MELODRAMA IN THE 1950s: 
A NEW PRODUCTION OF FRANCIS POULENC’S LA VOIX HUMAINE 

by 
SANDRA ALICE STRINGER 

B.Mus., Voice Performance, The University of Ottawa (Summa Cum Laude), 1997 
M.Mus., Opera Performance, The University of British Columbia, 2000 

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF 
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF 

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS 
in 
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES 
(Voice) 

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA 
October 2005 

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ABSTRACT

The thesis for Doctor of Musical Arts candidate Sandra Stringer is comprised of a series of recitals, operatic performances, and a thesis document. All components of said thesis were completed between September 2000 and October 2005.

In December 2000, Ms. Stringer played the role of “Hansel” in Englebert Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel* at the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts, directed by Nancy Hermiston and conducted by Richard Epp.

In March of 2001, Ms. Stringer played the role of “Elizabeth Proctor” in American composer Robert Ward’s *The Crucible*, which is based on the highly successful American play of the same name by Arthur Miller. The opera was directed by Nancy Hermiston, conducted by Jesse Read, and the performances were held at the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts.

In her second year, Ms. Stringer completed her operatic requirements with a performance of Henry Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* in which she played the role of “Dido” in March 2002. The opera was paired with a performance of Giacomo Puccini’s *Gianni Schicchi*. These operas are related by their subject matter in that the great Italian Renaissance writer Dante alluded to both of these stories in his *Divine Comedy*. The operas were directed by Nancy Hermiston, conducted by Neil Varon, and the performances were held at the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts.

Ms. Stringer gave the first of two recitals in May 2002 with the pianist Gladys Lau. The program included song cycles by Gabriel Fauré, Richard Wagner, Manuel da Falla, and André Previn. The recital was performed in the UBC School of Music Recital Hall.

Finally, Ms. Stringer gave a lecture recital presentation of Francis Poulenc’s *La Voix humaine* in which she played the sole character, “Elle.” The performance was given in September 2005 in the UBC School of Music recital hall and accompanied by Richard Epp on the piano. The recital was presented in conjunction with her thesis document entitled, “Melodrama in the 1950s: A New Production of Francis Poulenc’s *La Voix humaine*.”
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
Recital Hall
Saturday, May 4, 2002
8:00 p.m.

DOCTORAL RECITAL*
SANDRA STRINGER, MEZZO-SOPRANO
with
Gladys Lau, Piano

Cinq mélodies de Vénise (1891)
Mandoline
En sourdine
Green
À Clymène
C’est l’extase

Wesendonck-Lieder (1858)
Der Engel
Stehe still!
Im Treibhaus
Schmerzen
Träume

- INTERMISSION -

Siete Canciones Populares Españolas (1922)
El Paño Moruno
Seguidilla Murciana
Asturiana
Jota
Nana
Canción
Polo

Five Songs for Mezzo Soprano (1978)
Morning has spread again
Home is so sad
Friday night in the Royal Station Hotel
Talking in bed
The trees

* In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Musical Arts
with a major in Voice.

Reception to follow in the faculty lounge.
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
Recital Hall
Saturday, September 17, 2005
8:00 p.m.

DOCTORAL LECTURE-RECITAL*
SANDRA STRINGER, mezzo-soprano

La Voix humaine (1959)  
Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

‘Elle’: Sandra Stringer
Piano: Richard Epp
Production and Direction: Sandra Stringer

- INTERMISSION -

Lecture: ‘Melodrama in the 1950s: A New Production of Francis Poulenc’s La Voix humaine’

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree with a major in Voice Performance.
THE CHAN CENTRE and UBC OPERA ENSEMBLE

present

Hansel and Gretel

December 8, 2000
8PM
December 10, 2000
3PM

Chan Centre for the Performing Arts, UBC
Synopsis

Act 1
In the cottage of a broom maker in the Hartz Mountains, Hansel and Gretel play, sing a charming duet and dance a merry dance. Their mother, Gertrude, angry at their idleness, scolds the children for playing instead of working. The mother sends the children out into the woods to gather strawberries for the evening meal. The father, Peter, enters with a rousing song bringing a bundle of food. Learning that the children have gone into the woods, he grows apprehensive. Both the mother and father rush into the woods to find the children.

Act II
In the forest, Hansel looks for strawberries while Gretel sings a folk song. The strawberries are gathered and the children yield to the temptation of eating them. As night begins to fall, darkness brings terror. The children cannot find their way home. Frightened, the children fall asleep with the aid of the Sandman, first singing their evening prayer. Fourteen angels appear and protect the children while they are asleep.

INTERMISSION

Act III
The Dew Fairy wakens the children who then notice a delicious gingerbread house. They begin eating the cakes and creams. The Witch catches them nibbling at her house, forces them inside with a magic spell and prepares to make them into her supper entrée. As the Witch sings a gleeful song about her strange activities, Gretel steals her wand and frees her brother from his cage. As the Witch checks the oven, the children thrust the old witch into its flames. The oven explodes and all spells are broken; the gingerbread children return to life. The mother and father catch up with their wayward pair, and all unite in a hymn of thanks.
The Arts Umbrella Dance Company is a performance-oriented program for the serious dance students. It is a repertory company, which performs original contemporary choreography. The Dance Company performs during the year for schools and main stage venues located throughout the province. The goal of the Company is to provide young dancers with broad-based technical training and performance opportunities in preparation for a professional career in dance and post-secondary dance study. The Dance Company instills the sense of commitment and discipline necessary for the development of professional dancers.

Dance Company members participate in a minimum of six classes per week for Junior members and ten classes per week for Senior members, plus weekday and Sunday rehearsals. The Company experience includes master classes with special guest instructors. Original works are set on the Company by renowned guest choreographers such as Mary Louise Albert, Joe Laughlin, Bengt Jorden, Judith Marcuse, Jennifer Mascall, John Ottman, Grant Strate, Glenn Gilmour, Edmund Kilpatrick, Crystal Pite, Giaconda Barbuto, David Earle, Lynn Sheppard, Wen Wei Wang, Dominique Dumais, Emily Molnar and Edward Hillyer.

Coffee Concerts at Arts Umbrella
December 17, 2000
January 28, 2001
February 18, 2001
March 11, 2001
April 29, 2001
Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra

Violin I
Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra
Sharon Norman

Trumpet
Kathleen Bowles*
Hitoshi Ishizaka

Tony Clarke**
Anne lies Reeves

Horn
Marianne Plenert*
Lyle Hillaby

Rodney Blackwell
Wilfred Schmidt
Maureen Hole

Gayane Bobloyan
Mary Szendry
Janet Summers*

David Brownstein
Bass
Steven Woodside

Jim Dery
Al Cone*

Bass Trombone
Peter Waldkirch

Shirley Dunfield
Russell Sholberg

Trombone
Jim Marcia*

Connie McDermott
Jeff Warner
Vasyl Pistruga*

Etsuo Saito

Joan Measday

Tuba
Scott Weaver

Miriam Sonstenes
Douglas Hagerman*

Timpani
Kim Holland*

Cheryl Shizgal
English Horn

Percussion
Brad Fisher


Horn

Violin II
Marianne Plenert*

Janet Measday

Luke Whittall

Joan Carne*
Piccolo

Harp
Lani Krantz

David Clark
Ruth Cornish

**Concertmaster

Heather Dunfield

European Percussion

Reita Goldberg

Janie Oye*

Kelsy Todosychuk

Elaine Griffiths
Cathy McCashin

Sarah Cole-Burnett

Brad Fisher

Maria Horvath

Clarinets

Luke Whittall

Colin Percival

Clarinet

Bass Clarinet

Harp

Barry Pierce

Chuck Currie

Bassoon

Lani Krantz

C. H. R. S.

Diedre Rogers*

Clarinet

Charmian Hoyle

Kim Hollis

David Clark

Janine Oye*

Caroline Kirkpatrick

Heather Dunfield

Cathy McCashin

Heather Dunfield

Bass Trombone

Ruth Cornish

Remo LaBallister

Reita Goldberg

Douglas Hagerman*

Kate McKenzie

Elaine Griffiths

English Horn

Janine Oye*

Bassoon

Kelsy Todosychuk

Maria Horvath

Janie Oye*

Bass Clarinet

Percussion

Joan Measday

Timpani

Elaine Griffiths

Charmian Hoyle

Bill Weatherall

Gillian Taylor

Clarinet

Bass Clarinet

Lani Krantz

Joan Measday

Janie Oye*

Harp

Bev Hunter

Clarinet

Lani Krantz

Bass: Al Cone, Russell Sholberg, Jeff Warner

**Concertmaster

****section principal

Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra

Arts Umbrella Ballet

Hannah Berman

Noi Harrison-Weiss

Caitlin Brown

Meaghan Hoyle

Katherine Bushman

Caroline Kirkpatrick

Sarah Cole-Burnett

Sheralyn LaBallister

Veronica de Jong

Zahrah McKenzie

Anastasia Facchin

Julie Pecard

Carmella Gray-Cosgrove

Kelsy Todosychuk


The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts
UBC Opera Ensemble
Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra

Opera in three acts
Performed in English

HANSEL AND GRETEL
Music by Engelbert Humperdinck
Libretto by Adelheid Wette
Based on the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm

Director Nancy Hermiston
Conductor Richard Epp

December 8, 2000
Hansel  Sandra Stringer
Gretel  Rhonwen Adams
Mother  Sheila Christie
Father  Todd Delaney
Witch  Shauna Martin
Sandman  Katy Bowen-Roberts
Dew Fairy  Rhoslynn Jones

December 10, 2000
Aliya Ahmad
Melissa Bencic
Janet Vandertol
Justin Welsh
Jeanine Fynn
Dory Hayley
Jinny Park

Market Folks: Amy LaFroy, Rosa Nam, and Gil Anderson
Ballet: Arts Umbrella Ballet

There will be one twenty-minute intermission

This production is made possible through the assistance of the Chan Endowment Fund of the University of British Columbia.
UBC Opera Ensemble

The UBC Opera Ensemble, which draws its performers from advanced students and young professionals, has been producing opera since 1964. Through the preparation of fully staged operas, excerpts and concerts, students participate in all aspects of operatic production, including performance, coaching, conducting, stage direction, lighting, scenery and costume design. In recent years the Opera Ensemble has performed in Europe three times, toured BC, collaborated with Vancouver Opera, the Vancouver Symphony, appeared in Senior's homes, colleges and schools throughout the Vancouver region and has become an integral part of our university's life.

Upcoming Performances at:
The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts:
The Crucible, Mar. 1, 2, 3, at 8:00 P.M. and Mar 4, at 3:00 P.M.
Opera Excerpts, with the UBC Choral Union and UBC Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Mar. 23 & 24 at 8:00 P.M.
Opera Bon Bons at the Old Auditorium Apr. 20 & 21 at 8:00 P.M.

Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra

The Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra, now entering its 36th year, is a community orchestra offering five concerts a year. Local professionals are often featured as soloists. The orchestra provides an opportunity for serious amateur musicians to study and perform in the stimulating environment of a full orchestra. The Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra would like to thank the Hamber and Leon and Thea Koerner Foundations for their support.

Upcoming Concerts:
Sat. Feb. 17, 2001 8:00 P.M.
Shaughnessy Heights United Church, 1550 West 33rd Ave.
Sun. April 8, 2001, 2:00 P.M.
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts
Sat. June 2, 2001
Shaughnessy Heights United Church
Acknowledgements

Production

Stage Director
Nancy Hermiston*

Music Director/Conductor
Richard Epp

Choreographer
Wen Wei Wang

Reperteurs
Donna Falconer
Daniel Chow
Brett Kingsbury

Offstage Recorder
Rhoslyn Jones

Technical Director
Cameron McGill

Lighting Designer
Jeremy Baxter

Lighting Assistant
Mike Inwood

Follow-spot Operators
Brooke Harris
Beverly McArthur

Soloists Costume Designer
Alison Green**

Production Manager
Peggy Jameson*

Stage Manager
Neil Wright

Production Assistants
David Jeffries
Elio Good
Neema Bickersteth
Dory Hayley
Katy Bowen-Roberts

Set Decoration
Elio Catana
Jeanine Fynn
Katie Bowen-Roberts
Dory Hayley
Alex Good
Phillip Grant
Janet Vandertol

Costume Co-ordinator
Lydia Hiebert

Costume Assistant
Elio Catana

Wigs
Elke Englicht

Makeup
Nel Volrich

Makeup Assistant
Alexandria Beck

*Member of Canadian Actors' Equity Association
** Member of Associated Designers of Canada

Special Thanks

Mr. Thomas Thompson whose generosity made it possible for the Witch to renovate her House, UBC School of Music, Frederic Wood Theatre: Janet Bickford, Ian Pratt and Frederick Wood shop staff, Wallace Leung, Hussein Janmohamed, Dr. Irving Guttmann, Derek Mack, Patrick Roberge Productions, The Chan Centre staff and crew, Arts Umbrella, David Spencer Encouragement Fund, Martha Lou Henley Charitable Foundation, Phyllis Lavalle and the Friends of UBC Opera.
The Crucible
by Robert Ward

March 1, 2, 3, 4, 2001
Chan Shun Concert Hall
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts
The Crucible
An opera in four acts based on the play by Arthur Miller
Music by Robert Ward
Libretto by Bernard Stambler

with
The UBC Opera Ensemble &
The UBC Symphony Orchestra

Conductor ~ Jesse Read
Stage Director ~ Nancy Hermiston
Musical Director ~ Richard Epp
Set & Costume Design by Alessia Carpoca
Light Design by Jeremy Baxter

There will be one twenty-minute intermission

Chan Shun Concert Hall

March 1, 2, 3, 4, 2001

This Presentation is made possible by generous assistance through the Chan Endowment Fund of the University of British Columbia
Welcome to a memorable night of opera! I hope you will savor this evening, the ideal kind of theatre experience, an opera based on a great piece of dramatic art-Arthur Miller’s striking play, a score from a legendary composer who has graced us with his presence, a sharply-defined visual and theatrical setting which complements and supports the story, all performed by the singers and musicians from what is emerging as the most exciting opera training program in Canada! We are proud of this production, excited that UBC, the School of Music and the Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing can collaborate again to bring you into its midst. As the Director of the School and conductor of tonight’s performance, I share your excitement, enthusiasm and sense of appreciation for the talent and dedication necessary to give birth to such a moving and dramatic production. Thank you for joining us.

Warm wishes,

Jesse Read - Conductor, Director UBC School of Music

The Performing Arts are too often assumed to be just entertainment. Theatre in all its forms, has been a crucial part of our societal development, with an importance far beyond the merely diversionary. The Crucible is a case in point. In 1950, the play was Arthur Miller’s response to a social injustice, and it gave us a picture of how we behave in the throes of political hysteria. Robert Ward’s operatic work makes this picture even more poignant and more accessible to an even broader audience. The Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing is proud to join with the Opera Program to present this classic, relevant and important story.

Ron Fedoruk - Head of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing, UBC
About the Composer

Robert Ward was born in 1917 in Cleveland, Ohio. He studied with Howard Hanson and Bernard Rogers at the Eastman School of Music; with Frederick Jacobi, Bernard Wagenaar, Albert Stoessel and Edgar Schenkman at the Juilliard Graduate School, and with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center. He has served on the faculties of Queens College, Columbia University, and the Juilliard School of Music where he was also Assistant to the President from 1952 to 1956. He was the Director of the Third Street Music School Settlement from 1952 to 1955. He was Executive Vice-President and Managing Editor of Galaxy Music Corporation and Highgate Press until 1967 when he became President of the North Carolina School of the Arts. Until his retirement in 1987, he was the Mary Duke Biddle Professor of Music at Duke University. Mr. Ward’s large and distinguished musical creation has, in large measure, been commissioned by the New York City Opera, Broadcast Music, Inc., the New York Philharmonic, the Friends of Dumbarton Oaks, the Juilliard Musical Foundation, and many others. His opera, The Crucible, based on the play by Arthur Miller, won both the 1962 Pulitzer Prize for Music and the New York Music Critics Circle Citation for the same year.

A Message from the Director

Robert Ward’s opera The Crucible gives us pause to think of our own human strengths and weaknesses. We have chosen to give the piece no fixed period as the issues addressed by this very moving work are ones which have remained with us long before and long after those Puritan days of Salem. One needs only to look into our history books, listen to the 6:00 o’clock news, enter some schools, universities, colleges or even some courts and churches to see that mass hysteria, mob mentality, persecution, jealousy, hatred, sexual repression, and the darker sides of power and love are as present now as they were in Salem or in Miller’s 1950 U.S. society. Through this most disturbing and inspiring work both Miller and Ward provide us with the opportunity to find, as does John Proctor, “that shred of goodness” in ourselves.

When asked what the opera has to say to modern audiences, Robert Ward replied: “We think events like the Salem witch trials or the McCarthy hearings can’t happen again, but as we look around us in the world, we see the same conditions recur again and again.”

It is a great honour and privilege to have the composer with us for this production.

Nancy Hermiston Director UBC Opera Ensemble
The Opera Ensemble and I would like to thank you for your continued support and interest. The 2000/2001 season has been a most exciting and active one. Our collaboration with the Opera House in Usti nad Labem, Czech Republic, was a most successful and rewarding venture. A highlight of our European schedule was our performances of Gärtnerin aus Liebe in the Stovosky Theatre, Prague, where Mozart premiered his Don Giovanni.

A further consequence of this venture was the collaboration between the Usti Opera House and the Opera Ensemble in this production of The Crucible. On Sept. 21, 2001 the Opera House in Usti will present the Czech premiere of The Crucible with this production featuring a Czech/UBC Opera Ensemble cast.

We return to Usti in May and June to perform three operas, Gounod's, Faust in French, Janacek's The Cunning Little Vixen in Czech, and Mozart's Gärtnerin aus Liebe in German. Internationally renowned conductor David Agler will conduct the Faust performances while Usti's General Music Director; Norbert Baxa will lead the Vixen and Gärtnerin. The Ensemble will complete its tour at the International Festival for Young Opera Singers in the University town of Erlangen, Germany with a performance of Gärtnerin aus Liebe on July 1, Canada Day. Along with their colleagues from Usti the Ensemble will share this Festival with singers from Italy and Germany.

Our season has also included the annual David Spencer Memorial concert, our Christmas production of Hansel and Gretel, many community concerts and a tour to Cranbrook, B.C. with our shortened school version of Hansel and Gretel, where approximately 1500 children attended our performances. In addition, we participated with Italy's Ruggiero Ensemble in a production of Monteverdi's Il Ritorno d'Ulisse di Patria.

After The Crucible we will join the Choral Union and Wind Symphony for Operatic excerpts Mar. 23 & 24 and present three evenings of Operatic Bon Bons on Apr. 20, 21, & 22 in the Old Auditorium, featuring excerpts from Faust, Otello, Romeo and Juliette, Hamlet and Sir John In Love, with guest directors, Irving Guttman and Mari Hahn.

