²³⁵

Even in the early twentieth century, treatments of Catholicism in opera avoided staged enactments of liturgical ritual. Giacomo Puccini's *Suor Angelica* (1917), which is addressed later in this chapter in the context of the opera's inclusion of an *Ave Maria*,

²³⁴ Religious topics in opera date back to the origins of the genre although their occurrences were infrequent. For instance, Emilio de' Cavalieri's *La rappresentazione di anima e di corpo* was premiered in Rome in 1600. On Cavalieri's allegorical religious musical drama, see Murray C. Bradshaw, "Character and Meaning in Cavalieri's opera *The Play of Soul and Body* (1600)," in *Music Observed: Studies in Memory of William C. Holmes*, ed. Susan Parisi (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park, 2004), 15-30.

²³⁵ Non-Catholic Christian music also appeared in grand operas, including the use of the Lutheran chorale "Ein feste Burg" in Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (1836). For a discussion of Meyerbeer's operas, including *Les Huguenots*, see Jane Fulcher, "Meyerbeer and the Music of Society," in *Music Quarterly* 67 (1981): 213-29.

focuses on the plight of a nun who struggles with the fact that she gave birth to an illegitimate child. The religious aspects of the opera, which is situated in a convent, serve as a framework for Angelica's personal turmoil, with the opening *Ave Maria* sung offstage and away from the view of the audience.

Another opera that incorporates Catholic elements is Jules Massenet's *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame*.²³⁶ Although this French opera includes Latin religious texts sung on stage, the texts are performed outside of a liturgical context. The first of these instances occurs following an orchestral introduction in scene 1 of Act II, when a music teacher leads a singing class. The text is part of a Marian devotional poem, "Ave coeleste liliun," by medieval theologian and philosopher St. Bonaventure, and the music teacher intersperses French instructions with the Latin words.²³⁷ At the conclusion of the opera, the juggler, who had been criticized earlier for his impious ways, miraculously comprehends Latin after experiencing a miracle. A statue of the Virgin Mary smiles at Jean in Act III, scene 3, and the juggler suddenly understands the prayer of the monks who witness the miraculous event. The intoned text initially resembles the Kyrie of the Mass, but the words turn out to be the beginning of the Litany of Loreto, a prayer to Mary that is frequently spoken in private devotions in addition to liturgical settings.²³⁸ The use of a familiar Latin prayer onstage in an opera

²³⁶ On *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame*, see Jean-Pierre Bartoli, "Le langage musical du *Jongleur de Notre-Dame* de Massenet: Historicisme, expression religieuse et système musico-dramatique," in *Opéra et religion sous la IIIe République*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Alban Ramaut (Saint-Étienne, France: Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006), 305-33.

²³⁷ On "Ave coeleste liliun," see Benjamin Musser, *Franciscan Poets* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1933), 152.

²³⁸ Angelo de Sancti, "Litany of Loreto," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09287a.htm> (accessed on 28 September 2011).

comes closer to approaching a staged liturgical ceremony than any of the other examples cited above, but the use of Latin is fleeting, lasting only one measure, before French is resumed. Jean dies shortly after the miracle, and the brief Latin prayer serves as an indication that God has blessed him. Although Massenet included a brief prayer onstage, the function of the text differs from Poulenc's staged liturgical music. The latter composer specifically used the religious texts in *Dialogues des Carmélites* to depict structured worship ceremonies, such as the gathering of the Carmelite nuns in the convent to sing the *Ave Maria*. In the case of *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame*, the Litany of Loreto is a spontaneous response to the miracle of the Marian statue. The next section focuses on French grand operas that use religious texts more extensively than the two examples cited above, but I also return to *Suor Angelica* because of its inclusion of an offstage *Ave Maria*.

Depictions of Catholicism in French Grand Opera

Dialogues des Carmélites differs from earlier French operas on religious topics because of the close relationship between music and drama. With its emphasis on history, the nineteenth-century grand opera tradition in particular drew on plots that dealt with religious conflict as one of several possible options for dramatic topics that appealed to large middle-class audiences. Although the traditional view of grand opera has been that the genre exploited historical conflicts mostly for economic profit, recent studies have explored the wider cultural and political implications of grand opera scenarios.²³⁹ The historical distance created by grand opera plots allowed composers

²³⁹ See William Croston, *French Grand Opera: An Art and a Business* (New York: Kings Crown Press, 1948) for the focus on the economic profits of grand opera. Jane Fulcher challenged the notion

and librettists (mainly Eugène Scribe) to comment obliquely on current social issues of the time by disguising them as historical events. For example, an opera with a religious subject matter could comment on ties between the Catholic Church and royal authority in the aftermath of the French Revolution.²⁴⁰

Two grand operas that make musical references to Catholicism are Halévy's *La Juive* and Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes*. In these instances, the religious music appears offstage and in conjunction with other singing and action. Thus, the music functions for reasons other than the staged performance of Catholic ritual, such as the enhancement of dramatic suspense during pivotal scenes where controversial characters' fates will be determined. On the other hand, a non-Catholic religious ritual in *La Juive* seems closer aligned to Poulenc's treatment of staged Catholic worship in *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

Of these two operas, the most extended depictions of religious ceremony take place in *La Juive* (first performed at the Paris Opéra on 23 February 1835) with the opening *Te Deum* in Act I and a Jewish Passover Seder meal at the beginning of Act II.²⁴¹ During the first scene of the opera, an offstage church choir sings the *Te Deum* in celebration of the Emperor's defeat (led by Prince Léopold) of the Hussites. At the

that grand opera was merely a commodity in *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) for a cultural analysis of grand opera.

²⁴⁰ Diana R. Hallman, "The Grand Operas of Fromental Halévy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 234.

²⁴¹ On the history of the *Te Deum*, see Michel Huglo, "Te Deum," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 (1965), 771-73. In addition to the weekly inclusion of the *Te Deum* at the end of Sunday Matins, this hymn of praise has also been used historically to commemorate consecrations, ordinations, and military victories. Emanuel Rubin and John H. Baron have noted that music is an important part of the Seder in *Music in Jewish History and Culture* (Sterling Heights, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2006), 20.

same time, the Jewish jeweler Eléazar continues to work, which bothers Christian observers who believe no one should work on the feast day. Halévy's homophonic chorale-like setting of the Latin *Te Deum* verses alternates with onstage French recitative dialogue, and eventually, these two elements overlap as the tension mounts over Eléazar's rejection of the Christian holiday.²⁴² Yet, the *Te Deum* remains offstage, due to censorship restrictions of the time.²⁴³

The Seder meal, on the other hand, takes place in full view of the audience, which calls attention to the distinction between these two religious practices. Diana R. Hallman has traced the way that censors monitored the rehearsals of *La Juive*, in order to ensure that depictions of Catholicism, including the *Te Deum*, would not cause offense.²⁴⁴ In contrast, the Commission de Surveillance (the official censors) remained silent on the issue of Jewish religious ceremony in Act II.²⁴⁵ The Seder's presence onstage does not mean that the depiction was entirely true to Jewish custom, however. Cormac Newark has argued that there is an intrusion on the authenticity of this scene's depiction of religious worship. This occurs both in the audience spectatorship of the

²⁴² Diana R. Hallman has demonstrated how Halévy revised this opening scene to intensify the conflict by shifting the comments about Eléazar to occur after the first phrase of the *Te Deum*. See *Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century France: The Politics of Halévy's La Juive* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 162-64. Also see Hallman, "The Grand Operas of Fromental Halévy," 237, for a discussion of ways that Halévy used the music to make the conflict seem urgent.

²⁴³ Censorship of operas in Paris was by no means consistent or uniform throughout the time period in which grand opera thrived. Guidelines changed according to political sensitivities, and the overriding concern tended to be the text rather than the music. See Fulcher, *The Nation's Image*, 28, 37, 67, 89-90, and 97-100.

²⁴⁴ Hallman, *Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism*, 141-42. See Fulcher, *The Nation's Image*, 82 and 90, for an explanation for an explanation of the crown's increased sympathy toward the Church after a period of condoning anti-clerical attitudes.

²⁴⁵ Hallman, *Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism*, 142.

Seder meal as well as with the presence of the disguised Christian Prince Léopold, who represents himself as a Jewish painter named Samuel because of his forbidden love of Eléazar's daughter Rachel. Furthermore, Newark viewed the lack of orchestral accompaniment during the Seder meal as a means to heighten the voyeuristic intrusion of the audience upon the Jewish characters, in contrast to the orchestral support that is heard during the *Te Deum* scene.²⁴⁶ These instruments are minimal when the choir actually sings phrases of the Latin hymn, however. The first phrase is *a cappella*, and when the orchestra does accompany the choir, only sustained chords support the *Te Deum*. Even the overlap of the *Te Deum* and French dialogue receives this same sustained treatment. The calmer texture is in contrast to the lively orchestral celebratory music that contributes to the grandiosity of the remainder of the first scene.²⁴⁷ The religious representation in both the *Te Deum* and Seder scenes emphasizes the texts, through simple musical settings and sparse or nonexistent instrumental accompaniment.

One notable difference between the *Te Deum* and the Seder meal, beyond the staging, is the language used for these religious ceremonies. The *Te Deum* adheres to the traditional Latin, but Eléazar and his compatriots sing in French. This linguistic distinction lends support to Newark's argument about the audience's voyeurism during the Seder because, without the French text, the primarily Catholic spectators might not

²⁴⁶ Cormac Newark, "Ceremony, Celebration, and Spectacle in *La Juive*," in *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 171.

²⁴⁷ The use of organ might indeed be interpreted as a marker of religiosity, but Hector Berlioz' review of the opera implies that organ had become standard in showy grand operas following its use in Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*. See Ruth Jordan, *Fromental Halévy: His Life and Music, 1799-1862* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996), 64-65, for an excerpted translation of the *Le Rénovateur* review of 1 March 1835.

comprehend the nature of the event.²⁴⁸

Certainly the *a cappella* responsorial treatment of the text, “O Dieu de nos pères,” allows the text to be heard clearly, while also contributing to the religious atmosphere of the scene. Yet the setting also reinforces the distinction between the Jewish characters and Christian authority. Most obvious, Eléazar’s role as the song leader clarifies his personal defiance of the Christians who criticize him, beyond his collective identification with other Jews. Furthermore, the solo-group musical structure evokes Jewish tradition along with other musical features such as the use of the raised fourth.²⁴⁹ This music relates both to Halévy’s Psalm settings in general and to some Jewish chants in particular.²⁵⁰

The contrast between the representations of the *Te Deum* and the Jewish Passover Seder serves as a microcosm of the overarching collective versus individual struggle throughout the opera. Both the beginning and end of *La Juive*, naturally rely on public spectacle, with the celebratory feast day and then the casting of the outwardly Jewish characters into a boiling cauldron, in order to appeal to large audiences who expected grandiosity at the Paris Opéra.²⁵¹ As Diana Hallman has pointed out, though, the second and fourth acts of the opera concentrate on individual characters and their

²⁴⁸ For a discussion of Jewish status in early to mid nineteenth-century France, see Hallman, *Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism*, 73-107 and 253-296.

²⁴⁹ Hallman, *Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism*, 177-79.

²⁵⁰ On Halévy’s Psalm settings, see Hallman, *Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism*, 177. See James Parakilas, “The Chorus,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, 90-91, and David Charlton, “Romantic Opera: 1830-1850,” in *Romanticism (1830-1890)*, ed. Gerald Abraham, New Oxford History of Music, vol. 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 103, on chant models for the Seder music.

²⁵¹ As Rachel is thrown into the cauldron, Eléazar reveals that he had concealed her Christian identity from the time of her early childhood.

personal experiences.²⁵² The depiction of a Passover dinner inside a home certainly offers a more intimate view of religious worship than the festive public *Te Deum*.

The musical dramaturgy of the first two acts of *La Juive* suggests that the Seder meal expresses more authentic devotion than the public spectacle of the opening *Te Deum*. Whereas the orchestra interrupts the Christian chorus after its first phrase in the *Te Deum*, the Jewish congregants in Act II arrive at the end of their prayer. Thus, the singing of “O Dieu de nos pères” offers a devotional prayer in observation of the Passover, a religious observation that avoids promoting Catholicism. The *Te Deum*, which receives subsequent interruptions (including a “man of the people” who objects to Eléazar’s ignorance of the festival), serves as background music for the conflict that must be established at the beginning of the opera. This contextual treatment of Catholic music as a means to convey a historical and topical setting for the drama, without an unwavering focus on Christian worship, deemphasizes the devotional aspect of the *Te Deum* while introducing the dramatic tension that will unfold throughout the opera.

Verdi’s *Les Vêpres siciliennes* (premiered at the Paris Opéra on 13 June 1855) also downplays religious worship. Although the title of Verdi’s collaboration with the established French grand opera librettist Eugène Scribe refers to a historical massacre that coincided with a Catholic Vespers service, Scribe altered the occasion of the Sicilian revolt to commence at the sound of wedding bells, rather than a church service.²⁵³ As a result, the operatic rendition of the thirteenth-century event avoids the

²⁵² Hallman, “The Grand Operas of Fromental Halévy,” 237.

²⁵³ For historical context on *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, see Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Verdi* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969), 282-85. Mary Ann Smart has made a case for Hélène’s embodiment of the French Revolutionary peasant girl Marianne, most famously represented in the Eugène Delacroix painting “Liberty Leading the People,” in “‘Proud, Indomitable, Irascible’: Allegories of Nation in *Attila* and *Les Vêpres siciliennes*,” in *Verdi’s Middle Period, 1849-1859: Source Studies*,

need to present music specifically associated with Vespers. The last scene of the fourth act includes religious music, however, as two Sicilians anticipate their execution by their French occupiers.

Verdi paid special attention to the scene in which the Sicilians prepare for their deaths. While he was composing the opera, Verdi requested that Scribe write an extension of the final scene of Act IV, in which monks sing the *De Profundis*. The composer wanted to intensify the Sicilian patriot Henri's acknowledgment that the oppressive French ruler Governor Montfort was actually his father by adding verses to lead up to the declaration "O père! O père!" Scribe acquiesced by restoring some previously cut lines to the scene, with slight modifications, and allowing for an onstage quartet that Verdi had desired.²⁵⁴

Verdi's attention to this scene indicates the importance of the *De Profundis* in the dramaturgy of the opera. Like the *Te Deum* in *La Juive*, the *De Profundis* sounds from offstage and weaves with other voices onstage. The placement of the monks out of the audience's sight suggests that conventions for the treatment of Catholic music at the Opéra had not changed in the two decades since *La Juive's* premiere.²⁵⁵ Yet, the offstage music in Act IV of *Les Vêpres siciliennes* differs from the opening of *La Juive* in that the text of the *De Profundis* relates much more closely to the onstage action than

Analysis, and Performance Practice, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 227-56.

²⁵⁴ See Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 373-76, and Andrew Porter, "Les Vêpres siciliennes: New Letters from Verdi to Scribe," in *19th-Century Music 2* (1978): 102-3 and 108-9.

²⁵⁵ Jane Fulcher has traced the history of the Opéra through this time period, when Napoleon III ruled, and she notes a contradiction between the advocacy of reform on the one hand and ties to conservative and clerical elements on the other. By the time that *Les Vêpres siciliennes* first appeared, the Commission of Surveillance had essentially been replaced by Achille Fould, who served as the *Ministre de la Maison de l'Empereur* in supervising every aspect of operatic productions. See Fulcher, *The Nation's Image*, 100.

the *Te Deum* had. The *De Profundis* text, taken from Psalm 130, begins with a cry to the Lord from “Out of the depths,” asking for mercy. In spite of Scribe’s scenic change to the end of the opera, the connection to Vespers is subtly present in that the *De Profundis* is sung as part of the Office of the Dead at Vespers.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, the choice of text reinforces the dramatic situation because Henri’s acceptance of his French father allows the Sicilians’ allies, Procida and Héléne, to escape execution and receive the mercy of Henri’s father, Governor Montfort. The ensuing plans for a Franco-Sicilian truce, by way of Henri and Héléne’s wedding, then sets up the massacre of the opera’s final act.

Verdi ensured that the audience would clearly hear the *De Profundis* text by introducing the monks by themselves before relegating them to occasional background punctuations. The *a cappella* homophonic text setting, which grows out of a single bass voice line, plainly articulates the *De Profundis*, invoking the Office of the Dead and alerting the audience to the two Sicilians’ impending fates. After the liturgical text has been established, the monks drop out in order to call attention back to the onstage drama, with the monks supporting Montfort’s attempts to entice Henri. While the monks never appear onstage, Verdi heightened the suspense of the drama through dialogic exchanges between the Sicilian characters and the monks. Thus, as the tension builds, the religious text is reduced to motivic fragments, such as the opening words “De profundis,” which the monks exclaim five times over the course of eleven measures, always filling in the other characters’ rests. In this way, Verdi’s musical dialogue

²⁵⁶ See F.G. Holweck, “*De Profundis*,” trans. Christine J. Murray, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04738b.htm> (28 September 2011).

features the Catholic text more integrally than Halévy's opening scene in *La Juive*, where the onstage characters and offstage worshippers seem to exist independently, even when they sing simultaneously.

The development and reception of *Les Vêpres siciliennes* indicate that both Scribe and Verdi were perceived as reusing previous works with their respective contributions to the opera, including the *De Profundis*.²⁵⁷ Music critics linked Verdi's treatment of the *De Profundis* with another work, his Italian opera *Il Trovatore* (1853), a different operatic genre with a text by Salvatore Cammarano. Numerous reviews of the opera, perhaps responding in part to each other, compare the *De Profundis* to the offstage *Miserere* found in Act IV of Verdi's earlier work.²⁵⁸ Indeed the *Miserere* also accompanies an execution procession, as Leonora prepares for the death of her beloved Manrico. Both the *De Profundis* and the *Miserere* begin with a *cappella* male voices before the onstage characters sing, but in the case of *Il Trovatore*, a chime occasionally punctuates the chorus. Just as the *De Profundis* precedes an unrealized execution in *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, Leonora bargains with Count di Luna in *Il Trovatore* in order to gain a reprieve of Manrico's death sentence after the *Miserere* scene.

Catholic Ritual in *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Outside of the final tableau that are discussed in Chapter 5, religious music in

²⁵⁷ See Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 336-39 and 346-49. With regard to Scribe's output, the most obvious previous source of inspiration was his libretto *Le Duc d'Albe*, which was first intended for Halévy but finally appeared in Italian translation with music by Gaetano Donizetti.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁸ Hervé Gartioux tracks these reviews in *Giuseppe Verdi: Les Vêpres siciliennes: Dossier de presse parisienne* (N.P.: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 1995). See page 27 for his explanation of the comparison, as well as comments by reviewers on pages 35, 43, 51, 58, 64, 71, 100, 105, 113, 121, and 128.

