
Deborah Williamson, B.M., M.M., A. D.

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APPROVED:

Linda Di Fiore, Major Professor
Cody Garner, Related Field Professor
Lenora McCroskey, Committee Member
Graham Phipps, Chair of Graduate Studies in College of Music
James C. Scott, Dean of the College of Music
C. Neal Tate, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse School of Graduate Studies
Lili Boulanger was an important composer of early twentieth century French music. Her compositional style represents a development and mastery of musical techniques of the great composers of her time including Fauré, Debussy and Wagner combined with her own creative expression. The result is a compelling musical language that was uniquely her own. She held an important place among her contemporaries in Paris and her accomplishments were considered newsworthy during her lifetime (1893-1918). She obtained a much sought-after publishing contract with Ricordi. Her more famous sister, Nadia Boulanger, felt that Lili was the better composer of the two, and her peers and music professors clearly felt that both her musical and personal qualities were extraordinary. Evidence of her intelligence, creativity, and artistic growth can be seen in her music.

As the first woman to win the Prix de Rome (July 5, 1913), Lili Boulanger, unlike Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn, or Alma Mahler, was acknowledged and acclaimed during her lifetime for her skill as a composer. Yet, nearly a century later the music of this talented French composer is not as well known as it deserves to be. In an
effort to discover the reasons for this relative anonymity, this document will examine Lili Boulanger’s life including her family and childhood influences, musical training, preparation for the *Prix de Rome* and the influence of Claude Debussy and other composers. This document will discuss her mature compositional style, specifically as it is reflected in her song cycle, *Clairières dans le ciel*. The text will be examined in conjunction with the literary movement of symbolism in 20th century France and the symbolist poet, Francis Jammes, with special attention to the composer’s personal identification with the poetry. Considerations of the musical setting of the cycle will include the melodic style as it relates to the text, the harmonic idiom and its relation to the poetry, rhythmic and metrical devices used, formal devices and the relationship of the piano accompaniment and the voice. Performance considerations for this cycle include the recommended transpositions if performed by soprano rather than the tenor voice for which it was originally composed and the level of difficulty from an interpretative as well as technical standpoint.
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CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

Introduction

Lili Boulanger was an important composer of early twentieth century French music. Her compositional style represents a development and mastery of musical techniques of the great composers of her time including Fauré, Debussy and Wagner combined with her own creative expression. The result is a compelling musical language that was uniquely her own. She held an important place among her contemporaries in Paris and her accomplishments were considered newsworthy during her lifetime (1893-1918). She obtained a much sought-after publishing contract with Ricordi. Her more famous sister, Nadia Boulanger, felt that Lili was the better composer of the two, and her peers and music professors clearly felt that both her musical and personal qualities were extraordinary. Evidence of her intelligence, creativity, and artistic growth can be seen in her music.

As the first woman to win the *Prix de Rome* (July 5, 1913), Lili Boulanger, unlike Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn, or Alma Mahler, was acknowledged and acclaimed during her lifetime for her skill as a composer. Yet, nearly a century later the music of this talented French composer is not as well known as it deserves to be. In an effort to discover the reasons for this relative anonymity, this document will examine Lili Boulanger’s life including her family and childhood influences, musical training,
preparation for the *Prix de Rome* and the influence of Claude Debussy and other composers. This paper will discuss her mature compositional style, specifically as it is reflected in her song cycle, *Clairières dans le ciel*. The text will be examined in conjunction with the literary movement of symbolism in 20th century France and the symbolist poet, Francis Jammes, with special attention to the composer’s personal identification with the poetry. Considerations of the musical setting of the cycle will include the melodic style as it relates to the text, the harmonic idiom and its relation to the poetry, rhythmic and metrical devices used, formal devices and the relationship of the piano accompaniment and the voice. Performance considerations for this cycle include the recommended transpositions if performed by soprano rather than the tenor voice for which it was originally composed and the level of difficulty from an interpretative as well as technical standpoint.

**Family and Childhood Influences**

Lili Boulanger enjoyed a rich heritage of musical and artistic talent within her family. Her paternal grandfather, Frédéric Boulanger, was a cellist, vocal coach, composer, and professor of music. In 1797 he won the first prize in cello at the Conservatoire National in Paris, and later served on its faculty. His wife, Lili’s grandmother, also attended the Conservatoire where, in 1809, she won first prize in voice and, in 1810, first prize in *comédie lyrique*. In 1812 she joined the *Théâtre de l’Opéra Comique* as a regular member of the company, where she was extremely successful as evidenced by reviews which proclaimed her voice as one of great beauty, both brilliant and facile, and reported the many encores demanded by her audiences time after time at
the end of her performances. Lili’s father, Ernest Boulanger, could hardly help but be
influenced by the colorful artistic circle to which he was exposed as a child. Surrounded
by composers, performers, poets, playwrights, librettists, and intellectuals of all sorts, he
quite naturally took to the artistic world himself. Like his mother, he attended the Paris
Conservatoire, winning the *Prix de Rome* Competition in composition in 1835. He had a
considerable reputation as a composer in musical circles and collaborated with such
librettists as Michel Carré and Jules Barbier for some of his operas. He was a professor of
voice at the Conservatoire when he married Raissa Mychetsky, a Russian princess who
was a gifted singer and highly educated, having simultaneously learned German, French,
and Russian as a child before going to France to complete her studies.

Into this atmosphere of highly talented and artistic people Lili and her older sister
Nadia were born. In a conversation with Bruno Monsaingeon, Nadia described their
home life:

> At home everyone made music; music was the starting point and the center of our
> life. My younger sister Lili played music; we were extraordinarily close and
> attached but quite independent. She roamed about, musically; playing the piano a
> little, the violin a little, the organ a little, composing. She already had ideas, some
> of which were developed in a very moving way. I believe that her whole talent
> was rooted in her first knowledge of grief. When our father died, she was six
> years old. And at six she understood what death was; that it is the grief of
> surviving someone you love. She never forgot that up to her own death; she never
> forgot any detail of our father’s life. . . . She was so gifted that, when still a baby,
> at two and a half, she used to sing all the time. Moreover, much later, Fauré quite
> often used to come to accompany her gladly because she could sight read a
> melody of which she might not have been expected to understand anything but of
> which she seemed to understand everything.¹

¹ Bruno Monsaingeon, *Mademoiselle: Conversations with Nadia Boulanger* (Manchester:
Besides Fauré, others of Lili’s father’s close friends were the composers Charles Gounod and Massenet, the organist and composer Theodore Dubois and many other notable musicians. Even after her father’s death, Lili’s mother continued to cultivate the friendship of creative artists. Both Nadia and Lili Boulanger responded to this rich cultural environment and continued the family tradition in their own ways. Nadia became one of the most famous composition teachers of her time, while Lili’s destiny as a composer was cut short, although we are left with a tantalizing sample of what it might have been.

Musical Training

Lili Boulanger’s musical training was necessarily sporadic due to an illness which modern medicine would call Crohn’s disease. Though she was able to audit her sister’s classes at the Conservatoire, and later to study privately with Nadia for a time, Lili was unable to undertake systematic studies in music because of her condition. Between 1905 and 1909 she was in such poor health that she was frequently sent to various spas. Nevertheless, she continued her music study and began an intensive reading program at home of the Greek classics and, important to this discussion, French symbolist poets. In 1907 she began composing, which led her to seek out training in theory and composition two years later from George Caussade and Paul Vidal beginning in 1909. Although her education was irregular, it was also guided by the most accomplished teachers from the Paris Conservatoire, including Gabriel Fauré.
Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Lili Boulanger was her single-minded and fierce preparation for the *Prix de Rome* competition. This prestigious award was offered by the French Académie des Beaux-Arts and included a funded period of study in Rome for winning artists and composers. Previous winners included Berlioz, Gounod, Bizet, Massenet, and Debussy.