- Nancy Hermiston

**THE OPERA ENSEMBLE EXECUTIVE**

RHOWEN ADAMS
MELISSA BENCIC
NEEMA BICKERSTETH
RHOSLYN JONES
JANET VANDERTOL
ALEXIS BARTHELEMY
KATY BOWEN-ROBERTS
JEANINE FYNN
RILEY MCMITCHELL
JUSTIN WELSH
The Crucible
by Robert Ward

Cast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>March 1 &amp; 3</th>
<th>March 2 &amp; 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty Parris</td>
<td>Katy Bowen-Roberts</td>
<td>Dory Hayley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reverend Parris</td>
<td>Russell Robson</td>
<td>Phillip Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tituba</td>
<td>Beverly McArthur</td>
<td>Katherine Landry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abigail Williams</td>
<td>Melanie Krueger</td>
<td>Mari Hahn</td>
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<td>Ann Putnam</td>
<td>Shauna Martin</td>
<td>Cindy Koistinen</td>
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<td>Thomas Putnam</td>
<td>Elio Catana</td>
<td>Krzysztof Biernacki</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebecca Nurse</td>
<td>Jeanine Fynn</td>
<td>Suzanne Abbott</td>
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<tr>
<td>Francis Nurse</td>
<td>Joel Klein</td>
<td>Pierre Hungn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giles Corey</td>
<td>Craig Johnson</td>
<td>Neil Wright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Proctor</td>
<td>*Gil Anderson</td>
<td>*Andrew Greenwood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reverend Hale</td>
<td>David Jefferies</td>
<td>Shae Apland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Proctor</td>
<td>Alexis Barthelemy</td>
<td>Sandra Stringer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Warren</td>
<td>Maaike deBruyn</td>
<td>Neema Bickersteth</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(March 1st)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sheila Christie</td>
<td>(March 3rd)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ezekiel Cheever</td>
<td>Ian Paul</td>
<td>Alex Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judge Danforth</td>
<td>Neil Wright</td>
<td>Philippe Castagner</td>
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<td>Sarah Good</td>
<td>Elaine Lee</td>
<td>Elizabeth Cushnie</td>
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<td>Ruth Putnam</td>
<td>Jinny Park</td>
<td>Rhoslyn Jones</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susanna Walcott</td>
<td>Mia Harris</td>
<td>Paula MacNeil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mercy Lewis</td>
<td>Soula Parassidis</td>
<td>Alexandria Beck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha Shelton</td>
<td>Charis Vanelst</td>
<td>Rosa Nam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget Booth</td>
<td>Rhonwen Adams</td>
<td>Katie Cross</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*by permission of Canadian Actor's Equity Association

Chorus

Stephen Bell   Jerome Dubois
Jeannette Gibault  Andrew Jameson
Amy LaFroy      Michael Mori
Steven Rathjen  Mark Sampson
Janet Vandertol
ORCHESTRA

**VIOLIN 1**
+ Alycia Au  
Ruth Huang  
Evet Bo-Kyoung Kim  
Adrian Dyck  
Amanda Hsueh  
James Wei  
Angela Hodgson  
Amy Pei  
Amelia Mori  
Jenny Atkinson  
Ruth Houtman

**BASS**
* Leanna Wong  
Peggy Tong  
Jennifer Chu  
Jessy Giammarino

**FLUTES**
* Tara Whittaker  
Greg Kirczenow (piccolo)

**OBOE & ENGLISH HORN**
Marisa Chang

**VIOLIN 2**
* Gillian Mott  
Brooke Day  
James Hill  
Denise Ng  
Jessica Wan  
Trevor Pearce  
Vincent Wong  
Phyllis Ho  
Heather Liau  
Jack Tsai

**CLARINETS**
* Eileen Walsh  
Jennifer McEnhll  
Amanda Beatty (bass clarinet)

**BASSOONS**
Meghan Dahl

**HORNS**
* Megan Smith  
David Quackenbush

**VIOLA**
* Beth Schaufele  
Aaron Butler  
Szabolcs Kabok  
Suzanne Schweikle-Davey  
Gillian Hunter

**TRUMPETS**
* Meghan Turner  
Chris Mitchell

**BASS TROMBONES**
Peter Waldkirch

**CELLO**
* Colin Giles  
Diederik van Dijk  
Anne Davison  
Seung Young Song  
Lucas Wong  
Sarah Tippett  
Alexandra Sia  
Hsin-Pei Liu

**TIMPANI & PERCUSSION**
Bruce Henczel

**LIBRARIAN**
Peggy Wong

**MANAGER**
Colin Giles

+ **CONCERT MASTER**
* **SECTION LEADER**
PRODUCTION

FOR THE OPERA DEPARTMENT

Music Director
Richard Epp
Repétiteurs
Daniel Chow
Donna Falconer
Brett Kingsbury
Technical Director
Cameron McGill
Technical Coordinator
Jason Bosher
Wigs
Elke Englisch
Head of Properties
Valerie Moffat
Prop Builder
Make-Up
Nel Volrich
Lighting Assistant
Mike Inwood
Lighting Board Operator
Jeremy Baxter
Painters
Gennie Willoughby-Price
Costumes
Opera House, Usti nad Labem, Czech Republic
Costume Coordinator
Lydia Hiebert

PRODUCTION
Stage Manager
Peggy Jameson*
Assistant Stage Managers
April Lawrence
Maya Sanders
Stage Crew
Laura Parson
Stacy Landers

FOR THE THEATRE DEPARTMENT

Technical Director
Ian Pratt
Production Manager
Robert Eberle
Props Supervisors
Janet Bickford
Lynn Burton
Costume Supervisors
Jean Driscoll-Bell
Stage Carpenters
Jim Ferguson
Don Griffiths
Jay Henrickson
Business Manager
Marietta Kozak
Communications
Joan Wellwood
Poster Design
James A. Glen
Box Office
Gerry Bratz
Office Support
G. Vanderwoude
Program Layout
Maryke Flameling

Media Sponsors

CBC Radio Two
105.7 Classics and Beyond

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The Chan Family, Michael Noon
The Vancouver Opera, The Vancouver Playhouse, The Arts Club Theatre, Valerie Moffat,
School of Music Office Staff, Phyllis Lavalle and The Friends of UBC Opera, David
Spencer Endowment Encouragement Fund, Enchanted Florist, Ian Pratt, Thomas
Thompson, UBC Opera Ensemble, The Moving Guys, and
Jim Wright General Director of The Vancouver Opera

A Special Thank You to the Vancouver Opera Guild for their donation to this production.
The Crucible - Synopsis

Act I

The curtain rises on the Reverend Samuel Parris kneeling distraught at the bed of his daughter Betty. She lies immobile and scarcely breathing, as she has lain since Parris came upon her and her cousin Abigail dancing in the woods the night before. Tituba comes to ask about Betty but is angrily sent away.

Abigail enters to say that the town is whispering of witchcraft and that Parris should go out to make denial. He bitterly turns on her to question her about the dancing and about her mysterious dismissal from the service of the Proctors. As she vehemently denies any wrongdoing, attributing her dismissal to Goodwife Proctor's arrogant desire for a slave, the Putnams enter to tell that their Ruth was stricken at the same time as Betty Parris and that they have sent to Beverly for the Reverend Hale, known for his skill in discovering witches.

While Parris, fearful of any suspicion of witchcraft in his own household, is anxiously doubting the need for Hale, Rebecca and Francis Nurse enter with Giles Corey. Rebecca is comforting, old Giles is flippant about the illness of the girls. When Putnam insists that witches are at work in Salem, Giles accuses him of using a witch scare to defraud his neighbors of their land. John Proctor's entrance only brings this quarrel to a higher peak. (Abigail, though silent in the upper room, visibly reacts with excitement to John's entrance.) Rebecca reprimands the men for this untimely squabble in a house of illness, and calls them back to their senses. Giles departs with John.

They sing a psalm to beseech God's help. As the psalm proceeds, Betty begins to writhe on the bed and then with an unearthly shriek tries to fly out of the window. They rush to her side. In the midst of the commotion the Reverend Hale enters. He calms them with his air of authority and then methodically sets an inquiry under way. He soon learns that Tituba has played an important role in what has been happening, having also been present at the dancing. Ann Putnam asserts that Tituba knows conjuring. Tituba is sent for; at her entrance, Abigail, who has been under severe inquisition by Hale, lashes out to accuse Tituba of compacting with the Devil. Tituba, overwhelmed by the sternness of Hale and the malevolent intensity of Parris and the Putnams, finally confesses that she has been visited by the Devil, but denies that he has persuaded her into any wrongdoing—for a few moments she frightens Parris and the Putnams with a heartfelt fantasy of the hellish power to bring them harm that the Devil had offered her.

With Tituba's confession the spell over Betty is broken. All return to the psalm in great thanksgiving, while Abby envies the attention now being given to Tituba, hysterically repents her own compact with the Devil, and visibly receives an answer to her prayer for forgiveness and for a call to mark out others of the Devil's crew.
Act II

John Proctor returns from a day's planting to find Elizabeth listless and moody. In her mind the witch trials have become an aggravation of her domestic troubles, with Abby at the center of both. She insists that John expose Abby's fraud to Judge Danforth; his reluctance to do this convinces her that he still has a warm spot in his heart for Abby. John's self-defense is double: that he has no witness to what Abby told him, and that she will avenge herself by revealing John's adultery with her. And he is fed up with Elizabeth's sitting in condemnatory judgment upon him. She gently denies this but regrets the vanished sweetness of their love. Abby, she says, will not confess the lechery lest she damn herself. And what of those who suffer in jail because of John's silence? No, John must tear the last feeling for Abby out of his heart, or she will never give up hope of some day having him for her own.

Mary Warren enters furtively from her day at court as one of Abby's crew of witchfinders. She tells, breaking into tears, that the number of those arrested has tripled—and that Goody Osborn has been condemned to hang! She is truly troubled by this, and by her own part in it, but demonstrates how the mob excitement of the courtroom procedure turns her into an hysterical accuser even against her own will. When John threatens to whip her if she ever returns to that court she blurts out that Goody Proctor herself has been mentioned in court and that only Mary's defense of her prevented an outright accusation.

Elizabeth is sure that Abby is behind this and is once more pleading with John to go to the court when Reverend Hale and John Cheever enter with a warrant for her arrest: that very evening Abby has charged Elizabeth with employing a witch's poppet to kill her. John makes Mary acknowledge it is her poppet, but Hale, although deeply troubled by these new directions of the witch-hunts, feels that he must arrest Elizabeth for examination.

John is about to burst out wildly to prevent their taking Elizabeth away, but instead turns with intense but controlled passion upon Mary: she will tell her story in court even though it may provoke a charge of adultery from Abby and ruin both Abby and John completely—anything rather than that Elizabeth should be in danger for his sake.

Act III

Scene 1.

Abby, with a mixture of scheming but passionate love for John and a mystical belief in her mission, tries to persuade John to abandon Elizabeth and to join her in the holy work of cleansing the puritanically corrupt town. He will not listen to this, but instead pleads that she free the town from the curse of her foolish wickedness, and then threatens to expose her fraud. She defies him: now any dire fate that descends on Elizabeth will be of his doing.
Scene 2.

Judge Danforth’s invocation in court reveals the strength and fervor of his conviction that God’s will is working through him to cleanse the land of a plague of witches.

As court opens, Giles Corey accuses Thomas Putnam, in his greed for his neighbors’ land, of having bragged of his role in the charges of witchcraft. Judge Danforth sends Corey to jail and torture for refusing to name his witnesses for this accusation. There is a great hubbub as Giles leaps at Putnam as the man responsible for the arrest of his wife and himself, and of Rebecca Nurse as well.

John Proctor presents Mary Warren’s deposition that the entire crying-out against witches started only as an exciting game for the girls-and is a complete pretense and fraud. But Abby, he says, has continued the game in an effort to dispose of Elizabeth. Her encouragement to this arose from the adultery that took place between Abby and himself, which he is now confessing. When Elizabeth, ordinarily incapable of a lie, is brought in and fails to confirm John’s confession; Abigail counterattacks, charging that Mary herself has turned witch. Mary, helpless and then hysterical, turns on John Proctor-accusing him of being the Devil’s man who has forced her into trying to confuse and overthrow the court. All but the Reverend Hale close in on John Proctor with sadistic vindictiveness.

Act IV

Tituba and Sarah Good, crazed by the rigors of imprisonment, sing of the Devil and his broken promises to them. Abby comes into the prison courtyard; she has bribed the jailer to permit Proctor to escape. John, although broken by the months of prison and torture, scornfully rejects the freedom and love she offers him. Abby runs off weeping.

Hale, and then Parris, try to persuade Judge Danforth to postpone the executions of Proctor and Rebecca Nurse scheduled for that morning: Salem may break into open rebellion at the execution of such respected citizens. Danforth indignantly refuses, but agrees to ask Elizabeth to persuade her husband to confess.

John is brought in and left alone with Elizabeth. She tells him that Giles Corey has died, pressed to death rather than say aye or nay to the charge of witchcraft, but that many have confessed in order to save their lives. John reluctantly brings out his own wish to confess-if it will not make her think ill of him for lying. Passionately she answers that it was her lie that doomed him-and that she wants him alive. Exultant, he shouts that he will confess to the charge of witchcraft.

Danforth, Hale, and Parris rejoice—for their various reasons-over John’s confession, and Parris tries to persuade Rebecca, who has been brought in on the way to the gallows, also to confess. She refuses to damn herself with the lie. John is asked to sign his confession, that it may be exhibited before the town. But this is too much: he has deeply shamed himself by confessing, but he will not set his hand to the destruction of his own name—and the eternal shame of his sons. He tears up the document. In fury Danforth orders John and Rebecca to be led out to execution. Hale pleads with Elizabeth that she change John’s decision while there is yet time. She refuses: “He has found his name and his goodness now-God forbid I take it from him.”
Images and Texts about the Salem Witch Trials

Above: "The Trial of George Jacobs, August 5, 1692" by T.H. Matteson, 1885


WARRANT FOR THE ARREST OF ELIZABETH PROCTOR AND SARAH CLOYCE (APRIL 4, 1692):

There Being Complaint this day made (Before us) by capt Jonat Walcott, and Lt Natheniell Ingersull both of Salem Village, in Behalfe of theire Majesties for themselves and also for severall of their Neighbours Against Sarah Cloyce the wife of peter Cloyce of Salem Village; and Elizabeth Proctor the wife of John Proctor of Salem furnaces for high Suspition of Sundry acts of Witchcraft donne or Committed by them upon the bodys of Abigail Williams, and John Indian both of Mr Sam parris his family of Salem Village and mary Walcott daughter of the abovesaid Complainants, And Ann Putnam and Marcy Lewis of the famyly of Thomas Putnam of Salem Village whereby great hurt and dammage hath beene done to the Bodys of s'd persons above named therefore Craved Justice.

You are therefore in theire Majest's names hereby required to apprehend and bring before us Sarah Cloyce the wife of peter Cloyce of Salem Village and Elizabeth proctor the wife of John Procter of Salem furnaces; on Munday Morning Next being the Eleventh day of this Instant April aboute Eleven of the Clock, at the publike Meeting house in the Towne, in order to theire Examination Relating to the premesis aboves'd and here of you are. not to faile Dated Salem April 8'fh 1692

To George Herick Marshall of the County of essex
John Hathorne
Jonathan Corwin  Assists
The Deposition of Sam Parris, Nathaniel Ingersoll, and Thomas Putnam
[pictured below]

The Deposition of Sam: Parris aged about.39.years, & Nathanael Ingersol aged about fifty & eight years, & Thomas Putnam aged about forty years all of Salem -

...testifyeth & saith that John Indian, Ann Putman & Abigail Williams & others of the bewitched persons were several times & grievously tortured at the Examination of Elizabeth Proctor wife to John Proctor of Salem Farms before the Honoured Magistrates the, 11th April. 1692. & particularly that Eliz: Hubbard was in a Trance during the whole examination unable to speak a word tho often called upon by s'd Magistrates, & also the said Abigail Williams & Ann Putman then testified that they saw this Eliz: Proctor & her husband John Proctor several times afflicting of Bathshua Pope the wife of Joseph Pope of Salem Yeoman, at which times the said Bathshua Pope was seized with violent fits: & farther that the said Abigail Williams & Ann Putnam, both of them made offer to strike at said Eliz Proctor, but when said Abigails hand came near to said Eliz: Proctor it opend (whereas it was made up into a fist before) & came down exceeding lightly as it drew near to said Proctor, & at length with open & extended fingers touche said Proctor's hood very lightly, & immediately said Abigail cried out, Oh! my fingers, my fingers, my fingers burne, & Ann Putman took on most grievously of her head, & sunk down, as far as she could being held up by such as tended her.

- Nath: Ingatson and thom. Putman did on their oaths owne this their testimonies to be the truth be fore the Jurors of Inques this 30 of June 1692.

To learn more about the Salem Witch Trials, visit the website http://etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft
SIEGFRIED JERUSALEM  
(tenor)  
IN CONCERT  

Renowned in Bayreuth circles for his masterful interpretation of German opera and art song, the great Wagnerian tenor makes a rare recital appearance at the Chan.

SATURDAY MARCH 17, 8:00pm  

Tickets available at Ticketmaster [280-3311]  
or call the Chan Centre Box Office at 822-2697

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Upcoming Events

Masterclasses with Siegfried Jerusalem  
March 12-14..................Old Auditorium  
March 15.........................Recital Hall  
Student Concert  
Admission: $5.00 for each class and student concert  
Masterclass Pass: Admission to all Masterclasses and the Student Concert: $20.00  
UBC music students: Free admission

A Concert of Operatic Excerpts  
March 23 & 24  
8:00pm.................Chan Centre for the Performing Arts  
UBC Ensemble, UBC Choral Union, UBC Symphonic Wind Ensemble  
Admission by donation

UBC Symphony Orchestra  
April 5, 12:30pm  
April 6, 8:00pm......Chan Centre for the Performing Arts  
Free admission

Masterclasses with Dawn Upshaw  
April 12, 12:00pm-2:00pm  
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts  
Admission: $10/$15 at the door

Opera Bon Bons  
April 20 & 21, 8:00pm  
April 22, 3:00pm............Old Auditorium  
Excerpts from Othello, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliette, Sir John in Love, and Faust  
Guest directors: Irving Guttmann and Mari Hahn  
Admission by donation

For more concert information visit The School of Music website at:  
www.music.ubc.ca  or phone 822-5574
THE CHAN CENTRE

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MICHAEL NOON

DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS
CAMERON MCCGILL

PROGRAMMING MANAGER
JOYCE HINTON

EVENTS COORDINATOR
WENDY ATKINSON

CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER
MARIE EDWARDS

STAGE COORDINATOR
OWEN SCHELLENBERGER

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STEVE DARKE

SYSTEMS COORDINATOR
TED CLARK

FRONT OF HOUSE COORDINATORS
YOLANDA BUTT & JENNY PETERSON

CONCESSIONS COORDINATOR
BASIL WAUGH

TICKET OFFICE COORDINATOR
DONNA CAEDO

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FLORA LEW

FINANCIAL CLERK
LAURA LEE SAMUELS

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GREEK
by Steven Berkoff

MAR 8 - 17, 2001  7:30pm
TELUS Studio Theatre
Adults $16  Students/Seniors $10

THE BEGGER'S OPERA
by John Gay

MAR 22 - 31, 2001  7:30pm
Frederic Wood Theatre
Adults $16  Students/Seniors $10

BECKETT

BIRTHDAY BASH IV  April 13 2001
TELUS Studio Theatre 7:30pm
NOT I  FOOTFALLS BREATH
& READINGS OF PROSE
1 Show  Tickets & Info 822-2678
DOUBLE BILL

DIDO AND AENEAS
HENRY PURCELL

GIANNI SCHICCHI
GIACOMO PUCCINI

OPERA

The Chan Shun Concert Hall
March 7 - March 10, 2002
Message from the Heads

The world of opera and the world of drama quite often follow separate and sometimes not even parallel courses. But there are times when those courses converge, and it is a great pleasure to be able to explore all the ways that this union can create exciting and moving theatre.

One of the great advantages of operating a Theatre Program in the diverse environment of UBC is the possibility of interaction with other artists and scholars, and input from colleagues around the university is a vital factor in our presentations. Our students, whether they be singers, actors, technicians, musicologists or dramaturgs, will all benefit from exposure to joint presentations. We trust that they will take forward an increased understanding of both the work itself and of the complexities of the art of the Theatre.

Ronald Fedoruk
Associate Professor and Head
Theatre, Film and Creative Writing

The School of Music is very pleased to collaborate again with the Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing in another wonderful opera production. These performances of Purcell’s and Puccini’s masterpieces demand the kind of disciplined musicianship from singers and orchestra for which our School is known. But it takes the stagecraft of Theatre - sets, lightings, acting and movement - to bring about the magic synergy of opera. I am especially pleased that with this collaboration we can honour the fifth anniversary of the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts. Its beautiful concert hall has inspired our students and helped to raise the standards of performance. I hope that you will sense our gratitude, and that you will enjoy these operas as much as we do.