Dialogues des Carmélites occurs in the convent at Compiègne during moments that depict the nuns' reverence. This music, in fact, highlights Catholic ritual, including those associated with the Marian Year that was explored in Chapter 3, as a main component of the opera and represents the main type of modification that Poulenc made from Bernanos' text. Because Poulenc was already established as a composer of religious choral music, he was able to draw on previously developed skills in the setting of texts for vocal ensembles. The following section includes comparisons of his previous choral settings of *Ave Verum Corpus* (1952) and *Salve Regina* (1941) with the operatic versions in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, along with a contextualization of other composers' settings in order to establish how Poulenc's approach in the opera differed from those previous settings. In addition to these two texts, *Dialogues des Carmélites* also features the nuns singing the *Ave Maria* as well as a brief portion of the Office of the Dead sung by Blanche and Constance. As addressed in Chapter 3, a brief portion of the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* also appears at the end of the opera, but the passage is too short to discuss in comparison to previous settings of the hymn. Through the choice of specific religious texts, Poulenc was able to reinforce the themes of death and devotion that are central to the trajectory of the drama. In each case, Poulenc composed original music for the familiar Latin texts that were commonplace in Catholic ritual prior to the Second Vatican Council.

The *Salve Regina*

The musical dramaturgy of the *Salve Regina* is discussed further in Chapter 5, but for consideration at this point, this particular text has a broader meaning for

Catholics of Poulenc's time. Poulenc's choice of this Marian antiphon resonates with the historical account of the eighteenth-century Carmelite nuns singing the *Salve Regina* as they processed to their execution, and both Le Fort's novella and Bernanos' play preserve this factual element. At the time of the opera's premiere, however, the *Salve Regina* was familiar to Catholic members of the audience because Pope Leo XIII had instructed that the prayer should always be recited after the Catholic Mass, a prescription that was in place until 1964.²⁵⁹ Therefore, the prayer to Mary at the end of the *Dialogues des Carmélites* takes on the implication that a public religious ritual has concluded.²⁶⁰

Poulenc's treatment of the *Salve Regina* at the end of *Dialogues des Carmélites* differs substantially from his four-part *a cappella* motet from 1941. Although both of the mostly homorhythmic settings center on a minor tonality (G minor for the motet and A minor for the opera tableau), the instrumental bass line that accompanies the nuns' singing in the opera provides a stronger emphasis of the tonic triad than what is found in the motet. Some harmonic conflicts occur between the nuns' melody and the bass line, but the instrumental ostinato provides a grounding force that makes the nuns' melody more palatable (See Example 1).

²⁵⁹ Pope Leo XIII made this prescription in 1884, and it was in place until 1964. See R. J. Snow, "Salve Regina," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12: 631.

²⁶⁰ For a history of the *Salve Regina*, see R. J. Snow, "Salve Regina," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 631-32. Pope Leo XII decreed that the *Salve Regina* Marian antiphon should be recited at the end of every Mass, both public and private. This guideline was in place between 1884 and 1964. The *Salve Regina* has also been important for the Carmelite Order, including its inclusion in the Mass. The text is translated by Herbert Thurston and transcribed by Christine J. Murray as: "Hail, O Queen, Merciful mother, Our life, our sweetness, Our hope, hail! To you we cry out, We children of Eve in exile. To you we sigh, Moaning and weeping In this vale of tears. O you, our advocate, Turn towards us Your merciful gaze. And let us see Jesus, the blessed fruit Of your womb When our exile is over, O merciful, O pure, O sweet Virgin Mary." See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07110b.htm> (Accessed on 28 September 2011).

Example 1. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, mm. 12-13

The musical score consists of seven staves. The first four staves are for the vocalists: Soprano (Sop.), Alto (Alt.), Tenor (Ten.), and Bass (Bas.). Each vocal line begins with a *pp* dynamic marking. In measure 12, all four vocalists sing "Oh!". In measure 13, they sing "Sal - - - ve Re - gi - na ma". The fifth and sixth staves are for the Soprano (Sop.) and Mezzo-soprano (Mez.) parts, which also sing "Sal - - - ve Re - gi - na ma" in measure 13. The seventh staff is the piano accompaniment, marked *pp*, featuring a steady bass line with chords in the right hand.

The motet, on the other hand, lacks the steady repetition that the instrumental bass line supplies in the opera tableau, which causes the dissonances to sound more pungent. For instance, the last four measures of the motet contain some harmonic minor seconds; the penultimate measure has the temporary effect of a tone cluster with the bass on c^1 , the tenor on $e\text{-flat}^1$, and the alto on d^1 (See Example 2). The pitch class G certainly operates as a focal point in the motet's final measures, even when an $a\text{-flat}^1$

occurs up against the bass-voice g. in measure 54. The last chord is an open fifth without the third, driven by an unconventional resolution of the soprano part, which jumps an augmented fourth from a-flat¹ to d² at the very end when traditional part-writing standards would prefer b-flat¹ or g¹. Melodically, the motion from a-flat¹ to b¹, in both the tenor and the alto parts, suggests a push toward G major in measure 54, but then the soprano reinstates b-flat¹ in the following measure (See Example 2).

Example 2, Poulenc, *Salve Regina* motet, mm. 54-57

The musical score for Example 2, Poulenc's *Salve Regina* motet, measures 54-57, is presented below. The score is for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). It features a dynamic marking of *pp* *très doux* and a tempo marking of *très doux*. The lyrics are "o dul - cis vir - go Ma - ri - - - a." The score shows a dissonance in measure 54 and a resolution in measure 57.

The “sweet” or “pleasing” (“dulcis”) quality of the Virgin Mary is momentarily challenged, given the dissonance on the word “dulcis,” before the resonant resolution in measure 57.

It could be argued that Poulenc referenced the final phrase of his *Salve Regina* motet in the later *Dialogues des Carmélites*. The soprano melody in measures 54-55 of the motet (first half of Example 2) is exactly the same as Sister Constance’s melody in

measures 73-74 of the tableau (repeated in measures 75-76), with the same text as well (Example 3).

Example 3, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, mm. 73-74

The musical score for Example 3, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, measures 73-74, is presented in a multi-staff format. The top four staves are for the vocal parts: Soprano (Sop.), Alto (Alt.), Tenor (Ten.), and Bass (Bas.). The fifth and sixth staves are for the vocal parts Sr. C. and M. J., with lyrics written below the notes. The seventh and eighth staves are for the Piano accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics for Sr. C. and M. J. are: "pi - - - a, o dul - cis Vir - go Ma". The piano part provides harmonic support with chords and melodic lines.

The sequence of pitches in the motet relates to the opera until the motet melody descends to b-flat¹ in measure 55 of the soprano part. Yet, the differing treatments of rhythm and accentuation in the final tableau of the opera call into question any deliberately conscious effort to quote the *Salve Regina* motet. Poulenc treated the first syllable of “dulcis” (on g² in both settings) as an accented passing tone in the opera

tableau, whereas the soprano g^2 in the motet finds support three octaves lower in the bass voice. Another contrast between the two versions of the *Salve Regina* exists in the alto parts (Mother Jeanne has the lower line at this point in the opera). The alto in the motet is on b^1 for the syllable “cis,” but in the opera Mother Jeanne sings c^2 , which produces the linear interval of a major third, versus the augmented second from a-flat to b-natural in the motet. Mother Jeanne’s part in the opera also includes some awkward intervals, such as the descent from b-flat¹ to e^1 in measure 71 followed by a leap from e^1 to a-flat¹. Based on the differences between the two *Salve Regina* settings, any similarities seem to be coincidental.²⁶¹

An additional point of comparison between Poulenc’s two *Salve Regina* settings is the pronounced shift in syllabic accentuation. One reason for this contrast is the processional nature of the final tableau in the opera, which results in steady beats for the text setting. Poulenc’s choral interpretation of the *Salve Regina* includes a wider variety of rhythms and metric shifts, such as the change from 3/4 to 5/4 time in measure 13 at the text “Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes.” The comparable section of the opera tableau maintains a constant 4/4 meter and stresses the syllables “Ad,” “ra,” and “men” on downbeats, whereas the motet emphasizes the syllables “te” and “ge” (See Examples 4 and 5).

As a result, the motet has a completely different flow than the opera tableau and adheres less to the prosody of the text.²⁶² This is the case even when the meter is the

²⁶¹ In other instances, Poulenc overtly borrowed from his own compositions. The connections between *Dialogues des Carmélites* and his Flute Sonata are addressed in the conclusion of this dissertation.

²⁶² Keith Daniel has argued that Poulenc paid closer attention to prosody in his operas and songs than in his choral works. See *Francis Poulenc*, 214.

same between the two settings, as in the beginning words “Salve Regina,” which occupies a single measure in the motet but almost two complete measures in the opera.

Example 4. Poulenc, *Salve Regina* motet, mm. 12-13

The musical score shows four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). Measure 12 is in 4/4 time with a dynamic marking of *p*. Measure 13 is in 2/4 time with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The lyrics are: "væ _____" in measure 12, and "sus - pi - ra - mus," in measure 13. The Tenor part includes the word "Ad" in measure 12 and "te" in measure 13.

In the choral setting, the syllable “Ma” then receives an agogic accent, while the second syllable of the word (“ter”) is stressed. The music remains processional and march-like in the opera, especially compared to the less rigid rhythms that are present in Poulenc’s choral setting of the *Salve Regina*. One reason for the rhythmic difference between these two settings is the presence of the guillotine in the opera, a topic that is discussed in Chapter 5.

These contrasts between Poulenc’s two renditions of the *Salve Regina* indicate that one did not serve as a compositional model for the other. Instead, the differences between the two *Salve Regina* settings reveal how the genre of each one had an impact on the way that the text was treated. The melodic profile of the choral version differs from the nuns’ melody in the opera, and the four-part harmonies that pervade the motet fit the conventions of its genre.

Example 5. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, mm. 41-43

The musical score for Example 5 consists of several parts:

- Vocal Parts:** Soprano (Sop.), Alto (Alt.), Tenor (Ten.), and Bass (Bas.). Measures 41 and 42 show rests for all vocalists. In measure 43, the Tenor and Bass sing the word "a" (part of "ad").
- Lyrics:** The lyrics "ad te sus-pi-ra-mus ge-men-tes et" are written below the vocal staves, with "à 5" and "à 4" indicating breath marks.
- Piano Accompaniment:** The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand, marked with *mf*.

On the other hand, the operatic *Salve Regina* demonstrates the impact that the drama can have on the music, with the nuns dropping off one by one as the guillotine falls.

When Jeffrey Kallberg referred to a musical “rhetoric of genre,” he recognized that listeners are actively involved in the process of experiencing and receiving music.²⁶³

The choice of a particular genre serves to persuade an audience to listen with certain expectations concerning the traditions and conventions of that genre. In this way, genre

²⁶³ Jeffrey Kallberg, “The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin’s Nocturne in G Minor,” in *19th-Century Music* 11 (1988): 243. He was not alluding to the tradition of rhetorical devices that dates back to the Baroque Era, but rather, rhetoric “in its wider sense of referring to the whole complex network of relationships that may connect a writer [composer] with an audience.” See footnote 28 on page 259.

functions “as a communicative concept” and not merely a configuration of established attributes.²⁶⁴

Thus, the expectations of the audience for the choral motet would differ from what an audience would anticipate at an opera production. Poulenc described the motet as a composition for the marriage of Georges Salles, but he was also accustomed to hearing performances of choral works at the Princesse Edmond de Polignac’s home.²⁶⁵ A serene four-part *a cappella* choral setting of the *Salve Regina*, such as Poulenc’s motet, would be unsuitable for the climactic end of *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Instead, the nuns’ opening unison melody with the marching bass line functions as a procession to the scaffold and intensifies the unsettling build-up to the guillotine’s first fall.

Contemporary settings of the *Salve Regina* demonstrate that other composers considered the text adaptable to a variety of genres. For instance, André Jolivet’s *Suite Liturgique* from 1942 includes a *Salve Regina* movement for voice and violoncello (with a harp flourish at the end of the movement).²⁶⁶ Jolivet set the *Salve Regina* in 3/4 time, with dissonant clashes between the voice and violoncello as well as difficult melodic intervals in the vocal part.²⁶⁷ In terms of prosody, Jolivet’s *Salve Regina* movement aligns more closely with Poulenc’s operatic version of the prayer than with Poulenc’s

²⁶⁴ Kallberg, “The Rhetoric of Genre,” 243.

²⁶⁵ Poulenc composed the *Salve Regina* for the marriage of Georges Salles. See Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, 271, and Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, 217. Poulenc specifically mentioned Monteverdian motets that were performed at a salon concert.

²⁶⁶ This suite for tenor or soprano voice, English horn, violoncello, and harp comprises an instrumental Prelude, the *Salve Regina* movement, an Alleluia, a Magnificat, a Benedictus, an instrumental interlude, and a Finale that is also set to the text “Alleluia.”

²⁶⁷ For instance, the last three vocal pitches are g-flat¹, a¹, and f¹.

motet. The first line of text stresses the syllables “Re” and “cor” on agogic accents (Example 6).

Example 6. Jolivet, *Suite Liturgique*, “Salve Regina,” mm. 3-6

The image shows a musical score for Violoncello and VOIX (Voice) from Jolivet's *Suite Liturgique*, "Salve Regina," measures 3-6. The score is in 3/4 time. The Violoncello part is in the bass clef, and the VOIX part is in the treble clef. The lyrics are: Sal - ve, Re - gi - na, ma - ter mis - er - i - cor - di - ae:.

Of those two syllables, only “Re” in “Regina” differs from Poulenc’s operatic setting, with Poulenc emphasizing the second syllable “gi” (See Example 1 earlier in this chapter). Henri Pousseur’s setting of the *Salve Regina* as the third movement of his *Trois chants sacrés* for soprano voice, violin, viola, and violoncello (1958) also stresses the syllables “Ma,” and “cor,” but overall, the voice often obscures the downbeat with complicated rhythms, changing meters, and melismas with ties that carry over to the subsequent measure (Example 7).

Both Jolivet and Pousseur demonstrated the expanded options for the *Salve Regina* by challenging traditional notions of genre and resignifying the prayer in a flexible chamber ensemble setting that could be performed in a variety of venues.²⁶⁸ The liberal interpretations for this Marian prayer are even more evident with Giacomo Puccini’s solo song for soprano voice and organ or harmonium.

²⁶⁸ Carl Dahlhaus addressed the twentieth-century “disintegration of musical genres” in his exploration of generic history. See “New Music and the Problem of Musical Genre,” in *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 33-44, especially page 38. Although Kallberg argued that Dahlhaus’ interpretation of genre in the twentieth century focused too narrowly on “social function” and the composer’s perspective, Dahlhaus’ main contingency is useful for understanding twentieth-century treatments of the *Salve Regina*. See Kallberg, “The Rhetoric of Genre,” 239-42.

Example 7. Pousseur, *Trois chants sacrés*, “Salve Regina,” mm. 2-7

The musical score consists of four staves: Soprano, Violino, Viola, and Violoncello. The Soprano part begins with a 5-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure rest, and then the vocal line. The instrumental parts (Violino, Viola, and Violoncello) provide accompaniment with various dynamics and articulations. The lyrics are: "Sal - - - ve - - - Re - gi - na - Ma - ter mi - se - ri - cor - di - ae;".

Although Puccini titled the song “Salve Regina,” the word “Regina” never actually appears in the song. Instead, Antonio Ghislanzoni’s Italian text opens with “Salve” and then departs from the familiar text to make a plea for unfortunate creatures while also honoring the Queen of Heaven’s earthly blessings.²⁶⁹ In these ways, the compositions

²⁶⁹ See Giacomo Puccini, *Songs for Voice and Piano*, collected and ed. By Michael Kaye (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 67, for a translation of Ghislanzoni’s text.

by Jolivet, Pousseur, and Puccini differ from Poulenc's more traditional operatic and choral settings that refer to the liturgical context of the *Salve Regina*.

The Ave Maria

The *Ave Maria* occurs in the second tableau of Act II, when Mother Marie leads her sisters in prayer as they contemplate the prospect of martyrdom. Poulenc inserted the antiphon to the conversational text that Bernanos had supplied in the second scene of the play's third tableau. As the *Ave Maria* is not mentioned in Bernanos' play, Poulenc's use of the antiphon is one of the few additions that the composer made to his source material.

Poulenc set the text in a responsorial fashion, with Mother Marie (labeled M. M. in the following example) invoking "Ave Maria" before the other nuns join in with the remainder of the verse (Example 8).

Example 8. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act II, Tableau 2, mm. 128-30

The musical score for Example 8 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Mother Marie (M. M.), starting at measure 128 with a box containing the number 33. The music is in 3/4 time, marked *mf* and *très lié*. The lyrics "A - - - - ve Ma - ri - a." are written below the notes. The middle staff is for the chorus, labeled "Les Carmélites", starting at measure 129. It is marked *pp* (bouche fermée) and *Bien calme* with a tempo marking of ♩ = 50. The lyrics "Gra - ti - a ple - - na" are written below the notes. The bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment, which is mostly silent in this excerpt. The score ends at measure 130.

The second Prioress assumes a similar leadership role at the text "Sancta Maria," and

in both solo instances, the sisters intone with closed mouths to create an effect that suggests medieval organum. Both “Ave” and “Sancta” are extended through melismas, which also lend to the medieval austerity of the scene. This is reinforced further by the spare orchestral accompaniment, with the nuns at times singing a *cappella*.

The choice of the *Ave Maria* text is logical for both the overarching plot of the opera as well as the moment in which the Marian prayer is situated. The acknowledgment of Mary as “blessed among women” offers comfort to the nuns as they realize that their lives are at risk, and they implore Mary to intercede for them, both in the present moment and also when they die.²⁷⁰ Thus, the prayer alludes to the execution of the nuns at the end of the opera, while also serving as a common devotion that typified monastic religious practice.²⁷¹

The nuns’ prayer to Mary in *Dialogues des Carmélites* differs from other familiar settings of the *Ave Maria* from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in that the examples discussed below depart from Catholic tradition. One example is an earlier operatic *Ave Maria*, sung by Desdemona in Act IV of Giuseppe Verdi and Arrigo Boito’s *Otello* (1887). Whereas the Carmelites adhere to the Latin text, Desdemona transforms her supplication into an expanded personal, mostly Italian language plea (other than the Latin words “Ave Maria”) for mercy that begins and concludes with a recitation on the

²⁷⁰ For a history of the *Ave Maria*, see R. Steiner, “Ave Maria (Antiphon), in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 929-30. The antiphon is sung on the Feast of the Assumption, in observance of the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she would give birth to the Christ, and as an Offertory antiphon. The text is translated by Herbert Thurston and transcribed by Christine J. Murray as: “Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus, Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07110b.htm> (Accessed on 28 September 2011).

²⁷¹ See M. Jennifer Bloxam, “Plainsong and Polyphony for the Blessed Virgin: Notes on Two Masses by Jacob Obrecht,” in *The Journal of Musicology*, 12 (1994): 51-52, for a brief history of Marian veneration in music.

dominant pitch e-flat¹, except for a final arpeggiation of the tonic A-flat triad before ending on e-flat¹.²⁷²

Just as Desdemona's *Ave Maria* departs from the Latin text, Puccini's one-act opera *Suor Angelica* includes an *Ave Maria* that is mainly Italian, the language of the opera. This change of language distances the antiphon from its liturgical convention at a time when Latin was still the official (pre-Second Vatican Council) language of the Catholic Church. The opera opens with an offstage chorus of nuns singing the *Ave Maria* from inside a church that is not visible to the audience, which along with the Italian language prevents the performance of the *Ave Maria* from seeming exactly like a staged worship ceremony. As has been mentioned, one way that Poulenc's opera departs from tradition is that he placed the liturgical aspects of *Dialogues des Carmélites* in full view of the audience. Unlike Desdemona's *Ave Maria* in *Otello*, the text of Puccini's *Ave Maria*, by Giovacchino Forzano, adheres to the message of honoring Mary for her special place among women. The first two words, "Ave Maria," are the only ones in Latin, though, and the rest of the intercessory prayer is directly translated into the vernacular Italian with no deviations from the antiphon text. The nuns sing the choral melody in unison with the exception of the opening "Hail Mary" and the Italian "Santa Maria" later in the antiphon, both of which are set antiphonally between first and second sopranos (Example 9).