In spite of several severe bouts of ill health, Lili Boulanger won the *Prix de Rome* on July 5, 1913. Her winning composition was a cantata entitled *Faust et Hélène*, perhaps the work for which she is still best known. As the first woman to win this award, the newspapers heralded her feat, and Lili Boulanger became “an international celebrity almost overnight. By July 7, 1913, accounts of her triumph . . . had already reached the United States,”\(^2\) and she soon signed an exclusive contract with Ricordi to publish her music. As a part of the *Prix de Rome* award, Lili took up residency at the Villa de Medici in Rome, but was forced to return to Paris because of the outbreak of World War I. It was during this year that she composed the song cycle *Clairières dans le ciel*. Between 1908 and her death in 1918, at the age of 25, Lili Boulanger composed over fifty works in a variety of genres, but concentrated primarily on sacred and secular vocal music, including music for chorus with and without orchestra, vocal chamber works, songs, and an opera which she did not live to finish.\(^3\)


\(^3\) For a complete list of works by Lili Boulanger see Appendix 1.
The Influence of Claude Debussy and Other Composers

The influence of Lili Boulanger’s teachers upon her compositional skills and style are evident in her use of “a neo-Romantic style, similar to that of the music of Gabriel Fauré, Marcel Dupré, or Charles-Marie Widor.”\(^4\) Chromaticisms and contrapuntal textures characterize her earliest works. Possessed of wide musical interests, Lili Boulanger was exposed to and reacted to the music of composers from the great masters of the sixteenth century to Wagner. Another influence of great importance was the music of Claude Debussy.

The Paris musical scene being dominated by Debussy during Lili Boulanger’s formative years, it is scarcely surprising that his is the influence most readily discernible in her work; but she was far from being a mere Debussyiste and a large proportion of her music shows preoccupation with pedal points and ostinati, both decidedly un-Debussyan.\(^5\)

Some elements that Boulanger’s works have in common with Debussy, however, are “a . . . preference for . . . symbolist poets, an emphasis on subtlety and understatement, occasional use of exotic subjects [Oriental, Spanish, American], and melodies and harmonies that focus on whole-tone and pentatonic scales.”\(^6\) Lili Boulanger often chose harmonies for their coloristic effect, creating tonal ambiguities, a trait shared with both Debussy and Wagner. Also in common with Debussy, the vocal lines of *Clairières dans le ciel* are frequently declamatory following the text in both stress and length. The accent


marks above many of the notes create a visual as well as aural similarity to Debussy’s vocal writing. A tribute to Wagner is prominently demonstrated in the sixth song of the cycle in which the composer employs a direct quote from the prelude to Tristan while accompaniment patterns in the cycle are often reminiscent of Fauré in their repetitive motion.

Mature Compositional Style

In spite of stylistic affinities with other composers, Lili Boulanger “found her own musical personality almost at once” 7 and her compositions stand on their own merits. “The works of her final years . . . testify to the emergence of a distinctive musical personality and are clearly the product of a distinguished, markedly individual creative intelligence.” 8 Her emphasis upon subtlety through impressionistic devices such as harmonic ambiguity and her judicious use of timbre and dynamics result in works of great dramatic impact. She was ever conscientious to explore the potential of voices and instruments and to make idiomatic use of them. Lili Boulanger’s mature compositional style including treatment of text, melodic and harmonic writing, use of rhythm and meter, formal devices and idiomatic use of voice and piano accompaniment is exemplified in the song cycle Clairières dans le ciel.


CHAPTER II

THE TEXT OF *CLAIRIÈRES DANS LE CIEL*

French Symbolist Poetry

Symbolism was a major literary movement based in Paris in the 19th century that had widespread influence into the 20th century. Associated with other literary movements such as decadence, aestheticism, neoromanticism, hermeticism, modernism, imagism, and impressionism, symbolism retained certain characteristics identifiable to its own aesthetic and mystique. The goal of symbolism was to define the indeterminate in human emotions and in nature through the art of refined ambiguity. The great poets Baudelaire and Verlaine were associated with this movement but it was Stephane Mallarmé (1842-1895) whose poems served as the theoretical model for symbolism. According to Mallarmé, a symbol was created in one of two ways: from the outside in or, conversely, from the inside out. In the first instance, an object such as a statue or flower had a mysteriously haunting effect upon the poet, making him gradually aware of a seemingly unrelated emotion. In the second, an emotion such as love, hope, or despair was projected onto an exterior object such as a landscape, the sun, or the moon. The resulting ambivalence is similar to the way in which music affects us in a sensual and often inexplicable manner. It is this affinity with music that inspired the Paris symbolist poets to name Richard Wagner, the first to promote the coalition between music, poetry and all of the arts, as their patron saint. More attuned to invoking a mood than explicitly setting a scene, symbolist poets considered words primarily for their color and phonemic
structures rather than their meaning. For instance, in order to invoke a dark or somber mood, words containing darker vowels were chosen, with brighter, higher vowels for moments of joy. The result was poetry containing beauty of sound with music infused into the very words themselves. It is not surprising that such poetry has inspired so many musical settings.

About the Poet, Francis Jammes

Francis Jammes (1868-1938) “belongs to the symbolist movement by virtue of the liberties he took with versification and syntax, but diverges from that poetic movement in his clarity.” His works are generally divided into two periods with the year of 1905 as the point of division. Before 1905 his verses were free in form with somewhat pagan subject matter and a lyrical style. In 1905 Jammes experienced a return to the Catholic faith of his childhood, which is reflected in his works by more religious subjects and regular verse. His love of nature is one defining characteristic throughout his writings. Another is an affinity for young girls who are innocent, frail and graceful as is the heroine in Clairières dans le ciel.

Jammes’s TRISTESSES Compared to the Version Used by Lili Boulanger

Because a song is a combination of words and music, the literary climate of a period is of basic importance to a composer. Lili Boulanger gravitated to the French symbolist poets above all others, especially Francis Jammes and Maurice Maeterlinck (Attente, 1912).

9 Rosenstiel, The Life and Works of Lili Boulanger, p. 263.
Jammes’s original poetic cycle entitled *Tristesses* (1906) included twenty-four poems in which

. . . the poet expresses, in accordance with the Symbolist aesthetic his feelings toward his lost love, evoking in the process the interplay of fleeting and complex emotions which are aroused in him, for example, by a Madonna at the foot of his bed, two columbines on a hillside, the sight of a country landscape, a keepsake medal given him by his love, a memory of last year’s lilacs and a sudden rainstorm.  

Of the original twenty-four poems, Lili Boulanger chose thirteen to form a dramatic whole under the title of *Clairières dans le ciel*. The following table illustrates the poetic cycle and the composer’s selections from it. Lili Boulanger has maintained the order of poems from Jammes’s *Tristesses* with the exception of *Je garde une médaille* which she has moved to a later position in *Clairières dans le ciel*.