John Roeder
Acting Director
UBC School of Music
UBCMUSIC present

DIDO AND AENEAS
BY HENRY PURCELL
IN THE EDITION BY BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND IMOGEN HOLST

&

GIANNI SCHICCHI
BY GIACOMO PUCCINI

DIRECTED BY NANCY HERMISTON
CONDUCTED BY NEIL VARON
MUSIC DIRECTION BY RICHARD EPP
CHORUS PREPARED BY BRUCE PULLAN
SCENERY DESIGN BY KEVIN McALLISTER**
LIGHTING DESIGN BY JEREMY BAXTER
COSTUMES FOR GIANNI SCHICCHI BY MALABAR LTD., TORONTO
**Member of Associated Designers of Canada

There will be one 20-minute intermission

The Chan Shun Concert Hall
March 7 – March 10, 2002
On behalf of the Opera Ensemble I would like to welcome all of you to our spring production. This year is a very special one for many reasons. It is the fifth anniversary year of the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts. This Centre has had such an impact on the cultural life of UBC, the Vancouver community, the province of BC and indeed Canada, that one cannot believe that it has only been in existence for a mere five years. For the Opera Division and for the whole of the School of Music it has raised the level of performance of our different ensembles to a standard of which we can all be very proud. None of this would have been possible without the generosity of the Chan family and the Chan Centre Endowment for which we will be eternally grateful. Tonight in celebration and appreciation of that fact, we are proud to present almost every singer in the School of Music - with the combined forces of the Opera Ensemble and the University Singers - as well as our own UBC Symphony Orchestra, and our internationally acclaimed guest conductor Mr. Neil Varon. We are also equally delighted to have the technical support and cooperation of Theatre at UBC for this production and as always are extremely grateful for the financial assistance given to this project by the Chan Endowment. Our strong alliance with the Vancouver Opera and the Vancouver Opera Guild has also been of great assistance in making this production possible. Their support and cooperation is extremely important to the Opera Division and its students. As always we are especially delighted to have you, our loyal audience, attend our performances. It is the positive reinforcement, which you provide by your presence at our performances that has helped our young artists to mature and grow. Your support of our program has enabled them to travel throughout B.C. and to Europe, where they have gained such valuable experience. On this, our fifth season at the Chan - and its fifth anniversary - we welcome you and hope that you will continue to enjoy our performances here, as much as we enjoy presenting them to you.

Nancy Hermiston
Neil Varon - Conductor

Neil Varon was born in New York in 1950 and studied piano, composition and conducting at the Juilliard School. Since 1972 when he went to Europe, he first held positions at the Istanbul Opera, the Vienna Chamber Opera, the joint theatres of Krefeld and Monchengladbach, the Bremen Opera and the Nuremberg Opera. In 1981, he was named first Kapellmeister of the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf, and in 1987 he became the Chief Conductor of the Südwestfälische Philharmonic. In 1991 he was appointed General Music Director of the City of Gelsenkirchen. He remained at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein as a permanent guest conductor, as well as at the Südwestfälische Philharmonic. In addition to his repertoire performances, he conducted numerous Gala Performances featuring such singers as F. Araiza, P. Capuccilli, E. Gruberova, K. Ridderbusch, R. Grist and M. Jung, as well as many others. Additionally, he has conducted in numerous theaters such as the Hamburg Staatsoper, The Nuremberg Opera, Staatstheater Wiesbaden, Stuttgart Opera, the Berliner Staatsoper and the New York City Opera. He directed the German premiere of Un Re in Ascolta by Luciano Berio in Düsseldorf, and the World Premiere of Erinys by Volker David Kirchner in Wuppertal. Neil Varon is a frequent guest to European and Asian orchestras, as well as festivals; for example: the Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin, the Philharmonia Hungarica, the RSO Saarbrücken, the Radio Orchestra in Cologne, the Radio Orchestra of the SWF in Kaiserslautern, the RSO Athen, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo, the Philharmonic Orchestra of Bremen, the Bochumer Symphony, the Nuremberg Philharmonic and the Niederrheinische Sinfoniker, the Korean Symphony in Seoul, the Yomiuri Orchestra in Tokyo, and the Kyushu Philharmonic in Fukuoka. His concerts have been broadcast by the Westdeutsche Rundfunk and RIAS Berlin, and television appearances have been broadcast by RTL Luxemburg and the Bayerische Rundfunk. In 1991 and 1992, he led the Tokyo Philharmonic in a series of performances of The Magic Flute for the Mozart Festival in Japan. Since 1995, Neil Varon has been a Guest Professor for the renowned Toho Gakuen Conservatory in Tokyo. In the years following 1996 he has guested in Japan, Korea, Slovakia, Italy, Sweden, the USA and more recently, Canada. His Vancouver Opera Debut was made in November 2001 with Die Fledermaus. Neil Varon has been named Chief Conductor of the Staatstheater in Saarbrucken, Germany beginning with the 2002-2003 season.
DIDO AND AENEAS
By Henry Purcell

Cast
Thursday March 7th and Saturday March 9th.

Dido  Sandra Stringer
Understudy for Dido  Rose-Ellen Nichols
Aeneas  Krzysztof Biernacki
Belinda  Janine Park
Second Woman  Janet Vandertol
Sorceress  Heidi Meundel
First Witch  Jennifer Farrell
Second Witch  Rose-Ellen Nichols
Spirit  Alexandria Beck
First Sailor  Craig Johnson
Dido's Attendants  Jeanette Gibault

Witches  Katie Cross
Erinn Evdokimoff
Brooke Harris
Megan Morrison

Sailors  Andrew Jameson
Fraser Walters

Chorus  The University Singers

Friday March 8th and Sunday  March 10th.

Dido  Beverly McArthur
Understudy for Dido  Rose-Ellen Nichols
Aeneas  Elio Catana
Belinda  Cindy Koistinen
Second Woman  Amy La Froy
Sorceress  Jeanine Fynn
First Witch  Soula Parassidis
Second Witch  Mia Harris
Spirit  Mieke Rickert
First Sailor  Ian Paul
Dido's Attendants  Jeanette Gibault

Witches  Katie Cross
Erinn Evdokimoff
Brooke Harris
Megan Morrison

Sailors  Andrew Jameson
Fraser Walters

Chorus  The University Singers

Choral Director  Bruce Pullan

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UBC Symphony Orchestra - *Dido and Aeneas*

**Violin I**
- Ruth Huang**
- Evet Kim
- Amy Pei
- Amanda Hsueh
- Drie Ignoas
- Regina Ho
- Kimi Hamaguchi
- Michael Yagi

**Violin II**
- Jason Ho*
- Angela Hodgson
- Tanya Tomasch
- Elaine Griffiths
- Katya Sokolovskaya
- James Wei

**Viola**
- Beth Schaufele*
- James Hill
- Aaron Butler
- Brooke Day

**Cello**
- Kathryn Thompson*
- Anne Davison
- Alexandra Sia

**Bass**
- Jennifer Chu*
- Enzo Figliuzzi

**Harpsichord**
- Richard Epp

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*Principal*

**Concertmaster**

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**University Singers**

**Soprano**
- Christy Avril
- Caitlin Bradley
- Jarlline Chuang
- Bree Dickey
- Brooke Harris
- Nancy Hasiuk
- Paula MacNeil
- Marizza Mislang
- Dionne Sellinger
- Whitney Sloan

**Tenor**
- Jordan Back
- David Baker
- Tim Burns
- Stephen Bell
- Charlie Davidson
- Will Howie
- Wei-Hsi Hu
- Ryan Phelps
- Matthew Stephanson
- Fraser Walters
- Kevin Zakresky

**Alto**
- Jennifer Chin
- Naomi Derksen
- Shirin Eskandani
- Elspeth Finlay
- Gillian Hunter
- Jennifer Hutchinson
- Christine Magee
- Megan Morrison
- Amanda Murdock
- Katy Skinner
- Sarah Smith

**Bass**
- Kevin Chui
- John Conlon
- David English
- Andrew Jameson
- Mike Mori
- Jonathan Ng
- David Poon
- Shane Raman
- Matt Ramer
- Joel Stephanson
- Al Smith
- Joseph Su
GIANNI SCHICCHI
By Giacomo Puccini

Cast

Thursday March 7th and Saturday March 9th.

Gianni Schicchi        Justin Welsh
Lauretta               Neema Bickersteth
Zita                   Jeanine Fynn
Rinuccio               Philippe Castagner
Gherardino             Jennifer Farrell
Betto                  Elio Catana
Simone                 Pierre Hungr
Nella                  Rhoslyn Jones [March 7]
Gherardo               Alex Good
Marco                  Joel Klein
La Ciesca              Sheila Christie
Understudy for La Ciesca Erinn Evdokimoff
Spinelloccio           Riley McMitchell
Amantio di Nicolai     John Conlon
Pinellino              Andrew Jameson
Guccio                 Michael Mori
Understudy for Guccio  Riley McMitchell
Buoso Donati           David English

Friday March 8th and Sunday March 10th.

Gianni Schicchi        Gilbert Anderson*
Lauretta               Rhonwen Adams
Zita                   Katherine Landry
Rinuccio               David Doubleday
Gherardino             Jennifer Farrell
Betto                  John Conlon
Simone                 Gerrit Theule
Nella                  Rhoslyn Jones [March 8]
Gherardo               Shauna Martin [March 10]
Marco                  Joel Jaffe
La Ciesca              Stephen Bell
Understudy for La Ciesca Rosa Nam
Spinelloccio           Erinn Evdokimoff
Amantio di Nicolai     Michael Mori
Pinellino              Andrew Jameson
Guccio                 David English
understudy for Guccio  John Hales
Buoso Donati           Riley McMitchell

*Appears courtesy of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association
UBC Symphony Orchestra - Gianni Schicchi

Violin I
Evet Kim**
Adrian Dyck
Ruth Huang
Amy Pei
Amanda Hsueh
Drie Ignas
Gillian Mott
Regina Ho
Kimi Hamaguchi
Jenny Atkinson
Alisa van Dijk
Natalie Jeon
Jason Ho
Michael Yagi

Violin II
Amelia Mori*
Angela Hodgson
Tanya Tomasch
Elaine Griffiths
Katya Sokolovskaya
James Wei
Karen Mende
Jessica Wan
Vincent Wong
Jack Tsai
Simon Chow
Lisa Aird
Eric Zhang

Viola
Beth Schaufele*
Meghan Verdejo*
James Hill
Aaron Butler
Brooke Day
Szabolcs Kabok
Sarah Weingarten

Cello
Kathryn Thompson*
Anne Davison
Sarah Tippett
Tina Hsu
Alexandra Sia
Richard St. Onge
Wesley Attewell
Chris Sanford
Regina Matthew
Kamilla Karoli
Katherine Sepp

Celeste
Richard Epp

Bass
Peggy Tong*
Jennifer Chu
Enzo Figliuzzi
Trevor Yeats

Flute
Greg Kirczenow*
Sandi Chih
Michelle Tsao

Oboe
Marisa Chang*
Justina Kuo

Clarinet
Brenda Kim*
Samuel Davidson

Bassoon
Meghan Dahl
Anne LePage

French Horn
Chris Unger*
Garlanda Kwan
Micajah Sturgess
Cheryl Lane
Tatina Osokin
Adrienne Wasyluk

Trumpet
Chris Mitchell*
Alison Gorman
Rachel Lowry

Trombone
Andrew Poirier*
Shawn Wright
Peter Waldkirch

Tuba
Matt Thompson

Harp
Lani Krantz

Tympanni
Bruce Henczel

Percussion
Chris O’Niel
Kim Ettinger

**Concert Master
*Principal
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Acknowledgements:
The Chan Family, Michael Noon, the Vancouver Opera Association, The Vancouver Playhouse, The Arts Club Theatre, Valerie Moffat, School of Music Office Staff, Phyllis Lavalle and The Friends of UBC Opera, David Spencer Endowment Encouragement Fund, Enchanted Florist, Ian Pratt, Thomas Thompson, Norman Young representing The BC Entertainment Hall of Fame, Judith Forst, UBC Opera Ensemble, Jim Wright General Director of The Vancouver Opera, Randy Smith and Nik von Schullman, Stuart Tarbuck, Peggy Jameson.
A Special Thank You to the Vancouver Opera Guild for their donation to this production.
Plot Synopsis - *Dido and Aeneas*

The action of the opera takes place in Dido's Palace, the cave of the Sorceress, a Forest and the Harbour of Carthage. The story is the familiar one concerning the tragic relationship of Dido, Queen of Carthage, and Aeneas, son of Anchises, a Trojan prince and Venus, Goddess of Love. In Virgil, it is Mercury, messenger of the Gods, who is sent to shatter their dreams of love and empire-building with the reminder that Aeneas is to fulfill his destiny with the founding of Rome as a new Troy. In the opera, it is a false Mercury who is sent by the Sorceress, seen here not merely as a malevolent operatic prototype but a rival, an outlaw queen, who uses the black arts to achieve the downfall of Dido.

*Dido and Aeneas*, Purcell's only through composed opera, was written originally for performance by a girls' school in London's Chelsea in 1689. It is unique among Purcell's other principal dramatic works (*The Fairy Queen*, *The Indian Queen*, *King Arthur* and *The Tempest*) in that there is no dialogue, and because it is the only one not cast in the stylized form of a Masque. It is a miniature masterpiece where the interplay of love, hatred, and despair is given full dramatic opportunity at the same time as being distilled into little more than an hour of music. The two existing manuscript copies of the score both date from the eighteenth century and it is on these that the present version is based. In any vocal-dramatic work of the period, the arrangement of the continuo (the harpsichord, cello and string bass which accompany so much of the opera) is left to the discretion of the performer or editor and it is principally with this aspect, and sometimes with the indication of vocal ornamentation (or lack of it) and the lay-out of the string parts, where the Britten/Holst realization is involved: there is no new harmonization nor reorganization of Purcell's original, in fact no alteration of any kind other than the supplying of some Purcell music from other sources for a missing scene for the witches at the end of Act II. This music does not exist in any available manuscript, but the words for it do appear in the published libretto of 1698.
Plot Synopsis - Gianni Schicchi

The action takes place in the house of Buoso Donati in Florence, at the time of the Renaissance. The rich Buoso Donati has died and his relations and their dependents are discovered uncertainly mourning his departure: no one knows to whom he has left his possessions, in particular his house in Florence, his mule, and his sawmills at Signa. The relations despair at the outcome of the will and are most unsympathetic to Rinuccio’s ill-timed suggestion that they should ask the wily Gianni Schicchi to help them. Apart from being the father of Rinuccio’s beloved Lauretta, Gianni is a somewhat disreputable, though highly successful merchant who has risen from the ranks of the peasantry. It is this last fact which makes him so unpopular with Buoso’s snobbish relatives. However, they find that they have no option but to ask for his help. But the tables are turned on them more than once before the end of the opera when, in Schicchi’s words, Buoso’s money is put to better use.

Gianni Schicchi forms part of Puccini’s Trittico, three one-act operas of which the other two are Suor Angelica and Il Tabarro. Today, the operas are more often than not performed separately, but the first performance of the complete Trittico was given by the Metropolitan Opera in 1918.

Giuseppe De Luca, the first Gianni Schicchi, at the Metropolitan Opera, 1918
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FRANCIS POULENC’S 1959 OPERA La Voix humaine IS BASED ON JEAN COCTEAU’S SUCCESSFUL 1927 MONODRAMA OF THE SAME NAME. LIKE ITS PREDECESSOR Dialogues des Carmélites, IT WAS AN IMMEDIATE SUCCESS AND IS FREQUENTLY FEATURED BY OPERA COMPANIES IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA. THE OPERA IS A tour de force THAT PRESENTS FOR A PERFORMER THE FORMIDABLE TASK OF ACTING OUT ONE SIDE OF A TELEPHONE CONVERSATION. IT ALSO PRESENTS UNIQUE CHALLENGES TO A DIRECTOR WISHING TO CREATE A NEW PRODUCTION. ONE MUST CATER TO THE IDIOSYNCRASIES OF THE EARLY FRENCH TELEPHONE SYSTEM SO IMPORTANT TO THE DRAMA; THEREFORE, THE OPERA DOES NOT LEND ITSELF WELL TO EXTREME MODERNIZATION. THIS THESIS IS A COMPREHEND OF ALL THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED LEADING TO AN INFORMED CREATION OF THE PRODUCTION INSPIRED BY THE 1950S COLOUR MELODRAMAS OF DOUGLAS SIRK.

CHAPTER 2 DESCRIBES THE GENESIS OF BOTH THE PLAY AND THE OPERA IN RELATION TO COCTEAU AND POULENC’S LIVES AND WORKS. IT ALSO FEATURES A DISCUSSION OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PLAY AND LIBRETTO, INCLUDING THE WAYS IN WHICH EACH DEPICTS THE MAIN CHARACTER Elle. Chapter 3 presents a study of the genre of melodrama as an introduction to the work of Douglas Sirk. I also consider the libretto in light of the characteristics of melodrama and illustrate how the genre is applicable to the opera. Chapter 4 provides a brief analysis of the score illuminating the connection between dramatic and musical themes. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the major influences on the production: North American society in the 1950s and Douglas Sirk’s mature style. Three Sirk films from the latter half of the 1950s are examined and certain stylistic features identified. These stylistic features are employed in the production of La Voix humaine.
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Last, but certainly not least, a heart-felt thank you to Richard Epp for agreeing to accompany me in my lecture-recital and for preparing this score with so much care and attention to detail.
for Dorothy...

(1927-1995)
CHAPTER I

Introduction

Francis Poulenc's third and final opera, *La Voix humaine* (1959), like its predecessor *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1957), was an immediate success with audiences and critics. This is not entirely surprising given the other principal players: Jean Cocteau, author of the highly successful play of the same name upon which the opera is based, and Denise Duval, Poulenc's muse and creator of Thérèse/ Tîrêsias in *Les Mamelles de Tîrêsias* and Blanche de la Force in *Dialogues*.

*La Voix humaine* captures the tortured farewell between a woman and a man that have been lovers for five years. When the opera opens, we are confronted with the woman, simply known as 'Elle,' anxiously awaiting a promised telephone call from her lover. Elle must endure wrong numbers and insults from other people on the party line before finally connecting with her lover. Elle believes her lover to be at his home, but when their call is disconnected and the operator connects her to her lover's number, she discovers that he has lied to her and is elsewhere. When Elle's lover calls back, she decides to admit that she has told him some lies and uses her confessions as a means of encouraging him to do the same. Elle is unsuccessful, even after explaining to her lover that if he has ever lied to her out of kindness she would only love him more. In the final moments of the opera, Elle admits that she does not have the courage to end the conversation but musters up the strength to ask him to do it for her. As the opera concludes, Elle is left sobbing into the telephone.

Although maintaining a place in the repertoire, *La Voix humaine* has been largely glossed over and even ignored by music scholars. Those that have written on the work treat it primarily as a straightforward, two-dimensional piece rather than as a living, breathing work for the stage. They do not address those elements that upon
close inspection prove to be ambiguous and contradictory, nor do they examine the elements of the score that directly affect choices made by the conductor, the director and the performer. Throughout this thesis I examine the play and libretto, Poulenc’s use of motives, and the dramatic genre melodrama since La Voix humaine exhibits an affinity to it especially in the excess of Elle’s overwrought emotion and the strong sense of pathos that is elicited from the audience. The history of melodrama provided much inspiration for the production. Since the opera was composed in the late 1950s, it seemed natural to set it in that decade, which in turn led to an investigation of the film melodramas of Douglas Sirk, a master of this genre. Given the substance of the melodramas produced during the 1950s, especially those by Sirk, the operatic version of La Voix humaine would have lent itself well to treatment by this director, either on stage or on film. In fact, this is not without precedence since the play was transferred to the big screen in 1947 by Roberto Rossellini in an Italian version for actress Anna Magnani (Voce Umana) and was later taken up in the 1960s by Ted Kotcheff who directed Ingrid Bergman in a made-for-television version in English (The Human Voice). The sole character in La Voix humaine is a woman that displays character traits similar to the lead female parts in Sirk’s films: Elle experiences a great loss and desires more than she has. Taking all of this into consideration, the production of La Voix humaine has been influenced by the mise-en-scène of Sirk’s films.

Chapter 2 recounts the genesis of the opera. A biography of Jean Cocteau offers highlights of his life and works in order to put his 1927 play and the 1959 operatic version into perspective. I report on the creation of the play and the highly successful original production at the Comédie Française starring Berthe Bovy. A description of Christian Bérard’s original production is provided along with a discussion of the reasons why Cocteau wrote such a mainstream play at a time when
he had spent a great deal of effort creating avant-garde performance works. A biography of Francis Poulenc follows along with a discussion of the discovery of Cocteau’s play as a suitable libretto. Cocteau’s production design is also mentioned. Following this is a lengthy examination of the play and libretto, comparing the two and bringing out the differences between Cocteau’s Elle and Poulenc’s Elle.