²⁷² James Parakilas has read Desdemona's *Ave Maria* as a depiction of distinctly female nineteenth-century attitude toward Catholicism in "Religion and Difference in Verdi's *Otello*," in *Musical Quarterly* 81 (1997): 371-92. See especially pages 379-88. In spite of the Shakespearean origin of the opera, he considers the Verdi-Boito collaboration to depict nineteenth-century religious conflicts. For an analysis of the aria's genesis, see Linda B. Fairtile, "Verdi's First 'Willow Song': New Sketches and Drafts for *Otello*," in *Nineteenth-Century Music* 19 (1996): 228-30.

Example 9. Giacomo Puccini, *Suor Angelica*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 9-12

CHORUS OF SISTERS (off stage)
6 Sopranos (1)
9 *p* 10 11 12

A - ve, Ma - ri - a, pie - na di gra - zia, il Si - gnore è te - co,
6 Sopranos (2)
p
A - ve, Ma - ri - a, pie - na di gra - zia, il Si - gnore è te - co,
pp

Orchestral support for the melody consists of high-register repeated motives above a treble ostinato, and an offstage obbligato piccolo joins after the first line of text. An organ and bells eventually enter, enhancing the religious atmosphere, and bass instruments provide for a fuller range than the dreamlike beginning. In spite of the churchlike coloristic elements in Puccini's *Ave Maria*, the Italian language and offstage chorus offer a contrast to Poulenc's use of Latin in a staged performance of the antiphon.

The two most famous non-operatic settings of the *Ave Maria* also avoid an overt connection to Catholic liturgy in that they have origins that are outside of the Catholic tradition. Schubert set his famous *Ave Maria* song (D. 839) of 1825 to a text by Sir Walter Scott, translated into German by D. Adam Storck, even though the song is best known with the Latin *Ave Maria* text. The first two words were always "Ave Maria," but then the text diverged into Scott's own poetry. Schubert titled the song, which was part

of a three-song set, as “Ellens Gesang III: Hymne an die Jungfrau.” Schubert conceived the composition as a solo song, and the style fits this genre with a simple, lyrical melody and arpeggiated piano accompaniment. Schubert did consider the song to be one of religious devotion, though, as he expressed in a letter to his father and stepmother.²⁷³ The other famous *Ave Maria*, on the other hand, has a secular origin in that Charles Gounod set his melody to Johann Sebastian Bach’s Prelude in C Major from the first book of the *Well-tempered Clavier*. The melody is, therefore, dictated by the preexisting work, and Gounod relied extensively on Baroque sequential patterns to fit the harmonic progressions of the Prelude. Poulenc certainly would have been familiar with these two versions of the *Ave Maria*, but his own operatic rendition of the Marian antiphon is distinctive from Schubert’s as well as Bach and Gounod’s compositions.

Ave Verum Corpus

The priest initiates the singing of the *Ave Verum Corpus* hymn with the nuns in the fourth tableau of Act II of the opera after announcing that he has just completed his last Mass as their leader. The corresponding scene in Bernanos’ play (Scene 12 of the third tableau) ends with the priest instructing: “Let us sing together the adoration of the Cross.”²⁷⁴ The priest never specifies a particular hymn, though, and the scene ends immediately after the priest’s command, with the stage direction: “withdrawing, he blows

²⁷³ See Brian Newbould, *Schubert, the Music and the Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 35.

²⁷⁴ In the original French, “Nous allons chanter ensemble l’adoration de la Croix.”

out the sanctuary lamp and leaves the door of the tabernacle open.”²⁷⁵

Poulenc truncated the priest’s line to end with “Let us sing together,” without the reference to the cross, and then inserted the *Ave Verum Corpus* hymn as a bridge to the ensuing conversation between the priest and Blanche about the priest’s plans now that he can no longer serve in his position. While Bernanos situated the dialogue in a separate scene that takes place in the parlor, Poulenc allowed the exchange to occur seamlessly following the group hymn. The staging advantage to Poulenc’s version is the reduction in scene changes, but the intervening hymn also reinforces the generic distinction between spoken play and sung opera.

Yet, Poulenc’s treatment of Bernanos’ text contradicts the literal meaning of the priest’s words. In spite of the priest’s direction that the ensemble should sing as a group, the priest and the nuns never actually sing at the same time. Instead, the priest (labeled as L’Aumônier in the following example) leads them in a responsorial fashion, with the nuns in three-part homorhythmic harmonies. A further distinction between the priest and the nuns is that the priest receives orchestral support, including harp flourishes, while the nuns have very little accompaniment and sing *a cappella* for the most part (See Example 10).

Poulenc’s reason for choosing *Ave Verum Corpus* as a hymn at this juncture in the plot most likely relates to the last two lines of the text. The words “Thou who hast died with such suffering / For the sins of all mankind” connect back to the First Prioress’

²⁷⁵ In the original French, “En se retirant il soufflé la lampe du sanctuaire et laisse la porte du tabernacle ouverte.”

agonizing death and the concept of vicarious suffering.²⁷⁶ In referencing the crucifixion, Poulenc also alluded to the adoration of the cross that is mentioned in Bernanos' play.

Example 10. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act II, tableau 4, mm. 25-32²⁷⁷

The image displays a musical score for a scene from *Dialogues des Carmélites*. It features two vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The first system is for L'Aumônier, starting at rehearsal mark 65 (boxed) and measure 25. The music is marked *ff* and *au même mouvement*. The lyrics are: "A - ve — ve - rum cor - pus na - tum ex Ma - ri - a Vir - gi - ne." The piano accompaniment is also marked *ff*. The second system is for Les Religieuses, starting at measure 29. The vocal parts are marked *f* and *subito p*. The lyrics are: "Ve - re pas - sum im - mo - la - tum in - cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne." The piano accompaniment is marked *f* and *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation marks, and rehearsal numbers.

At the same time, the hymn evokes Communion because of its text and its historical context. By the mid twentieth century, the *Ave Verum Corpus* no longer had a liturgical function, but the opening line “Ave verum corpus” (Hail the true body) fits with the hymn’s former position during the Elevation of the Mass, when the bread and wine are

²⁷⁶ Translation by Robert Hess, printed at the beginning of Francis Poulenc, *Ave Verum Corpus* (Editions Salabert: Paris, 1973), 2. Original text is “‘vere passum immolatum / in cruce pro homine.”

²⁷⁷ I have retained the rehearsal number markings from the published vocal score to make it easy to locate the example in the score. These rehearsal numbers are boxed to distinguish them from measure numbers.

raised.²⁷⁸ Thus, the hymn serves as a stand-in for the actual Communion during the Eucharist, which the priest can no longer lead. Instead of leading the nuns with the liturgical text “Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi,” which is recited during Communion, the word “corpus” (body) becomes a source of reverence for the priest and nuns in the opera.

Soon before Poulenc began to compose *Dialogues des Carmélites*, he published a three-part female motet on the first verse of *Ave Verum Corpus* (1952).²⁷⁹ In spite of the close temporal proximity of the motet to the opera, the two settings of the text differ greatly. The responsorial treatment and syllabic, homorhythmic text setting in the opera offer a sharp contrast to the Palestrina-like melismatic imitative polyphony at the opening of the motet. Poulenc added the word “Christi” to the first line in order to extend the opening phrase and allow for a shift from imitative polyphony to a homophonic texture. The motet alternates between polyphony (both imitative and non-imitative) and homophonic chords.

The tendency toward homophony in Poulenc’s choral works has led Keith Daniel to argue that Poulenc was strongly influenced by the late Renaissance composer Claude Le Jeune.²⁸⁰ Although Le Jeune is best known for his chansons in the

²⁷⁸ J. Szövérfy, “*Ave Verum Corpus*,” in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 931.

²⁷⁹ *Ave Verum Corpus* was commissioned by the Howard Heinz Foundation. The premiere, by the Pennsylvania College for Women Choir with conductor Russell G. Wichman, took place on November 25, 1952, at the Pittsburgh International Contemporary Music Festival, held at the Carnegie Music Hall. See Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse*, 374. On August 20, 1952, Poulenc wrote to Pierre Bernac that he had composed the “très simple, très pur” (very simple, very pure) motet in a mere two days. See Francis Poulenc, *Francis Poulenc: Correspondance 1910-1963*, 736.

²⁸⁰ Keith Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, 200, and “Poulenc’s Choral Works with Orchestra,” in *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Sidney Buckland and Myriam Chimènes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 57. In this latter source, Daniel also listed the emphasis on harmony in Tomás Luis de Victoria’s music as a model for Poulenc.

homophonic *musique mesurée* style, a broader examination of his output reveals that the composer also wrote polyphonic, or “ordinary,” music.²⁸¹ The *Dodecacorde* (1598), for instance, includes French versions of Psalm settings in all of the modes. These multi-part settings of individual Psalms alternate between non-imitative polyphonic and homophonic textures. Anne Harrington Heider has pointed out that Le Jeune tended toward the technique of *musique mesurée* even when a *cantus firmus* differed from the rhythms of the other voices. Most telling is the use of irregular scansion that emphasizes long and short syllables in the French text.²⁸² This textual treatment differs considerably from the fluid rhythms of Poulenc’s Latin *Ave Verum Corpus*. One possible point of resonance between Poulenc and Le Jeune, though, is the sectional phrases that are marked with clear rests. For instance, the homophony of measure 7 in *Ave Verum Corpus* is preceded and followed by an eighth rest, which allows the entire chorus to breathe together (Example 11). Le Jeune’s chansons have similar rests to mark textual-musical phrases, but the texture is clearly homophonic and almost completely homorhythmic.²⁸³ Le Jeune’s Psalm settings and the Latin *Missa ad Placitum* lack these clear delineations, even in homophonic sections.²⁸⁴

Example 11. Poulenc, *Ave Verum Corpus* motet, mm. 6-8

²⁸¹ D. P. Walker and François Lesure used the term “ordinary” to describe Le Jeune’s polyphonic music. See “Claude Le Jeune and *Musique mesurée*,” in *Musica Disciplina* 3 (1949): 164.

²⁸² Claude Le Jeune, *Dodecacorde: Comprising Twelve Psalms of David Set to Music according to the Twelve Modes*, ed. and with an introduction by Anne Harrington Heider, *Recent Researches in the Music of the Renaissance*, vol. 74 (Madison: A-R Editions, 1989), x-xi.

²⁸³ For example, see “Combien a d’heur l’home dont le cœur,” in *Claude Le Jeune: Pseaumes en vers mezurez*, ed. M. Henry Expert, *Les maîtres musiciens de la renaissance française*, vol. 20 (Paris: Alphones Leduc, 1905), 2-8.

²⁸⁴ See Claude Le Jeune, *Missa ad placitum à 5 et 6 voix*, ed. Michel Sanvoisin (Paris: Heugel, 1967). This mass was not published in a modern edition until four years after Poulenc’s death, so he most likely was not familiar with it.

The image shows a musical score for three voices: Soprano (SOPRANI), Mezzo (MEZZI), and Alto (ALTI). The score is divided into three measures, numbered 6, 7, and 8. Measure 6 starts with a 3/4 time signature. Measure 7 changes to a 4/4 time signature and includes the dynamic marking *f subito*. Measure 8 includes the dynamic marking *mf*. The lyrics for each voice are: Soprano: -ti, cor - pus Chris - ti / cor - pus Chris - ti / na - - - - tum; Mezzo: -ti, cor - pus Chris - ti / cor - pus Chris - ti / na - - - - tum; Alto: -ve A - ve ve - rum / cor - pus Chris - ti / na - - - - tum.

If Le Jeune was indeed a source of inspiration for Poulenc, the overall effect of *Ave Verum Corpus* points toward a general concept of sixteenth-century choral music, as filtered through the nineteenth-century fascination with Palestrina. The imitative polyphony that begins the motet recalls composers such as Palestrina and Josquin des Prez, and the use of homophony could relate to Palestrina's own homophonic music, instead of Le Jeune's *musique mesurée*. One other way that Poulenc's motet references the past is through the predominance of the lowered seventh scale degree, instead of a leading tone, in the outer sections of the motet. The Aeolian mode of the outer sections is contrasted by a middle section in the major mode, but even the half cadence that ends this central portion of the motet sounds old-fashioned with the juxtaposition of b-flat¹ close to g-sharp¹ (Example 12). The simultaneous occurrence of b-flat¹ and g-sharp¹ in measure 19 of this example is also reminiscent of the f-sharp¹ and a-flat¹ convergence in measure 54 of Poulenc's *Salve Regina* motet (see Example 2 earlier in this chapter).

The contexts in which Poulenc's motet and the operatic setting of *Ave Verum Corpus* were created also inform the difference in style of the music. The motet was commissioned for performance at a music festival, but in the opera, the priest and nuns

sing the *Ave Verum Corpus* as a brief impromptu religious ceremony. Therefore, the responsorial texture, which distinguishes the priest as spiritual leader from his followers, evokes a liturgical Mass, in contrast to the freestanding concert choral style of the motet.

Example 12. Poulenc, *Ave Verum Corpus* motet, mm. 18-20

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff has lyrics: "in cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne, ho - mi - ne". The middle staff has lyrics: "in cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne, ho - mi - ne". The bottom staff has lyrics: "in cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne ho - mi - ne". The score includes dynamic markings: *f* (forte) at the beginning of each staff, *mf* (mezzo-forte) in measure 19, and *p* (piano) and *pp* (pianissimo) in measure 20. There are also crescendo and decrescendo hairpins.

The dramaturgy of the operatic scene shapes the way that the text is presented. In spite of this fuller treatment of the *Ave Verum Corpus* in the opera, Poulenc still deviated from the exact text that is printed in the *Liber Usualis*. Most notably, the nuns in the opera sing “O clemens!” (O mercy) where the *Liber Usualis* indicates “O Jésus dulcis!” (O sweet Jesus), which should be followed by “O Jésus pie!,” but the priest omits “Jésu.” The result is that Jesus is downplayed while Mary is emphasized for her role as the Virgin mother, pointing to the gender of the nuns—rather than the priest—and hinting to their execution when they request mercy for their sins. Again, the spiritual significance of Mary in the opera, discussed in Chapter 3 and earlier in this chapter, is evident.

Outside of Poulenc’s renditions of the *Ave Verum Corpus*, the most famous

setting is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's motet, K. 618, from 1791.²⁸⁵ His motet, for four-part mixed chorus and strings with organ continuo, includes the first two verses of the hymn. The music treats the text in a simple, homophonic style with an instrumental introduction, an interlude that separates the two verses, and a conclusion.²⁸⁶ While Poulenc might have been familiar with Mozart's poignant motet, Poulenc's motet and quasi-liturgical operatic treatment avoid any conscious reference to the Mozart setting.

Mourning the First Prioress and Contemplating Death

Poulenc's reliance on familiar Catholic texts is perhaps most evident in the first tableau of Act II. When Blanche and Constance sing from the Office of the Dead after Prioress Croissy has died, they allude to their own mortality and to the contemplation of death that pervades *Dialogues des Carmélites*.²⁸⁷ The section of the Office of the Dead uses the word "requiem," which also evokes an association with the Requiem Mass. As with the insertion of the *Ave Maria* and the *Ave Verum Corpus*, Poulenc again selected a Catholic text that Bernanos had not specified in the play. These devotional moments are some of the few instances where Poulenc strayed from the preexisting play on

²⁸⁵ Mozart composed his *Ave Verum Corpus*, dated December 17, 1791, in Baden. According to David Humphreys, the work was most likely composed for Anton Stoll, a church musician and schoolmaster, for performance on the Corpus Christi. See Humphreys, "Sacred Music," in *The Mozart Compendium: A Guide to Mozart's Life and Music*, ed. H. C. Robbins Landon (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 317.

²⁸⁶ The style of the motet might suggest a Masonic influence, especially related to the choruses in *Die Zauberflöte*. See Humphreys, "Sacred Music," in *The Mozart Compendium*, 317. Christoph Wolff argued that Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* points to a "new direction," which is expanded upon in the *Requiem*, for Mozart's religious music. See Wolff, "Composition and Completion of Mozart's Requiem, 1791-1792," in *Mozart Studies*, ed. Cliff Eisen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 75.

²⁸⁷ Plot summaries of *Dialogues des Carmélites* tend to identify the music simply as a requiem. The word "requiem" occurs in the Office of the Dead, but Blanche and Constance do not sing from the Requiem Mass. See, for instance, Jeremy Sams, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*.

which he constructed his opera. By choosing texts that relate to Christ's death and to Mary's intercession at a particular moment and at the hour of death, Poulenc refined the theme of vicarious suffering that Bernanos had emphasized.

The tribute to Prioress Croissy focuses on the first lines of the Great Responsory "Qui Lazarum resuscitasti a monumento foetidum," from the Matins of the Office of the Dead.²⁸⁸ This particular responsory is located after the second lesson in the first Nocturn, and refers to Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, as recounted in John 11:1-44.

Poulenc set the responsory in a different manner from the traditional liturgical practice. Rather than have a soloist lead the singing with a group response, Poulenc specified that Constance and Blanche would alternate phrases of the text as individuals before joining together for "et locum indulgentiae, Amen" in closing. Perhaps in order to create the illusion of a soloist and group, Poulenc distinguished Constance's part by setting it in a significantly higher range than Blanche's part (Example 13).²⁸⁹ The sparse woodwind obbligato accompaniment of Constance's singing in measure 24-26 of Example 13 (on the second from the bottom staff) also contrasts with the chordal support for Blanche, which includes brass instruments for a fuller timbre. By adding a weightier accompaniment to Blanche's lines, Poulenc suggested a chorus of responders, in spite of the solo singing.

²⁸⁸ See Richard Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 99-100, for an explanation of the structure of the Office of Matins, and pages 105-7 for information about the form of the Great Responsories.

²⁸⁹ The difference in range also points back to Poulenc's correspondence with Pierre Bernac, when the two discussed the importance of ensuring that the main characters be developed with contrasting ranges and vocal types in order to avoid too many similar voices, as explored in Chapter 2. Constance is a "light soprano," whereas Blanche is designated simply as "soprano."

Example 13. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act II, tableau 1, mm. 18-26

18 19 20 21 22

Sr. C. *Blanche*

Bl. *pp* *mf* *pp*

2 Tu e - is, Do - mi - ne, do - na re - qui - em et lo - cum in - dul -

23 24 *p* 25 26

Sr. C. Qui ven - tu - rus es ju - di - ca - re vi - vos et mor - tu - os,

Bl. gen - ti - æ.