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10 Ibid., p. 172.
Table 1

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<td>2. <em>Elle était descendue</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Dans le chemin</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. <em>Elle est gravement gaie</em></td>
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<td>5. <em>Parfois, je suis triste</em></td>
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<td>6. <em>Un poète disait</em></td>
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<td>7. <em>Son souvenir emplit l’air</em></td>
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<td>8. <em>Au pied de mon lit</em></td>
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<td>9. <em>Elle avait emporté</em></td>
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<td>10. <em>Si tout ceci n’est qu’un pauvre rêve</em></td>
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<td>11. <em>Je ne désiré point</em></td>
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<td>12. <em>O mon coeur! ce sera</em></td>
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<td>13. <em>Nous nous aimerons tant</em></td>
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<td>14. <em>Faisait-il beau</em></td>
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<td>15. <em>Je garde une médaille</em></td>
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<td>16. <em>J’ai quelqu’un dans le coeur</em></td>
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<td>17. <em>Vous m’avez regardé</em></td>
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<td>18. <em>Je songe à ce jour-là</em></td>
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<td>19. <em>Les lilas qui avaient fleuri</em></td>
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<td>20. <em>Deux ancolies se balançaient</em></td>
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<td>21. <em>Par ce que j’ai souffert</em></td>
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<td>22. <em>Venez sous la tonnelle</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>23. <em>Venez, ma bien-aimée</em></td>
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<td>24. <em>Demain fera un an</em></td>
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The first poem, *Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie* is the poet’s tender remembrance of the heroine in a meadow. Use of sexual symbolism gives these words added intimacy and, even in this early poem, a sense of pervasive melancholy.
Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie
Et, comme la prairie, était toute fleurie de plantes
Dont la tige aime à pousser dans l’eau . . .
Ces plantes inondées je les avais cueillies.
Bientôt, s’étant mouillée,
Elle gagna le haut de cette prairie là qui était toute fleurie.
Elle riait et s’étbrouait . . .
Avec la grace dégingandée qu’ont les jeunes filles trop grandes.
Elle avait le regard qu’ont les fleurs de lavande.

She had gone down to the foot of the meadow
And like the meadow, was decked with flowers
Whose stems love to shoot forth from the water . . .
Those drenched plants which I had picked.
Soon, dripping,
she reached the top of that meadow which was all abloom.
She was laughing and splashing about . . .
with that awkward grace peculiar to overly tall girls.
She had the look of lavender flowers.

In the second poem of the cycle, *Elle est gravement gaie*, the poet continues the
description of his love in a more personal vein recalling the juxtaposition of seriousness
and gaiety within her personality.

Elle est gravement gaie.
Par moments son regard se levait
comme pour surprendre ma pensée. . . .
Elle était douce alors comme quand il est tard,
Le velours jaune et bleu d’une allée de pensées.

She is serious but mirthful.
Sometimes she would suddenly glance up at me
As if to catch my thought . . .
She was sweet then, as when it is late,
The yellow and blue velvet of a path of pansies.

*Parfois je suis triste*, the third poem of the cycle, is a graphic depiction of the
uncertainty of new love and the desolation of the loss of love. Here the poet expresses his
unhappy loneliness when separated from the heroine quickly followed by his joyfulness
in the remembrance of her. In these verses, the melancholy of the first poem grows into a
very real sense of foreboding as the poet expresses his sorrow at the realization of an
irrevocable separation between him and his love. The ambiguity so prevalent in the words
of the symbolists exists in the unrevealed nature of the heroine’s fate.

Parfois, je suis triste. . . .
Et, soudain, je pense à elle
Alors, je suis joyeux. Mais je redeviens triste
De ce que je ne sais pas combien elle m’aime.
Elle est la jeune fille à l’âme toute claire,
Et qui, dedans son coeur, garde avec jalousie
L’unique passion que l’on donne à un seul.
Elle est partie avant que s’ouvrent les tilleuls,
Et, comme ils ont fleuri depuis. . . qu’elle est partie,
Je me suis étonné de voir, ô mes amis,
Des branches de tilleuls qui n’avaient pas de fleurs.

Sometimes I am sad. . . .
And, suddenly, I think of her
Then, I am joyful. But I grow sad again,
Not knowing how much she loves me.
She is the young girl whose soul is bright,
And who jealously holds in her heart
That unique passion reserved for only one.
She left before the blossoming of the lindens
And since they bloomed after she departed
I was amazed to see, oh my friends,
Branches of lindens which had no flowers.

In the fourth poem, *Un poète disait*, the poet’s joy returns as he speaks of
anointing his love with “the color of a perfume that will be nameless.”
Un poète disait que lorsqu’il était jeune,
Il fleurissait des vers comme un rosier des roses.
Lorsque je pense à elle,
Il me semble que jase une fontaine intarissable dans mon coeur.
Comme sur le lys Dieu pose un parfum d’église,
Comme il met du corail aux joues de la cerise,
Je veux poser sur elle, avec devotion,
La couleur d’un parfum qui n’aura pas de nom.

A poet once said that when he was young
He festooned his verses like a rosebush with roses.
And when I think of her,
I feel an inexhaustible fountain spring forth in my heart.
As God bestows a holy scent on the lily,
As He colors the skin of the cherry with coral,
So would I, with devotion, anoint her
with the color of a perfume that will be nameless.

The earlier sense of doubt returns with the fifth poem, *Au pied de mon lit* a prayer
to the Virgin whose statue sits at the foot of the poet’s bed. Here he expresses gratitude
for the restoration of his spirit even in those moments when he is feeling unworthy of the
heroine’s love.

*Au pied de mon lit, une Vierge négresse
Fût mise par ma mere.
Et j’aime cette Vierge
d’une religion un peu italienne.
Virgo Lauretana, debout dans un fond d’or.
Qui me faites penser á mille fruits de mer
Que l’on vend sur les quais où pas un soufflé d’air
N’émeut les pavillons qui lourdement s’endorment.
Virgo Lauretana, vous savez qu’en ces heures
Où je ne me sens pas digne d’être aimé d’elle.
C’est vous dont le parfum me refraîchit le coeur.*
At the foot of my bed my mother placed
a black Virgin.
And I love that Virgin
with a rather Italianate piety.
Virgo Lauretana, standing before a golden backdrop.
You who bring to mind a thousand catches of the sea
which they sell on the wharves, where not a breath
of air disturbs the heavy, slumbering tents.
Virgo Lauretana, you know that during those hours
when I feel unworthy of her love,
it is you whose perfume restores my spirit.

In the sixth poem, the poet’s melancholy increases as he ponders the possibility
that his happiness has only been a dream and that disillusionment is, once again,
inevitable in his life.

Si tout ceci n’est qu’un pauvre rêve.
Et s’il faut que j’ajoute dans ma vie
Une fois encore, la désillusion. . . aux désillusions;
Et si je dois encore, par ma sombre folie,
chercher dans la douceur du vent et de la pluie
les seules vaines voix que m’aient en passion.
Je ne sais si je guérirai, ô mon amie.

If all this is no more than a dream,
and if once again in my life
I must add disillusion. . . upon disillusion;
and if I must, once again in my melancholy distraction,
seek in the gentle wind and rain
the only hollow voices which have impassioned me,
I do not know if I shall ever recover, oh my friend.

The tender mood of the seventh poem Nous nous aimerons tant is descriptive of
the poet’s desire for a love in which no words are necessary; only a touch is needed to
convey the lovers’ feelings for one another.
Nous nous aimerons tant que nous tairons nos mots,
en nous tendant la main, quand nous nous reverrons.
Vous serez ombragée par d’anciens rameaux
sur le banc que je sais où nous nous assoierons.
Donc, nous nous assoierons sur ce banc, tous deux seuls. . .
D’un long moment, ô mon amie,
Vous n’oserez. . .
Que vous me serez douce et que je tremblerai.

We shall love each other so much that we won’t need words.
When, hands entwined, we see each other again,
you will be shaded by ancient branches along a
riverbank that I know, where we will sit.
Yes, we will sit on that bank, just the two of us. . .
Alone for a long while, my love.
You won’t dare to. . .
How sweet you will be to me, and how I shall tremble.

In *Vous m’avez regardé*, song eight, the wistfulness of the beginning of the cycle
returns as the poet recalls a look of impassioned calm shared with his love.