Chapter 3 discusses ‘melodrama’ as both a theatrical and cinematic genre. Melodrama is a much-maligned term that has been used colloquially more as a pejorative than as a genre category. It has been employed in descriptions of theatre, film or television that display overwrought emotions and unrealistic acting. I am not interested in changing the public use of this term; rather, I would like to provide a thread linking Cocteau’s play, Poulenc’s opera and Sirk’s films of the 1950s. To accomplish this task, I demonstrate that the libretto of La Voix humaine is unequivocally a melodrama, as opposed to a tragedy as suggested by Poulenc’s subtitle tragédie lyrique. It is imperative for the performer and director to know what genre the work belongs to so as to make appropriate dramatic choices and to inform the creation of a new production. A variety of definitions of melodrama are considered and a method for determining whether a play or film is a melodrama is proposed by using La Voix humaine as an example. This is followed by a brief discussion of the difference between ‘tragedy’ and ‘melodrama,’ focussing on the differences between the protagonists of each genre. I continue with an account of the origins of classical melodrama and discuss the father of melodrama, Guilbert de Pixérecourt, and his first successful play, Coelina. It is generally accepted that this play is the foundation upon which the entire genre was built. A report on the development of the genre in the twentieth-century as it made the move from stage to

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1 I understand that this term primarily hearkens back to the operas of Lully and particularly to his distinctive musical style, but given that Cocteau referred to the opera as a tragedy it is important to firmly establish to which genre the opera belongs.
silver screen rounds out the discussion of melodrama. The chapter concludes with a lengthy examination of the sole character, Elle, and demonstrates that she is a melodramatic heroine.

Chapter 4 discusses the musical score of the opera, focussing specifically on the use of motives. I begin by discussing the relative merits and shortcomings of Denis Waleckx’ list of ‘leading motives’ and his analysis of the score. Following this is a discussion of what I have determined to be the three ‘leading motives’ and two ‘secondary motives’ as well as an examination of the only aria in the entire work. The analysis has helped in my preparation for the role and considering this, it is intended to have a practical application for any singer preparing this role.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the Sirk-inspired production created for the lecture recital. From the early 1970s to the present, there has been an almost constant interest in the director and his innovative use of mise-en-scène, colour, lighting, camera angle, and subject matter to comment on the ‘family’ of Eisenhower’s America. Critics generally refer to five films in particular when discussing Sirk’s style: Magnificent Obsession (1954), All that Heaven Allows (1955), There’s Always Tomorrow (1956), Written on the Wind (1957), and Imitation of Life (1959). I will focus on three of these films, All that Heaven Allows, Written on the Wind, and Imitation of Life as representative of Sirk’s style.

In this chapter I briefly investigate the 1950s, and the representation of women and home life in the media. A biography of Sirk is included to acquaint the reader with his life and career. I discuss important elements of Sirk’s style in relation to three of his colour films. I then provide a comparison between Elle and several of Sirk’s leading female characters. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the production of La Voix humaine created for the lecture recital.
CHAPTER II

The Genesis of the Play and the Opera

2.1 Jean Cocteau and the Play

The French poet, playwright, artist, filmmaker and impresario Jean Cocteau lived through many periods of social and artistic change. Throughout his life he was directly involved in promoting new trends in the arts. Although not responsible for ‘inventing’ any of the major artistic trends of the first half of the twentieth-century, Cocteau is remembered as a passionate presence in French artistic circles, often seeking to astonish his audiences with his inventive and thought-provoking presentations.

Jean (Maurice Eugène Clément) Cocteau was born into a wealthy bourgeois family at Maison Laffitte, near Paris, on 5 July 1889. His father, Georges Cocteau, had a brief career in law, while his mother, Eugénie Lecomte came from a well-to-do family with connections to the stock exchange and the diplomatic corps. Although born outside Paris, Cocteau considered himself a Parisian, and indeed spent much of his formative years in the vicinity of Pigalle in his grandparents’ home on the Rue La Bruyère. It was here that Cocteau began his education in the arts as the home provided endless stimulation: countless books filled the shelves, Greek busts and paintings by Ingres and Delacroix adorned the upper floors, and visits by famous musicians, like the violinist Sarasate, were not uncommon. It was the theatre above all that attracted the young Cocteau. By the age of twelve, he and several of his friends were known to loiter outside the Comédie Française waiting to see the famous actress Madame Réjane emerge following a performance. He was equally taken by Sarah Bernhardt, Mounet-Sully and Edouard de Max, a man who was to take an active interest in Cocteau’s artistic development.
Cocteau suffered a great personal loss at a very young age. Georges Cocteau died in 1898 when Jean was only nine years old. Throughout his lifetime, Cocteau rarely spoke of the circumstances surrounding his father’s death, and it was not until 1957 that it was revealed in Jean Marais’ autobiography, *Mes Quatre Vérités*, that Georges died by his own hand. It was such a devastating event, that Cocteau did not discuss it publicly until 1963, the year of his own death. His cousin Marianne (Lecomte) Singer has recounted that she was with Cocteau when he heard the news, that it seemed to make little impression on him at the time, and that she had “often wondered whether Jean heard those details [that his father shot himself in the head with a pistol], and whether they have anything to do with the blood and the suicides he put into his novels and plays.”

Cocteau reacted to his father’s passing by becoming more and more antagonistic towards his mother and by doing so poorly in his academic studies that he failed to pass his Baccalaureate more than once and was expelled from many schools.

His poor performance as a student certainly did not mean that Cocteau lacked intelligence or creativity. Both were displayed in abundance as a child. After having been formally introduced to de Max, who had a penchant for wearing eye shadow off-stage and surrounding himself with beautiful young men, Cocteau was taken under the wing of the older man. It was de Max that was responsible for the first public reading of Cocteau’s poetry in 1906, to which the critics responded favourably. In the same year, Cocteau co-founded a literary magazine, *Schéhérazade*, an auspicious start to a career that would encompass almost every possible aspect of the fine and performing arts.

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In 1909, Cocteau made the acquaintance of another very powerful man in Paris: the impresario Serge Diaghilev, founder of Les Ballets Russes. Through his relationship with Diaghilev, Cocteau began to transform himself from an energetic and idealistic young man to a more thoughtful and inventive artist. Always impressed by those that displayed intelligence and creative ingenuity, Cocteau allied himself with this man who attracted such talented composers as Debussy, Stravinsky, and Ravel to the fold, as well as those composers who were later to be known as ‘Les Six’: Auric, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc, Durey and Tailleferre. The early professional relationship between Cocteau and Diaghilev resulted in a failed ballet, *Le Dieu bleu*. Diaghilev’s exasperation with Cocteau led to the command, “Astound me!” in 1912.3

World War I was partially responsible for delaying Cocteau’s ability to “astound” Diaghilev. Although he was declared unfit for active duty, Cocteau still managed to take part in the War as a member of an illegal ambulance service on the Belgian front. He was discovered by the authorities and returned to Paris, but was nonetheless changed by the experience, which he later poured into the novel *Thomas, L’imposteur* (1923). During the War, Cocteau also made the acquaintance of a stunt pilot by the name of Roland Garros. Accepting an invitation to fly with the famous aviator had a profound effect on Cocteau, which he expressed in a volume of poetry dedicated to the airplane. The poems in *Le Cap de Bonne-Espérance* (1919) treat the airplane as a living entity.

At this time, Cocteau made the acquaintance of several men who were already or soon to be influential artists, notably Pablo Picasso, Guillaume Appollinaire, and Max Jacob. Through Cocteau, Picasso was introduced to Diaghilev and in an instant

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3 It was not until 1917 when Cocteau’s *Parade* opened that he was able to impress the older man.
the ballet *Parade* was born. The scenario was by Cocteau, music by Satie, and sets and costumes by Picasso. The resultant juxtaposition of unusual music, an ambiguous ‘plot,’ and strange sets and costumes caused the spectators to react instantly and violently, as they had years earlier at the premiere of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring.*

*Parade* succeeded in astounding Diaghilev. Cocteau followed the ballet by publishing his personal and controversial thoughts on aesthetics in an essay entitled *Le Coq et l’arlequin* (1918). He called for a simpler, purely French musical style, and he deplored the influence of certain composers, especially Wagner, Debussy, and Stravinsky. Ultimately, Cocteau and his ideas came to be associated with ‘Les Six’ although in reality there was little to connect these six composers from an aesthetic perspective.

The year 1919 marked a turning point in Cocteau’s life. It was in that year that he met the fifteen-year-old literary prodigy Raymond Radiguet, whom some believed was not only a great friend of Cocteau but also his lover. Radiguet had a profound influence on Cocteau, encouraging him to refine his means of expression, specifically suggesting he should continue to strive for a simpler, more direct language. The results of this great friendship produced, among other works, *Le Boeuf sur le toit* (1920, with music by Milhaud and décor by Raoul Dufy), *Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel* (1921, with music provided by only five of ‘Les Six’—Durey declined to take part), and *Plain-Chant* (1923). Radiguet died of typhoid fever in 1923, and he was to have an even more far-reaching effect on Cocteau in death than he did in life.

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4 Benjamin Ivry, *Francis Poulenc* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 38. “Darius Milhaud recalled: ‘[Collet] chose six names arbitrarily, those of Auric, Durey, Honegger, Poulenc, Tailleferre and me simply because we knew each other and we were pals and appeared on the same musical programmes, no matter if our temperaments and personalities weren’t all the same! Auric and Poulenc followed some ideas of Cocteau, Honegger followed German Romanticism, and myself, Mediterranean lyricism!’”

5 Steegmuller, 265. *Plain-Chant* is a lyrical poem that revolves around love, death, and poetic inspiration. The poem contains a line that lists five members of “Les Six”: “Auric, Milhaud, Poulenc, Tailleferre, Honegger.” Durey felt that this line was a kind of revenge for his decision not to participate in *Les Mariés.*
This was the first experience Cocteau had with great loss, aside from the suicide of his father, and without Radiguet he found that life was unbearable. On a trip to Monte Carlo with Diaghilev in 1924, Cocteau found an effective salve for his grief in opium. Louis Laloy, a musicologist, influential music critic, and an expert in the consumption of opium suggested it as a means of relieving Cocteau's pain. From that time until the end of his life, Cocteau was addicted, occasionally attempting to wean himself off the drug by undergoing various 'cures' available to him. During his first 'cure,' Cocteau received a visit from the famous philosopher Jacques Maritain, a man who managed to convince Cocteau to return to Catholicism, at least for a time. Maritain and his philosophy had a strong effect on Cocteau, helping him to refine the direction he was to take in the following years. He wrote several works for the stage at this time, including a reworking of the Orpheus myth (1925), the libretto for the Stravinsky opera-oratorio Oedipus Rex (1927), the play La Voix humaine (1927), and the novel Les Enfants terribles (1930). In addition, Cocteau published the diary of his drug addiction, Opium (1930).

During the 1930s, a renewed fervour enveloped Cocteau, and he busied himself with a staggering variety of projects. He wrote plays (La Machine infernale, 1932 and Les Parents terribles, 1938), took a trip around the world in eighty days and published an account of his adventure, spent a brief time as the manager of prize-fighter Panama Al Brown, began his fruitful collaboration with the actor Jean Marais, penned a regular column for Ce Soir, wrote poetry, and experimented with the medium of film with the critically acclaimed Le Sang d'un poète. Cocteau later wrote screenplays for ten more films, directing six of the eleven films he conceived and making appearances in three.

Steegmuller, 325. Stravinsky suggested the reason Cocteau never managed to stop abusing opium was that it aided Cocteau in his creativity.
The German occupation, and later the liberation, brought new challenges to Cocteau as he was not only criticized and censored by his own people, but by the Germans as well. He resisted the pressure from all sides, continuing to write new plays, directing films, publishing accounts of his travels, writing a collection of essays, and designing frescoes for the City Hall at Menton, the Chapel of Villefranche-sur-Mer, the chapel of Notre Dame in London, and the church of Saint Blaise-des-Simples at Milly-la-Forêt. During the late 1950s, Cocteau collaborated with Poulenc to produce the operatic version of his 1927 play *La Voix humaine*. Interestingly, this event receives little attention by Cocteau’s biographers.

Cocteau’s passing in October 1963 is notable for its incredible coincidence: four hours after learning of the death of his friend Edith Piaf, Cocteau himself passed away.

Cocteau’s 1927 play *La Voix humaine* marked a departure from the more avant-garde types of presentations he had previously created. It is the most accessible of his theatrical works possessing both a clear plot and a more traditional structure. Inspiration for this play may have come from at least two sources. When the play opened on 17 February 1930, he recalled the story of having witnessed the great French actor Mounet-Sully perform a play that consisted only of a monologue and he “wondered how a single actor could act a play.” The other inspiration may have been a telephone conversation that Cocteau overheard in which a couple having a disagreement had to deal with many connection troubles.

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7 Bettina L. Knapp, *Jean Cocteau* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 11. Cocteau’s works were frequently the target of censors due to the subject matter he treated. For example, *Les Parents terribles* was banned on the grounds of immorality. Objection to Cocteau and his works grew to such a fever pitch that he was eventually beaten by a group of fascists for not saluting the Nazi flag during the occupation.

8 For Cocteau, the novelty was in the traditional aspects of the play.

9 Knapp, 69.

10 Steegmuller, 402.
After being invited by the Comédie Française to read La Voix humaine to the committee of actors and administrators who would either accept or reject this play, he was immediately invited to stage it. Cocteau had to wait almost a year before the play opened, and despite the presence of the famous tragedienne Berthe Bovy in the role of Elle, the drama had a rather inauspicious debut. Only a couple of minutes into the monologue, Paul Eluard shouted from a box—"Obscene! Enough! Enough! It's Desbordes on the other end of the line!"11 This disruption instigated further shouts aimed at the man responsible for the interruption, and it was not until he was ejected from the theatre that Bovy continued. Cocteau biographer Francis Steegmuller suggests that the reason Eluard caused such a scene was because he was a Surrealist who could not believe that Cocteau had "moved brilliantly to the forefront" of French artistic circles, and found it "more contemptible than ever for having openly 'joined the establishment' with the production of his play at the state-controlled Comédie Française, the 'Maison de Molière.'"12 The French love a scandale and this opening was no different. Although not all the critics found merit in this work, the public loved it. Bovy went on to perform it more than one hundred times by 1941, and her success in the role made other actresses leery of taking it on. For reasons that are unclear, the Comédie Française retired the play and it was not revived until 1953.

Both the original presentation and the revival maintained essentially the same production that was created by Christian Bérard. In Cocteau's prefatory remarks to the published play, the room is described as "sombre" and showed the angle of a bedroom in which there is a large bed in disarray.13 There is also a pedestal table on

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11 Steegmuller, 400. Eluard was referring to Jean Desbordes, another young literary prodigy that Cocteau had introduced to Paris literary circles and with whom he apparently shared a personal relationship much as he had done years earlier with Raymond Radiguet.
12 Steegmuller, 401.
13 Jean Cocteau, "La Voix humaine" in Oeuvres Complètes de Jean Cocteau vol. 7 (Lausanne: Éditions Marguerat, 1948), 57.
which sits the telephone and a lamp casting a cruel light. On the short side of the room is a door that opened to a well-lit bathroom and a large, menacing portrait hung at an angle on the wall.\textsuperscript{14} The costume Bérard designed for Bovy consisted of a chemise and a peignoir.\textsuperscript{15} For the revival, Louise Conte wore a nightgown and robe in white crepe more in keeping with current fashion and added to this was a red coat designed by Cocteau.\textsuperscript{16}

Cocteau’s biographers have remained fairly impartial when discussing the origins of this play, not indicating one way or the other whether Eluard’s accusation held any merit. Among scholars that have written on Poulenc’s operatic treatment, only Keith Clifton has attempted to argue that the play and opera are about the end of homosexual relationships. The foundation of his argument is based on Cocteau and Poulenc’s individual observations that autobiographical events influenced the creation of the works. In this instance it may be worthwhile to turn to the words of Cocteau himself in order to shed some light on what he was thinking when writing the play.

It would be wrong to believe that the author seeks the solution of some kind of psychological problem. He is only interested in resolving problems of a theatrical nature...The author adds that he presented this act at the Comédie-Française to upset the worst prejudices: that of the young theatre against the official stages.\textsuperscript{17}

These remarks, which appear in the prefatory pages of the published play, say nothing about Cocteau’s personal life, and address only theatrical issues. Regardless of the

\textsuperscript{14} Cocteau, 57.
\textsuperscript{15} Cocteau, 58. The set for the later operatic version of \textit{La Voix humaine} was the same, with only minor changes, although it does not seem that Christian Bérard was credited for the production design since he died in 1949.
\textsuperscript{16} Philippe Baron, “\textit{La Voix humaine} à la scène,” in \textit{Jean Cocteau et le Théâtre}, ed. by Pierre Caizergues. France: Durand S.A., 2000, 226. Cocteau kept the idea of the red coat in the production he later designed for Denise Duval.
\textsuperscript{17} Cocteau, 54. “Ce serait une faute de croire que l’auteur cherche la solution de quelque problème psychologique. Il ne s’agit que de résoudre des problèmes d’ordre théâtral...L’auteur ajoute qu’il a donné cet acte à la Comédie-Française pour rompre avec le pire des préjugés: celui du jeune théâtre contre les scènes officielles.” All translations are my own.
reason for which Cocteau wrote this play, it remains the most successful and most often performed of his theatrical works, and it was probably due to the success of the revival that Hervé Dugardin suggested to Poulenc that *La Voix humaine* would prove to be a powerful libretto.

2.2 Francis Poulenc and the Opera

The French composer Francis Poulenc wrote prolifically for the voice, as evident by his choral works, solo songs, and three operas. He is well known for certain works in these genres as they have been regularly programmed as part of choral and solo recitals. Both *Dialogues des Carmélites* and *La Voix humaine* have found their way into the seasons of many opera companies.

Poulenc was born in Paris on 7 January 1899 to Emile Poulenc, director of the family pharmaceutical business (later to become the great Rhône-Poulenc), and Jenny Royer. Poulenc’s mother was from a family of artist-craftsmen specializing in tapestry, bronze, and carpentry. From a young age, Poulenc displayed an aptitude for music, using store catalogues as scores at his toy piano by the age of two. He began formal piano lessons at the age of five, but despite the encouragement from his mother, his father wanted him to complete a classical education at the Lycée Condorcet, at the completion of which he would be allowed to enter the Conservatoire; however, the war and the premature death of both his parents prevented him from following those plans.

From 1914 to 1917, Poulenc studied piano and composition with Riccardo Viñes, a man that became a great influence in his life. It was through Viñes that Poulenc became acquainted with George Auric (a contemporary and already established as a literary prodigy and composer), Eric Satie, and Manuel da Falla. It was also around this time that Poulenc’s life-long friend Raymonde Linossier took
him to Adrienne Monnier's bookshop where he met some of the great literary minds of the day: Appollinaire, Eluard, Breton, and Gide, among others. In September 1917, Poulenc attempted to enter the Conservatoire to study composition in a formal setting. He was rejected by Paul Vidal simply because it was obvious that he had been influenced by Stravinsky and Satie. Later that year, Poulenc made his compositional debut in Paris with a work dedicated to Satie, *Rhapsodie nègre*. He was fortunate enough to have Stravinsky take notice of him, and the elder composer helped him to have his early works published by Chester in London.

From 1918 to 1921 Poulenc was a military conscript but he did not let this interfere with his composing. He enjoyed great success with *Trois mouvements perpétuels*, and his first song cycle *Le Bestiaire* on poems by Appollinaire. It was around this time that Poulenc made the acquaintance of Cocteau, who would become a life-long friend. Despite a close friendship and mutual respect, Poulenc set only five of Cocteau’s texts over the course of his career and they did not directly collaborate until *La Voix humaine*.

In 1921, Poulenc approached Charles Koechlin for formal composition lessons. While he was still a pupil he received a commission from Diaghilev for Les Ballets Russes that resulted in *Les Biches*, his first complete ballet score. Poulenc’s works of the 1920s include ballets, many works for piano, and several song cycles. Aside from four examples of incidental music (now lost), Poulenc did not compose again for the stage until he began work on his first opera *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* in 1939, a work that took five years to complete and another two years before it was first performed in 1947. In the meantime, Poulenc had begun a professional association

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18 In Poulenc’s song output, he clearly preferred texts by Appollinaire, Max Jacob, Eluard, and Louise de Vilmorin. Of Cocteau’s texts Poulenc set *Toreador* for solo voice and piano (1918), *Cocardes* for solo voice and ensemble (1919), *Plain-chants* (now lost) for solo voice and piano (1936), *La Voix humaine* (1959), and *La Dame de Monte Carlo* for soprano and orchestra (1961).
(and great friendship) with the French baritone Pierre Bernac. It was in 1934 that Poulenc and Bernac began to perform together in concert and the duo stayed together for the next twenty-five years.

In the late 1920s Poulenc suffered a bout of depression, the first of many he was to experience. Around that time he was becoming fully aware of his homosexuality. His depression coincided with his attraction to Richard Chanlaire, his first great love. At this time, Poulenc was also coping with the death of his close friend Raymonde (the only woman he had ever considered marrying), a loss he never quite recovered from.