3

ppp *p*

Although Poulenc could have involved all of the nuns in the singing of the responsory, Bernanos' play specifies in the eleventh scene of the second tableau that Blanche and Constance are alone when they watch over the Prioress' body. Thus, Poulenc adhered to his source material by retaining the intimacy of the exchange between the two novices, who bond at various points during the opera. At the same time, Poulenc deviated once again from Bernanos' drama by choosing a portion of the Office of the Dead for the scene. Bernanos indicated that Blanche and Constance would recite psalms, in contrast to the liturgical text that Poulenc set.

The particular section of the Office of the Dead that Poulenc selected offers a parallel between the Biblical relationship of Lazarus to Jesus and the operatic connection between the Prioress and Blanche. Just as Lazarus' resurrection precedes that of the Christ, the Prioress' death paves the way for the execution of the nuns, including Blanche, who initially resists the commitment to martyrdom. The notion of vicarious suffering, addressed in Chapter 2, provides a notable contrast between these two narratives, however, in that the Prioress' prolonged suffering allows Blanche to experience an easier death. Lazarus' death, on the other hand, occurred for the purpose of allowing Jesus to demonstrate his ability to perform miracles while also preparing his followers for the hope of resurrection. Because the message of the Gospels is that Jesus offered the ultimate sacrifice, Lazarus cannot be viewed as suffering vicariously for the Christ.

This notion of opera as Catholic ritual differs sharply from the treatment of Catholicism in earlier operas, particular French grand operas. Whereas nineteenth-century politics required that Catholic music not be performed on the opera stage, Poulenc was able to place Catholic ritual in the foreground of *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Yet, he also limited the way that he presented religious worship onstage by selecting texts other than the Mass for the opera. The closest that the opera comes to displaying an actual liturgical ritual is in Act II with Blanche and Constance singing from the Office of the Dead. Due to the word "requiem" that is articulated during the scene, audience members can understand that the two novice sisters are memorializing the Prioress' death, but the reliance on the monastic Divine Office, rather than the congregational Requiem Mass, distances the scene from the public sphere of the Mass. Poulenc may

have sensed that, even in the mid twentieth century, an onstage depiction of a Mass could have been too controversial for audiences in Milan and Paris.

Although Poulenc did not include the Mass in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, he still chose to stage liturgical music that was historically confined to the off-stage realm in French opera. The lengthiest and most dramatically intense instance of Poulenc's use of Catholic ritual occurs in the final scene of the opera, when the nuns are executed as they march to the scaffold singing the *Salve Regina*. Chapter 5 explores this intensely moving scene and the ways in which the end of *Dialogues des Carmélites* pushes the boundaries on how opera functions as a multivalent art form.

CHAPTER 5

STAGING AN EXECUTION: THE FINAL TABLEAU OF *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*

The final tableau of *Dialogues des Carmélites* frames a historical event inside a modern commentary through music that functions in different capacities, with the sound of a guillotine serving as the regulating force in the scene. Other elements of the tableau, including the presence of the silent priest, also contribute to the reenactment and reinterpretation of the Carmelites' execution. These multivalent aspects are all important for a comprehensive understanding of the way that the tableau is constructed and performed. The Latin language of ritual that was pervasive prior to the Second Vatican Council lends to the solemnity and enriches the spiritual meaning of this scene.

The Components of the Final Tableau

The final tableau consists of several musical and dramatic elements that create a sense of the intensity of the staged execution. The participants include the nuns, the onstage spectators, the silent priest, the guillotine, and the orchestra that supports the onstage drama. This section offers an overview of the tableau as a whole before exploring each component that contributes to the overall impact of the scene.

The schemata shown in the following table, modeled on Sergio Durante's analysis of Mozart's operas, illustrates these relationships.²⁹⁰ I have found such a

²⁹⁰ Durante, "Analysis and Dramaturgy," 311-39. Durante's graph represents character interactions, plot developments, key schemes, and sectional divisions in late eighteenth-century opera. His research is situated in a movement, much of which originated with Mozart scholarship, that argues for considering the multivalent aspects of opera beyond form-based music and text analyses. The motivation for Durante's own analysis was in response to the tendency in Mozart operatic analyses to emphasize symphonic formal structures, such as sonata form. See also Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) and Mary

graphic summary of the multiple facets of the scene to be a useful way to diagram the multivalent nature of large-scale operatic scenes more generally. The table also serves an important function in identifying the significance of the silent priest who participates solely through his gestures, demonstrating the ways that opera involves movement in addition to text and music. In this particular scene, the notion of multivalence suggests that the sound of the voice, as well as its absence, contributes to the musical dramaturgy. This map of the final tableau outlines the textual verses, characters singing, occurrences of the guillotine, and basic tonal centers of the final tableau. Because the majority of the text comes from the *Salve Regina*, I have noted the *Salve Regina* in the left column. The *Veni, Creator Spiritus* is marked in the middle column of the diagram when Blanche introduces it.

The character groupings refer to the nuns, Blanche (who never sings with her sisters), the silent priest, and the spectators who witness the execution. The nuns (labeled as C in the character grouping) collectively sing the *Salve Regina* up until the third verse when individual nuns are identified in the score. One of these nuns (noted as F in the table) is referred to in the score as “1 Carmelite” without an actual character name. The comment section includes measure numbers for the execution of identified nuns, as well as a record of the measure where the crowd of spectators gasps “oi” in response to the first fall of the guillotine.

Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: A Poetics of Entertainment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Table 2. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4

Measure numbers	1-11	12-21	22-29	30-37	38-45	46-53	54-61	62-70	Summary
Verse (Salve Regina)	[none]	1	1	1	2	2	3	4	mm. Characters
Character grouping	{A}+B	{A}+B+C	{A}+B+C	{A}+B+C	{A}+B+C	{A}+B+C	{A}+B+C	{A}+B+D+(E)+(F)+G	1-11 {A}+B 12-61 {A}+B+C 62-70 {A}+B+D + (E)+(F)+G
Measures for guillotine			21	27	36	40 41 43 46 48	54	59 62 66 70	71-77 {A}+B+D+(G) 78-88 {A}+B+(D) 89-98 {A}+B+(H) 99-105 {A}+B
Comments								F dies m. 66, E dies m. 70	{A never has text} (Characters in parentheses die before the end of the verse)
Tonal center	A	A	C	G	F-sharp	E	A-flat	F	
Measure numbers	71-77	78-79	80-82	83-86	87-88	89-97	(98) 99-100	101-105	Characters
Verse (Salve Regina)	5	5 (2 words)	none]	5 (cont.)	[none]	Veni, Creator Spiritus			A = Priest B = Crowd C = Chorus of nuns D = Constance E = Mathilde F = 1 Carmelite (no name supplied) G = Mère Jeanne H = Blanche
Character grouping	{A}+B+D+(G)	{A}+B+D	orchestra	{A}+B+D	orch.	{A}+B+H	{A}+B	orch.	[Silent, disguised priest absolves nuns of their sins]
Measure for guillotine		77			87		98		
Comments	G dies m. 77				D dies m. 87		H dies m. 98 (Silence)		
Tonal center	C	A-flat	C	A	F-sharp	C	C	C	

The verses of the *Salve Regina* are more overtly melodic than the majority of the opera's vocal music, which tends mainly toward quasi-melodic recitative and arioso outside of the other liturgical texts that were addressed in Chapter 4. The hymn-like melody conveys the solemnity and spiritual devotion of the scene as the nuns sing together. In the next section of this chapter, the verses of the *Salve Regina* and *Veni, Creator Spiritus* are discussed in relation to the guillotine.²⁹¹

The orchestra functions as a means to set the tone for the tableau and also to support the nuns' singing. From the outset of the execution scene, the texture of the orchestra consists of a string walking bass line underneath higher strings and winds that instrumentally introduce the nuns' melody. Even when the nuns begin singing in unison after this orchestral beginning, the orchestra continues with the arpeggiated bass line and melodic support for the nuns.

When the steady, march-like low strings begin the tableau, they allude to and set the tone for the imminent execution by offering an aural depiction of a procession. These pulsations continue unaffected, except for the instant that the guillotine first falls, until the final moments of the tableau. The eventual disintegration of the processional line punctuates the moment when Constance discovers that Blanche, who had run away from the convent after the nuns took their vow of martyrdom, has rejoined her sisters. Although the marching bass line resumes temporarily, its ultimate cessation marks the individual significance of Blanche's own ascension to the scaffold.

²⁹¹ Although the focus of my analysis is on the relationship between the guillotine and the music, another reading of the final tableau could explore the aural impact of the diminishing resources as each nun disappears from the vocal forces. Such a dwindling of voices causes the sound to become gradually quieter over time, in a way that is unusual in musical performances. A similar effect can be heard in Haydn's *Farewell* Symphony, with each performer exiting the stage during the course of the final movement.

At the beginning of the tableau prior to the nuns' singing, the orchestra also presents the melody that the nuns will sing. Along with the walking bass line, the opening melody functions in a manner similar to an instrumental introduction in a song. This beginning also alerts the audience to the impending action, but its continuation as a melodic doubling along with the nuns allows this line to function differently from the walking bass. Whereas the bass line creates the solemn, processional mood for the scene, the orchestral melody informs the audience of the hymn's significance in the tableau.

At the beginning of the tableau, before the nuns begin to sing, the crowd's hums reinforce the orchestral procession, while also preparing the audience for the appearance of the nuns. In the score, Poulenc instructed the chorus to hum on specified pitches with a "closed mouth" (*bouche fermée*), with the further comment that "The rumblings of the crowd are always less intense than the singing of the Carmelites."²⁹² The word "rumblings" emphasizes the quality of the choral sound, which is solemn instead of bright or distressed in the buildup to the first fall of the guillotine. When the nuns start the "Salve Regina," the chorus sings articulated syllables that underscore the sisters. The crowd continues to support the nuns harmonically, with various non-lexical vowels ranging from "o" to "a" to "ou" until Blanche's final verse before her execution.

When the crowd resumes singing an "a" vowel after the momentary silence that marks Blanche's death, there is a sense of shifting from a role of accompanying the nuns to one of supporting the orchestra. The voices in measures 99-100 are heard

²⁹² In the original French, "La rumeur de la foule est toujours moins intense que le chant des Carmélites."

along with an instrumental motive that has recurred throughout the opera.²⁹³ The *mise en scène* instructs that the crowd “begins to disperse.”²⁹⁴

The chorus also serves to make the audience aware of the silent priest, who absolves the nuns of their sins as they approach the scaffold. The *mise en scène* describes, “hair dressed in a Phrygian bonnet, the priest murmurs the absolution, making a furtive sign of the cross.”²⁹⁵ Throughout the tableau, the priest remains disguised and unacknowledged as he hides among the other spectators who are present at the execution. Because the priest is disguised, the audience becomes aware of his identity through his movements and his lack of participation in the choral singing. His difference from the crowd, through gesture, marks his religious role in the scene as he absolves the nuns of their sins and spiritually prepares them for their death.²⁹⁶

The Guillotine as a Regulating Force in the Final Tableau

The presence of the guillotine throughout the final tableau relates to the drama, singing, and orchestral music in complex ways. An exploration of how the guillotine functions in the acoustic realm of the tableau contextualized the interactions between the guillotine and the other musical elements. Mladen Dolar’s exploration of “voice”

²⁹³ Keith Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, 304.

²⁹⁴ In the original French, the text reads: “La foule commence à se disperser.”

²⁹⁵ In the original French, “coiffé d’un bonnet phrygien, l’Aumônier qui murmure l’absolution, fait un furtif signe de croix.”

²⁹⁶ The silence of the priest at the end of *Dialogues des Carmélites* is starkly contrasted by the presence of the vocally powerful Catholic authorities who are complicit in the massacre of the protestant religious minority in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*. The extravagant music that accompanies the murder of the Huguenots also differs from the solemnity of the Carmelite execution. See Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 158-161 and 197-199 for a discussion of the violence against the Huguenots in Meyerbeer’s opera.

provides a framework for understanding how the guillotine operates as a regulating force in the tableau.

The guillotine functions in such a way that it blurs the distinction between “voice” and “noise” in the midst of the singing and orchestral music of the final tableau. For the purpose of this discussion, I am using the term “voice” in the sense that Dolar has presented it, which differs from an authorial voice in the tradition established by Edward T. Cone or the narrative voice that Carolyn Abbate has explored.²⁹⁷ Dolar has defined voice as being “*what does not contribute to making sense* [emphasis in original],” or more positively as an object conveying “precisely that which cannot be said.”²⁹⁸ In other words, the voice is the mediator that delivers a message without being the message (word) itself.²⁹⁹ The attempt to identify what constitutes a voice forces us to expend energy in order to discern which sounds we need to hear. Technological advances have contributed to a wider spectrum of sounds that compete for our attention. Some of these sounds serve as voices, blurring the dichotomy of voice versus noise.³⁰⁰

During the French Revolution, the guillotine was an example of technology

²⁹⁷ See Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). On page 1 of this seminal monograph, Cone posited, “If music is a language, then who is speaking?” His question stemmed from the long history of explicating literature from the vantage point of voice, whether it be the author’s own voice or a third-person perspective. Carolyn Abbate focused on whether a narrative voice could exist in opera and programmatic music in *Unsung Voices*. She concluded on page 28 that narrative voices are rare because music tends not to provide distancing moments when a discourse can be identified. One clear illustration of this point occurs in Chapter 3 where she has argued that an indication of past tense is necessary for narration, noting that music rarely speaks of the past. See especially pages 52-53.

²⁹⁸ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 15.

²⁹⁹ Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 16.

³⁰⁰ Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 13.

assuming a voice in that it transmitted a terrifying, threatening message in a way that words could not accomplish. The guillotine in and of itself was a neutral object that took on the role of mediator when an executioner forced the blade down onto a human neck, delivering a message that those who rebelled against the revolutionary agenda would be killed. In *Dialogues des Carmélites*, the harsh sound of the guillotine blade might be considered a sound prop (perhaps even “noise” to some startled ears) because it is not a traditional musical instrument. Yet, Poulenc conceived of the guillotine as an instrument that is part of the musical soundscape, notating in the score the specific moments when it should sound. Furthermore, Poulenc carefully selected the timings of the guillotine, in order to avoid any “automatic” contrivances.³⁰¹ This allows the guillotine to function both as a dramatic sound effect and a part of a musical ensemble. Returning to Dolar’s notion of a blurring between voice and noise, the guillotine functions in multiple spheres that challenges the notion of what constitutes a voice. From a purely musical perspective, the guillotine might be considered noise, but the message that it delivers shifts the object to one that can function as a voice.

By way of analogy, the shofar, a horn crafted from an animal, is another instance of a non-human object that has the ability to take on powerful significance beyond its sound. The shofar dates back to the Hebrew Bible where its function in Jewish ritual could evoke an animal cry. For Dolar, drawing on the work of Theodor Reik, the shofar also serves as a means for worshipers to feel the presence of and identify with God. In this way, the shofar becomes the voice of God and transmitter of the word (*logos*),

³⁰¹ Poulenc to Pierre Bernac, September 1955, in *Francis Poulenc “Echo and Source,”* 232.

commanding “total compliance although it is senseless in itself.”³⁰² The instrument accomplishes this through its volume, which in the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, even surpassed the loudness of the thunder. Dolar emphasized the aural significance of that moment when the Mosaic law was delivered with the observation that “*there is no law without the voice* [emphasis in original].”³⁰³

The guillotine became a voice transmitting the institutional law to those within earshot when executions were turned into public spectacles that culminated in the display of decapitated heads. In one sense, the guillotine symbolically represented revolutionary authority through ongoing ritual reenactment. Richard D. E. Burton, for instance, has argued that executions were viewed as a secular analogue to Christ’s crucifixion.³⁰⁴ On another level, though, the guillotine was not only a symbol but also the mediator that delivered the message of those in power.³⁰⁵ Turning to Poulenc’s opera, yet another way the guillotine operates is as an authority in itself, exerting a certain degree of power over the music and the characters the *Salve Regina*.

³⁰² Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 53. To take this reading further, the shofar is the “voice of the father,” specifically the moan of the dying father whose voice survives beyond the death. See pages 52-54 and 101-2.

³⁰³ Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 54. This statement is repeated verbatim on page 102 but without the italics that he used in the previous instance.

³⁰⁴ Burton, *Blood in the City*, 53-59.

³⁰⁵ Whereas the shofar was the dying “voice of the father,” transmitting the Mosaic law, the guillotine might be heard as the “voice of the revolution” that would ultimately kill the man who was largely responsible for the Reign of Terror, Maximilien Robespierre. Robespierre’s execution represented on some level a the death of the “voice of the revolution, which like the shofar’s “voice of the father” does not actually die, as the guillotine continued to be used after his execution. The eagerness of the Carmelite nuns to become martyrs at the scaffold raises the possibility that the guillotine functions as two voices: the voice of the divine father and the voice of institutional law. If the march to the scaffold could be compared to a wedding procession, then the physical contact between the guillotine and the nuns’ throats (as Dolar wrote about the shofar, a “voice against voice”) might represent the marriage union between God and the nuns, at the very moment that God is moaning for the violence of the Revolution. On the other hand, the silent, disguised priest does not die in the scene, reinforcing the connection between the singing voice and the guillotine’s voice.

With the nuns' first verse of the *Salve Regina*, the guillotine functions as a disruptive and connective force that regulates the melody and allows the nuns some control over their music. When the nuns repeat the words "et spes nostra salve," the guillotine falls on the last syllable of "salve," as the nuns finish the phrase. Although the nuns sing the first textual verse two more times, the first occurrence is the only instance in which they repeat "et spes nostra salve," suggesting that the nuns chose to rearticulate those words in order to coincide with the first nun's execution. If that is the case, then the nuns, rather than the guillotine, are in control of when the melodic phrase ends. Poulenc altered the melodic contour to emphasize the nuns' agency further as they repeat the last words of the verse, moving up to f^2 before dropping to $g\text{-sharp}^1$, which vocally depicts the fall of the guillotine.³⁰⁶ (Example 14)

Although, on the one hand, the guillotine connects with the nuns' melody, it also disrupts and regulates the nuns, both by eliminating one of the voices (the deceased nun) and by halting the melodic line. The upsetting force of the guillotine is emphasized by the "o!" exclamation from the onstage spectators, which coincides with the guillotine's fall. Poulenc was specific about how he wanted this moment to sound, with detailed instructions in the score. The guillotine is described as having a "heavy and muffled noise," whereas the chorus and orchestra are directed to have a "sec" (dry) tone. One beat of silence, with no resonating vibrato, follows the blunt, disruptive guillotine.³⁰⁷ After this startling moment, the nuns leap up a diminished fourth from $g\text{-sharp}^1$ to c^2 .

³⁰⁶ The textual repetition also features a shift in rhythmic flow, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

³⁰⁷ The original French reads, "bruit sourd et lourd."

Example 14. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, 17-23

17 18 19

Sop. — — —

Alt. — — —

Ten. — — —

Bas. — — —

Sop. — ce do et spes no stra, sal ve et *p*

Mez. — ce do et spes no stra, sal ve et *p*

20 21 *ff sec* 22 *mf* 23

Sop. — oi a

Alt. — oi a

Ten. — oi a

Bas. — oi a

Sop. *mf* spes no stra sal ve. *ff* à 7 Sal ve Re gi na, Ma

Mez. *mf* spes no stra sal ve. *ff* à 7 Sal ve Re gi na, Ma

64

In these ways, the guillotine has a simultaneous connective and disruptive impact on the musical dramaturgy. Ultimately, though, the rhythmic shift that occurs on the repeat of “et spes nostra salve,” in anticipation of the first execution, mediates the paradoxical relationship between the guillotine and the nuns.