Vous m’avez regardé avec toute votre âme.
Vous m’avez regardé longtemps comme un ciel bleu.
J’ai mis votre regard à l’ombre de mes yeux.
Que ce regard était passionné et calme.

You looked at me with all your soul.
You looked at me a long while like a blue sky.
I took that look into the depths of my own eyes.
How impassioned yet calm was that look.

Anguish is the pervasive tone of the ninth poem, *Les lilas qui avaient fleuri* as the
poet bewails the lack of something hoped for, something even he doesn’t know how to
describe, but that he had wanted from her.
Les lilas qui avaient fleuri l’année dernière
vont fleurir de nouveau dans les tristes parterres.
Déjà le pêcher grêle à jonché
le ciel bleu de ses roses,
comme un enfant la Fête-Dieu.
Mon coeur devrait mourir au milieu de ces choses
Car c’était au milieu des vergers blancs et roses
Que j’avais espéré. . . je ne sais quoi. . . de vous
Mon âme rêve sourdement sur vos genoux.
Ne la repoussez point. Ne la relevez pas,
de peur qu’en s’éloignant de vous elle ne voie
combien vous êtes faible, et troublée
dans ses bras.

The lilacs that bloomed last year
will bloom once again in the wretched flowerbeds.
The delicate peach tree has already sprinkled
the blue sky with its blossoms
like a child on Corpus Christi day.
My heart should have broken in the midst of all this.
For it was in the midst of white and pink orchards
that I had hoped for something. . . I don’t know what. . . from you.
My soul languishes, insensible on your lap.
Do not thrust it aside. Do not awaken it
lest when you dismiss it, it should see how
very weak and disconcerted you have been
in its embrace.

This seemingly unrelated poem depicts, through the story of two columbines,
mutual vulnerability and the potential fulfillment of embracing such vulnerability and
risking love.

Deux ancolies se balançaient sur la colline
Et l’ancolie disait à sa soeur l’ancolie:
Je tremble devant toi et demeure confuse.
Et l’autre répondait:
Si dans la roche qu’use l’eau, goutte à goutte,
Si je me mire, je vois que je tremble,
Et je suis confuse comme toi.
Le vent de plus en plus les berçait toutes deux,
Les emplissait d’amour
et mêlait leur coeur bleu.
Two columbines were swaying on a hill.
One columbine said to her sister columbine,
“I tremble before you and that embarrasses me.”
The other answered,
“"When I look at myself in the pool in the rock so worn down by the trickling of water,
I see that I too am trembling,
and I am embarrassed just like you.”
The wind continued to rock them both.
It filled them with love,
and intertwined their blue hearts.

In the eleventh poem, *Par ce que j’ai souffert* the poet states that his own suffering has helped him to understand the suffering of others. This, the most passionate poem of the cycle to this point, depicts the poet’s anguish, his sleepless nights, and his resignation that the loss of his love is irrevocable.

*Par ce que j’ai souffert, ma mésange bénie,*
   Je sais ce qu’a souffert l’autre:
   Car j’étais deux.
Je sais vos longs réveils au milieu de la nuit
Et l’angoisse de moi qui vous gonfle le sein.
   On dirait . . . on dirait par moments
Qu’une tête chérie, confiante et pure,
Ô vous qui êtes la soeur des lins en fleurs
Et qui parfois fixez le ciel comme eux,
   On dirait qu’une tête inclinée dans la nuit
Pèse de tout son poids, à jamais, sur ma vie.

Because of what I have suffered, my dear little creature,
   I know what another has suffered:
   for I have been two.
I will know your long vigils in the middle of the night
and the anguish for me that swells your breast.
   One would say . . . one would say at times
that a beloved head, confident and pure,
Oh you who are the sister of the flax in blossom
who sometimes gazes at the sky the same way,
   One would say that a head bent in the night,
will forever be a burden, with all its heaviness, upon my life.
The anguish and melancholy continue to grow deeper in the twelfth poem of the cycle, *Je garde une médaille d’elle* as the poet tells of a medal which belonged to his love and which he has kept. The keepsake, however, is tarnished now and the dark medal reminds him of the tarnished emotions associated with her.

Je garde une médaille d’elle où sont gravés
Une date et les mots: prier, croire, espérer.
Mais moi, je vois surtout que la médaille est sombre:
Son argent a noirci sur son col de colombe.

I keep a medallion of hers on which are engraved
a date and the inscription: pray, believe, hope.
But as for me, I see above all that the medal is dark:
Its silver has tarnished on her dovelike neck.

The last poem of the cycle, *Demain fera un an* is by far the most poignant. It contains a distillation of all of the preceding emotions of the cycle but from the perspective of the story’s end. It tells of the early days of happiness, but always with the knowledge that this happiness will be lost, causing the poet to question why he, too, did not die on the day, just one year before, that the joy went out of his life.
Demain fera un an qu’à Audaux je cueillais les fleurs
   Dont j’ai parlé, de la prairie mouillée.
C’est aujourd’hui le plus beau jour des jours de Pâques.
   Je me suis enfoncé dans l’azur des campagnes,
   À travers bois, à travers prés, à travers champs.
Comment, mon cœur, n’es-tu pas mort depuis un an?
   Mon cœur, je t’ai donné encore ce calvaire
   de revoir ce village où j’avais tant souffert,
   ces roses qui saignaient devant le presbytère,
   ces lilas qui me tuent dans les triste parterres,
   Je me suis souvenu de ma détresse ancienne,
et je ne sais comment je ne suis pas tombé sur l’ocre du sentier,
   le front dans la poussière.
Plus rien. Je n’ai plus rien, plus rien qui me soutienne.
Plus rien. Pour quoi fait-il si beau et pour-quoi suis-je né?
   J’aurais voulu poser sur vos calmes genoux
   la fatigue qui rompt mon âme
qui se couche ainsi qu’une pauvresse au fossé de la route.
   Dormir. Pouvoir dormir. Dormir à tout jamais
   sous les aver ses bleues, sous les tonnerres frais.
   Ne plus sentir. Ne plus savoir votre existence.
   Ne plus voir cet azur englutir ces coteaux
   dans ce vertige bleu qui mêle l’air à l’eau,
   Ni ce vide où je cherche en vain votre presence.
   Il me semble sentir pleurer au fond de moi,
   d’un lourd sanglot muet, quell qu’un qui n’est pas la.
   J’écris. Et la campagne est sonore de joie.
   “Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie,
   et comme la prairie était toute fleurie.”
Plus rien. Je n’ai plus rien, plus rien qui me soutienne.

Tomorrow will mark a year since I gathered the flowers
   I spoke of from that dewy field at Audaux.
   Today is the most lovely Easter day.
   I plunged into the blue countryside
   through woods, across meadows and fields.
Yet, oh my heart, have you not been dead for the entire year?
   Heart, I have put you through the holy agony
   of seeing again that town where I’d suffered so,
   those bleeding roses in front of the parson’s house,
   the fatal lilacs in those wretched flowerbeds.
   I recalled the old torments
and I do not know how I did not just collapse right there on the yellow pathway,
my face in the dust.
Nothing. I have nothing left; nothing to sustain me.
Nothing. Why is this day so lovely; and why was I born?
I should like to have placed in your calm lap
the weariness that breaks my spirit,
which lies like a pauper in a ditch along the roadside.
To sleep. To be able to sleep. To sleep forever
under the blue downpours, under the cool thunderbolts.
To feel no more. To know your existence no longer.
To no more see the azure
engulf those hills in whirl of blue, mingling water with air,
nor that void where I still search in vain for your presence.
I seem to weep at the very depths of my being
with a heavy, stifled sob, someone who is not really there.
I cry out. And the countryside resounds with joy
“She had gone down to the foot of the meadow
and like the meadow, was decked with flowers.”
Nothing. I have nothing left, nothing can sustain me.
Nothing left. Nothing.