In the 1930s, Poulenc began to spend more and more time composing at his home in Noizay. He took refuge there for most of World War II, even though it was in the German occupied zone. The Nazis left Poulenc alone since he did not take sides politically, one way or the other. His personal return to Catholicism around this time, particularly his desire to believe, is notably demonstrated in the choral work *Litanies à la Vierge noire*, which he composed during a visit to Rocamadour in 1936.

Following the War he began a new collaboration with the soprano Denise Duval who was to become his muse over the next fifteen years and who premiered the roles of Thérèse/Tirésias, Blanche, and Elle. Duval, who began her career at the Follies-Bergères, was preparing for her debut at the Opéra Comique in *Madama Butterfly* when she was brought to Poulenc’s attention. When he heard her sing he declared that she was the right person to sing the title role of *Les Mamelles*. As he later said: “When I met Denise Duval, I was immediately struck by her luminous
voice, her beauty, her elegance, and especially that ringing laugh of hers which is so marvellous in Les Mamelles. 

The 1950s were years of great compositional productivity that saw the creation of his last two dramatic works, Dialogues des Carmélites and La Voix humaine. In the summer of 1952, Poulenc was commissioned by Ricordi to compose a ballet for La Scala; however, Poulenc preferred to write an opera on a mystical subject. Ricordi’s director, Guido Valcarenghi, suggested the screenplay Dialogues des Carmélites by the Catholic writer, Georges Bernanos. Poulenc saw the play twice and read it at home before agreeing to the project. It took him three years to complete the opera, during which time it seemed the project would never receive approval from the American owner of the screenplay, Emmet Lavery. The musical language of Dialogues is clearly influenced by the composers listed in the dedication: Verdi, Monteverdi, Debussy, and Mussorgsky. Many of the characters were modeled after Verdian roles in terms of range and required vocal quality, and each has motives associated with them or a quality they represent. This approach to composition returned in his final opera, La Voix humaine. Dialogues was an immediate success following its premiere at La Scala in January 1957 and opera houses all over the world wanted to be the next to present it.

Following the success of Dialogues, Hervé Dugardin, the Paris director of Ricordi, suggested to Poulenc that he set to music Jean Cocteau’s one-act monodrama La Voix humaine for Maria Callas to be premiered at La Scala. Upon reflection, Poulenc agreed to set the text but could not envisage anyone but Duval singing the role of Elle. The great challenges for Poulenc with this work were to set the text faithfully with correct French declamation, to bring continuity to an episodic text, and

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to provide enough musical interest to keep an audience’s attention for forty-five
minutes. Poulenc biographer Henri Hell described the problems:

Let us measure the perils of the enterprise. There are no possibilities for the
born melodist that is Poulenc to allow his melodic ability to run freely (at least
not in any way apparent: no grand arias). Also, there was no question of
writing a symphonic type of accompaniment (he has always rejected this, as
seen in *les Mamelles* and in *les Dialogues*). The problem to resolve was the
following: writing a work that found its unity in a group of musical fragments
that were often very brief.  

Poulenc’s correspondence shows his great enthusiasm for and preoccupation
with the composition of the work. He wrote of “finding” his themes and admits to an
autobiographical content:

I found, and this is the secret, *all* my themes. Two are extravagantly
*erotic*... When Elle notices that he is calling from some “Ox on the Roof”
[“Boeuf sur le Toit”, bar] there is a whiff of incredible 1920s Parisian jazz.
The theme of the lie...is horrible (it weighs a ton). Fundamental: I found all
the end, coming from a distance when they no longer have anything to say to
each other, before and after...Blanche was me, and Elle is me again...

Cocteau approves of my whole plan which structures the text into ‘phases.’
(Phase of the dog, the lie, the overdose.) I have a lot of ideas already. Two
shocking themes, among others, which *ces monsieurs* will find quite
scandalous: one full of love, the other erotic. For the responses, the rhythm
came to me quite instinctively. I do not have any fears about the orchestral
volume (medium). The ensemble is horrific. ‘She’ tells of her overdose to the
rhythm of a sad, Sibelius-like waltz.... The whole ensemble flouts every rule:
bars doubled, even trebled, but this style, normally worth nothing, is
successful here, I think.

On the subject of autobiographical traces present in *La Voix humaine*, Poulenc
biographer Benjamin Ivry has this to say:

Poulenc de donner libre cours à sa veine mélodique (tout au moins de façon apparente: pas de grand
air). Pas question non plus d’écrire un accompagnement de forme symphonique (il y a d’ailleurs
toujours répugné, et dans *les Mamelles* et dans *les Dialogues*). Le problème à résoudre était le suivant:
écrire une œuvre qui trouvât son unité dans une suite de fragments musicaux souvent très brefs.”
21 Carl B. Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc* (New York:
22 Buckland, 252.
...Elle was obviously intended to be a credible woman, not Cocteau or Poulenc in drag. Nevertheless, the authors of *La Voix humaine* identified with Elle’s situation. Many themes of Cocteau’s play, the pills, the dread spectre of suicide and the love for a dog were present in Poulenc’s life, even if he were not living through the kind of rejection Elle experienced.\(^{23}\)

Poulenc made certain adjustments to Cocteau’s play to suit his vision for the opera and he also worked very closely with Denise Duval throughout the compositional process. In an interview years later, Duval also admitted to autobiographical elements in the libretto for both the composer and singer alike and remembered the process of the creation of the opera:

*La Voix humaine* was an astonishing experience for me... because I saw Francis Poulenc write it page by page, bar by bar, for me, with his flesh, but also with my heart wounds: we were then both in the midst of sentimental drama, we were crying, and this *Voix humaine* has been like a diary of our tears. I was working then with my friend Janine Reiss, who is the most marvellous professor, and who is a midwife not only of the voice but of the soul. Each day Francis Poulenc brought us one or two new pages of his score, the ink hardly dry, and, straight away Janine and I threw ourselves at it. We worked detail by detail, in front of Poulenc who stayed to listen to us. Occasionally I asked him to alter a note or a passage, in order to find something more suitable for my voice. This was a unique experience, participating in the gestation and very birth of a work.\(^{24}\)

As for Cocteau, he was responsible for all aspects of the mise-en-scène, including modifications of the original set and costume designed by Christian Bérard for the 1930 production of the play. In a letter to Poulenc, Cocteau outlined in no uncertain terms how he envisioned Elle’s appearance and included for Poulenc a drawing of the costume he intended to use:

The appearance of the character must not be tragic. It must not be frivolous. No studied elegance.

\(^{23}\) Ivry, 201.

\(^{24}\) Schmidt, 424.
The young woman has simply put on what was [at] hand but she is waiting for that telephone call from her lover and believes she will be visible to him. In spite of her lie about the pink dress there is a natural elegance about her, that of a young woman used to looking elegant. The tragic touch will come from a shawl, or a trench-coat, or a loden, which she will throw over her shoulders without a trace a coquetterie—because she is cold, ‘cold within’. This is how I will show her inner coldness on stage.  

When the score was finally complete, Poulenc and Duval left for the Riviera where Cocteau had taken up residence to recuperate from an illness. Upon arrival, composer and singer presented the finished product to Cocteau, to which he responded enthusiastically, “My dear Francis, you have fixed, once and for all, the way to say my text.” This favourable first response was confirmed when in a radio interview with Robert Sadoul, Cocteau stated:

I was utterly overwhelmed, because it was completely new, it was a new way of performing the play, of perceiving it. It was neither recitative nor song, it was a musical tragedy and it required not only a singer but a great actress to perform this little opera which had become a very great tragedy thanks to Poulenc.

Duval and Poulenc spent a week with Cocteau working on the details of the staging. Cocteau was specific in his requirements for the set and the costume, but he was not unbending when it came to staging Duval. Staging an opera presents unique challenges to any director, but with an opera so heavily dependant on the comprehension of the text, Cocteau was forced to make changes to the ideas he had when the play was first produced. This is evidenced by the inclusion in the operatic score of only half the original staging instructions from the play. He not only left out the instruction concerning the various poses Elle should take for each of the ‘phases’

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26 Hell, 281. “Mon cher Francis, tu as fixé, une fois pour toutes, la façon de dire mon texte.”
of the text, but instructions concerning the costume Elle should wear, various set
pieces that should be included, and indications of how the performer should interpret
the text are also omitted. No explanation is given for the omission, but I suggest that
it is because of the nature of operatic performance and the restrictions inherent in the
art form, i.e. the constant need for contact between performer and conductor, and the
restrictions of the human voice attempting to be heard over an orchestra. For Elle’s
costume, Cocteau specified what he wanted Duval to wear but his design was
specifically for her, and would have been different had another singer premiered the
role. As for the lack of interpretive suggestions, this seems to be Cocteau’s
acknowledgement of Poulenc’s detailed setting, which captured the spirit of the text
in incredible detail.

_La Voix humaine_ premiered in Paris on 6 February 1959 at the Opéra-
Comique, and on 18 February at La Piccola Scala in Milan. Following this were
premieres in the United States at Carnegie Hall and King’s Theatre in Edinburgh.
Poulenc, Cocteau and Duval were a success everywhere with the public and the critics
alike.

2.3 From Play to Libretto

As with his previous two operas, Poulenc was responsible for creating the
libretto for _La Voix humaine_. As early as Easter 1958, Cocteau had approved the

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28 Cocteau, 57-8. The following instructions were not included in the published operatic score: “Chaque
pose doit servir pour une phase du monologue-dialogue (phase du chien—phase du mensonge—phase
de l’abondée, etc.). La nervosité ne se montre pas par de la hâte, mais par cette suite de poses dont
each doit statufier le comble de l’inconfort. Peignoir-chemise, plafond, porte, fauteuil-chaise,
housses, abat-jours blancs. Trouver un éclairage du trou du souffleur qui forme une ombre haute
derrière la femme assise et souligne l’éclairage de l’abat-jour. Le style de cet acte excluant tout ce qui
ressemble au brio, l’auteur recommande à l’actrice qui le jouera sans son contrôle de n’y mettre aucune
ironie de femme blessée; aucune aiguë. Le personnage est une victime mediocre, amoureuse d’un bout
tà l’autre; elle n’essaie qu’une seule ruse: tendre une perche à l’homme pour qu’il avoue son mensonge,
qu’il ne lui laisse pas ce souvenir mesquin. Il voudrait que l’actrice donnât l’impression de saigner, de
perdre son sang, comme une bête qui boîte, de terminer l’acte dans une chambre pleine de sang.
Respecter le texte où les fautes de français, les repetitions, les tournures littéraires, les platitudes,
résultent d’un dosage attentif.”

29 Cocteau oversaw the design for the premiere of his play and the 1947 Rossellini film version with
Italian actress Anna Magnani. Cocteau approved costumes for the particular actresses playing Elle.
structure of Poulenc’s libretto, which suggests that Cocteau had given Poulenc carte blanche to adjust the original play as he saw fit. Cocteau was notoriously involved in all aspects of the creation of his works, and in the case of the operatic version of La Voix humaine, one can only attribute this change in him as a sign of respect for his forty-year friendship with Poulenc. The adjustments Poulenc made to Cocteau’s play are significant because the libretto presents a different Elle than one finds in the play. This is a particularly noteworthy topic for discussion because it forces one to consider the importance of familiarity with Cocteau’s Elle. While it is certainly interesting to read the play, the information left out of the libretto changes one’s perception of Elle. The differences between the play and the libretto are considered below as a means of discovering the characteristics inherent in each of the Elles and of revealing Poulenc’s concept of the character based on the qualities he emphasizes.

In his discussion of the cuts Poulenc made to Cocteau’s play, Denis Waleckx prepared a chart that indicates the ‘phases’—to use Cocteau’s term—of the play (as he understands them) and briefly indicates which parts of the play have been omitted from the libretto. He attempts to show that “Poulenc was careful not to alter the fundamental balance of the work,” while at the same time saying little that is significant about the cuts made to the play, except that Poulenc offers a “specific reading.” Waleckx does not explain how Cocteau’s play achieves balance, nor does he clearly indicate how Poulenc’s libretto maintains it. In fact, when one examines Waleckx’s chart in detail, one discovers that the second half of the play contains more phases than the first half, suggesting an imbalance. Appendix 1 is a chart similar to that of Waleckx’ that provides a new summary of each phase of the play (correcting some of his minor errors) in which the material that has been cut is indicated in square

31 Waleckx, 329.
brackets. The chart provides a comparison of the phases assigned by Waleckx for the
play and those I have assigned, and references to the page numbers where each phase
is located. Table 1 (below) is a diagram of the phases I have assigned to the libretto
that shows its balanced nature. I demonstrate that the libretto follows the shape of an
arch, and that it has a clearly delineated Introduction, Development, Climax,
Denouement, and Conclusion. For the purposes of clarity, I will use the names I have
assigned to each phase in the following discussion.32

Climax
Truth

Denouement

Revelation......................Aftermath

Telephone as Weapon...............Suffering

“Seeing”/Flirting..................Dog Phase

Feigned Courage.....................Old Habits

Lies 1..............................................Lies 2

Development

Introduction...........................................Conclusion

Table 1. This diagram indicates both the balanced arch structure of the phases and mirror image of the
two halves of Poulenc’s libretto for La Voix humaine.

The first phase, “Introduction: Telephone Problems,” is short in comparison to
other sections of the play. Despite its brevity, Poulenc cuts almost half the text from
this phase. There are two pieces of critical information given here that have been
deleted. Firstly, Cocteau makes us aware that Elle’s lover is in fact among the people
on the party line, even though she is not able to speak to him directly until later: “On

32 Where a section of text has been entirely omitted from the libretto, I will refer to it by Waleckx’ title
and on occasion, I have borrowed an appropriate title from Waleckx (see Appendix 1).
me sonne et je ne peux pas parler. / Someone is calling me and I am unable to talk".  

Secondly, the longest segment cut is Elle’s first direct connection with her lover. 

Allô! C’est toi?...c’est toi?...Oui...J’entends très mal...tu es très loin, très loin.... Allô! ... c’est affreux...il y a plusieurs personnes sur la ligne...Redemande. Allô! Re-de-mande....Je dis: redemande-moi..../ Hello! It’s you?...it’s you?...Yes...I’m having trouble hearing...you are very far away, very far...Hello!...this is awful...there are several people on the line...Call back.. Hello! Call back...I said: call me back... 

In her attempt to be heard over the noise of the party line, she says three times that he should call back. It seems that if nothing else gets through to him, it is crucial that he understand her great need to speak with him. Whereas at the beginning of the libretto Elle’s anxiety is strong, the play shows not only her anxiety but also her desperation to speak with her lover.

“Lies 1,” the second phase, begins the Development section and contains very few cuts. One of the lines omitted from this phase has a comparable line later on.

Without the deleted line in which Elle tells her lover that she has put all the letters in the yellow bag, the corresponding one (below) makes little sense.

Le sac? Tes lettres et les miennes. Tu peux le faire prendre quand to veux... / The bag? Our letters. You can send for it when you want to.

The inclusion of this line in the libretto suggests that Elle’s lover had some previous awareness of the bag otherwise he could not have inquired about it. The other interesting cut refers to Elle’s smoking habit. She is quick to deny that she is smoking

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33 Although Poulenc left this out of the libretto, he did not leave it out of the score. It is not immediately recognized as such, but Poulenc represents the lover’s presence on the phone with a musical motive. Please refer to Chapter 4.
34 Cocteau, 59.
35 Cocteau, 61.
and tells him that she has only smoked three cigarettes all day. Given her responses, this is clearly a habit of which her lover disapproves.

The next phase, "Feigned Courage," omits two lengthy and significant segments of text. In the first cut, Elle admits that she and her lover had always agreed to be frank with each other and that she had warning that the split was imminent.

...il a toujours été convenu que nous agirions avec franchise et j’aurais trouvé criminel que tu me laisses sans rien savoir jusqu’à la dernière minute. Le coup aurait été trop brutal, tandis que là, j’ai eu le temps de m’habituer, de comprendre... / ...it was always agreed that we would be frank and it would have been criminal if you had prevented me from knowing until the last minute. The shock would have been too brutal, whereas I had the time to adjust, to understand.

Since this information and all subsequent references to her knowledge of the impending break-up are omitted from the libretto, the end of the affair appears to come as a great shock to Elle in the libretto and can therefore be considered the reason for the attempted suicide. Given that the Elle of the play knew that her relationship was about to end, her attempted suicide appears to be a hollow reaction rather than the honest response of a woman in shock.

The second segment cut from this phase shows Elle admitting that their love was up against too many obstacles and that she knew from the beginning that theirs was not a love affair that would last.

Il fallait resister, refuser cinq ans de bonheur ou accepter les risques. Je n’ai jamais pensé que la vie s’arrangerait. Je paye cher une joie sans prix...Allô!...sans prix et je ne regrette....je...je ne regrette rien – rien – rien... / It required resisting, refusing five years of happiness or accepting the risks. I never thought that life would work out. I pay dearly for a priceless joy...Hello!...priceless and I regret...I...I regret nothing – nothing – nothing...

36 In the Ingrid Bergman version, Elle is shown actively smoking during the play and a close-up on her ashtray plainly shows that she has smoked many cigarettes since last she saw her lover.
37 Cocteau, 61.
38 Cocteau, 62.
This admission shows a woman who preferred to risk the inevitable pain of a broken heart than to lose the opportunity to be with this man. It also puts a different spin on the lines directly following this segment. Without the preceding information in the libretto, the lines, “J’ai ce que je mérite. J’ai voulu être folle et avoir une bonheur fou…/ I got what I deserved. I wanted to be foolish and have a foolish happiness…” seem to suggest that Elle is playing the martyr.\(^{39}\) It appears that in the libretto, Elle accepts full responsibility for her current predicament, as though it was ‘wrong’ for her to want to be happy, and that somehow she is now being punished for her past happiness. In the play, Elle accepts responsibility for her part in the relationship, but she also acknowledges that the onus of disclosure was shared equally between them, and that she is not solely responsible for her misery.

Following this phase, Poulenc made significant cuts to the text, essentially eliminating two of Waleckx’ phases. The first is “Dog Phase (first time),” where Elle describes the odd behaviour of their pet since her lover’s departure. Elle implores her lover to take the dog because she feels ill equipped to care for it.\(^{40}\) The second deleted phase, labelled “Fetishist,” refers to a pair of gloves that Elle’s lover has left behind. In the first part of this phase her lover inquires whether or not Elle has seen the gloves in the apartment. Although she ‘searches’ for them, she tells him that she cannot find them. One of the few lengthy stage directions within the play proper indicates Elle’s attachment to them.

Elle ramasse sur la table, derrière la lampe, des gants crispin fourrés qu’elle embrasse passionnément. Elle parle avec les gants contre sa joue. / She

\(^{39}\) Cocteau, 62.

\(^{40}\) There is a second “Dog Phase” in the play in which Elle asks her lover to take the dog away, again insisting that she cannot and does not want to care for the dog, and when considering the segments together, one may conclude not only that Elle cares nothing for the dog, but that she cares only for her lover. The latter is confirmed in a subsequent phase (Waleckx’ “Social Isolation”) in which Elle discusses her gradual retreat from her friends, family, and society.
collects off the table, behind the lamp, fur-lined gloves that she embraces passionately. She speaks with the gloves against her cheek.\(^{41}\)

Waleckx’s label for this phase is apt and indicates another facet of Elle’s personality that Poulenc has chosen to omit. Her passionate embrace of the gloves is a replacement of that which she once shared with her lover, and by doing so while speaking to him on the telephone she momentarily fulfills her sexual desire. Since this segment has been left out of the libretto and this is the only fetishist moment in the play, the Elle of the libretto has no opportunity to display this side of her character. There is no indication that her lover has left anything behind, aside from the letters mentioned earlier, that she can hold onto and use as a surrogate lover.

The rest of the “Fetishist Phase” refers back to the letters that Elle has collected and placed in the yellow bag as well as “papers” belonging to her lover’s sister that Elle has burned. She asks her lover to collect their love letters and to burn them, and, that if he agrees, she would like him to return the ashes to her. This request is similar in nature to retaining the ashes of a deceased loved-one. By eliminating these objects from the libretto, or greatly reducing their importance, Poulenc placed greater emphasis on the situation in which Elle now finds herself. She is completely and utterly alone, without objects that she can imbue with the power to replace her lover. In this way, Poulenc paints a more pitiable portrait of Elle than does Cocteau.

Poulenc makes very small cuts in the “Seeing/Flirting Phase,” and the “Telephone as Weapon Phase.” There are, however, some important omissions in the next part, the “Truth Phase.” During Elle’s admission of the lies, which constitutes the Climax of the play and libretto, she describes to her lover the events of the previous evening. She tells him of a dream that she had and that when she woke to discover

\(^{41}\) Cocteau, 63.
that what she dreamed was in fact real, she was distressed to discover that she was not lying next to him. Poulenc cuts a few words here that show Elle is a very sensual and tactile being. The cuts are indicated by square brackets.