The first instance of the word “spes” occupies two beats, with a rising minor third before “nostra.” Two measures later, “spes” is reduced to a single beat, which causes the second syllable of “nostra” to sound on a strong beat, contrary to the conventions of Latin accentuation. Then the word “salve” appears in the same manner, forcing the weaker syllable to arrive on a strong agogic accent; as has been mentioned, this downbeat marks the first fall of the guillotine.

The nuns control the melody, including the rhythmic alteration, and their repetition of the text implies that they have some power over the initial timing of the guillotine. Yet, their knowledge of the guillotine’s presence serves as a catalyst for their compression of the melody. The second instance of the first verse is not the only place where the nuns might demonstrate their agency in the way that they deliver the *Salve Regina* text. When the nuns first sing “Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes,” they leave out the subsequent text “in hac lacrimarum valle,” and instead, repeat the words that they have just articulated. The second occurrence of the word “Ad,” in measure 46 of the tableau, coincides with the fall of the guillotine, as if the nuns had decided to stop short of the previous phrase in order to synchronize the start of the next phrase with the sound of the blade (See Example 15).

Example 15. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, mm. 42-56

42 43 44

Sop. - - - - -

Alt. - - - - -

Ten. *mf*
a a a

Bas. *mf*
a a a

Sop. *mf*
ad te sus-pi-ra-ra-mus ge-men-tes et

Mez. *mf* $\lambda 5$ $\lambda 4$
ad te sus-pi-ra-ra-mus ge-men-tes et

mf

45 46 47

Sop. - - - - -

Alt. *mf* *très lié*
a a a

Ten. *mf*
a a a

Bas. *mf*
a a a

Sop. *f*
flen-tes Ad te sus-pi-ra-mus ge-

Mez. *f* $\lambda 4$
flen-tes Ad te sus-pi-ra-mus ge-

f

48 *mf* 49 50

Sop. *mf*
a

Alt.

Ten. *mf*
a

Bas. *mf*
a

Sop. *mf*
men - tes et flen - - - tes in hac la - cri -

Mez. *mf*
men - tes et flen - - - tes in hac la - cri -

51 52 53

Sop.

Alt. o

Ten. a

Bas. o a a

Sop. ma - - - rum, la - - - cri - ma - rum val - le

Mez. ma - - - rum, la - - - cri - ma - rum val - le

The image shows a musical score for a vocal ensemble. The top section (measures 54-56) features Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts, all singing the syllable 'ou'. The bottom section (measures 69-71) features Soprano and Mezzo-soprano parts singing the phrase 'E - - - ia er - - - go, ad - - - vo - ca - ta'. The piano accompaniment is shown at the bottom. Dynamics include *pp* and markings like *à 3*.

In this way, the guillotine drives the drama, even as the nuns' phrases connect with the executions. After the guillotine falls in measure 45, the nuns extend the verse to include the previously omitted words, even singing “lacrimarum” twice, before the strike of the guillotine again in measure 53, during the next verse of text.

Although the relationship between the guillotine and textual phrases becomes less predictable after the first nun is executed, harmonic motions indicate pivotal moments throughout the entire tableau. The basic key structure for the tableau is shown in Table 3.

These changes of tonal center correspond with the beginnings of textual verses, including repetitions of verses, which helps delineate the structure of the final tableau. Toward the beginning of the tableau, the modulations also coincide with the fall of the guillotine. For instance, the abrupt modulation that occurs after the first sound of the

guillotine emphasizes the disruption, already explored in this chapter, that has taken place.

Table 3. Key Structure in Act III, tableau 4 of *Dialogues des Carmélites*

Verse	1 "Salve Regina"	1	1	2 "Ad te clamamus"	2 "Ad te suspiramus"	2
Tonal center	A minor	C minor	G minor	F-sharp minor	E minor	E minor
Measure number	1	22	30	38	42	46

Verse	3 "Eia ergo"	4 "Et Jesum"	5 "O clemens"	5	5 "O pia"	[Veni, Creator] "Deo Patri"
Tonal center	A-flat minor	F minor	C minor	[modulating]	[modulating]	C major to C minor
Measure number	54	62	71	78	83	89

Although the motion from A minor at the beginning to C minor when the nuns repeat the first verse of the *Salve Regina* could have been written with smooth voice leading, Poulenc chose to create a stark contrast between these two key areas by having the nuns move directly from g-sharp¹ up to c² (after dropping from f²), while the tenors in the chorus have an even larger leap from g-sharp to e-flat (See Example 14 on page 136). This upward leap moves the nuns' voices from a tessitura that had conveyed the solemnity of the scene to a brighter sound that increases the urgency of the moment. From a harmonic standpoint, the result is that a simple pivot modulation, with the G-sharp fully diminished seventh chord, functioning enharmonically as a B fully diminished seventh chord in the motion to C minor, instead leaps unpredictably in order to intensify the execution. The bass line, which lands resolutely on A (doubled up an octave)

underneath the G-sharp fully diminished seventh chord in measure 21, further complicates the modulation (See Example 14). Although the orchestra had been largely mirroring the nuns' melody, the mechanical bass line needed the disruptive sound of the guillotine to cue the modulation, and in measure 22, the bass line indeed underscores the C minor tonality.

When the nuns begin the first verse of the *Salve Regina* for the third time at measure 30, the modulation is much smoother than the previous one, which suggests that the shock of the guillotine has diminished. The shift from C minor to G minor is accomplished through a D major pivot chord that allows for a solid authentic cadence, with the sopranos moving up a fourth from d^2 to g^2 , while the mezzo-sopranos move down to g^1 (Example 16). At this third occurrence of the first verse, the nuns still have a single melody, but the mezzo-sopranos sing an octave lower when the pitches are above f^2 .³⁰⁸ Although the leap to g^2 in the soprano line builds intensity into the repetition of the verse, the overall effect is less startling than the first modulation.

The less unsettling modulation is due in part to the more fluid voice leading, compared to the abrupt leaps that occurred during the first modulation. Furthermore, the orchestral bass line's congruence with the rest of the music, set up by a pre-cadential dissonance in the bass line, reinforces the smoother tonal shift. Immediately before the cadence, the bass pitch D sounds underneath an F-sharp fully diminished seventh chord on the word "spes" in measure 28, but then the bass plays the tonic pitch G at measure 30. In essence, the tonal shift in the bass line has been displaced to an earlier point, in order to allow for the authentic cadence in G minor, and as a result, this

³⁰⁸ Poulenc also had the mezzo-sopranos sing down an octave for lower pitches when the phrase peaks on a pitch that is too high for their range.

second modulation lacks the pungency that underscored the earlier motion to C minor. Unlike the earlier modulation, the guillotine and the chorus are absent, also allowing for the smoother transition to G minor, in comparison with the modulation to C minor at measure 22.

Even when the nuns finally reach the second verse of the *Salve Regina*, the modulation to F-sharp minor moves fluidly, with no disruption from the guillotine. Just as the third instance of the first verse began with a smooth cadence, the arrival of the second verse avoids the jarring motions, with a pivotal C-sharp major-minor seventh chord functioning as the dominant of F-sharp, which occurred at the first repetition of the previous verse.

Example 16. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, mm. 28-30

The musical score for Example 16 consists of vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are Soprano (Sop.), Alto (Alt.), Tenor (Ten.), and Bass (Bas.). The piano accompaniment is shown in the bottom two staves. The score is in 4/4 time and features a modulation to F-sharp minor. The lyrics are: "spes nos - tra sal - ve. Sal - - ve Re". The dynamic markings are *mf* for measures 28 and 29, and *ff* for measure 30. A rehearsal mark [65] is present in the piano part at the beginning of measure 30.

Again, the clashing moment in the processional bass line has been moved to the word “spes” of the previous phrase, in order to create a harmonious authentic cadence at the arrival of F-sharp minor (Example 17).

Example 17. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, mm. 36-40

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 36 to 40. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts enter in measure 36 with the lyrics "spes nos tra sal ve. Ad te cla". The piano accompaniment features a prominent bass line with a clashing moment on the word "spes". The second system covers measures 39 to 40. It features four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts enter in measure 39 with the lyrics "ma mus ex su les fi li". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar bass line pattern.

Measures 36-40: Sop. (mf), Alt. (mf), Ten. (mf), Bas. (mf). Lyrics: spes nos tra sal ve. Ad te cla.

Measures 39-40: Sop. (à 6), Mez. (à 6), Bas. (66). Lyrics: ma mus ex su les fi li.

One other way that the various tonal centers are reinforced throughout the tableau is through the nuns' singing of the tonic pitch at the beginning of each phrase. This happens from the beginning of the tableau until all of the nuns but Constance have been executed. When Mother Jeanne dies, Constance, not yet aware of Blanche's presence, is left to sing alone at measure 78 during a modulatory passage that is not clearly in a specific key. For the first time, she starts a phrase on the third scale degree (C), instead of the root of the A-flat major-minor seventh chord. Although the argument could be made that because the passage is modulating, A-flat (which points to C by way of G) is not a true tonal center.

Constance's line continues to depart from the established pattern of starting on the root of the chord in measure 79 when Constance reaches an a^2 , as part of an F-sharp fully diminished seventh chord (Example 18). At measure 83 over a bass A, she sings "O pia, o dulcis Virgo Ma-" as a recitation on c^2 , which has been her focal pitch since measure 71, when she and Mother Jeanne were the last two remaining nuns.

The underlying tonal center in measure 83 is A minor, and throughout this passage leading up to Constance's execution in measure 87, the bass line alternates between A-natural and A-flat before arriving at G, the dominant of C, which is the tonal center until the end of the tableau. Thus, Constance's chant foreshadows the final tonal center, while the bass line creates an unsteady fluctuation that contradicts her constancy.

Constance's recitation coincides with her realization that Blanche will join her at the scaffold. While Blanche silently witnesses Constance's death, her presence on the stage seems to have an impact on the way that Constance delivers the final text of the

Salve Regina. Constance demonstrates both her individuality, by departing from the manner in which the rest of the *Salve Regina* text has been sung, and her connection to Blanche, through her audible reaction to Blanche's arrival.

Blanche, for whom Constance has served as a literary foil throughout the opera, sings the last verse of the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* hymn, instead of the *Salve Regina* text. Unlike Constance, she does in fact begin her solo on the tonic pitch of c^2 . Her music comprises primarily intervals of major and minor thirds, both above and below the tonic C, along with perfect fourths from A to D. The alternation between E-natural and E-flat, as well as A-natural and A-flat, recalls the bass line that accompanied Constance's solo recitation.

Example 18. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, mm. 78-88

78 79 80 81 82

Sop. *pp*

Alt. *pp* oh oh oh

Ten. *pp* oh oh oh

Bas. *pp* oh oh oh

(Blanche, le visage dépouillé de toute crainte, se fraye un passage dans la foule où elle se confond.)

(Constance l'aperçoit. Son visage s'irradie de bonheur. Elle s'arrête un court instant.)

Sr. *ppp très doux*

C. O cle - - - mens...

pp

83 84

Sop. —

Alt. —

Ten. *pp*
o

Bas. *pp*
o

73 (Reprenant sa marche à l'échafaud, elle sourit doucement à Blanche)

Sr. C. *pp*
O pi - a - o

85 86 87 88

Sop. —

Alt. —

Ten. *ppp*
o

Bas. *ppp*
o

Sr. C. dul - - - cis Vir - - - go - Ma -

(Incroyablement calme, Blanche emerge de la foule stupéfaite et monte au supplice.)

Blanche's wavering music reminds listeners of her character's struggles throughout the opera. Her last sung pitch is, in fact, a¹, which is supported by a D⁹ chord, with a C bass pedal tone (See Example 19). The tableau then ends in C minor, with a brief orchestral conclusion where the violins and oboe recall a motive that has been developed throughout the opera.

Conclusion

As explored in Chapter 3, Poulenc departed from Georges Bernanos' treatment of Blanche's death by having Blanche approach the scaffold by herself, instead of being pushed forward by members of the crowd, which is further emphasized through the musical dramaturgy of the tableau. The significant modification in Blanche's execution allows her to gain an independence that she did not exhibit in the spoken play or in Gertrud von le Fort's novella. Poulenc called attention to this individual agency by giving Blanche distinctive music—and a different text—to separate her from the other nuns, including Constance.

The juxtaposition of Constance and Blanche at the end of the tableau stresses the importance of these two characters. Constance is finally left to sing alone in measure 77 as the guillotine silences Mother Jeanne's voice, and she is the only nun who discovers that Blanche has rejoined her Carmelite sisters. As has been explored, Constance then begins to recite her text, departing from the hymn-like text setting that has predominated throughout the tableau. Yet, she continued with the *Salve Regina*, unlike Blanche who departed from the text that her sisters had sung.

Blanche's use of the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* distinguishes her singular role in the opera. Even the choral vocables have been reduced in both length and quantity, which calls attention to Blanche's individuality. Unlike Constance, Blanche begins her solo without choral accompaniment, with the chorus joining a measure later for two and one-half beats before allowing Blanche to sing alone again. When the chorus surfaces three measures later, the chord lasts for under three beats, and then Blanche sings her final words ("In saeculorum saecula, In saeculorum") by herself. Because the orchestra's

music has also been scaled down, including the cessation of the marching bass line, Blanche's voice stands out over the accompanying music (See Example 19). In effect, she emphasizes her personal decision to join her sisters on the scaffold by singing alone.

Example 19, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 4, mm. 95-105

95 96 97 98

Sop.

Alt.

Ten.

Bas.

Bl.

In se - cu - lor - um se - cu - la, In se - cu - lor - um...

(La foule commence à se disperser)

RIDEAU

99 100 101 102 103 104 105

Sop.

Alt.

Ten.

Bas.

75

pp

sec

sans changer jusqu'a

FIN DE L'OPERA

When Blanche is finally executed, before she can repeat the word “saecula,” the guillotine serves as a delineator for the end of the drama, separating the orchestra from the scene onstage. The orchestra’s quiet reemergence after the fall of the guillotine, with two arpeggiated C-minor seventh chords, frames the final tableau in its final moments. The orchestral music at the very end of the opera provides an acoustic effect that allows the audience to make connections between the scene at the scaffold and earlier points in the opera. This music is reminiscent of music previously heard in the first tableau of Act I, summarizing Blanche’s progression from timid and apprehensive to independent and strong.³⁰⁹ In these concluding measures, the orchestra, momentarily supported by the onstage chorus, draws the audience out of the theatrical world while recalling the trajectory and significance of Blanche’s life.

³⁰⁹ For an analysis of recurring motives used throughout the opera, see Wilfrid Mellers, *Francis Poulenc*, 102-28.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: OPERATIC SHOCK AND ITS AFTERMATH

Dialogues des Carmélites has remained part of the repertoire since its 1957 premiere. One reason that the opera continues to be performed is that the characters, subject matter, and especially the ending are compelling to audiences.³¹⁰ Poulenc's view on mystical substitution, as explored in Chapters 1 and 2, suggests that theater can be a spiritual experience for those who are involved with the work.

The reception of Georges Bernanos' play reinforces this notion of theater having such a strong impact on those who encounter it. I mentioned in Chapter 2 a performance of Bernanos' work in Zurich where the audience stood to sing the *Salve Regina* at the end of the play.³¹¹ This audience response indicates that the spectators were familiar with the Marian antiphon, and they were willing to engage in a liturgical performance at a secular theater. In this way, the conclusion of Bernanos' play was transformed into an instance of Marian devotion for those in attendance.

Poulenc's Crowd and Lacanian Traumatic Shock

The final tableau of *Dialogues des Carmélites* invites a psychoanalytic reading based on the notion of traumatic shock according to Slavoj Žižek's model. Although his approach has been influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Žižek

³¹⁰ *Dialogues des Carmélites* was recently mentioned in a blog on the National Public Radio website. The author, who argued that fans of a television show about vampires would also be fascinated by operatic death scenes, described the guillotine as "startling musical onomatopoeia." See Thomas Huizenga, "Five Operas that Are Truly Bloodier than 'True Blood,'" Deceptive Cadence from NPR Classical, entry posted 16 September, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/deceptivecadence/2010/09/16/129909218/five-operas-that-are-truly-bloodier-than-true-blood> (accessed 29 September 2011).

³¹¹ See also Gendre, "*Dialogues des Carmélites*," 287.

has offered his own understanding of trauma that relies on the analysis of popular film. The legacy from Freud, who drew on medical research on neurosis, recognizes that trauma causes some sort of suffering.³¹² Lacan's contribution, building on Freud's writings on stages of development, was to consider the significance of language and other symbolic systems on human experience. He referred to this system as the Symbolic Order, noting that: "Symbols in fact envelop the life of man with a network so total that they join together those who are going to engender him 'by bone and flesh' before he comes into the world."³¹³ In other words, the Symbolic Order exists before a person is born as well as after that person has died, and individuals enter into the larger network of humans who share this way of relating to the world and each other. Lacan was also fascinated by what he referred to as the Real, or what exists outside of the Symbolic Order.

Žižek's reliance on film and literature to describe the Real indicates the difficulty of defining Lacan's notion of the Real in words. Žižek has analogized the Symbolic Order and the Real to "inside" and "outside" with Robert Heinlein's science fiction novel *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathon Hoag*. The flooding in of the Real occurs when a character rolls down her car window to discover "a grey and formless mist" instead of the images of traffic and the city that she believed she saw when the window was

³¹² Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 8-9. Freud distinguished between three different types of reactions to psychological suffering. "Apprehension" involved an expectation of and preparation for danger. "Fear" required a definite object of which a person was afraid. "Fright" referred to a more generalized condition in which a person was surprised by danger without anticipation or preparation. Later on (page 36), he addressed the feeling of "shock," which he argued could cause a molecular injury. This could be related to the condition of "traumatic neurosis," which impacted the central nervous system. See also Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), for a contextualization of Freud's approach.

³¹³ Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (W. W. Norton: New York and London, 2002), 231.

closed.³¹⁴ The window represents a threshold between “inside” and “outside,” serving as a shield from the unknown. Inside the car is a fantasy-space that creates the illusion of a larger space than its actuality, with the window protecting the passengers from the formless exterior.

In this instance, the metaphor for the Real suggests a vertical threshold between the Symbolic Order and the formless, unstable mist that defies symbolization. Other places tend to present the boundary between these two fields in a horizontal relationship. For instance, Žižek argued that at times “The real functions here not as something that resists symbolization, as a meaningless leftover that cannot be integrated into the symbolic universe, but on the contrary, as its last support.”³¹⁵

Both of these descriptions (the vertical and the horizontal) imply that the Real is always present, but the chain of signification typically prevents the Real from being evident. Space must exist in order for the undefined excess of the Real to have room to surface.³¹⁶ Such a fissure occurs in the moment of silence that follows the first fall of the guillotine in the final tableau of *Dialogues des Carmélites*. While the visual image of the guillotine suggests a vertical disruption to the Symbolic Order, the overall musical texture elicits a horizontal association. These two ways of considering the Real reveal that both vertical and horizontal realms can be disrupted by the unfixed excess that breaks through the chain of signification.