Jammes’s poems are highly segmented and “may be described as free Alexandrine verse
whose rhymes, when they occur at all, result from the internal meanings of the poem
rather than being imposed by external considerations of poetic form.”¹¹ Lili Boulanger’s
compositional style reflects this with free flowing responses to the moods expressed by
the poet.

The Composer’s Personal Identification with the Text
The number thirteen had a special significance for the composer, for there were
thirteen letters in her name, and she therefore used the number thirteen as a symbol for
herself. As her biographer Léonie Rosenstiel comments, “. . . the thirteen songs in
Clairières dans le ciel are a personal and private way, one known only to the composer

¹¹ Ibid., p. 221.
and those closest to her, of showing how deeply involved she was in this cycle.”¹² She felt a very strong identification with the heroine of the poems, “a tall, somewhat mysterious young girl who suddenly disappeared from the poet’s life,”¹³ and marked what she believed to be the similarities between the fictional woman and herself. An example of these similarities may be seen in the first song, in which the heroine—tall, like Lili herself—is described as having an “awkward grace peculiar to overly tall girls.” In the second song the heroine is said to be “serious but mirthful.” Lili had quite a mature, serious outlook on life due largely to the immense amount of suffering she had endured; yet those closest to her, according to their personal accounts, were charmed by a giddy quality that would emerge mischievously before being hidden away again. The third song refers to “the young girl whose soul is bright” before sadly recounting, “She left before the blossoming of the lindens.” These passages appear to be autobiographical in nature as the brightness of Lili’s soul was often reflected in her good humor and yet she left this earth before fully blossoming into the woman and composer that she might have been. The fifth song “had a deeply personal meaning for Lili Boulanger, beginning as it does with the description of a black Virgin put at the foot of the poet’s bed by his mother. Lili kept one of her mother’s Russian icons at the foot of her own bed.”¹⁴ Further evidence of this relation can be seen in Lili’s dedication of the fifth song to her mother. Having lived her entire life faced with an incurable illness that frequently left her

¹² Ibid., pp. 173-174.

¹³ Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 178.
weak and unable to function, Lili was already very preoccupied with her own impending death, and in song number six she may have identified with the phrase, “I do not know if I shall ever recover.” In the eleventh song the poet expresses

. . . that his own suffering has helped him to understand that of others. Those knowing the circumstances of Lili Boulanger’s life . . . must see a direct parallel between the words of the poet and the ideas of Lili Boulanger herself.15

Similarly, all of the songs dealing with loss and unrealized dreams must have struck a chord of recognition within Lili. The final song of the cycle reflects the hollowness of death in its words, “Plus rien. Je n’ai plus rien, plus rien qui me soutienne. Plus rien.” “Nothing. I have nothing left, nothing can sustain me. Nothing.”

15 Ibid., p. 183.
CHAPTER III

THE MUSICAL SETTING OF *CLAIRIÈRES DANS LE CIEL*

Lili Boulanger remains true to the poet’s intent by connecting his poems into a musical cycle just as he had connected them into a poetic one. Her selections of poems, connected as they are by a general idea, tell the story and retain the emotional progression of the poet. The songs are designed to form a musical unit with key relationships and returning musical material between the songs as unifying factors.

The coloristic qualities of the music of Lili Boulanger’s *Clairières dans le ciel* call to mind a prism with its subtle yet ever changing kaleidoscope of colors. Although her use of modality, polytonality and chromaticism make the vocabulary of functional harmony inadequate when discussing music of this kind, Boulanger’s strict training in functional harmony, counterpoint, and fugue and her exceptional craftsmanship are easily recognizable upon examination of the score.

Melodic Style and the Text

The melodic style of these songs is greatly influenced by the mood of the poetry. In the happier, more peaceful poems, the vocal line is more conjunct with scale-wise motion and triadic intervals. In the poems depicting grief, loss or foreboding the vocal line is much more disjunct with greater chromaticism and awkward leaps such as minor sixths and tritones. In the first song of the cycle a sense of tenderness created in part by the sweeping melodic line pervades before “the poet’s changing moods are mirrored in sudden skips in the vocal line.”16 The third song marks the first time that a sense of

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sadness and loss is depicted. The use of a declamatory style in the vocal line for these moments of unhappiness, doubt, and loss as demonstrated by Musical Example 1 creates a sharp contrast to the more lyrical melodic style employed for remembrances of happier times as in Musical Example 2. The composer also emphasizes the word *triste* in the second measure of Musical Example 1. Translated “sad,” this word is heightened with a 9 -8 suspension doubled at the octave in the accompaniment.

Musical Example 1 (Song 3: *Parfois, je suis triste*, measures 14-16)

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16 Ibid., p. 174.
The melodic line of the fourth song is almost conversational, with predominantly eighth-note motion and a syllabic text setting in the first ten bars as the poet relates something he once heard. The melodic contour and rhythm follow that of normal speech inflection and the rhythm of the spoken words. (See Musical Example 3.)
Musical Example 3 (Song 4, *Un poète disait*..., measures 1-11)
Musical Example 4 shows how the eighth note rhythms give way to longer note values in the vocal line accentuated by a sweeping accompaniment as the poet talks of God’s creations of scent and color.

Musical Example 4 (Song 4, *Un poète disait...*, measures 24-29)

Another skillful example of melodic highlighting of textual ideas is illustrated in this song by the ascending vocal line which climaxes on a G# as the poet describes the “inexhaustible springing forth of a fountain in his heart.” The composer emphasizes the intent of this section with the expressive markings *sans ralentir* and *accelerando*.

(Musical Example 5.)
Musical Example 5 (Song 4, *Un poète disait...*, measures 15-20)

In the sixth song, Boulanger creates a sense of unreality and emptiness in the melodic line by the repetition of an F-natural in the middle register of the voice. This device, frequently used by Wagner for the same purpose, gives the impression of the poet mulling over a single repetitive thought. (Musical Example 6.)
This pervading mood of hollowness is interrupted by a short, agitated section in which the melodic line suddenly becomes very chromatic for the words, “melancholy distraction” and full of more jagged leaps for the text, “search,” and “hollow voices.” The awkwardness of the vocal line is perhaps a depiction of a sexual yearning and the poet’s passionate response to the possibility that the love between himself and the heroine may only be a dream and that he may, once again, have to search in vain for fulfillment. (Musical Example 7.)
A return to the same F-naturals and slower tempo reflects the hopelessness portrayed in the text. (Musical Example 8.)
Musical Example 8 (Song 6, *Si tout ceci n’est qu’un pauvre rêve*, measures 30-38)

The final song of *Clairières dans le ciel*, illustrated in Appendix B, begins with a recitative-like declamation of the text, then proceeds to use all of the melodic devices previously employed in the cycle: the hollow tunelessness of repeated pitches, the jagged leaps of passionate emotions, and the beautiful, flowing melodies of happy dreams and remembrances. Short phrases, broken by rests, add a breathless quality as the hero describes his journey across the countryside.
Harmonic Idiom and the Text

In the harmonic idiom as in the melodic style of these pieces there exists a close affinity between the music and the mood created by the text. Lili Boulanger makes full and frequent use of the richness of seventh, ninth, and eleventh chords within the framework of modal, chromatic, and even polytonal writing. In the first song, the device of planing major seventh chords in descending and later ascending patterns is used the first of several times throughout the cycle. An example of text painting in this first song is illustrated in the first two poetic sentences. (See Musical Example 9.) The first sentence, “She had gone down to the foot of the meadow,” (measures 1-6) is illuminated by a harmonic progression that descends by whole steps from E to B-flat\(^7\); while the second sentence, “Soon, dripping, she reached the top of that meadow,” (measures 9-10) is depicted by an ascending harmonic progression in minor thirds from C\#\(^7\) to B-flat\(^7\).
Musical Example 9 (Song 1, *Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie*, measures 1-13)
drenched

plants

which

I

had

picked.