Je me suis réveillée [en sursaut] toute contente parce que c'était un rêve, et quand j'ai su que c'était vrai, que j'étais seule, que je n'avais pas la tête sur ton cou [et sur ton épaule, et mes jambes entre tes jambes,] j'ai senti [que je ne pouvais pas,] que je ne pouvais pas vivre… / I awoke [with a start] entirely happy because it was a dream, and when I became aware that it was true, that I was alone, that I did not have my head against your neck [and on your shoulder, and my legs between your legs,] I felt [that I could not,] that I could not live…

By deleting the words “mes jambes entre tes jambes,” Elle and the relationship she shared with her lover become somehow more pure, more about her love for him, and less about their sexual encounters. While in the libretto one is aware that Elle shared a bed with her lover for many years, this part of the play suggests a sexual intensity between them that one does not sense in the libretto. It also suggests a level of openness and trust that is not evident in Poulenc’s version. Along with the previous admission by Elle that she knew the end was imminent thanks to their mutual frankness, this phrase aids in portraying the lover in a more favourable light than he is in the libretto. By deleting this information, and all references to Elle’s understanding that the end of her relationship was near, Poulenc makes the lover seem crueller in the libretto. Because in the play the lover ensured that Elle understood the terms of their relationship, Cocteau presents a kinder man than does Poulenc.

Later in the “Truth Phase,” Poulenc cut two interesting lines that interrupt the serious atmosphere created during Elle’s admission of her lies. Both lines add levity to the situation. In respect to the attempted suicide, Elle says:

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42 Cocteau, 68.
Il paraît que c'est très difficile de s'empoisonner et qu'on se trompe toujours de dose. / It seems that it is very difficult to poison oneself and that one always miscalculates the dose.  

Not only does this have the effect of breaking the tension of the scene, especially given the nature of Elle’s description of how she felt under the influence of the pills just prior to this line, but it also suggests a certain level of pre-meditation. Perhaps Elle’s admission is an overly dramatic account of what really happened the night before and that she was actually in total control. Perhaps she exaggerated the number of pills she swallowed, and in actual fact, she had no intention of killing herself; rather, it was a ‘cry for help,’ because she is incapable of dealing with the fact that she is now alone.

The other interesting cut to this phase is a line suggestive of an inner strength not evident in the Elle of the libretto.

Je m’étais juré de ne pas te donner d’inquiétude, de te laisser partir tranquille, de te dire au revoir comme si nous devions nous retrouver demain.../ I promised myself that I wouldn’t worry you, that I’d let you leave without causing a scene, that I’d say goodbye as if we were going to see each other tomorrow...  

Elle then candidly admits to her lover that what is truly difficult about her situation is to hang up the receiver, “de faire le noir / to create the darkness.” All of this suggests calmness and lucidity, as though Elle’s attempted suicide was planned and not so much an attempt on her life as an attempt to get her lover’s attention, and perhaps to rekindle their relationship. As none of these lines appear in the libretto, one is left with the sense that Elle really was driven to a state of temporary madness in

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43 Cocteau, 68.
44 Cocteau, 68-9.
45 Cocteau, 69.
which she was incapable of making sound decisions, and that the only reason she tells her lover about this event is in order to get him to admit to his own lies.

"Aftermath" begins the Denouement and initially consists of small talk. Poulenc cut a large portion of text from this phase. First of all, through Elle's responses, we are made aware that her lover is concerned for Elle's well being. He attempts to take the blame for her current emotional state, saying that he is "lâche/cowardly." Elle denies his culpability, reminding him that he had brought her nothing but happiness. She then reaffirms that she knew the end was near and that in fact she was waiting for it to happen.

This is the second time in the play that Elle admits she was fully aware that the end of her relationship was near. It is also an indication that her lover is not the callous man of the libretto. Despite knowing that the end was imminent because she had seen a photograph of her lover's fiancée in a magazine, she had not indicated to him that she knew because she did not want to ruin their final weeks together. The fact that he had been engaged to another woman for some time before their break-up perhaps suggests that his feelings for Elle ran deeply and that it was difficult for him to end the relationship. It is possible that the impending marriage is one not based in love. Since no further details are provided regarding the engagement, we can only speculate, but this information is interesting because it tells us that Elle really did have the time to

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46 Cocteau, 69. We know that he used this word to describe himself because Elle repeats it, questioningly, and says that it is she who is cowardly.

47 Cocteau, 69.
adjust to the coming separation and that the upcoming nuptials were not a surprise.
The libretto, on the other hand suggests that Elle had no warning about the break-up,
and certainly none about her lover’s impending marriage. Since this text was cut from
the libretto, the image presented of the lover and his actions leaves one with the
impression that he cared only a little for Elle and her feelings, and that theirs was a
relationship in which both parties wanted something different.48

Much of the “Suffering Phase,” which relates the pain Elle has been
experiencing since her lover left, has been cut. In a long omitted segment, Elle
describes the distressing dreams she had the night of the break-up. She went to sleep
with the telephone next to her because he had promised to call her. Elle recounts some
“little dreams” she had in which the telephone figured prominently.49 In the first two
dreams, Cocteau makes a play on the word “coup / call” where the “coup de
téléphone” transforms into “un vrai coup / a real blow” that he administers to her; or,
that it becomes “un cou qu’on étouffe / a throat being strangled.”50 The third dream
uses the telephone as a metaphor, this time referring to the telephone line as “un tuyau
de scaphandre / a diver’s air tube” that attached Elle to her lover, and in the dream she
begged him not to cut off the air supply.51 It is interesting that Poulenc cut such vivid
imagery since it would have reinforced Elle’s fears of being alone. It is one of only
few instances in the play when it is apparent how Elle was truly reacting to the break­
up. Throughout, she has tried to take the blame for her situation, admitting that she
knew from the beginning that theirs was not a life-long relationship, and
acknowledging that she had the time to prepare for the day he would officially end the

48 Remember, the text concerning the frankness of their communications throughout the relationship
was also cut from the libretto and the combination of all this omitted text paints a very different picture
of their relationship and especially of Elle’s lover.
49 Cocteau, 70.
50 Cocteau, 70.
51 Cocteau, 70.
affair. Only the attempted suicide (which I have suggested may have been a pre­
meditated—undertaken in order to return her lover’s attentions to her), her declaration
that she is suffering, and these dreams indicate that she is not as brave as she wishes
him to believe.

Poulenc excluded another interesting piece of information from the “Suffering
Phase”:

Depuis ce fameux dimanche soir, je n’ai été distraite qu’une seule fois, chez le
dentiste, quand il m’a touché un nerf../ Since that famous Sunday night, I
have not been distracted by anything except at the dentist when he touched a
nerve...  

This line indicates that Elle has actually left her apartment at least once since the
break-up, whereas the libretto creates the distinct impression that she has not left her
house since the night of the break-up, two days earlier. In the libretto, Elle appears to
have been waiting constantly for his promised telephone call. By not allowing Elle to
leave her apartment, she appears completely obsessed with speaking to him again,
whereas in the play it seems that Elle has made at an attempt to get on with her life.

“Dog Phase,” which in Waleckx is “Dog Phase (second time),” also contains
significant cuts, and, at first glance, it is surprising that Poulenc included anything
from this phase at all considering the first dog phase was omitted entirely. The two
dog phases appear in complimentary parts of the play, so the inclusion of only one of
them in the libretto is somewhat surprising. Immediately prior to this phase Elle has
indicated that she will continue her life alone, and one must surmise that her lover
then suggests that she is not alone because she has the dog.

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52 Cocteau, 71.
53 For a discussion of the inclusion of this dog phase in the libretto, please refer to Chapter 3.
There are two note-worthy deletions in this phase. The first is the story of how Elle’s aunt Jeanne reacted to the news that her son had been killed. She describes her aunt as first becoming very pale and small and then becoming “toute rouge et géante / all red and enormous,” an appearance that terrified those around her, especially her little dog. This story serves little dramatic purpose and is used merely to explain the odd behaviour of Elle’s dog. It is not surprising that Poulenc elected not to include it.

In the second passage, Elle says in no uncertain terms that she no longer desires to travel for fear that she will encounter her lover. Like the burning of the letters, the dog she does not want, and the photographs she destroyed, her fear of running into him is one more sign that Elle is greatly pained by the end of her affair and that she wants few reminders of their time together.

Finally, the last phase containing any significant cuts is that which Waleckx labelled “Social Isolation.” In this phase, Elle speaks of how those not directly involved in a given situation are quick to judge those who are, and that outsiders do not often understand the decisions made by those involved. The excluded segment refers to an encounter that Elle had with an acquaintance on the day of the break-up. The acquaintance, referred to simply by the initials B.S., asks Elle if her lover has a brother and if the marriage announcement she read in the newspaper was for him. That this segment was cut from the libretto is significant because Poulenc removed all indications in the play that Elle has any friends or family (except for Martha) so as to portray the utter loneliness and despair she feels at being abandoned. In the play, it is obvious that Elle starts her affair having friends, especially when she admits that “peu à peu j’ai lâché tout le monde / little by little I dropped everyone,” but in the libretto it appears that the reason she was so obsessed with her lover throughout their

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54 Cocteau, 73.
55 Cocteau, 74.
relationship was because she really did not have anyone else in her life besides Martha.

By eliminating all evidence of Elle's knowledge of the impending break-up, her fetishist quality, and the reference to her earlier friendships, Poulenc simplifies the character by choosing instead to place emphasis on the pitiable situation in which she finds herself. His concept of the character suggests a psychological fragility that we do not sense in the play. The obsessiveness with which she waits for her lover's telephone call for two days and her attempted suicide seem to be the actions of a woman in shock rather than one who knew that heartbreak was inevitable. While Cocteau and Poulenc's Elles bear a resemblance one to the other, it is clear that the differences between them are significant.
CHAPTER III

Melodrama

An understanding of melodrama as a theatrical genre is of central importance to this thesis, since the production will be influenced by the content, décor, and direction of Hollywood melodramas of the 1950s, specifically those of Douglas Sirk. This chapter will explore different conceptions of melodrama and arrive at a definition to illuminate how applicable it is to La Voix humaine.

3.1 Defining Melodrama

Charting melodrama’s genealogy has proven so problematic, and the literature on melodrama so inconsistent, because over the last two hundred years the genre’s basic features have appeared in so many different combinations.

—Ben Singer, Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts

Let us consider some different definitions of melodrama. A good place to start is with a standard English language dictionary, in which one may encounter a general definition such as this:

n. 1. Originally, a drama with a romantic story or plot, sensational incidents, and usually including some music and song. 2. Any sensational and emotional drama, usually having a happy ending. 3. Excessively dramatic or emotional behaviour or language.56

At the end of the definition is the traditional breakdown of the word into its constituent parts, i.e. melos (music), and drama. The first definition briefly details the elements of classical melodrama, which is a label applied to examples of the theatrical genre from around 1800 to the advent of the motion picture around 1900. The second definition may be applied to later stage dramas, film melodramas of the 1930s to 1950s, and radio and television soap operas. The final definition provided relates to its

widespread misuse to describe extreme emotional responses. Taken together, the three definitions demonstrate how a word can change in meaning from defining an entire theatrical genre to becoming a negative colloquial expression.

The dictionary entry does not include a definition of the word as it pertains to the history of music and because the subject of this thesis is an opera, it is important to explore this term as it has been employed in a musicological context. For this I will turn to *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, which states that a melodrama is “a musico-dramatic technique in which spoken text alternates with instrumental music against a continuing musical background.”\textsuperscript{57} It continues by discussing what is generally accepted to be the first example of melodrama, *Pygmalion* by Rousseau, a work the composer described not as a melodrama but as a *scène lyrique*. It then proceeds to give further examples of melodramas written by other composers, including Beethoven’s *Fidelio* (act 2, scene 1) and Weber’s *Der Freischütz* (act 2, scene 2).

This definition is clearly limited as it considers only the musical aspect of the genre and not the dramatic content or the production standards of the dramatic genre. For this, we must turn to an oft-quoted book on the history of the genre by Frank Rahill, which offers a rich definition of classical melodrama:

Melodrama is a form of dramatic composition in prose partaking of the nature of tragedy, comedy, pantomime, and spectacle, and intended for a popular audience. Primarily concerned with situation and plot, it calls upon mimed action extensively and employs a more or less fixed complement of stock characters, the most important of which are a suffering heroine or hero, a persecuting villain, and a benevolent comic. It is conventionally moral and humanitarian in point of view and sentimental and optimistic in temper, concluding its fable happily with virtue rewarded after many trials and vice punished. Characteristically it offers elaborate scenic accessories and

miscellaneous divertissements and introduces music freely, typically to underscore dramatic effect.\textsuperscript{58}

This definition is very specific, but, again, is limited to classical melodrama. To round out our understanding of this term, we must investigate cinematic melodrama by looking to the writings of film scholars.

The well-known film theorist Thomas Elsaesser defines melodrama as “a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks emotional effects.”\textsuperscript{59} He defends this definition by classifying the constituent elements of melodrama (music, overwrought emotion, grand gestures, and elaborate scenic design) as “a system of punctuation”\textsuperscript{60} that works synchronously to express the underlying meaning of the drama. He later goes on to describe melodrama “as a particular form of dramatic \textit{mise-en-scène}, characterized by a dynamic use of spatial and musical categories, as opposed to intellectual or literary ones.”\textsuperscript{61} Elsaesser points out is that while tragedy and comedy rely on words (the former) and situation (the latter) to provide dramatic impetus, melodrama, by definition, requires all the elements for which it has been harangued—excessive emotional responses displayed in rhetoric and physical gesture, as well as music appropriate to the emotional situations, and the typical happy ending—in order for the drama to be successful.

Now that we have an understanding of the term melodrama, it would be useful to have a means of determining whether a dramatic work, be it an opera, a play, or a film, may be described as a melodrama. Ben Singer, another film scholar, offers two ways of establishing that a dramatic work is a melodrama. First, he suggests that all

\textsuperscript{58} Rahill, xiv.
\textsuperscript{60} Elsaesser, 50.
\textsuperscript{61} Elsaesser, 51.
melodramas exhibit two overriding elements: excess and situation. He defines ‘excess’ as a certain overwrought or exaggerated quality that cannot be dealt with adequately in a narrative and therefore is diverted into “non-naturalistic” mise-en-scène, colours, overly symbolic props, and music. He reminds us that excess was an important element of classical melodrama and that it appears in film melodrama as well. ‘Situation’ is defined as a “striking and exciting incident” interrupting the narrative flow and eliciting a sense of dramatic tension on the part of the spectator. Whereas in classical melodrama these moments of suspense tend to be sudden and generally place the life of the heroine in danger, in later film melodrama these moments, while still being highly charged emotionally, are generally not as dire.

Second, Singer approaches melodrama as a “cluster concept”. His method considers melodramas (specifically film melodramas) on an individual basis and evaluates them according to five key concepts: 1) Pathos, 2) Overwrought Emotion, 3) Moral Polarization, 4) Non-classical Narrative Structure, and 5) Sensationalism. While not every melodrama will display these features equally, Singer suggests this method is preferable because all melodramas exhibit these elements to some degree.

Since Singer’s method of determination is quite effective, I would like to consider briefly the elements of the libretto of La Voix humaine in this light. Abandoned by her lover, with no family and few friends to turn to, the pathetic situation of the protagonist clearly elicits a strong sense of pathos from the audience. Her obsessive nature, personal situation and grand mood swings display the requisite overwrought emotion. As for moral polarization, Elle’s lover (in this reading) has

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63 Singer, 41.
64 Singer, 44.
65 Non-classical Narrative Structure refers to a structure not based on cause and effect. Typically, melodramas are built by a series of episodes.
been vilified by Poulenc so we may consider Elle as ‘good’ and her lover as ‘evil.’

The episodic nature of the libretto qualifies it as a non-classical narrative structure and where sensationalism is concerned, Elle’s illicit five-year love affair more than qualifies. According to Singer’s method, *La Voix humaine* is definitely a melodrama.

### 3.2 Tragedy versus Melodrama

The original intention of the word ‘tragedy’ has been largely lost as it had been misappropriated by the media to describe every single event that imposes a negative outcome for a seemingly innocent person. Robert Heilman suggests that the word tragedy has an elite and weighty status, which has made it ripe for use in all sorts of contexts, and therefore open for misinterpretation. Instead of conjuring the image of a theatrical event that imposes catharsis on the audience, the term typically conveys only an unfair outcome of an uncontrollable situation. The word ‘tragedy’ has been used to describe early and unexpected death by terminal illness or motor vehicle accident, epidemics, brutal wars, and genocide. It has even been applied to murders, suicides, and financial failures. Certainly, for those involved and for everyone aware of the situations, they are sad, incomprehensible events that seemingly serve no purpose. In our attempt to bring meaning and comfort to those affected we have appropriated a term resonant with the finality of the event because “tragedy” is something we would avoid if we could.” Instead of ‘tragedy’ these events should be called ‘disasters.’ The term literally signifies “an undoing by hostile action of the stars” and is a more appropriate means to describe those negative events that are imposed on us from without rather than chosen by us.

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67 Heilman, 4.
68 Heilman, 22.
In general, an event or play may be labelled a tragedy if the principal person or character involved endures an inner moral struggle that culminates in their ultimate defeat. Tragedy differs fundamentally from disaster (and melodrama) as those involved in the latter are acted upon from outside forces against which they struggle and in the end are either victorious or not.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle indicates all the necessary elements of tragedy: it “normally [happens in] a single twenty-four-hour period, or just over” (unity of time), and it “is the imitation of an action which is serious, complete and substantial” (unity of action). A tragedy must also contain reversal (*peripeteia*), “when circumstances change to their direct opposite,” and discovery (*anagnorisis*), “a change from ignorance to knowledge.” He also describes the nature of the protagonist, commonly known as the ‘tragic hero.’ The tragic hero has two overriding characteristics: 1) he is a good man, and 2) his troubles happen due to an error (*hamartia*) or shortcoming in his character “which leads [the man] to a disastrous choice of action.” This is commonly called the ‘tragic flaw.’ Therefore, the ‘good man,’ who displays moral rectitude, has a flaw that is not consistent with his morality. This is the root of tragedy: an inner struggle that pulls apart the character. Finally, for Aristotle, the primary goal of a tragedy was the therapeutic effect it had on the spectator, and that “by evoking pity and terror it brings about the purgation (*catharsis*) of those emotions.”

One of the crucial differences between melodrama and tragedy is the existence of a ‘tragic flaw’ within the hero. Whereas the hero of a tragedy is divided within, the

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70 Aristotle, 15.
71 Aristotle, 17.
72 Aristotle, 9.
melodramatic hero/heroine is said to be undivided or 'whole.' In other words, the divisive quality of the tragic hero's personality forces him to make a choice between two paths both of which lead to his downfall, whereas the classical melodramatic hero/heroine displays an overriding moral fortitude that sustains them through perilous events imposed on them by an evil transgressor.

Robert Heilman suggests that there are three different types of divisions that occur within the tragic hero: 1) opposing imperatives, 2) a conflict between an imperative and an impulse, and 3) opposing impulses. An 'imperative' is described as an "overriding obligation...that cannot be rejected without penalty." It is the voice of the law, whether divine, moral, or civil, and it is the path by which the community at large lives together in harmony. An 'impulse' speaks to the ego of the individual and "is open to challenge, judgment, or replacement in a way that imperative is not. ...Imperative has authority and permanence; impulse bows to it, rebels against it, exists independent of it, or holds its power only temporarily."

By way of example, let us consider two tragic Shakespearean heroes: Hamlet and Macbeth. Hamlet is charged with the responsibility of revealing his murderous and usurping uncle and of avenging his father's death. To do this he must disobey his mother's wishes and disclose the actions of his uncle/stepfather. Avenging the old king's death means committing regicide, which in turn would lead to Hamlet's own demise. Hamlet is conflicted between an imperative and an impulse: bringing his father's murderer to justice and committing a crime in order to do so. Macbeth, on the other hand, desires more than his station in life permits, and with the urging of an

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73 Heilman, 79.
74 Heilman, 10-12.
75 Heilman, 13.
76 Heilman, 13. Heilman also points out that in this case, he is referring only to impulses that serve only the individual, since there are impulses that aid the well being of other people and these would not be in conflict with imperatives.
ambitious wife, he plots to murder the king so that he himself will be crowned. In order to fulfill his personal desires, he too must commit regicide. Macbeth also faces a conflict between imperative (laws forbidding the murder of the king), and impulse (his desire to be king).