³¹⁴ See Žižek, “The Undergrowth of Enjoyment: How Popular Culture Can Serve as an Introduction to Lacan,” in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 18-19. Reprinted from *New Formations* 9 (1989): 7-29. Žižek also discussed this film scene in *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Literature* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1991), 29-30.

³¹⁵ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 31.

³¹⁶ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 17-18.

When the guillotine first falls, the signifying chain that characterizes the Symbolic Order is disrupted, creating a constitutive gap as the crowd audibly registers the shock of its collective experience.³¹⁷ As shown in Example 14 in Chapter 5, the witnesses convey their shock with a brief non-lexical exclamation “oi.” The silence that follows the outburst exists outside of language and sound, allowing the Real to emerge in this fracture of the musical dramaturgy. This momentary surfacing of the Real reveals the spectators’ immediate inability to articulate the impact of a shocking event that exists outside of their familiar environment. When the chain of signification is restored, we learn that the Real had always been there. Yet the guillotine does continue to fall, but the crowd never again reacts in such an abrupt manner, and the guillotine becomes absorbed into the *Salve Regina* without additional silent pauses. With the subsequent sounds of the guillotine, the Symbolic Order is restored and the Real returns to its supportive role beneath the surface of language and comprehension. Yet, its momentary surfacing calls attention to the unstable nature of the boundary that Žižek identified in his window metaphor.

Restoration of the Symbolic Order: Dialogism in Poulenc’s Late Works

The appearance of the Real in the final tableau of *Dialogues des Carmélites* can be situated in a larger narrative of the history of France in general and Paris in particular. In his exploration of the role of violence in Paris from the French Revolution to the German occupation of World War II, Richard D. E. Burton concluded “that

³¹⁷ Lacan analogized the signifying chain to “links by which a necklace firmly hooks onto a link of another necklace made of links.” See Lacan, “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud,” in *Écrits*, 145.

recourse to political violence was the norm, not the exception, in France during the period under consideration.”³¹⁸ The Revolution was preserved in the French cultural memory along with the “Bloody Week” of May 1871, when a clash between the temporarily powerful leftist Paris Commune and the right-wing government of France’s Third Republic resulted in mass executions of the Communards by firing squads.³¹⁹ Burton’s *Blood in the City: Violence and Revolution in Paris, 1789-1945* traces the ways that these acts of violence that culminated in the German occupation were landmark events in the midst of a near continuous fascination with blood and mutilation. The Catholic mystical concept of vicarious suffering fits into this framework, especially with literary works that equate this type of suffering with blood, such as Huyman’s *The Cathedral*, as explored in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Poulenc was affected not only by his belief in vicarious suffering but also by the general struggles of his country’s history and present. During the German occupation, he composed a choral work entitled *Figure humaine* that functioned as a statement against the oppression of the German forces. Although the poetic sources were secular poems by Paul Eluard, his inspiration came from a visit to Rocamadour, the site of the Black Virgin that was discussed in Chapter 3. Poulenc recalled in an interview with Claude Rostand:

After a pilgrimage to Rocamadour, I had the idea of composing a clandestine work which could be prepared and printed in secret and then performed in the long-awaited day of liberation. With great enthusiasm I began *Figure humaine* and completed it by the end of the summer [of 1943]. I composed the work for

³¹⁸ Burton, *Blood in the City*, xii.

³¹⁹ Burton, *Blood in the City*, 16. The Communards were also responsible for gruesome shootings when they executed religious leaders in their attempt to suppress the power of the Catholic Church, echoing the anti-clerical attitudes of the French Revolution.

unaccompanied choir because I wanted this act of faith to be performed without instrumental aid, by the sole means of the human voice.³²⁰

This political and religious statement of resistance against the German occupation received its first performance over the airwaves in London immediately before the end of the war. Along with *Dialogues des Carmélites*, the choral *Figure humaine* demonstrates the ways that Poulenc could combine commentaries on significant violent events in French history with a religious message.

Yet, the end of the war did not in itself put to rest the traumatic impact of France's violent history. If that had been the case, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, with its tonal language that Poulenc recognized was old-fashioned, might have been initially seen as a relic of the past instead of as a work that was received enthusiastically at its premieres in Milan and Paris. In this context, the surfacing of the Real in the final tableau takes on the significance of breaking through the Symbolic Order not only of the tableau but also of France's cultural experience more generally.

When the Real disrupts the signifying chain in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, it participates in the gruesome historical narrative that extends from the French Revolution to the post-World War II era. The importance of this crucial moment in the final tableau is that the excess of the Real ultimately serves as a means of resolving the violence of the guillotine's first sounds. Žižek has argued that "traumas we are not ready or able to remember haunt us all the more forcefully. We should therefore accept the paradox that, in order really to forget an event, we must first summon up the

³²⁰ Francis Poulenc, *Entretiens avec Claude Rostand* (Paris: Réne Julliard, 1954), 103-104. Trans. in Mellers, *Francis Poulenc*, 84.

strength to remember it properly.”³²¹ The staging of the execution of the Carmelite nuns is indeed an instance when the horror of the Revolution is remembered properly in that the moment of traumatic shock that follows the guillotine’s first blow offers an opportunity for mid twentieth-century France to confront its violent history.

Poulenc’s subsequent *Sonate pour Flûte et Piano* (1957) informs listeners that the trauma of *Dialogues des Carmélites*’ final tableau (and France’s historical narrative) has subsided after that moment when the Real surfaces. The composer wrote this sonata in the aftermath of personal tragedy, especially related to his romantic life, and drew upon music that had appeared in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. This recontextualization of his opera adds an intertextual dimension to the sonata and reveals how the signifying chain remains restored in the afterlife of the opera. The lack of a disruptive moment in the Flute Sonata allows this work to function as music of remembrance without the trauma that was imbued in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Poulenc entitled the first movement *Allegro malinconico*, evoking a sense of melancholy in spite of the lively tempo. The second movement, a *Cantilena*, encourages an instrumental analogue to singing, which serves as another connection to the opera.³²² Finally, the third movement (*Presto giocoso*) evokes the generic label of *dramma giocoso* that Mozart used for *Don Giovanni* by playing with the notion of jocularity. Just as Mozart’s opera has a certain darkness to it, the concluding movement of Poulenc’s

³²¹ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 22.

³²² Rose Marie Chisholm has argued for flutists to perform the second movement in a lyrical style in “The Poulenc Sonata ‘Cantilena’: A Vocal Connection,” in *The Flutist Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1992): 25-26.

sonata resists outright revelry by cyclically recalling motives and melodic phrases from the melancholic first movement.

One significant musical borrowing in the Flute Sonata points back to the opening of the second act of *Dialogues des Carmélites*, when Blanche and Constance sing from the Office of the Dead (discussed in Chapter 4). Poulenc referenced the orchestral introduction to the operatic scene (Example 20) in the B section of the ternary first movement of the Flute Sonata (Example 21).³²³ The descending four-note scale with an upward turn in measure 1 of the Act II introduction appears in measure 86 of the sonata.

Example 20. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act II, tableau 1, mm. 1-2

The musical score for Example 20 consists of three staves. The top two staves are for vocalists Sr. Constance and Blanche, both in treble clef with a common time signature. The bottom two staves are for the piano, also in treble clef with a common time signature. The tempo is marked 'Très calme' with a quarter note equal to 50. The piano part begins with a forte (f) dynamic and a descending four-note scale with an upward turn in measure 1. The score is divided into two measures, with a first ending bracket over the first measure and a second ending bracket over the second measure.

A second basis for quotation is the new Prioress' (Madame Lidoine) aria in the third tableau of Act III as the nuns await their execution. The Prioress had been absent from the convent when the nuns took their vow of martyrdom, but she declares her commitment to their cause while they are imprisoned. At the beginning of the tableau,

³²³ Keith Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, 130.

the motive from Example 20 appears, this time in an oboe solo (Example 22). The oboe part is notated on the top line of Example 22, and the second measure features the four-note descending scalar pattern with an upward turn.

Example 21. Sonate pour Flûte et Piano, Mvt. 1, *Allegro malinconico*, mm. 86-87

Example 22, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 3, mm. 1-2

Furthermore, Madame Lidoine's melody serves as a loose model for the opening theme in the second movement of the sonata. Both thematic ideas involve a descending scalar pattern at a slow tempo, especially evident when comparing measures 9 and 10 of the operatic tableau (Example 23) with measures 13 and 14 of the sonata (Example 24). In addition to the tetrachordal descent, both examples include a falling arpeggiated pattern.

Although the association is less precise than the direct quotation from the opera in the first movement of the sonata, Keith Daniel argued that the reference in the second movement still exists, based in part on the frequency of self-borrowing in Poulenc's late works more generally.³²⁴

Example 23. *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Act III, tableau 3, mm. 8-11

La Prieure (très doux et calme)

Mes fil - les, voi - là que s'a -

chè - ve no - tre pre - miè - re nuit de pri - son C'é'

I hesitate to label the connection between Madame Lidoine's aria and the second movement of the Flute Sonata as an overt example of self-borrowing because the melodic relationships occur in different parts of the phrases. The operatic scalar descent appears in the first full measure of the phrase (measure 9), whereas the similar pattern in the sonata happens at the end of a phrase (measure 13). In referencing the opera

³²⁴ Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, 130.

indirectly, Poulenc made a statement about how his process of grieving had changed by the time he composed his Flute Sonata. Both sources for these examples occur at times in the opera when death is being addressed. Example 23 comes from the scene in which Blanche and Constance mourn the death of the First Prioress, and Example 26 happens when the new Prioress contemplates her own death.

Example 24. Sonate pour Flûte et Piano, Mvt. 2, *Cantilena*, mm. 11-14

The image displays a musical score for Example 24, which is the Cantilena movement from the second movement of the Flute Sonata for Flute and Piano. The score is presented in two systems, covering measures 11 through 14. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The flute part is written in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is written in the grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part features a steady accompaniment of chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand. The flute part has a melodic line with slurs and dynamics markings such as *p* and *pp*. The score is in black and white.

The restoration of the Symbolic Order at the end of *Dialogues des Carmélites* allowed the Flute Sonata to function as a work of remembrance. This technique of recalling operatic motives in an instrumental sonata is something that Poulenc would

use again with his last opera *La Voix humaine* (1958).³²⁵ Denise Duval, for whom Poulenc composed the part of Blanche, premiered the role of the nameless woman who sings into a telephone for forty-two minutes in this monodrama based on a play by Jean Cocteau. Music from this opera was then recontextualized for the *Sonate pour Clarinet et Piano* (1962), composed a year before Poulenc's death.

While this type of intertextual referencing was not unique to *Dialogues des Carmélites*, the position of this earlier opera in the historical framework of violence in France allows the musical recollections in the Flute Sonata to suggest that this compositional strategy could hint at a complex web of connections between musical works, history, and the composer's personal experiences. The moment of traumatic shock in *Dialogues des Carmélites* opens up the space for opera to participate actively in historical narratives instead of simply depicting historical events. The multivalence of staged opera provides ways for composers to engage in different types of referential exchanges both within and outside of musical expression. *Dialogues des Carmélites* ultimately teaches us about shared traumatic experience in the context of French history while also inviting future musical works to engage in an intertextual dialogue.

³²⁵ I explored the connections in my master's thesis, *Beyond the Human Voice: Francis Poulenc's Psychological Drama La Voix humaine (1958)* (Denton: University of North Texas, 2000), 77-79. Also see Daniel, *Francis Poulenc*, 130.

APPENDIX A

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF POULENC'S *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES* IN
COMPARISON TO BERNANOS' PLAY

Bernanos	Poulenc	Location in Opera
PROLOGUE (NO DIALOGUE)		
Scene 1	Omitted	
Scene 2	Omitted	
	ACT I	
FIRST TABLEAU	FIRST TABLEAU	
Scene 1	Reduced ³²⁶	Act I, Tableau 1
Scene 2	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 1
Scene 3	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 1
Scene 4	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 1
SECOND TABLEAU	SECOND TABLEAU	
Scene 1	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 2
Scene 2	Omitted	
Scene 3	Omitted	
Scene 4	Omitted	
Scene 5	Omitted	
	THIRD TABLEAU	
Scene 6	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 3
	FOURTH TABLEAU	
Scene 7	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 4
Scene 8	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 4
Scene 9	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 4
Scene 10	Reduced	Act I, Tableau 4
	ACT II	
	FIRST TABLEAU	
Scene 11	Reduced	Act II, Tableau 1, Office of the Dead
THIRD TABLEAU		
	FIRST INTERLUDE	
Scene 1	Reduced	Act II, First Interlude
	SECOND TABLEAU	
Scene 2	Reduced	Act II, Tableau 2, <i>Ave Maria</i>
Scene 3	Omitted	
Scene 4	Omitted	
Scene 5	Omitted	
Scene 6	Omitted	
	SECOND INTERLUDE	Act II, Second Interlude
Scene 7	Reduced	Act II, Second Interlude
	THIRD TABLEAU	

³²⁶ “Reduced” designates material that Poulenc drew from for his opera, whereas “omitted” indicates scenes that were entirely omitted. The Latin liturgical texts are indicated in the third column.

Scene 8	Reduced	Act II, Tableau 3
Scene 9	Omitted	
Scene 10	Omitted	
Scene 11	Omitted	
	FOURTH TABLEAU	
Scene 12	Reduced	Act II, Tableau 4, <i>Ave Verum Corpus</i>
Scene 13	Reduced	Act II, Tableau 4
Scene 14	Omitted	
Scene 15	Omitted	
Scene 16	Omitted	
FOURTH TABLEAU		
Scene 1	Omitted	
Scene 2	Omitted	
Scene 3	Omitted	
Scene 4	Reduced	Act II, Tableau 4
Scene 5	Reduced	Act II, Tableau 4
Scene 6	Omitted	
Scene 7	Omitted	
Scene 8	Reduced	Act II, Tableau 4
Scene 9	Omitted, except for one statement.	Act III, Tableau 3
Scene 10	Used	Act II, Tableau 4
Scene 11	Used	Act II, Tableau 4
Scene 12	Omitted	
	ACT III	
	FIRST TABLEAU	
Scene 13	Reduced	Act III, Tableau 1
Scene 14	Omitted	
FIFTH TABLEAU	Omitted	
Scene 1	Omitted	
Scene 2	Omitted	
Scene 3	Omitted	
Scene 4	Omitted	
	FIRST INTERLUDE	
Scene 5	Reduced	Act III, First Interlude
	SECOND TABLEAU	
Scene 6	Omitted	
Scene 7	Omitted	
Scene 8	Expanded	Act III, Tableau 2
	SECOND INTERLUDE	
Scene 9	Reduced	Act III, Second Interlude
Scene 10	Omitted	
Scene 11	Reduced	At III, Second Interlude

	THIRD TABLEAU	
Scene 12	Reduced	Act III, Tableau 3
Scene 13	Reduced	Act III, Tableau 3
Scene 14	Reduced	Act III, Tableau 3
	THIRD INTERLUDE	
Scene 15	Omitted	
Scene 16	Reduced	Act III, Third Interlude
	FOURTH TABLEAU	
Scene 17	Reduced	Act III, Tableau 4, <i>Salve Regina</i>

APPENDIX B

A COMPARISON OF THE PLOTS FOUND IN LE FORT'S *DIE LETZTE AM*
SCHAFOTT, BERNANOS' PLAY *DIALOGUES DES CARMÉLITES*,
AND POULENC'S OPERA

Le Fort ³²⁷	Bernanos	Poulenc
	PROLOGUE (NO DIALOGUE)	
[1.] The letter-writer, Monsieur de Villeroy, mentions the circumstances of Blanche's birth, quoting the Marquis de la Force's explanation for why Blanche entered the convent. As a crowd anticipated a fireworks display in celebration of the Dauphin Louis' (future Louis XVI) wedding, a small fire broke out, inciting panic among the masses. The Marquise, although secure in her coach, reacted to the chaos.	Scene 1: The Marquis and Marquise de la Force encounter a mob on their way home from the royal wedding of the Dauphin (future Louis XVI) and Marie-Antoinette in 1774. The Marquise is traumatized by this chaotic event.	This scene is not dramatized in Poulenc's opera.
[2.] The Marquise delivered Blanche prematurely and then died soon afterward. As a young child, Blanche was extremely timid and frail, especially when provoked by sudden sounds or movements.	Scene 2: A doctor delivers the Marquise' baby, but the Marquise does not survive.	This scene is not dramatized in Poulenc's opera.
		ACT I
	FIRST TABLEAU	FIRST TABLEAU
	Scene 1: In April 1789, the Marquis and his son the Chevalier anticipate the return of Blanche, the Marquis' daughter, to their home. They discuss Blanche's fragility.	The action is basically the same, except that Poulenc incorporated the situation from Bernanos' Prologue into the dialogue, as the Marquis recalls the circumstances of Blanche's birth.

³²⁷Because le Fort did not divide her novella into chapters, I have numbered the major events sequentially from beginning to end of the novella, with the numbers in brackets to indicate that I have assigned these numbers to the events. For the purpose of this appendix, Bernanos' play is the point of reference for both the novella and the opera. When possible, events from le Fort's novella are matched to comparative actions in Bernanos' play, and the order of the numbers in le Fort's column indicate how Bernanos' play (based on Father Raymond Bruckberger's scenario) sometimes rearranged events in the novella. Poulenc's revisions of the play are marked in brackets.

	Scene 2: Blanche arrives and wants to withdraw to her room. Her father suggests that she should request for some candles to be lit by a servant. He recalls that she believed as a child that she died each night and was born again every morning. Blanche says that the only day of Resurrection is Easter, but that she feels as if every night is the “Très Sainte Agonie” (Agony of Christ).	Blanche’s arrival and musings about the Agony of Christ are a continuation of the same tableau.
	Scene 3: Blanche disrupts her father’s and brother’s conversation when she screams in fear at the sight of a servant’s shadow in the candlelight.	The candlelight incident is also included in the first tableau.
[3.] Blanche’s governess (Madame de Chalais) announced that Blanche did not intend to marry but, rather, wished to become a nun. The narrator explains that Marquis subscribed to the view of intellectuals who argued that the Church was antiquated. In spite of his concerns that Blanche would attempt to escape the outside world by retreating to a convent, Blanche was in fact highly religious.	Scene 4: The Marquis visits with his daughter in her room, where she announces her intentions to become a Carmelite nun. Her father expresses concern that she despises the world, but Blanche assures him that she harbors no such feelings. She does feel out of place in the world, though.	Because Poulenc set this text as a continuation of the same tableau (with no division into scenes or set changes), the conversation about Blanche entering the convent does not shift to Blanche’s room. Otherwise, the content is similar.
	SECOND TABLEAU	SECOND TABLEAU
[4.] Blanche met with Madame de Croissy, a young but invalid Prioress who was nearing death, based on Madame de Chalais’ connections with the Carmelite convent at Compiègne. When the Prioress questioned whether	Scene 1: In the parlor of the Carmelite convent at Compiègne, the Prioress (Madame de Croissy), who is old and visibly ill, and Blanche visit. The Prioress observes that Blanche is not frightened by the strictness of the	The same conversation occurs between Blanche and the Prioress.