Un peu plus mouvementé

lil-

es

Bientôt,
s'é-tenant mouillé-

Soon,
dripping

Un peu plus mouvementé

she reached

the top of that meadow

which was all abloom.
Through the use of certain keys Boulanger achieves harmonic unity within the cycle. The key of E major seems to have significance for the composer, as this is her choice for those poems that are of a happy or peaceful mood. Included in this group are the first two songs, *Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie* and *Elle est gravement gaie*, in their tender description of the heroine and the fourth song, *Un poète disait*, that speaks of the poet’s desire to anoint his love with a nameless perfume. The fifth song, *Au pied de mon lit*, with its religious piety toward the Virgin, and the eighth song, *Vous m’avez regardé avec toute votre âme*, in its description of the calm and passionate look shared between the lovers are also of a calm and happy nature. For the poems of a more somber mood such as the third, *Parfois, je suis triste*, the sixth, *Si tout ceci n’est qu’un pauvre rêve*, the twelfth, *Je garde une médaille d’elle*, and the final song, *Demain fera un an* the composer uses the minor keys of a, f, d, and d respectively. In general, the harmonic language of the happier, calmer songs is on a more triadic basis, though it is not always classically diatonic. The songs depicting darker emotions, on the other hand, are more chromatic both melodically and harmonically.
The motive of a descending second, either major or minor is a signature device of the composer in this cycle. This motive appears in the opening measures, in the accompaniment, vocal line, or both, of all of the songs, except numbers seven, ten and thirteen, frequently as a harmonic as well as melodic device. According to tradition, one of the defining characteristics of a song cycle is that it begins and ends in the same key. Lili Boulanger adapts this definition to her own purposes, instead using the descending second as a unifying device for Clairières dans le ciel in the area of key relationships with the first song beginning in E major and the final song a descending second in d minor.

Rhythmic and Metrical Devices

Rhythmic and metrical devices in Clairières dans le ciel also serve to express the meaning of the poet’s words and to highlight the composer’s personal identification with the text. Lili Boulanger makes frequent use of meter change to depict a change in mood and rhythmic figures such as triplets for joy and pedal points for seriousness. Harmonic rhythm and augmentation are other musical devices used by the composer for emotional expression. The first reference the composer thought to be personal, “that awkward grace peculiar to overly tall girls,” is marked by the first use of syncopation in the accompaniment. (Musical Example 10.)
Musical Example 10 (Song 1, *Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie*, measures 14-17)

The change of meter from common to triple time as well as a new harmonic rhythm in the second song marks the change from a happy, commonplace memory to a more melancholy remembrance. *Elle était douce alors comme quand il est tard* . . ., (She was sweet then as when it is late). In the third song, *Parfois, je suis triste*, triplet figures announce the *joyeux* of the poet. (Musical Example 11.)
A sense of unrest predominates in the vocal line with each entrance occurring on a weak beat.

In the tenth song of the cycle, *Deux ancolies*, the right hand of the accompaniment illustrates the embarrassment of the swaying columbines in its triplet figuration. The accompaniment then continues the previous rhythm in augmentation as embarrassment turns to acceptance. Similarly, in these measures from the seventh song the composer
repeats a motive in diminution in order to illustrate the lovers’ increasing passion for one another. (Musical Example 12.)


Formal Devices

Perhaps the most striking aspect of *Clairières dans le ciel* is the attention to unity. Boulanger very skilfully draws on several formal devices to achieve this unity, such as the use of sequences, recurring motives (including the previously mentioned descending
second), rhythmic units and ostinato figures. (See Musical Example 13.) In the sixth song of the cycle a two-bar chromatic passage is presented three times, then twice more at a higher pitch level. This sequence is based on material drawn from the prelude to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* and “literally forms a sort of *leitmotiv* throughout this song.”¹⁷ As in Wagner’s prelude the languishing effect of this song creates an impression of uncertainty and irresolution.

Musical Example 13 (Wagner, Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*, mm. 1-18)

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¹⁷ Ibid., p. 179.
(Boulanger, Song 6, *Si tout ceci n’est qu’un pauvre rêve*, measures 1-11)
In addition to the descending second that appears throughout the cycle, Lili Boulanger uses the device of a recurring motif particularly in the final song.

*Demain fera un an*, number thirteen, is a distillation of the ideas presented in the rest of the cycle. As Schubert did in his *Winterreise*, Lili Boulanger creates a psychological whole out of the disparate elements of the twelve preceding songs by interweaving in this last song, elements of the others. This is not all the composer’s doing alone. The poem itself is also full of allusions to those in the cycle which preceded it.\(^{18}\)

In the opening words of this final song, the poet states numbly that tomorrow will mark a year since he gathered the flowers of his love. Boulanger, once again, as she did in the sixth song, utilizes the repeating single pitch, this time on D natural, to illustrate the hollowness of the poet’s sorrow. The music seems to evoke the memories that press in on the poet. Among musical quotations in this last song is the rhythmic accompaniment pattern of the fourth song, prompting the poet’s statement, “Heart, I have put you through the holy agony of seeing again that town where I’d suffered so...” The *Tristan* motive of the sixth song reappears as the poet says, “I recalled the old torments and I do not know how I did not just collapse right there on the yellow pathway, my face in the dust.” Both the words and music of the opening of the first song mark the poet’s last sweetly melancholic remembrance of the heroine, as she was at the beginning of their time together.\(^{19}\)

Another formal device common to these songs is the use of ostinato figures. One example is the two-bar ostinato of the tenth song of the cycle, which is stated four times

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 186.

\(^{19}\) Appendix B.
at the beginning of the song. Boulanger frequently used pedal points as well, as in the sixth song, illustrated back in Musical Example 13. This D-flat pedal relates it to the song that follows it, number seven, *Nous nous aimerons tant*, which contains a D-flat pedal as well. The first seven bars of the ninth song are over an E pedal point. In the tenth song Boulanger employs two different pedal points: F for the first section, D-Flat for the next before returning to F for the last section of the song.

The Relationship of Piano Accompaniment and Voice

Lili Boulanger has maintained an excellent balance between the piano and the voice in *Clairières dans le ciel*. In the relationship of the piano and the voice, the composer achieves textual highlighting through range and rhythmic figurations, establishes accompaniment patterns such as rhythmic ostinato or recitative style support for the voice, and uses the piano as an initiator of the drama. The piano accompaniment with its chromatic changes alternates shades of light and dark in an effect of *chiaroscuro*, which enhances but never obscures the complicated text and the emotions that it contains. An example of this is found in the twelfth song, Musical Example 14, in which “the inner conflicts of the hero are mirrored in the deliberate dissonances between the vocal line and the accompaniment.” 20 In this song the hero relates the words inscribed upon the medallion, “pray, believe, hope.” The pitch in the vocal line for the word “believe” is E with a D set directly against it in the piano accompaniment. The next instance occurs on the word *sombre* as the poet describes the darkness of the medal. Here the G-natural of the vocal line is juxtaposed with a G-sharp in the accompaniment.