As a comparison, I will summarize the fate of Elle. Her five-year affair has suddenly ended and she finds herself at a loss as to how to cope with her heartbreak. She waits obsessively for two days for a promised telephone call from her former lover. All she desires is to hear the sound of his voice because as long as she does, she can pretend that her relationship with him still exists. When she discovers that he has lied to her, her focus shifts to obtaining an admission of deception from him. Failing in her quest, she realizes the end is imminent. Elle faces no moral dilemma. At any given moment, she is strictly motivated by a single overriding impulse, and therefore demonstrates Heilman’s notion of the “whole” protagonist found in melodrama.

3.3 The Genesis of Melodrama: Pantomime

One form of entertainment above all others played a significant role in the birth of melodrama: pantomime. Pantomime is an ancient form of theatre that dates as far back as to the time of open-air theatres in ancient Greece and Rome. It was used to convey the plot to those too far away to hear the dialogue of the actors. Masks and stylized gestures were employed to help the actors portray different characters.

Centuries later, pantomime was one of the essential elements of the *commedia dell’arte*, which began in Renaissance Italy. It was the practice of these troupes to travel and perform all over Europe. They helped to shape a group of pantomimes known as “Harlequinades,” the adventures of Harlequin, his sweetheart Columbine, and her father Pantalone. There were also fairy tale pantomimes based on the popular
collection by Charles Perrault.\(^77\) This latter type foreshadows the innocence persecuted theme of melodramas: heroine taken by evil ogre and rescued by a prince. From this type of pantomime came the element of the persecution of the heroine, which was later appropriated by melodrama.

During the eighteenth century it was difficult for pantomime to evolve to include spoken dialogue since the Comédie Française had held the monopoly on spoken theatre for more than a century. Only court appointed theatres could present spectacles employing dialogue. Since pantomimes appeared primarily in the theatres of the Boulevard du Temple, a quarter that housed many ‘popular’ theatres, it was subject to strict guidelines. Pantomime was not allowed to contain dialogue; however, there were almost no restrictions placed on scenic displays so many director/playwrights took it upon themselves to increase the magnificence of their sets, costumes and theatrical effects. The stage effects tended to be as ambitious and as varied as the imagination of the director, and included storms, magical effects, and fireworks.\(^78\)

In the late 1770s the plots became more serious in nature, resulting in the ‘heroic pantomime,’ which included strong sentimental elements, utilized a stricter morality, and centred either on historical or current events. It became the form de rigueur. Just like its predecessors, this new type of pantomime was performed with grand gestures, elaborate costumes, and magnificent sets. When the action was not clear, signs or placards were used to clarify the situation. There was also a great deal of music played during the performances to identify characters and to underscore the plot. Despite the use of placards and music there were occasions when it was impossible to convey a piece of dramatic business through gesture, music, or the

\(^77\) Rahill, 22.
\(^78\) Rahill, 23.
written word. To remedy the situation, actors would drop into speech, from time to time. Since the Comédie Française did not allow the use of the spoken word on the stages of the Boulevard, the practice was used sparingly. Only gradually did the use of speech increase. This in turn led to another form of pantomime known as *pantomime dialoguée*. This genre, coupled with the newer, more heroic plot lines was the immediate precursor to melodrama.  

It was under these circumstances that melodrama emerged in the popular theatres of the Boulevard du Temple. Melodrama was a by-product of and a reaction to an era of great change, an era that saw the end of the *ancien régime*, the fall of the Church from its exalted place, and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in France. Classical melodrama responded to this time of upheaval by portraying the “individual’s powerlessness within harsh and unpredictable” modern life. At the same time it also replaced the role of the Church by “reassuring audiences that a higher cosmic moral force still looked down on the world and governed it with [an] ultimately just hand.” In other words, by portraying quasi-realistic situations endured by common people on the stage, and by ensuring that the hero or heroine was victorious in the end, melodrama helped people to cope with the harsh realities of their daily existence.

### 3.4 Guilbert de Pixérécourt and Coelina

Commonly accepted as the father of melodrama, Guilbert de Pixérécourt survived the terrors of the French Revolution to become one of the most popular playwrights of the early nineteenth century. His career spanned more than thirty years during which time he solidified the pattern of classical melodrama for the next hundred years. Despite his great success he was forced to defend the merits of

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79 Rahill, 24.
80 Singer, 134.
melodrama even at the height of his popularity. ‘Le Corneille des boulevards’ retired to his paternal home of Nancy, in poor health with his works ridiculed by a public that once favoured them.

Pixérécourt’s first great success was the three-act melodrama *Coelina* (1800). It follows the story of a young beautiful orphan named Coelina and the challenges to her virtue thrust upon her by the evil Truguelin. Scholars believe that the model of Pixérécourt’s virtuous heroine was the young Clotilde with whom he shared a brief romance in his youth. The character Coelina, like Clotilde, is a young and beautiful orphan with a kind heart and a noble soul. She is the ward of her uncle Dufour, similar to Clotilde who was the ward of her aunt.\(^{81}\)

*Coelina*, like most classical melodramas, begins in a particular way. In the words of Peter Brooks, “the play typically opens with a presentation of virtue and innocence, or perhaps more accurately, virtue *as* innocence.”\(^{82}\) As a melodrama proceeds, a threat to that virtue, in the form of a situation or person, will send the heroine out into the world to face many unknown perils.

The first act introduces the other main characters: Dufour, filling the role of the ‘good man’ of the *philosophes*, was a pedant\(^{83}\) and a necessary element to the drama as he was easily fooled by the villain; Stéphany, Dufour’s son, is much like Coelina: innocent, but courageous and completely incorruptible, always coming out

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\(^{81}\) However, despite the similarities, Coelina’s characteristics really owe little to Pixérécourt, since the material for the first two acts was lifted straight from a novel by Ducray-Duminil.

\(^{82}\) Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 29. On the subject of personification of good and evil in melodrama, Brooks observes that “virtue is almost inevitably represented by a young heroine, though in classical French melodrama (unlike later American melodrama) she need not be a virgin, for it is moral sentiment more than technical chastity that is at issue. She may be threatened by natural cataclysm (storm, flood, fire, shipwreck, avalanche, volcanic eruption, savage attack, to name only some of those favored [sic] by Pixérécourt), but it is the rare melodrama that does not have a villain. ...Opposed to virtue and innocence stands the active, concerted denial of the in the person of evil, known traditionally as *le traître*, no doubt because he dissimulates, but also because he betrays and undoes the moral order. Betrayal is a personal version of evil. ...[Although evil is personified, he is not a complex psychology character, rather] he is reduced to a few summary traits that signal his position, just as, physically, do his swarthy complexion, moustache, cape, and concealed dagger.” (pp. 32-33)

\(^{83}\) Rahill, 31.
on top in a fair fight; Truguelin, the villain, is treacherous and scheming throughout, although charming to those who will help him in his plans; and finally, the mysterious stranger who goes by the name of Francisque is a kind and gentle old man about whom nothing is known except that years earlier his tongue was cut out by pirates. At the beginning of the play, Coelina feels an irresistible pull toward Francisque and they become close friends very quickly. This unknown feeling is a device known as *la voix du sang*, or, an innate recognition of a member of one’s family. This device sets up the *reconnaissance*, or, discovery scene to be played out later in the drama.

As the first act continues, Truguelin arrives under the guise of proposing marriage to Coelina on behalf of his son, a proposal that is rejected. When he discovers the presence of Francisque, he reveals to the audience that it was he who was responsible for the attack on the old man years before. Fearing interference in his plans, Truguelin plots to murder the old man, a plan that is conveniently overheard by Coelina. The murder is thwarted and the villain is promptly removed from the household. Upon his exit he utters the words, “Tremble, all of you!”

Brooks, in his discussion of melodrama as the ultimate Manichean universe, points to the prevalence of certain elements. For example, the enclosed garden as a sign of the well guarded virtue of the innocent heroine. Walls generally surround the garden, with a locked grille-work gate overlooking a road that leads to the world beyond. It is from down this road, Brooks comments that the villain arrives, with an offer of friendship or as simply an intruder. If the villain appears as an intruder, he is always driven away, but only temporarily.

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84 Rahill, 31. This character fills the role of ‘the mute’ another convention of melodrama that will be discussed further below.
85 Rahill, 32.
86 Brooks, 29.
The second act opens on the garden of Dufour’s property and the preparations for the celebration of Coelina’s engagement to Stéphany. The festivities are derailed when Truguelin’s henchman arrives with a note disclosing Coelina’s true parentage.\(^7\)

It is in this moment that peril befalls the virtuous heroine. Truguelin reveals that Coelina is not in fact the daughter of Dufour’s deceased brother but is “the child of crime and adultery,” the illegitimate child of Francisque and his brother’s wife (Truguelin’s sister). Here is the *reconnaissance* for father and daughter. The revelation leads Dufour to repudiate Coelina and remove Francisque from the household. Before the end of the act, a minor character, Dr. Andrevon, reveals the true nature of Truguelin’s relationship to Francisque, which elicits a change of heart in Dufour, but it is too late. Father and daughter have been expelled from the household to face the perils of the world.

On the subject of the expulsion of the heroine, Brooks comments: “Expulsed from its [the heroine’s] natural terrain, its identity put into question through deceiving signs, it must wander afflicted until it can find and establish the true signs in proof of its nature.”\(^8\) Coelina leaves her guardian’s home willingly and without protest because to do otherwise would be to violate her innocent and virtuous nature.

The third act of a classical melodrama contains the most action, all part of the Manichean battle of good versus evil. It is through duels, chases, battles and many other violent actions that virtue is freed from the evils of the transgressor. The third act is a necessary part of melodrama since the recognition of virtue and evil by those that had previously judged the heroine and cast her out is not enough to bring resolution to the situation.

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\(^7\) Brooks, 29. This is a prevalent element in the structure of classical melodrama known as the interrupted fête.

\(^8\) Brooks, 30.

\(^9\) Brooks, 30.
The third act...[is] a full panoply of violent action which offers a highly physical “acting out” of virtue’s liberation from the oppressive efforts of evil. This violent action of the last act is possibly melodrama’s version of the tragic catharsis, the ritual by which virtue is freed from what blocked the realization of its desire, and evil expelled from the universe.\textsuperscript{90}

Only after the trials of Act III is the recognition of virtue restored and villainy defeated. Old alliances are restored as new ones are solidified. However, it is important to note that in classical melodrama, the protagonist’s only weapon against villainy is to remain true to his or her virtuous nature. As a rule, the hero or heroine cannot stop the villain by his or her own hands. It was very important that the protagonist remain morally untainted; therefore, no matter what trials endured, he or she must not react violently against agents of evil.\textsuperscript{91}

In the case of \textit{Coelina}, Act III opens with the sound of thunder. The setting is a wild mountainous area with a torrential stream flowing next to a mill. We see Truguelin searching for shelter from the storm and lamenting his current predicament. Truguelin encounters Michaud, friend to Coelina, who offers him refuge in the mill because he does not know that this man is wanted by the police in connection with the attempted murder of Francisque. Coelina and Francisque arrive on the scene, and Michaud, recognizing his friend, offers the weary travellers shelter from the storm in the mill, as well. As they enter the mill, Francisque encounters Truguelin and from his reaction, Coelina turns to see what has horrified her father. Coelina, Francisque, and Michaud flee the mill; then, Michaud leaves to find the police. In the meantime, Truguelin has been observing their every move. As Coelina leaves to follow Michaud, Truguelin approaches Francisque and threatens his life. An elaborately described fight sequence follows involving Truguelin, Francisque, and the police. Then, armed

\textsuperscript{90} Brooks, 32.
\textsuperscript{91} Brooks, 31.
villagers, Dufour, and his household arrive, preventing Truguelin from killing
Francisque. The police remove Truguelin from the scene, Coelina is reunited with
Stéphany, and the play concludes with a moralistic song sung by Michaud. It was this
basic pattern that melodrama was to follow for a century.

3.5 Identifying Features of Classical Melodrama

Thus far, I have been relating a system of identifying markers of classical
melodrama. Not only did the pattern of the classical melodramatic plot remain fairly
constant in the hundred years of its reign, but its constituent elements also remained
constant. What is more, as Thomas Elsaesser stresses, melodrama is an “expressive
code”\(^92\) in which the essential elements of the genre cannot be separated from the plot
itself. In other words, a play is not an example of classical melodrama without the
battle between good and evil, costumes that immediately indicate the nature of the
character, and scenic properties that underscore the dramatic situation. All these
elements are part of the melodramatic code developed at the end of the eighteenth
century, a code that continued to varying degrees into the twentieth century when
melodrama made the leap from the stage to the screen.

When speech finally infiltrated pantomime, it did not arrive in the form of the
refined verse found at the Comédie Française; rather, it took on characteristics of the
exaggerated gestures and facial expressions employed by the mute actors. Instead of
supplanting features of pantomime, hyperbolic rhetoric was added to the mixture. In
order to constantly affirm who they are, reveal the emotions they are feeling, and to
announce their plans, characters in classical melodrama all use dialogue to exteriorize
their thoughts, their moral judgements, and their personal characteristics. Characters
are described with only the strongest and most precise adjectives. For example, the

\(^92\) Elsaesser, 51.
words "honest," "virtuous," and "respectable" are used when speaking of the hero/heroine, and words like "wretched," "cruel," and "tyrannical" are all employed when referring to the villain. These words eliminate all ambiguities.

Consequently, the melodramatic monologue takes on a form that is the opposite of the tragic soliloquy. In a tragedy, the soliloquy reveals the dilemma of impossible choice faced by the protagonist. It is introspective, a moment of soul-searching necessitated by the choice faced. The melodramatic monologue reveals no such inner conflict and we therefore learn nothing new about the psychology of the individual. It is just a more extended version of the self-expressive remarks made by a character throughout the play.

The use of exaggerated speech encouraged the expression of extreme emotions. Such overt expression allowed the audience not only to witness the strong sentiments being voiced but also to participate in them, especially through pathos. They could relate to a character and imagine similar situations occurring in their own lives, eliciting a powerful sense of pity for the hero or heroine.

Directly related to melodramatic rhetoric is the inflated style of acting. I have previously mentioned the exaggerated gestures and facial expressions employed by pantomimic actors, a technique that was transferred to classical melodrama. There were other similar devices regularly employed to express the text and dramatic situations. For example, an actor would strike particular poses, grandiosely roll his or her eyes, or flash his or her teeth when speaking. He or she often used an artificial diction to accompany the exaggerated speech. The rolling of r’s or the hissing of s’s

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93 Brooks, 37.
94 Brooks, 38.
punctuated the language while heavy sighing and striking the stage with one’s shoes drove home the monologues.\textsuperscript{95}

Frequently, a melodrama includes a mute character, which is also related to the tradition of pantomime. While mutes are not the only characters to appear that have special afflictions, they hold a particular place in the canon of melodrama. Just as there are blind characters in tragedy (since tragedy is about insight), and deaf characters in comedy (since comedy deals with miscommunications), there are mute characters in melodrama, a genre that is intrinsically about expression.\textsuperscript{96} Only the most talented physical actors played mutes in classical melodrama since it was their job to express emotion and situation without using words. The character of the mute did not survive once melodrama started being used for sound films, but there still exists in Hollywood melodramas the need to express and a resultant inability to do so.

Finally, we must discuss the role of music in classical melodrama. The importance of music was heralded by the prominent display of a composer’s name along with that of the playwright on the title pages of the plays and in all the advertising. Music is one of the elements of melodrama whose role has not changed significantly in the last two hundred years. Thanks in part to Rousseau and his experiment with a new dramatic form in \textit{Pygmalion}, classical melodrama had an excellent example for music’s effectiveness of reinforcing the spoken word. \textit{Pygmalion} was Rousseau’s attempt to create a new musical genre, one that he thought might better serve the French language than opera. The work was the result of the marriage of a spoken text that employed music as a counterpoint to the ideas and emotions of the text, and pantomime to illustrate the action. From the early days of melodrama, music marked entrances of characters, attaching a specific theme for

\textsuperscript{95} Brooks, 47.
\textsuperscript{96} Brooks, 57.
each; it heightened the dramatic situation, especially the climatic moments of the action; and, during the course of almost every melodrama, music for dancing and singing made an appearance.

As melodrama moved from stage to screen, the importance of music was reinforced. Movie palaces and smaller venues employed musicians to accompany silent films. From this practice, catalogues of appropriate song titles and anthologies of music started to be published in order to facilitate the accompaniment of film presentations. Sound films made their first appearance in the late 1920s. The period from approximately 1927 to 1930 marked an unusual time in film during which the industry worked out the particular problems involved with marrying spoken word, music, and action in this new medium. Once the problems were solved, music returned to its pre-cinema position of importance. The 1930s heralded the age of the cinematic composer.

3.6 Melodrama in the Twentieth-Century

As technology made rapid advances toward the end of the nineteenth-century, melodrama kept up with the times by introducing new devices into its mise-en-scène. This adaptability allowed the genre to continue the tradition of spectacular scenic properties and renew the material used for ‘situation.’

Telegraphy, the telephone, the automobile, the air-ship, the rapid-gun fire, and the North Pole are made familiar to the public by means of the melodramatic stage long before they could be brought concretely to the public by other means.97

The introduction of modern inventions on the melodramatic stage was a long-standing tradition. As the advances themselves became more spectacular, and as they began

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97 Singer, 149.
infiltrating the daily lives of the paying public, audiences demanded even greater pictorial spectacle.

In this climate, motion pictures emerged and how better to introduce this new invention than to use it to provide the paying public with exactly the kind of spectacle they demanded from live theatre. In the early years of cinematic production, motion pictures were a novelty whose main subjects were all types of natural events, like waves crashing against the shore, storms, or people in motion, often dancers or boxers. Inventions such as the Zoetrope, the Kinomatoscope, and the Phasmatrope sought to bring to the public these ‘real’ or ‘live’ motion pictures. While this new invention was certainly a novelty, many soon grew weary of the silent moving pictures for which they paid to see only a couple of minutes worth of film. However, as with most new technology, motion pictures improved over time, becoming longer, the images clearer, and along the way, the subject matter began to change from images of the everyday to film representations of stage melodramas.

Several cinematic genres began to emerge in the late teens, and many would continue to have a successful life on the silver screen for decades to come. With the exception of what are known as ‘satiric comedies,’ ‘sight-gag comedies,’ animated cartoons and documentaries, all other film genres had either been previously seen on the stage or were a derivative of nineteenth-century melodrama. The ‘love story’ is perhaps the genre most closely resembling earlier classical melodrama, where the central character(s) is a woman, or a pair of lovers who must face obstacles to their romantic fulfillment. This is also the genre most closely associated with a type of film known as ‘family melodrama’ that makes its first appearance in the 1940s. The ‘spectacle,’ the ‘detective story,’ the ‘horror film,’ and the ‘western’ all have a

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connection to melodrama. Each contains the plot element ‘good versus evil,’ each relies on a series of climaxes to propel the story, and each almost always ended in favour of the protagonist.\textsuperscript{99}

From the beginning of the 1940s until the end of the 1950s, two genres of film dominated the silver screen, the film noir and the ‘melodrama.’ Film noir was a modified form of the gangster film and served as a response to the collective uncertainty experienced both during and following the war.\textsuperscript{100} The world of film noir is that of the city, at night, where violence lurks behind every corner and within which characters would lie and kill each other in a desperate attempt to make their lives better or to avoid their own destruction.\textsuperscript{101} In a similar vein to tragic characters, film noir protagonists are on an unavoidable path toward a fated destruction, urged to follow their impulses by the femme fatale who “first seduces them, then later betrays them.”\textsuperscript{102} The film noir is a black and white genre relying on the stark contrast between shadows and harsh street lights. Partly due to the advancements in colour film, it did not survive as a genre past the end of the 1950s, although there has been the occasional film emulating the style, for example \textit{Chinatown} (1974), \textit{Taxi Driver} (1976), and \textit{Body Heat} (1981).\textsuperscript{103}

As a complete antithesis to the film noir stands what has become known as the ‘melodrama.’ Alternately called the ‘family melodrama,’ the ‘adult film,’ and the ‘woman’s weepie,’ melodrama as a cinematic genre came to define any film whose central character is a woman dealing with “the pathos of a misplaced love and obstructed marriage... [and] the dignity and difficulties of female independence in the

\textsuperscript{99} Everson, 205-237. 
\textsuperscript{101} Nachbar, 65. 
\textsuperscript{102} Nachbar, 66. 
\textsuperscript{103} Nachbar, 74.
face of conventional small-mindedness and patriarchal stricture, and the pathetic
nobility of self-sacrifice.\textsuperscript{104} This genre of film extolled the virtues of suburban home
life. In the process, it elevated the role of wife and mother to an impossible and
unattainable height for the average female viewer, and emphasized the importance of
the family unit within American society. ‘Melodrama’ is the film genre most closely
related to classical stage melodrama because it relied on many of the same ingredients
for its success: a moral and sympathetic heroine whose self-sacrifice elevates her
position within the micro-society that is the family, emotional responses elicited from
the audience, and a marriage of elements (i.e. costume, décor, colour, mise-en-scène,
and music) designed to elicit such a response.