<p>Blanche would fear the strict rules of the convent, Blanche assured Madame de Croissy that there were greater things to fear than regulations. The Prioress asked for an example, Blanche answered that she had nothing specific in mind but could offer an answer later. The Prioress replied that she did not request an answer.</p>	<p>Carmelite Order, and Blanche says that she is attracted to the strictness. The Prioress discusses the importance of having faith in prayer and suggests that God will test Blanche's weakness, not her strength. She argues that the nuns must protect the Order, not seek it for protection, which Blanche had implied. When the Prioress asks about Blanche about her religious name, Blanche announces that she has chosen Sister Blanche of the Agony of Christ.</p>	
<p>[5.] Blanche became a postulant at Compiègne, and whenever France's troubles were mentioned, she recited reassuring phrases about how the nuns would not be affected.</p>	<p>Scene 2: The Carmelites of Compiègne receive Blanche as a postulant. Blanche is led to a statue of <i>le petit Roi de Gloire</i> (the petite King of Glory). There is no dialogue in this scene.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
	<p>Scene 3: At curfew time, the Prioress explains to Blanche that the bedroom doors must remain closed, unlike Blanche's partially opened door. Blanche says cannot sleep if she is unable to see anything in the dark. The Prioress tells her that she should be able to sleep anyway. Blanche asks for forgiveness but then opens the door again after the Prioress leaves. The Prioress notices the door again but does not close it.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
	<p>Scene 4: In the infirmary, a visiting doctor informs the Prioress that he</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>

	believes nothing else can be done for her. The Prioress insists that she will improve, and Mother Marie of the Incarnation supports the Prioress' claim to have had no trouble eating soup the previous day. Finally, the Prioress declares that her destiny will be controlled by God.	
	Scene 5: The doctor apologizes to Mother Marie outside the infirmary. Mother Marie explains that the doctor does not have enough experience with the Carmelite Order and that only the saintly and the silly who can die peacefully. The doctor assumes that the Carmelites have a "House of Peace," but Mother Marie asserts that theirs is a "House of Prayer" for others, without time for pleasure.	This scene is omitted.
		THIRD TABLEAU
[10.] The novice Constance, who was a novice before Blanche became a postulant, hoped that she and Blanche would live to be centenarians. By that time, Constance speculated that their Order would be allowed to operate freely again.	Scene 6: Blanche and Sister Constance de Saint-Denis receive and lament their stark provisions. Constance recalls her brothers' recent joyful wedding in the countryside, where she danced in celebration. When the conversation turns more serious, Constance speculates that she will die at a young age and together with Blanche. Upon this suggestion, Blanche criticizes Constance, and Constance says that	The same conversation occurs between Blanche and Constance.

	she did not mean to offend Blanche.	
		FOURTH TABLEAU
[6.] Prioress Croissy died after a painful struggle with moaning that could be heard throughout the convent. Blanche did not understand how God could allow such a pious woman to suffer so much. Because of Blanche's reaction, Sister Marie of the Incarnation momentarily delayed Blanche's investiture.	Scene 7: As the Prioress approaches death, she relays her concerns and protectiveness about Blanche's future to Mother Marie. The Prioress recalls that, when she joined the convent, she had also chosen the same spiritual name as Blanche's. Upon the request of the Prioress, Mother Marie promises to watch over Blanche.	The same conversation occurs between the Prioress and Mother Marie.
	Scene 8: The Prioress invites Blanche into the infirmary, where she advises the postulant to honor God always.	The same conversation occurs between the Prioress and Blanche.
	Scene 9: Mother Marie and the doctor watch over the Prioress as death becomes more imminent during the night. The Prioress becomes delirious, describing hallucinations, and displays a heightened anxiety, along with end-of-life signs such as the "death rattle" (noises from the chest) and a deep voice. Mother Marie is concerned that the sisters will be aware of the Prioress' distress.	The same action occurs in the opera, but merged continuously from the previous scenes of Bernanos' play.
	Scene 10: Some nuns surround the bed and support the Prioress, who requests that Blanche be called from her bedroom cell. Mother Marie objects, but Blanche is brought back into the infirmary. The frantic Prioress conveys her fear of death, and an overwhelmed Blanche attempts to	The Prioress' death scene continues and ends the first Act.

	share the Prioress' message.	
		ACT II
		FIRST TABLEAU
	<p>Scene 11: Blanche and Constance are supposed to keep vigil over the body of the deceased Prioress in the chapel, but Blanche cannot handle the responsibility alone when Constance departs to find those who are supposed to take the next shift. Mother Marie catches Blanche attempting to run off from the chapel, scolds the postulant, and instructs her to go to bed immediately, absolved of praying for forgiveness for her weakness until the following day.</p>	<p>After Blanche and Constance sing from the Office of the Dead, the same action occurs, but for Poulenc this is the start of a new Act, rather than the conclusion of a tableau (as with Bernanos).</p>
	THIRD TABLEAU	
		FIRST INTERLUDE
	<p>Scene 1: Blanche and Constance prepare a cross of flowers. In discussing that day's coming election of a new Prioress, both Blanche and Constance express hope that Mother Marie of the Incarnation will become the Prioress, but they are aware that some of the nuns prefer Madame Lidoine (Mother Marie of St. Augustine). Constance speculates about whether people might die the wrong deaths, questioning: "We do not die each for ourselves, but each for</p>	<p>The same action and conversation occurs between Blanche and Constance.</p>

	another, or even each in place of another, who knows?" ³²⁸	
		SECOND TABLEAU
[9.] Sister Marie of the Incarnation revealed to M. de Villeroi (long after the nuns' execution, while writing a book on the nuns) that the new Prioress, Madame Lidoine (Sister Theresa of Saint Augustine), had hoped that Sister Marie would become the new Prioress, but the Church had chosen Madame Lidoine. The narrator also alludes to Sister Marie's role in persuading the nuns to take a vow of martyrdom.	Scene 2: Madame Lidoine (Mother Marie of St. Augustine) has been elected as the new Prioress. The new Prioress advises the nuns to shun martyrdom and, instead, to focus on prayer. Mother Marie of the Incarnation, the Subprioress, backs up the Prioress' instruction, arguing that obedience is equally as important as prayer.	The same discussion takes place, and then Mother Marie of the Incarnation leads her sisters in singing the <i>Ave Maria</i> .
[7.] The superior of the Carmelite Order, Monsignore Rigaud, had advised that all postulants should immediately become novices in the hope that the National Assembly, who had recently begun to seize church property (in 1789) would permit those who had already become members to remain in their convents even if a law banning religious orders were to be passed. The Monsignore recommended that all new novices should take the name Jésus au Jardin de l'Agonie because that title best described the current situation. The narrator notes that religious names are	Scene 3: The new Prioress and Mother Marie of the Incarnation discuss a letter from the Superior requesting that the postulants should receive the veil. Mother Marie indicates some concerns for Blanche's character, but the second Prioress reminds Mother Marie of the first Prioress' special interest in Blanche. Mother Marie defers to the Prioress, but she also suggests that Blanche will not have the time that other aristocratic nuns had to grow into their strength of character.	This scene is omitted.

³²⁸ Bernanos, tableau 3, scene 1, trans. Michael Legat (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1952).

<p>symbolically important for the Carmelites. The new Prioress, Madame Lidoine conferred with Sister Marie of the Incarnation about whether Blanche should be admitted as a novice.</p>		
<p>[8.] Sister Marie of the Incarnation confessed to M. de Villeroi (years after the Revolution) that she had objected to Blanche's investiture, and she argued that Blanche's actions before the execution had proven that Sister Marie was correct. Nonetheless, the second Prioress allowed Blanche to become a novice at Compiègne. Sister Marie offered her own soul in mystical protection of Blanche.</p>	<p>Scene 4: Blanche takes the veil in the chapel and becomes Blanche of the Agony of Christ. There is no dialogue in this scene.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
	<p>Scene 5: An apologetic Revolutionary delegate and the notary for the convent discuss a mandatory inventory and seizure of the convent's possessions, including land and the sisters' dowries that were given to the convent at the arrival of each nun. There is no dialogue in this scene.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
	<p>Scene 6: The second Prioress expresses concern about the convent's poverty due to the property seizure by Revolutionary forces. Blanche proposes that the nuns could earn money as tailors. The discussion among the group of nuns turns toward the dire situation outside of the</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>

	convent. The Prioress reaffirms her belief that the nuns will not be martyred.	
		SECOND INTERLUDE
	Scene 7: An unnamed sister informs the Prioress that Blanche's brother, the Chevalier, has arrived at an inconspicuous entrance to the convent, requesting permission to speak with Blanche. The Prioress authorizes the visit if Mother Marie of the Incarnation will remain present during the entire time.	The action in Poulenc's version is the same, except that Constance delivers the news about the Chevalier's visit.
		THIRD TABLEAU
[23.] Madame de Chalais, Blanche's former governess, arrived to bring Blanche some clothes, after religious attire had been banned. She informed the nuns about the dire situation in France, of which the Prioress had protected the sisters from learning. The governess seemed distraught and did not take comfort in an image of <i>le petit Roi de Gloire</i> . At some point after departing the convent, she eventually fled France for Belgium, where she died three days later.	Scene 8: In the parlor, the Chevalier implores Blanche, on behalf of their father, to leave the convent. Blanche's brother suggests that fear keeps Blanche at Compiègne, but Blanche asserts that she is there because of God's will and that she is no longer gripped by fear. She resists the plea for her to go with her brother, but seeks comfort from Mother Marie.	The same conversation occurs between Blanche, her brother, and Mother Marie of the Incarnation.
	Scene 9: As Blanche's brother prepares to leave, the Priest who leads the convent arrives and invites the Chevalier to dinner before his departure. The Priest argues that Blanche's destiny is to remain in the	This scene is omitted.

	convent. Then he argues that the Revolutionaries fear the nobility but hate the religiously devoted.	
[11.] A commission arrived to search the convent for women who might have been imprisoned there. As Sister Marie of the Incarnation, under the authority of the Prioress, led the men through the cells, they showed their disrespect for the ways of the convent. Blanche screamed in terror when the men looked into her cell. Sister Marie recalled, long after the fact, that no other screams during the Revolution were as distressed. The men believed that Blanche was being held captive, but when they tried to coax her out of her cell, she burst into tears and sought comfort from Sister Marie.	Scene 10: Two Commissaries demand to inspect the convent, in the belief that young women are imprisoned there against their will. Mother Marie of the Incarnation leads them to the private cells, where they first encounter an old nun who does not match their anticipated profile. Then the men command Mother Marie, whom they address in the Revolutionary manner as “citoyenne,” to hand over her keys in order for them to open the doors without her direction. They encounter a frightened Blanche and assert that she is a captive of the religious order. They intend to liberate Blanche from the convent, but when Blanche clings to Mother Marie, and her tearful reaction to the threat of being removed from her home convinces the men that she has chosen to reside in the convent.	This scene is omitted.
[12.] The inspectors interviewed the other nuns. The men accused Sister Marie of the Incarnation of being filled with fear, as Blanche had been, but Sister Marie challenged their definition of “fear.” She insisted that the nuns had nothing to fear in the earthly realm, and she indicated that their authority	Scene 11: The Commissaries interview the remaining nuns, including Mother Marie of the Incarnation, in the chapter-house, after requesting a blessing from the Prioress. The head Commissary argues that Catholicism poses a threat to the Revolution. Mother Marie insists that the nuns wish	This scene is omitted.

<p>was under the auspices of what God. When a commissioner mentioned the execution of the commander of the Bastille, Sister Marie responded with a strange ecstasy. The narrator explained that the Carmelites revered suffering and persecution because of the belief that one person's sacrifice could save many lives, as an extension of Christ's sacrifice. After Sister Marie's interrogation, she joyfully told the Prioress that the commissioners threatened her with martyrdom. The Prioress was not thrilled by the prospect.</p>	<p>to live freely according to the rules that govern their faith. The Commissaries then accuses the nuns of adhering to superstition and imprisoning young women in a "Bastille" that should be destroyed. Blanche follows Mother Marie out of the room.</p>	
<p>[13.] Blanche suffered a nervous breakdown, while her sisters enthusiastically anticipated the prospect of martyrdom. The Prioress was concerned that the nuns were indulging in fantasy because the prospect of martyrdom was not imminent.</p>		
		<p>FOURTH TABLEAU</p>
	<p>Scene 12: The Priest concludes the Mass in the chapel and announces that he has been banned from continuing in his role. He reminds the nuns that their wisdom comes from God, not from the world.</p>	<p>After the Priest announces that he had just led his final Mass, he leads the nuns in singing the <i>Ave verum corpus</i>.</p>
	<p>Scene 13: In the parlor, Blanche asks the priest what will happen to him. He assures her that he will continue his</p>	<p>The conversation between Blanche and the Priest takes place in the chapel in front of the other nuns, but Poulenc</p>

	work in disguise, visiting the convent as often as he and Mother Marie of the Incarnation can make the necessary arrangements. He also reveals to Blanche that the first Prioress had asked Mother Marie to watch over Blanche.	omitted the part where the Priest mentions the first Prioress' request.
	Scene 14: Blanche asks Mother Marie about the Priest's assertion. Mother Marie confirms that she was entrusted with overseeing Blanche, but then she instructs Blanche to rely solely on God for strength, instead of leaning on Mother Marie.	This scene is omitted.
	Scene 15: As some nuns gather fruit in the garden, Constance eats the fruit that she reaches from up in a tree she has climbed. Sister Mathilde accuses Constance of choosing a strange way to prepare for martyrdom, through indulgence of food. Constance claims that there are different methods of preparation and that, ultimately, martyrs serve not to consume but to be devoured.	This scene is omitted.
[14.] The Carmelites learned of a ban prohibiting the taking of vows. Sister Marie of the Incarnation suggested to the Prioress that Sister Constance, the novice who was supposed to be initiated as a nun soon, could take the vow in secret. Madame Lidoine countered, however, that the world	Scene 16: The convent has received a decree barring the taking of vows by nuns, which will prevent the novices Blanche and Constance from becoming full-fledged nuns. Mother Marie of the Incarnation challenges the second Prioress' decision to adhere to the law due to her commitment to the	This scene is omitted.

<p>would benefit from the nuns feeling the hatred of those outside of the Church. For this reason, the Order should adhere to the suppression of their vows. She further argued that, when Blanche became a novice, the proscription was merely rumor, whereas the current ban was enforceable.</p>	<p>first Prioress' request to watch over Blanche. Mother Marie believes that God's will includes the fulfillment of Blanche's destiny to uphold the name "the Agony of Christ." She ponders whether the weakest and most unworthy (Blanche) has an important function for the nuns of Compiègne. The Prioress says that Mother Marie could suffer due to weakness, also arguing that spies would discover a secret ceremony of vows and ensure that the nuns would be executed. Mother Marie expresses a desire to die as a martyr.</p>	
	<p>FOURTH TABLEAU</p>	
<p>[15.] The Prioress announced the ban to the nuns after leading them in the hymn of Teresa of Avila, their patron saint. She explained that their disappointment should be embraced as part of the essence of the Carmelite Order. The narrator notes that Blanche might not have understood the message, judging by her disturbing behavior following the conversation.</p>	<p>Scene 1: In the chapter house, the Prioress reads the prohibition that religious vows may no longer be taken and acknowledges the impact on Constance and Blanche. She encourages them to take a secret vow in their own hearts. The Prioress reaffirms her perspective that the nuns should not desire martyrdom because that desire would go against the spirit of their Order.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
	<p>Scene 2: Blanche speaks to Mother Marie of the Incarnation in the garden. She asks whether Mother Marie would have allowed the novices to take their vows in spite of the ban. Mother Marie explains that her responsibility is to</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>

	respect the Prioress' decision, especially due to the outright written proscription.	
[17.] After Sister Jeanne of the Infancy of Jesus has sewn the shirt for <i>le petit Roi de Gloire</i> , the National Assembly confiscated all church property, including the crown and scepter of the <i>petit Roi</i> , leaving him with only the handmade shirt.	Scene 3: A crowd singing the Revolutionary hymn <i>Carmagnole</i> follows the Commissaries, and they storm the convent. Among the destruction, <i>le petit Roi de Gloire</i> is tossed aside after his mantle and crown have been stripped off the statue. The sisters, who do not witness the episode, begin to pray in the chapter house under the leadership of Mother Marie of the Incarnation. The Prioress defends her sisters.	This scene is omitted.
[16.] Sister Jeanne of the Infancy of Jesus sewed a shirt for the <i>le petit Roi de Gloire</i> . Her waning vision, as she was nearly 100 years old, affected the quality of her sewing. She told Blanche that the little king would visit her on Christmas Eve.	Scene 4: In this brief scene, the elderly nun Mother Jeanne completes an item of clothing for the <i>petit Roi</i> , and Blanche assists her in covering the statue. Mother Jean prays that on Christmas Eve, when the statue is carried to the nuns' cells, Blanche will receive courage from the <i>petit Roi</i> .	[This scene is shifted to the end of Act II, after the proclamation of expulsion (Tableau 4, Scene 11 of Bernanos' play). The impact is that the Christmas scene heightens the impact of the act's conclusion. The consequence, from a dramatic standpoint, is that the clandestine Good Friday and Easter services of Bernanos' version are skipped over in Poulenc's opera.] Mother Jeanne announces that the Prioress must depart for Paris, and then she expresses her hope that the <i>petit Roi</i> will give Banche courage. This statement telescopes directly onto the action of the following scene.
[18.] When the Prioress, Madame	Scene 5: On Christmas Eve, the <i>petit</i>	[This incident concludes Act II of

<p>Lidoine, brought <i>le petit Roi de Gloire</i> to the sisters' cells, they rejoiced in his simplicity, observing that Christ was born in a poor stable in Bethlehem. Although Blanche was at first moved at the fragility of the figure—to which Sister Marie of the Incarnation countered that the statue was small but powerful—Blanche suddenly realized that his crown was absent when she bent down to kiss him. She heard the <i>Carmagnole</i> hymn outside and jumped, dropping the statue. She exclaimed that the <i>petit Roi</i> was dead, and now they had only the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God).</p>	<p><i>Roi</i> makes his appearance in the cells, brought by the Prioress, Mother Marie of the Incarnation, and two sisters. When Blanche handles the statue, she reacts to his small, impoverished appearance. She starts at the sound of the <i>Carmagnole</i> from the streets, and the statue falls to the ground, breaking into pieces. She laments that in the absence of the <i>petit Roi</i>, they have only the Lamb of God.</p>	<p>Poulenc's opera.] Blanche remarks that the <i>petit Roi</i> is small and feeble, and then she drops the statue in reaction to the sound of the crowd outside singing the Revolutionary hymn "<i>Ça ira</i>." She also makes the statement about the <i>petit Roi</i>'s death, and the remaining Lamb of God.</p>
<p>[19.] The Prioress summoned Blanche for a private visit. First, the Prioress led Blanche in the Hymn of St. Teresa, but Blanche changed the ending, instead of repeating the correct words. When Blanche asked for "Zuflucht oder Todesangst" (refuge or mortal terror), the Prioress considered commenting on the changed text but did not say anything about Blanche's prayer. Madame Lidoine discussed the possibility, however, of sending Blanche home, due to Blanche's increasing anxiety. Blanche objected and suggested that her religious fear was instilled in her due the secret of her name. The Prioress wrote</p>	<p>Scene 6: In the Prioress' cell, the Prioress leads Blanche in saying the Prayer of Mother St. Teresa, with Blanche repeating each line after the Prioress. Blanche modifies the ending, however, to request protection or "mortal anguish." The Prioress has been contemplating the possibility of sending Blanche back to her family home, but Blanche argues that her place is in the convent. She speculates that God wishes for her to be afraid.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>