20 Ibid., p. 185.
Musical Example 14 (Song 12, *Je garde une médaille d’elle*, measures 4-11)

The influence of Fauré is readily recognizable in the accompaniment figurations used by Lili Boulanger. Like Fauré, Boulanger sets up a rhythmic ostinato in the accompaniment; but hers is frequently more virtuosic utilizing a wider range. A good example of these characteristics is in the second song of the cycle, *Elle est gravement gaie*. (Musical Example 15)
Lili Boulanger’s use of range in the piano accompaniment helps to define the emotional content of the poetry. In the eighth song, *Vous m’avez regardé avec toute votre âme*, the piano accompaniment rises steadily in range and arpeggiated figurations through the words, “how impassioned was that look” before settling into the descending second motive presented in a rhythmic ostinato for the words “yet calm.” (Musical Example 16.)
In the ninth song, *Les lilas qui avaient fleuri*, the agony of loss is presented in the accompaniment before the vocal line enters. Again, a rhythmic ostinato is established with a harp-like accompaniment figure in which the hands move in contrary motion. The resulting dissonances on the second and fourth beats of each measure suggest to the listener that the joy of the eighth song is past and that troubled memories once again plague the poet. (Musical Example 17.)
Musical Example 17 (Song 9, Les lilas qui avaient fleuri, measures 1-2)

There are several recitative-like sections within the cycle in which the piano accompaniment serves the same purpose as the recitative accompaniment of the Baroque era: providing a harmonic framework and a source of rhythmic organization under the free flowing speech rhythms of the vocal line. One such example occurs in the seventh song, Nous nous aimerons tant. (Musical Example 18.)

Musical Example 18 (Song 7, Nous nous aimerons tant, measures 24-26)

At other times, the piano accompaniment initiates the drama, arriving at the emotional core of the poetry with strong sonorities on the beats ahead of the voice whose entrances
occur on the upbeats of the measure. One such example is the dramatic ending to the
eleventh song (the only song in the cycle that ends on a forte dynamic), *Par ce que j’ai
souffert*. (Musical Example 19.)

Musical Example 19 (Song 11, *Par ce que j’ai souffert*, measures 30-40)

(see next page)
Consistently, the final song of the cycle contains all of the aforementioned piano accompaniment devices. The texture alternates between the rhythmic ostinati and the bare or hollow chords that accompany the recitative-like moments of despair. At other times the texture acts as the impetus for the strong emotions of the poet.

**Performance Considerations**

The vocal writing of *Clairières dans le ciel* was inspired by the voice of David Devriés, the tenor who had sung in the first performance of Lili Boulanger’s winning *Prix de Rome* composition, the cantata, *Faust et Hélène*. The high *tessitura* of these songs requires a singer who is able to successfully negotiate the *passaggio*. In the original keys the cycle is well suited to only the highly trained light lyric tenor voice, a voice type that is generally more comfortable and able to spend longer periods of time in the *passaggio* than are most women’s voices. The numerous forward, closed vowels set to notes in the upper register with a pianissimo dynamic marking also contribute to the difficulty of this music and are much more easily managed by the higher, brighter voice types. Additionally, the French school of singing is largely built around the lateral vowel. Tenors trained in this tradition may find the music more technically accessible than those trained in the traditional Italian or German schools. The internationally acclaimed collaborative pianist and coach, Dalton Baldwin, related to this singer a conversation between himself and Nadia Boulanger in which she communicated Lili’s desire that the cycle be transposed down one step if sung by a soprano.\(^{21}\) This transposition helps make this music accessible to sopranos, yet the *tessitura* is still exceedingly challenging.

\(^{21}\) Conversation with Dalton Baldwin, October 25, 2000.
Besides the technical difficulties for the singer, these songs with their chromatic, modal, and polytonal harmonies are formidable throughout the learning process for both singer and accompanist; and are most successfully assimilated by the most experienced and mature musicians. Nevertheless, the rewards are great and the process truly enriching. The cycle is not only harmonically satisfying, but also emotionally fulfilling in its length, which affords an opportunity for full exploration of the poet’s psyche. The childlike vulnerability of many of the songs is universal in its appeal.

Conclusion

“With its constant and irrational alternations of joy and fear, Clairières dans le ciel seems like a dramatic tableau of the life of Lili Boulanger.” 22 Familiarity with this score reveals not only the tremendous talent of the composer but an immense dedication to the perfecting of her craft. Her song writing achieves a high level of dramatic integration through the use of melodic highlighting of textual ideas, harmonic writing and its relation to the poetry, key relationships, rhythmic and metrical elements, the use of formal devices and the relationship between the piano accompaniment and the voice.

She achieves melodic highlighting of textual ideas through declamatory style and conjunct or disjunct vocal lines. Her harmonic writing is related to the poetry in triadic, diatonic writing for the happier songs and more chromatic, modal and polytonal writing for the songs depicting melancholy or despair. The key relationships between the songs,

and the association of certain keys as “content or peaceful” with others keys, usually
minor, as “sad or anguished” are another musical depiction of textual ideas.

Rhythmic and metrical elements are also used in this way. Changes in meter
depict changes in mood and rhythmic figures such as triplets and pedal points highlight
moments of joy and profundity. Rhythmic augmentation and diminution unify material
within the cycle. Lili Boulanger’s use of formal devices such as ostinato figures,
recurring motives like the descending second, sequences, and cyclical elements of
returning melodic, harmonic, and textual material are evidence of her attention to detail
and unity. The relationship of the piano accompaniment and the voice complement the
meaning of the words through range and rhythmic figurations in the piano, various
accompaniment styles and patterns, including rhythmic ostinati or recitative style, and
finally by the use of the piano in certain places as an initiator of the drama.

Although her works in many ways represent a logical progression from the
musical styles and languages of the influential composers of her time including Debussy,
Wagner and Fauré, Lili Boulanger’s development of these ideas reveals her individual
gifts. One wonders if the seriousness of her illness motivated her to reach these heights of
expression, skill, and depths of emotion at so young an age. If she had not felt the ever-
present threat of an early death, would she have pushed so hard and been so determined
to accomplish all that she did? On the other hand, if death had not taken her away at so
young an age, what else might she have accomplished? We can only know what she did
accomplish in her short life, and that those achievements have not received the
recognition that they deserve. Perhaps one of the reasons is the level of difficulty of her
works, which demand complete technical control, making them inaccessible to the fledgling musician. Additionally, for many years, Lili Boulanger’s works were difficult to attain commercially and the manuscripts remained in the personal possession of her sister, Nadia Boulanger. Whatever the reasons for this relative anonymity, perhaps, with time and continued exposure the musical world at large will finally discover another great composer in Lili Boulanger.
APPENDIX A

LIST OF VOCAL WORKS
LIST OF VOCAL WORKS

STAGE

La princess Maleine (op, 5, M. Maeterlinck and T. Ricordi), 1911-18, unfinished

CHORAL

Ps cxxix Ils m’ont assez opprimé, Baritone, male chorus, orchestra, 1910-16
Ps cxxx Du fond de l’abîme, Alto, Tenor, chorus, organ, orchestra 1910-17
Les sirens (C. Grandmougin), Mezzo, chorus, pianoforte, 1911
Sous bois (P. Gille), chorus, orchestra, 1911
Soleils de Septembre, chorus, pianoforte, 1911-12, incomplete
Renouveau (A. Silvestre), chorus, 4 solo voices, pianoforte/orchestra, 1911-13
Hymne au soleil (C. Delavigne), Alto, chorus, pianoforte/orchestra, 1912
Le soir, chorus, pianoforte/orchestra, 1912
Soir d’été, chorus, pianoforte, 1912, incomplete
La source (C. Leconte de Lisle), chorus, orchestra, 1912
La tempête (Pendant la tempête) (T. Gautier), chorus, pianoforte, 1912
Pour les funérailles d’un soldat (A. de Musset), Baritone, chorus, orchestra, 1912-13
Soir la plaine (A. Samain), Soprano, Tenor, chorus, orchestra, 1913
Vieille prière bouddhique (Buddhist prayer from Visuddhimagga, trans. S. Karpelés),
Tenor, chorus, orchestra, 1914-17
Ps xxiv La terre appartient à l’Eternel, Tenor, chorus, organ, orchestra, 1916

OTHER VOCAL

Maïa (cant., F. Beisser), Soprano, Tenor, Bass, pianoforte, 1911
Reflets (M. Maeterlinck), 1 voice, pianoforte/orchestra, 1911
Frédégonde (cant., C. Morel), Soprano, Tenor, Bass, pianoforte, 1911-12, incomplete
Attente (M. Maeterlinck), 1 voice, pianoforte, 1912
Le retour (G. Delaquys), 1 voice, pianoforte, 1912 [original version: La nef légère,
chorus, pianoforte, 1912]
2 vocal fugues, 4 voices, 1912, 1913
Faust et Hélène (cantata, E. Adenis, after J. W. von Goethe), Mezzo, Tenor, Baritone,
orchestra, 1913
Clairières dans le ciel (F. Jammes), cycle of 13 songs, Tenor, pianoforte, 1913-14 [nos.
1, 5-7, 10-13 orchestrated, 1915-16]
Dans l’immense tristesse (B. Galéron de Calone), 1 voice, pianoforte, 1916
Pie Jesu, Soprano, string quartet, harp, organ, 1918
APPENDIX B

SONG 13, *Demain fera un an*
Demain fera un an

repeating pitch illustrating the hollowness of the poet's sorrow

Librement
Lent p résigné

Demain fera un an qu'à Audaux je cueill-

Tomorrow will mark a year since I gathered

P grave et morne

lais les fleurs dont j'ai par - lé de la prairie mouillé - e.

the flowers I spoke of from that dewy field at Audaux.

poco accel:

C'est au-jourd'hui le plus beau jour des jours de Pâques.

Today is the most lovely Easter day.

a tempo

plus sonore

moins lent et plus agité

Je me suis enfoncé dans l'a - zur des campa - gnes,

I plunged into the blue countryside,

P sovérd

animez petit a petit...
a travers bois, through woods, 

a travers prés, across meadows, and

sombré

cresé:

Lent

profondément grave

champs...

Com- ment, mon cœur, n'estu pas fields.

Yet, oh my heart, have you not

Lent

mort.

been dead

de puis un an?

for this entire year?

Un peu moins lent

avec une grande lassitude

Mon cœur,

jo t'ai don... né ence... de cen.

Heart,

I have put you through the holy

Un peu moins lent

étendu

rhythmic accompaniment pattern of the fourth song
à l'aise

agony of seeing again that town where I'd suffered so.

Anima

those bleeding roses in front of the parson's house, the fatal lilacs in those wretched flowerbeds, I recalled

Très lent découragé

Tristan motive of the sixth song
de ma démesure ancienne, et je ne sais com-
the old torments, and I do not know

Tristan motive continues

ment je ne suis pas tombé sur l’oevre du sens tier,
how I did not just collapse right there on the yellow pathway, my face in the dust.

Vite see Tempo I. pp

-siè-re. Plus rien. Je n’ai plus rien, plus rien qui me sou-
Nothing. I have nothing left: nothing to sustain me

Vite see Tempo I.

-tien-ne. Plus rien.
Nothing.

pp très détaché
Pourquoi fait-il si beau et pourquoi suis-je né?
Why is this day so lovely; and why was I born?

J’aurais voulu poser sur vos calmes genoux la fou.
I should like to have placed in your calm lap the
ti-gne qui rompt mon âme qui se couche afin
weariness that breaks my spirit, which lies

ni qu'une pauvresse au fossé de la route...... like a pauper in a ditch along the roadside.

Dormir........... To sleep. Pouvoir dormir........... To be able to sleep.

Dormir........... à tout jamais sous les averse bleues, sous les tamarres frais......
To sleep forever under the blue downpours, under the cool thunderbolts.
Ne plus sentir. Ne plus savoir... votre existence.
To feel no more. To know your existence.

À l'aise
engloutir ces coteaux... dans ce vertige...
blue, mingling water with air.
Vite

ni ce vi de où je cherche en
	nor that void where I still search in

Vite

très expressif

vain

vain for your presence.

p éteint

Il me semble sentir pleurer sa

I seem to weep at the

P douloureux

sans nuances

un peu en dehors

fond de moi, d'un lourd sanglot mu et quel

very depths of my being with a heavy, stifled sob, someone
qu’un qui n’est pas là,
who is not really there.

J’earlis......
I cry out.

And the countryside resounds with joy.

Et la campagne est sô- no- re de joi- e.

She had gone down to the foot of the meadow, and like the meadow was decked with

words and music of the first song

Elle était descendue au bas de la prai-

Je n'ai plus rien,

plus rien qui me soutienne.

I have nothing left,

nothing can sustain me.

Plus rien.

Nothing left.

Plus rien.

Nothing.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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A Doctoral Recital

DEBORAH WILLIAMSON, soprano
assisted by
Brad Bennight, harpsichord • John Tarver, piano

Sunday, March 5, 2000  4:00 pm  Concert Hall

Fairest Isle ............................................ Henry Purcell
Bess of Bedlam

Mignon Lieder ........................................... Franz Schubert
KENNST DU DAS LAND
HEISS MICH NICHT REDEN
SO LASST MICH SCHEINEN, BIS ICH WERDE
NUR WER DIE SEHNSUCHT KENN

— INTERMISSION —

Five Poems of Anna Akhmatova, Opus 27 (Sung in Russian)  .. Sergei Prokofiev
Sunlight Streaming in the Chamber
There is Nothing Comparable with Love
Thoughts of Sunlight
Greetings!
The Gray-Eyed King

Poème de l'Amour et de la Mer  ....................... Ernest Chausson
La Fleur des Eaux
La Mort de l'Amour
Le Temps des Lilas

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A Doctoral Recital

DEBORAH WILLIAMSON, soprano
accompanied by
John Tarver, piano

Monday, March 12, 2001  6:30 pm  Recital Hall

PROGRAM

An Chloe, K. 524  ........................................... Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Der Zauberer, K. 472
Als Luise die Briefe ihres ungetreuen Liebhabers verbrannte, K. 520
Abendempfindung, K. 523

Mignon Lieder, Opus 98a  ................................. Robert Schumann
Kennst du das Land
Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Heiss mich nicht reden
So lasst mich scheinen

— INTERMISSION —

La Bonne Chanson, Opus 61  ............................... Gabriel Fauré
Une Sainte en son auréole
Puisque l’aube grandit
La lune blanche luit dans les bois
J’allais par des chemins perfides
J’ai presque peur, en vérité
Avant que tu ne t’en ailles
Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d’été
N’est-ce pas?
L’hiver a cessé

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A Doctoral Lecture Recital

DEBORAH WILLIAMSON, soprano
accompanied by
John Tarver, piano

Friday, October 12, 2001 6:30 pm  Recital Hall

A PERFORMER’S ANALYSIS OF LILI BOULANGER’S
CLAIRIÈRES DANS LE CIEL: SONG CYCLE FOR HIGH
VOICE AND PIANO

PROGRAM

Clairières dans le ciel (1913-1914) ......................... Lili Boulanger
Elle était descendue au bas de la prairie
Elle est gravement gaie
Parfois, je suis triste
Un poète disait...
Au pied de mon lit
Si tout ceci n’est qu’un pauvre rêve
Nous nous aimerons tant
Vous m’avez regardé avec toute votre âme
Les lilas qui avaient fleuri
Deux ancolies
Par ce que j’ai souffert
Je garde une médaille d’elle
Demain fera un an

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