<p>extensively about Blanche in her journal, speculating that God might have communicated His mortal fear to the weak novice. Ultimately, Madame Lidoine decided to allow Blanche to remain in the convent, and she removed Sister Marie of the Incarnation from the role of novice mistress, taking over the job herself, which caused tension between the Prioress and Sister Marie. The Prioress advised Blanche to seek peace and remain loyal to her fear.</p>		
	<p>Scene 7: The Priest arrives for a clandestine Good Friday service that includes religious devotees from outside of the convent, as well as the nuns. The Priest explains his increasingly difficult situation, and he preaches that Christ lived and died among the poor. He promises the nuns that he will see the nuns again on Easter Sunday.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
<p>[20.] The French Carmelite, Madame Acarie, was beatified by the Church. The Priest, who had not sworn allegiance to the Revolutionary government, led the nuns in a Mass in honor of the saint. Sister Marie of the Incarnation was especially thrilled about the beatification because she had decided to become a nun while standing over the grave of Madame</p>	<p>Scene 8: On Easter morning, the sisters anticipate the Priest's arrival. They discuss the situation surrounding priests and the pious, and Mother Marie of the Incarnation once again raises the issue of martyrdom. The Prioress insists that martyrdom should not be a conscious choice. Constance explains that she is conflicted about her love of life versus her fearlessness</p>	<p>[A brief portion of the text from this scene appears toward the beginning of Poulenc's Tableau 4, immediately after the material from Bernanos' Tableau 3, Scene 13.] When the Priest departs after conversing with Blanche, Constance and the other nuns wonder why no Frenchmen will defend the Priests. The Prioress' assertion that the nuns are not supposed to decide</p>

<p>Acarie. The repaired <i>petit Roi</i> had reappeared at the altar with a wreath of flowers, provided by Sister Jeanne, in lieu of the crown.</p>	<p>to die.</p>	<p>whether to become martyrs, in response to Mother Marie of the Incarnation's desire to take a vow of martyrdom, is also included.</p>
<p>[21.] Sister Marie of the Incarnation pushed for a vow of martyrdom, inspired by the festival for Madame Acarie. She believed that she had an obligation to offer penance for the sins of her royal heritage, and a letter from Madame Elizabeth of France reaffirmed her commitment. Madame Lidoine refused to lead the nuns in a vow of martyrdom, however, because of her concerns about the one weak member among them. Sister Marie referred to Blanche as "<i>la Faiblesse</i>," instead of "<i>la Force</i>," but the Prioress argued that Blanche was named "Jesus in the Garden of the Agony."</p>	<p>Scene 9: After the Easter sermon, some of the nuns talk about the Priest's sermon while making dresses. They ponder whether death should cause fear. Sister Marthe asserts that Christ was consumed by anguish in the garden of the Mount of Olives, save for the divine core of His being. Blanche is mocked for her timidity with a play on her name: 'Blanche de la Faiblesse' (Blanche of the Weak).</p>	<p>[This scene is omitted, except for one statement, which is transferred to the Prioress and inserted into the prison scene in Act III of Poulenc's opera.] As the nuns are in prison contemplating their impending execution, the Prioress comments on Christ's anguish in the garden of the Mount of Olives.</p>
<p>[22.] The Priest requested that the Prioress travel to Paris in order for the two to visit. Sister Marie of the Incarnation was left in charge of the convent.</p>	<p>Scene 10: In the absence of the Prioress, who has made a trip to Paris, the nuns must endure the sounds of the mob outside the convent, including sounds of the Revolutionary hymn "<i>Ça Ira</i>." The Priest returns to them when he cannot escape the convent, but then he departs again to stow away in secret.</p>	<p>[This part of the tableau follows the Prioress' statement on martyrdom.] The Priest arrives and then departs before the Commissaries burst in. Instead of singing "<i>Ça ira</i>," the mob instructs the nuns to open the convent doors.</p>
	<p>Scene 11: The convent is forced open, and the nuns are instructed to prepare for evacuation of their home. A sympathetic Commissary (formerly a</p>	<p>The proclamation of expulsion and exchange between the sympathetic Commissary and Mother Marie of the Incarnation takes place, but without</p>

	religious devotee) speaks with Mother Marie of the Incarnation, alerting her that Blanche has fearfully been in hiding alongside the Priest. Mother Marie speaks highly of the possibility of martyrdom.	mention of Blanche, who is not in hiding, or the Priest. The Commissary warns Mother Marie of a blacksmith who is an informant.
	Scene 12: This scene, without dialogue, reveals the condition of the convent after it has been ransacked.	This scene is omitted.
		ACT III
		FIRST TABLEAU
[24.] Sister Marie of the Incarnation, as the temporary head of the convent while the Prioress is in Paris, encouraged the nuns to take a vow of martyrdom. Some of the nuns showed signs of dismay, and Sister Constance expressed a specific concern about being the last among them to die. Sister Marie assured Constance that, according to the Carmelite tradition in other matters, the youngest would go first, rather than last. Then she stopped short of pointing out that Blanche was actually the youngest in the convent. Although Sister Marie explained that she was not attempting to compel anyone to commit to the vow, even Blanche, whom she expected to take advantage of the opportunity to evade the vow, insisted that she would accept the vow of martyrdom. When the Prioress	Scene 13: The nuns gather in the Sacristy, but the Prioress is still away from the convent. Mother Marie of the Incarnation asks the Priest to speak to the sisters about a vow of martyrdom. The Priest insists that his role can be only to receive and bless the vow, not to influence the nuns. Blanche has returned, and Mother Marie claims that Blanche had been in hiding as part of an unexplainable circumstance. Mother Marie asks the nuns to fill out a secret ballot to vote on whether to take the vow. A single ballot dissents, which is enough reason for Mother Marie to abandon the possibility of martyrdom, and the nuns suspect that Blanche cast the lone negative ballot. Constance states that she was in opposition to the vow but has now changed her mind, and the nuns are instructed to take the vow in pairs,	The action is the same as in Bernanos' play.

<p>returned, she questioned Blanche's intention, but Blanche affirmed that she did not want to be disloyal (referring to the Prioress' instruction for Blanche to be loyal to her fear). Constance and Blanche were beside each other as the vow was being made, with the "<i>Ça ira</i>" sounding from outside the convent, but then Blanche disappeared before the others rose to take communion.</p>	<p>starting with the youngest, as the Priest blesses them. As the noise outside escalates, a momentary distraction allows Blanche to flee the convent.</p>	
<p>[25.] The Prioress received a letter from the Marquis de la Force, with an account that Blanche became ill after her arrival at home in Paris. The Marquis, who had previously mocked the Church and the authority of the monarchy, now found himself advocating both of those institutions. By September, the Marquis and many of his friends were imprisoned.</p>	<p>Scene 14: When the Prioress returns, she learns of the vow and also that Blanche is no longer in the convent. She expresses concern that the nuns' salvation in martyrdom will be at the expense of Blanche's salvation. Mother Marie of the Incarnation requests permission to speak with Blanche in Paris when circumstances permit. She asks forgiveness for what she has done, and hopes that she will be the only person to suffer in atonement.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
	<p>FIFTH TABLEAU</p>	
	<p>Scene 1: This scene, at Blanche's family home, is almost completely silent. Blanche becomes scared and screams when a disguised man appears. The man, Antoine (a servant), informs Blanche that her father is in prison and that they must attempt to get him released.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
<p>[26.] The narrator, M. de Villeroi, shifts</p>	<p>Scene 2: In the prison, disorder is</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>

<p>his perspective to that of a spectator, rather than relaying events through third-party sources. In disguise as a servant, he searched throughout prisons for the addressee of his letter, but later learned that the addressee had fled to the Rhineland. During M. de Villeroy's quest, he witnessed the Marquis de la Force's execution.</p>	<p>prevalent, and the aristocratic inmates converse with a jailer, who has called the Marquis de Guiches for interrogation. At the end of the scene, another guard calls the Marquis de la Force to be interrogated.</p>	
<p>[27.] The crowd seemed as a single mass without individuals until a girl named Mademoiselle de Sombreul cried "<i>Vive la nation</i>" before drinking from a cup of human blood in order to save her father from being killed. A Revolutionary guard forced the same cup to Blanche's mouth, referring to the act as taking "communion, perhaps recognizing her status as a former nun due to her stance or short hair. A group of women then carried Blanche on their shoulders through the streets. These women assured M. de Villeroy that they would accompany Blanche home and serve her a meal. M. de Villeroy notes that mobs were not always bad and that they were indeed capable of anything, including acts of kindness.</p>	<p>Scene 3: The Marquis de la Force is granted his freedom when Antoine presents Blanche and asserts that the Republic had rescued her from the convent. He claims that Blanche would like to thank the Revolutionaries for liberating her.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
	<p>Scene 4: Back at home, the Marquis de la Force comforts Blanche in this silent scene, while some of the</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>

	servants have returned with Antoine.	
		FIRST INTERLUDE
	Scene 5: Three officers address the nuns at Compiègne and thank them for their disciplined behavior. They officers warn, however, against associating with counter-Revolutionaries, including priests. After the men depart, the Prioress and Mother Marie of the Incarnation discuss the consequences of the Priest returning to conduct a clandestine Mass.	The actions of this scene are included in the opera.
		SECOND TABLEAU
	Scene 6: The Priest blesses the nuns in this scene without dialogue.	This scene is omitted.
[28.] The “September Women” (as they were nicknamed during the Revolution) occupied Blanche’s family home and watched over her. Rumors differed on whether Blanche actively participated in the Revolutionary activities, but Blanche most likely became more withdrawn. M. de Villeroi suspects that the last the nuns had heard of Blanche’s circumstance was when the Marquis de la Force wrote to the Prioress. The Prioress did not comment further on Blanche in her journal, and her one entry from that period was to reflect on the impact of the king’s execution. The nuns had believed that France’s salvation	Scene 7: The Prioress and Mother Marie of the Incarnation learn from the Priest that the Marquis de la Force has been executed. The Priest suggests that Blanche should be brought back to the convent in order to protect her from the same fate that her father encountered, while recognizing that her life is still in jeopardy even at the convent. Mother Marie offers to retrieve Blanche, who is being treated like a servant in her own home, and the Priest provides a note addressed to his niece, the actress Rose Ducor, with information about how to assist Blanche. He hopes that Blanche can reach Ducor’s home.	This scene is omitted.

<p>depended on the safety of the king, and therefore, they (especially Sister Marie of the Incarnation) were concerned about the country's future.</p>		
<p>[29.] Around the time that Sister Marie of the Incarnation received a summons to appear before a tribunal in Paris, the Carmelite nuns of the Rue d'Enfer in Paris requested that the <i>petit Roi de Gloire</i> be sent to them in order to protect the prince. Although Sister Jeanne was devastated that the statue for which she had cared for eight decades would leave her (and sewed a new mantle out of an old habit for the <i>petit Roi</i>), Sister Marie and the Prioress carried the figure with them when they traveled to Paris. Sister Marie appeared in court to defend her income, and she carefully avoided saying anything that might result in her arrest, in order to safeguard her desire for real martyrdom alongside her sisters. During the Paris visit, she and the Prioress learned of the prince's tragic fate and that the other group of Carmelites really wanted to use the statue as a protective aid for dying children.</p>	<p>Scene 8: Mother Marie of the Incarnation finds Blanche in her home, where she is cooking. Blanche refuses to return to the convent with Mother Marie. The subprioress gives her the address of Rose Ducor and promises to wait for the novice until the following evening. Blanche insists that she will not leave her home because she believes that no one will search for her, but Mother Marie believes that Blanche, whom she had addressed as Sister Agony of the Agony of Christ, will indeed meet her at Ducor's home.</p>	<p>[In Poulenc's opera, this scene occurs in the library at the le Force home.] The dialogue between Mother Marie and Blanche is preserved, including the mention of actress Rose Ducor.</p>
		<p>SECOND INTERLUDE</p>
<p>[30.] Sister Marie's lawyer, M. Sézille, arranged for transportation back to Compiègne, but when the Prioress and</p>	<p>Scene 9: Blanche walks on a street, where the sounds of the "<i>Ça Ira</i>" amidst the noise of the busy street. As</p>	<p>This interlude takes place in the Quarter of the Bastille, launching into the third tableau.</p>

<p>Sister Marie were preparing to board their stagecoach, Sister Marie first spotted a some priests on the way to their execution and the a group of women who followed behind.</p>	<p>a troop passes with a human head on a stake, others on the street hide in a courtyard, where they eventually begin to discuss the situation in Paris. Blanche learns from a resident of Compiègne that the Carmelite nuns have been arrested, but when she is asked whether she has connections in the town, she denies having ever been there.</p>	
<p>[31.] Among the women, who mostly seemed like an indistinguishable collective, Sister Marie believed that she saw Blanche. She exclaimed that she finally understood the mortal angst, and she followed the women.</p>	<p>Scene 10: Blanche goes to Rose Ducor's home with the hope of saving her sisters from the guillotine. Mother Marie of the Incarnation had not heard the news, and she rejoices at the thought of the sisters' potential martyrdom. She encourages Blanche to return to Compiègne with her in order for them to join their sisters, not in order to save them but, rather, to be imprisoned alongside them. Blanche questions Mother Marie's focus on death, and she declares that she does not want to die. As she runs out, she encounters the Priest, from whom she also flees.</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>
<p>[32.] Sister Marie wondered if she had imagined Blanche's face among the otherwise chaotic, unrecognizable mob. Because the Prioress had already returned to Compiègne, Sister Marie would have to travel alone, but she is unable to leave the city due to</p>	<p>Scene 11: When the Priest asks about the cause of Blanche's fright, Mother Marie explains that Blanche has rebelled again. Mother Marie would like to return to Compiègne, but the Priest advises her to remain in Paris. He points out that the nuns might not</p>	<p>This scene is omitted.</p>

<p>blockades at the city gates. In the meantime, Sister Marie learned of her sisters' imprisonment, and she resigned herself to the more difficult fate of <i>not</i> being a martyr. At first, she stayed at her lawyer's home, where she met with M. de Villeroi, but then she moved to the home of the actress Rose Ducor.</p>	<p>have been condemned to death, and he instructs her to write the Prioress for further instruction.</p>	
		THIRD TABLEAU
	<p>Scene 12: The sisters discuss their discomfort in prison. The Prioress assures them that they will become accustomed to their environment now that they have almost survived the first night. She informs them that, although she was absent during the vow of martyrdom, she also accepts it, and she will speak on their behalf before the tribunal. Sister Constance believes that Blanche will return, based on a dream that she had during the night. The Prioress believes that the youngest nuns will be spared execution.</p>	<p>The conversation among the nuns occurs, including both the Prioress' pronouncement of the vow of martyrdom as well as Constance's recount of her dream.</p>
<p>[33.] The nuns of Compiègne were condemned to death after being defended by Sister Marie's lawyer.</p>	<p>Scene 13: In this silent scene, the tribunal condemns the nuns to death for their conspiratorial acts, including meeting in secret, against the Republic. Mother Marie of the Incarnation is included in the sentence <i>in absentia</i>.</p>	<p>Poulenc added dialogue to this pronouncement, with a jailer specifying the names of the condemned nuns and their crimes.</p>
	<p>Scene 14: The Prioress explains to her</p>	<p>The Prioress' directive to the nuns</p>

	sisters that she had hoped to save them, as a mother wishes to protect her children. She asks them to be obedient to her as their end nears.	follows the jailer's declaration of the nuns' impending execution.
		THIRD INTERLUDE
[36.] The <i>petit Roi de Gloire</i> , discovered on a street and covered in mud, arrived at Rose Ducor's home. Abbé Kiener led the others in the Easter prayer, <i>Regina coeli laetare</i> . M. de Villeroi ponders the emotional impact of the nuns' execution and Blanche's death. He ends the letter by requesting a reply from his addressee.	Scene 15: This scene, without dialogue, reveals that the <i>petit Roi de Gloire</i> has arrived at Rose Ducor's home, where Mother Marie of the Incarnation is still in hiding.	This scene is omitted.
[34.] The priest Abbé Kiener (different from the convent priest) planned to attend the execution and quietly give the nuns absolution, disguised among the verses of the <i>Carmagnole</i> . Sister Marie, for whom an arrest warrant had been issued, begged to accompany the Priest, but he refused her request. She knew that the nuns planned to sing as they marched to the scaffold, and she wanted to sing along with them. The Priest reminded her of Christ's agony and of Mary's silence during the crucifixion.	Scene 16: The Priest, at his niece Rose Ducor's home, reports to Mother Marie of the Incarnation that the nuns have been condemned to death. Mother Marie wishes to return to Compiègne, but the Priest directs her not to join her sisters. Mother Marie feels dishonored because she cannot fulfill her vow of martyrdom, but the Priest reminds her to think only of her dedication to God, not of her sisters.	The exchange between the Priest and Mother Marie occupies the third interlude.
		FOURTH TABLEAU
[35.] M. Sézille requested that M. de Villeroi accompany him to the site of the execution, in order to identify Blanche, who was rumored to be in	Scene 17: At the Place of the Revolution, the nuns await their execution as the Priest, disguised among a crowd of spectators, murmurs	Several significant changes differentiate Poulenc's tableau from Bernanos. The crowd sings with closed mouths (<i>bouche fermée</i>) as they

<p>attendance along with the September Women. M. de Villeroi reflects on the guillotine's indiscriminate behavior as a machine that enforces chaos. The Carmelites sang the <i>Salve Regina</i> (commonly sung when a nun was dying) and the beginning of the <i>Veni, Creator Spiritus</i>. The mob was stunned into silence as the voices dropped off one-by-one. Eventually, only two voices remained, and then just one. Suddenly from the crowd, a frail voice rose up, singing the <i>Veni creator</i>, but seemingly without fear. The Revolutionary women attacked Blanche and murdered her from within the crowd, but M. de Villeroi felt that the Reign of Terror would end soon.</p>	<p>the absolution and makes a furtive sign of the cross. The nuns sing the <i>Salve Regina</i> and the <i>Veni, Creator Spiritus</i> as they approach the scaffold (otherwise, there is no dialogue in this scene), while the crowd watches in silence. After her sisters have faced the guillotine, Blanche, also hidden in the crowd, begins to sing the <i>Veni creator spiritus</i>. She walks toward the scaffold with an expression that appears to be devoid of fear. A group of women shove Blanche toward the scaffold, where she disappears from sight. Her voice suddenly ceases. Although the scene includes a partial text of the <i>Veni, Creator Spiritus</i>, there is no written dialogue.</p>	<p>witness the execution. The nuns, who start as a unified chorus but eventually break apart into harmonized parts as the number of voices decreases, do not sing the <i>Veni, Creator Spiritus</i>. Finally, Blanche does sing the <i>Veni, Creator Spiritus</i>, setting her apart from her sisters. She sings after she approaches the scaffold, however, rather than as a catalyst for being pushed to the scaffold. She forces herself through the crowd with no pressure from the crowd, after making eye contact with Sister Constance, last to mount the scaffold, who had predicted that the two novices would die on the same day. The crowd disperses after Blanche's voice cuts off.</p>
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