Film melodrama did not survive the 1950s, as radical social and political
changes were about to erupt throughout the world. Women’s liberation, ‘free love,’
and the Vietnam War shattered the idealistic and mythical vision of the family upheld
by the genre. Although melodrama as a film genre was no longer viable, melodrama
as a dramatic genre survives to this day in various forms. It is most evident in the
serial soap operas that take up much of daytime television programming. It is there
that one can see overwrought emotion, clearly defined character-types, suspenseful
situations and good ultimately triumphing over evil on a daily basis.

3.7 Elle: Melodramatic Heroine

In theatre, opera, and film, one is always interested in discovering and
deciding upon subtext so as to infuse a character with life and motivation. The subtext
of a melodramatic heroine will be vastly different from that of a tragic heroine. If a
performer decides one route over another without adequate consideration, he or she
may encounter difficulties that cannot be resolved. In the case of \textit{La Voix humaine},

\textsuperscript{104} Singer, 38.
Elle has no revelatory monologues; therefore, the performer must rely on what Elle says to her lover and what she (the performer) imagines he says to her in order to determine what she is thinking at any given moment. Based on Ben Singer’s criteria for determining the genre of a piece of theatre, I demonstrated that Poulenc’s opera is a melodrama; however, the subtitle he provided suggests otherwise. Taken at face value, tragédie lyrique seems to suggest that Poulenc considered the substance of Cocteau’s play to be tragic, and in turn, that Elle is a tragic heroine.\textsuperscript{105} What must be determined is whether Elle is a woman torn between conflicting imperatives or impulses, or whether she is tortured by a single overriding impulse, one that completely blocks her from the opportunity to make another choice. We must decide if her ruin comes from within or from without. The following is an abstract discussion of the materials of the libretto as it pertains to a performer preparing the role of Elle. It is not intended to be a discussion of a specific performance; therefore, it does not take into account audience response or their understanding of the situation as it unfolds.

The “Introduction: Telephone Problems” phase indicates that Elle is a woman anxiously awaiting a telephone call as demonstrated by her two demands that the unknown woman on the shared line hang up.\textsuperscript{106}

Allô, allô,... Mais non, Madame, nous sommes plusieurs sur la ligne, raccrochez,... Vous êtes avec une abonnée...Mais, Madame, raccrochez vous-même./ Hello, hello...No, Madam, this is a party line, hang up...You are speaking to a subscriber...But, Madam, you hang up.\textsuperscript{107}

We do not yet know for whom she waits, but it is clear that she is intent upon speaking with that person. This is the first indication of Elle’s single-mindedness. The

\textsuperscript{105} In fact, Cocteau described the work as a ‘tragedy.’ See Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{106} For a list of the phases and their locations in the score, please refer to Table 2 at the end of this chapter.
telephone rings a second time and Elle’s frustration at her inability to communicate
with the person she is trying to reach mounts, culminating at the point when she
demands that the operator tell the other woman to hang up. Finally, when the
telephone rings a third time, Elle’s anxious waiting is rewarded with the voice she
desires to hear. It is clear from the nature of her responses that she is speaking with
someone she knows intimately, but the degree of intimacy is not immediately
revealed, and the audience must wait for many lines of text to be uttered before Elle
refers to the other person by an endearment: “chéri.”

Some initial pleasantries are shared between the two, and following this, Elle
tells her lover what he wants to hear (“Lies 1” phase, m. 68). She has obviously had
time to rehearse the lies she tells him concerning her activities since they were last
together. We are immediately aware that she is lying because of the mise-en-scène
indications provided by Cocteau and included in the first pages of the score for the
opera.

...Le rideau découvre une chambre de meurtre. Devant le lit par terre, une
femme en longue chemise étendue, comme assassiniée. / The curtain rises to
show a bedroom of murder. In front of the bed on the floor, a woman in a long
night gown is stretched out as though she has been assassinated.

In this early part of the conversation it is clear that Elle has prepared one long
lie that divides into four sections:

1) Elle tells her lover that she just arrived home ten minutes prior to his call.
2) She tells him that she took a sleeping pill the night before.
3) She talks about what she did during the current day.
4) She tells him that she had dinner that evening with Martha.

This section of text ends with Elle responding to her lover’s query as to what she is
wearing: “Ma robe rose...Mon chapeau noir. ...Oui, j’ai encore mon chapeau sur la

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108 Poulenc, 6.
109 Poulenc, prefatory remarks.
tête. / My pink dress...My black hat...Yes, I’m still wearing my hat." Not only is Elle not wearing what she describes to him, but she must also quickly change the subject since it would have been very unusual for her to still have her hat on. She realizes her mistake, and so as not to raise suspicion, she asks him about his evening.

Thus far, Elle has shown herself to be an impatient, anxious woman, who is quick to anger when she is not in control of the situation. Once she has her lover on the phone, her demeanour changes immediately and she remains calm while delivering her prepared speech. Only when he derails her with questions does she lose the tenuous hold on her emotions. The conversation continues with Elle believing that her lover is at home, and he, at least somewhat believing her story. Her only goal is to keep him on the line and to continue the conversation as long as possible.

The progression of the next part of the conversation, “Feigned Courage” phase (mm. 115-187) moves from Elle attempting to be stoic and voluntarily taking responsibility for the outcome of the relationship to her discovery of some kind of shocking news that momentarily throws her off guard once again. Her feigned stoicism is particularly notable when she tells him that she understands that it must be hard for him to come to her apartment to pick up the bag containing their love letters and when she later tells him that she got exactly what she deserved when the relationship ended.

Un peu dur...Je comprends. Oh! mon chéri, ne t’excuse pas, c’est très naturel et c’est moi qui suis stupide. A little difficult...I understand. Oh! my darling, don’t apologize, it’s very natural and I was being stupid.

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110 Poulenc, 9.
111 There are two examples of this in this section: first, when he pre-empts her story about having dinner with Martha, and second, when he questions her use of pills to help her sleep.
112 It has been suggested that it is at this point that Elle discovers that her lover is to be married to another woman the following day. This is certainly plausible given her response: “Demain? Je ne savais que c’était si rapide. Tomorrow? I didn’t know it was happening so soon.”
113 Poulenc, 10.
It is when she reminds her lover of a Sunday in Versailles that Elle’s obsessive nature strongly appears. From measures 159 to 172, Elle reveals her ability to remember every detail about their relationship. In relation to the trip to Versailles, she first insists that it was all her idea and then when he tries to argue with her, she says: “J’ai téléphoné la première, un mardi, j’en suis sure. Un mardi vingt-sept. /I called first, on a Tuesday, I’m sure of it. Tuesday the twenty-seventh.” That she keeps such close track of the dates of their rendezvous reveals the depth of her obsession with this man. Later, we learn that for five years she had nothing else to do but to wait for him.

The section from measures 203 to 275 (Telephone Trouble 2 and “Seeing”/Flirting” phase) foreshadows problems and twists in the plot. The two lovers first experience another episode of difficulty with the telephone connection that lasts much longer than the previous one. Elle then remarks that her lover’s telephone does not sound as it usually does.

Elle is completely unaware that it is not in fact her lover’s telephone that he is using. This short episode prefigures the complete severing of the telephone connection later in the libretto, which leads to Elle’s discovery that her lover has been lying about his whereabouts. The frequent breaking-down of the telephone symbolizes the growing rift between the two lovers.

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114 Poulenc, 12-3.
115 Poulenc, 14-5.
116 Poulenc, 19.
The rest of this section continues along in two related segments (mm.225-37 and mm. 238-75). This part of the libretto deals with the concept of the characters 'seeing' each other, a particularly ironic idea since we never see the other party and because Elle is concerned with hiding the truth from her lover. At measure 225, Elle changes her tactics and begins to flirt with him, pretending to see what he is wearing and what he is doing.117

Je te vois, tu sais. Quel foulard? Le foulard rouge. Tu as tes manches retroussées... ta main gauche? le récepteur... Ta main droite? ton stylographe. Tu dessines sur le buvard, des profils, des coeurs, des étoiles. / I see you, you know. Which scarf? The red scarf. Your sleeves are rolled up... your left hand? the receiver... Your right hand? your pen. You’re drawing on the blotter, profiles, hearts, stars.118

Whereas the first of the two parts deals with Elle ‘seeing’ her lover and describing what she ‘sees,’ the second deals with what she herself looks like. When her lover suggests that he can see her too, the mood in this scene changes instantly. Elle fears her lover’s gaze, knowing that it would reveal both her lies and the evidence of aging that she has only recently become aware of. At this point, Elle finally says something truthful and it is the first time she allows her lover to be aware of her true feelings.

When she tells him that he must not look at her, he asks her if she is afraid to have him see her. She tells him, no, she is not afraid, that it is much worse: she is not able to sleep alone. When he asks her what she looks like she says,

Je ne sais pas. J’evite de me regarder. Je n’ose plus allumer dans le cabinet de toilette. Hier je me suis trouvé nez à nez avec une vieille dame... Non, non! une vieille dame avec des cheveux blancs et une foule de petites rides. / I don’t know. I avoid looking at myself. I no longer turn on the light in the bathroom.

117 This is another moment of foreshadowing. She believes him to be at home and imagines him as she has seen him many times before. It is because of this section of text that Elle’s pain at discovering his deception is all the more poignant.  
118 Poulenc, 19-20.
Yesterday I found myself face to face with an old woman... No, no! an old woman with white hair and a bunch of little wrinkles.\textsuperscript{119}

Elle’s discovery of her aging makes her vulnerable in a way she has not been before. Had it not been for the break-up she might have continued to believe she was still as young and beautiful as when they began their relationship. No longer bound by her relationship, Elle is able to see what her lover could but that she could not: her youth was fading quickly. The truth of it is too much to bear. For Elle, youth and beauty had provided some sense of security in the relationship. Now that she realizes they are gone, she begins to understand one of the possible reasons the relationship failed.

In the “Telephone as Weapon” phase (mm. 276-284), Elle unknowingly describes the exact function of the telephone in this situation.

\textit{Heureusement que tu es maladroit et que tu m’aimes. Si tu ne m’aimes pas et si tu étais adroit, le téléphone deviendrait une arme effrayante. Une arme qui ne laisse pas de traces, qui ne fait pas de bruit.} / Fortunately you are not mean and that you love me. If you didn’t love me and if you were shrewd, the telephone would become frightening weapon. A weapon that leaves no traces, that makes no sound.\textsuperscript{120}

At this point, Elle is cut off from her lover, not to be reconnected without some trial. Rather than allowing Elle to communicate freely and honestly with her lover, the telephone, through its inconsistency and its limited nature (it relies solely on relaying oral information, information that can be ‘tampered with,’ i.e. lies are easily believed by those that hear them since there is no visual aid to indicate otherwise) does act as “frightening weapon.” At the beginning of the libretto, Elle suffered through the silence of the telephone; she waited anxiously for it to ring, but it did not. Once the telephone did ring, it was as though it mocked her, because she could not

\textsuperscript{119} Poulenc, 22-3.
\textsuperscript{120} Poulenc, 24-5.
speak directly to her lover. Also, each time their conversation is interrupted, Elle panics, fearing that she will never speak with him again. The telephone, an inanimate object, has been infused with life because of its power over Elle. It has so far had the power to make her anxious, frustrated, angry, relieved, and calm.

As after the first disconnection, Elle anxiously waits for the phone to ring. When it does, the operator is on the line (Telephone Line Cut 1, mm. 295-308). Through the operator, Elle tries to connect with her lover, instead of waiting for him to call her, as she had done previously. This is a crucial moment in the libretto, one that shows clearly that Elle is being worked on by forces outside her control. Without the intervention of the operator, Elle would not have tried to call her lover’s home phone. If she just waited for him to call her, she would not learn important information that changes the way she continues the conversation. When the operator tries the man’s phone number and the line is not free, Elle immediately suggests that he is trying to reach her. We are not privy to what the operator says in response, but I propose that she suggests trying the number again once the line is free to which Elle responds, “Bien.” This was an opportunity for Elle to take control and tell the operator she would wait for her lover to call her, but in her desperation to reach him, she allows herself to be acted upon. By accepting the operator’s help, Elle allows an outside element some measure of control over her future. This is a critical observation to make about Elle: she is constantly being worked on by outside forces, and while there have been instances where she seems to be in command of the conversation, i.e. when she recites her lies and when she flirts with her lover, she is never really the one in charge. She cannot control what her lover says to her, which

121 We know that her lover was one of the people on the line when she picked it up because when she is finally connected with him she says, “C’était un vrai supplice de t’entendre à travers tout ce monde.../ It was real torture to hear you over all those people...”
122 Poulenc, 27.
perhaps causes her to react in a way she does not want to. She cannot control the telephone, not when it rings, nor to whom she will speak. In moments of great weakness, like this one, she does not seem to be in command even of herself, allowing someone else to make decisions for her.

The telephone rings for a second time and instead of her lover, Elle speaks with Joseph, his butler ("Revelation," mm. 312-29). She explains to him that she had been speaking with "Monsieur" and that they had been disconnected. When he tells her that she is mistaken in calling him at home as he is not in, she responds:

Pas là? Oui, oui, il ne rentre pas ce soir...c'est vrai, je suis stupide! Monsieur me téléphonait d'un restaurant, on a coupé et je redemande son numéro.../ Not there? Yes, yes, he is not in this evening...it's true, I'm stupid! The Master telephoned me from a restaurant, we were cut off and I asked for his number...

Although Elle has unexpectedly discovered that her lover deceived her, she appears calm as she says goodbye to Joseph. Her course of action must be redirected, but her ultimate goal remains the same: to speak to her lover until there is nothing left to say, until she can avoid the inevitable no longer. Her tactics to obtain this goal, however, change and as we shall see, she tries everything in her power to get him to admit to his deception.

Following this revelation, the telephone rings and the two lovers speak of the disconnection and of their individual difficulty reaching each other (at the beginning of the "Truth" phase, mm. 336-45). Elle's tone of voice must tell Monsieur there is something on her mind and although she denies it, she is clearly concerned with the information she now possesses and tries to decide how to proceed. Her next line of text indicates the decision she has made: "Écoute, mon amour. Je ne t'ai jamais

123 Poulenc, 27-8.
menti. Listen, my love. I have never lied to you." Her remark, while subtly attempting to urge him to admit his deception, has a negative effect on him, and he obviously feels threatened by the remark. In order to diffuse the situation, she gently admits to her earlier lies, and thus commences the central section of the libretto (mm. 353-460), which is built around her confessions.

As Elle’s confessions begin, she admits that she knows that lying does not return to her what she has lost. She tells her lover that she does not enjoy lying to him, even for his own good. It is clear that her lies were for her own good so that she may continue to speak with him. By suggesting her lies were for his good, she subtly tells him that if by lying to her he was trying to protect her, his efforts were in vain. She continues by admitting she has lied about nothing too important, just about her dress and having dined with Martha. Of course, this small confession opens the floodgates and she then reveals to him the depth of her torment while waiting for the telephone to ring:

Je n’ai pas diné, je n’ai pas ma robe rose. J’ai un manteau sur ma chemise, parce qu’à force d’attendre ton téléphone, à force de regarder l’appareil, de m’asseoir, de me lever, de marcher de long en large, je devenais folle! / I did not eat, I am not wearing my pink dress. I have a coat over my nightdress, because I was forced to wait for your call, forced to watch the telephone, to sit, to stand, to walk back and forth, I became crazy!  

Following this admission is a long section of almost uninterrupted text, which sustains the only aria in the opera (mm. 412-53). In the first half of the aria, Elle does not make small talk, nor try to control the direction of the conversation. Indeed, she seems almost oblivious to her lover. As if in a trance, she tells him how she swallowed an entire bottle of pills so as to put herself in a permanent sleep in which she would neither dream, nor wake. However, she did dream. She dreamed of her

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124 Poulenc, 31.
125 Poulenc, 33-4.
current predicament, and when she awoke she was relieved to discover that it had
only been a dream. Then, when reality hit her, and she realized she was alone, she felt
that she could no longer live. In the second half of the aria (beginning at measure
433), Elle describes the aftermath of her overdose, and that she called Martha because
she did not have the courage to die alone. She tells him that Martha arrived with a
doctor who wrote a prescription, and that her friend stayed until this evening when
she begged her to leave because he had promised to call.

The text of the aria clearly reveals the obsessed and unstable spirit that
inhabits Elle. She cannot fathom living without her lover and attempts to end her
miserable existence. While she is clearly tortured, this is not a woman torn by an inner
conflict. She thinks only of him and how worthless her life is without him. He is her
entire world and responsible for her happiness. For Elle, there is only one road to
follow and that road leads directly to her lover. If she were a tragic heroine, she would
see at least two roads before her and would struggle to make either the best moral
decision of the two possible choices or the best personal decision, the one that in the
short term would reward her most. Elle has no choices presented to her. Hers is not a
moral decision to be made. She has only one overriding impulse. In other words, like
her classical melodrama counterparts, Elle remains true to her nature through all her
trials, but whereas in classical melodrama the heroine is a paragon of virtue and
ultimately rewarded for her steadfastness, Elle is not virtuous and her overriding
characteristic—obsession—cannot lead to happiness.

Following the aria, Elle’s next ploy is to flirt with him again, telling him that
hearing his voice filtered through the telephone reminds her of the times when they
would talk in bed and her head would rest in its usual place against his chest.
("Aftermath" phase). She then appeals to his sense of mercy, at the beginning of the
"Suffering" phase (mm. 510-22):

Pardonne-moi. Je sais que cette scène est intolérable et que tu as bien de la
patience, mais comprends-moi, je souffre, je souffre. Ce fil, c'est le dernier qui
me rattache encore à nous. / Forgive me. I know that this scene is intolerable
and that you have much patience, but understand me, I suffer, I suffer. This
cord is the last one that attaches me to you.\footnote{Poulenc, 46-7.}

This last line seems to work; at least it keeps him on the telephone with her, and now
begins another confession. First, she admits to having slept with the telephone in her
bed because it is her last link to him. Then another critical admission on Elle's part:
for five years, all she did was think of him. She spent her time alone waiting for him
to walk through the door, believed him to be dead if he was late, was sick with worry
that perhaps he was dead, and when he would finally arrive, be frightened he would
leave again. For five years she obsessed over his every move; she lived solely for him
and now it is only because they are talking that she can continue to breathe.

Elle then describes her life as it is now, without him. She tells him that
although she slept the first night after he left, she has not slept since and moves
through each day with nothing to do, nothing to look forward to. Like an automaton,
she goes through the motions of everyday existence, unthinking, and with no purpose.
She ends this confession by saying something that we have come to suspect (mm. 562-
65): "Mais, mon pauvre chéri, je n'ai jamais eu rien d'autre à faire que toi. / But, my
poor darling, I have never had anything else to do but you."\footnote{Poulenc, 51.} She lived only for him
and the life they had together, such as it was. Although they had a long-standing
intimate relationship, they maintained separate residences, and given the length of

\footnote{Poulenc, 46-7.}
\footnote{Poulenc, 51.}
their affair, it seems unlikely to an outsider that her lover ever had any intention of marrying her. We do not know why this is; only that it is so.

We now come to a fairly long segment on the subject of Elle’s dog (“Dog” phase mm. 566-600). This section recounts the dog’s odd behaviour in the last three days since the break-up. If we take it at face value, it seems to be an odd choice by Cocteau to write about the dog at this moment, and it seems equally strange that Poulenc would choose to include this part of the original text when he cut the other dog episode from the source material. Cocteau obviously used the image of the angry, frightened little dog as a metaphor for Elle. By talking about the dog Elle reveals more about herself (mm. 574-78).

Il ne mange plus. Il ne bouge plus. Et quand il me regarde il me donne la chair’ de poule. / He no longer eats. He no longer moves. And when he looks at me he gives me goose bumps.

Elle no longer eats; no longer moves and when she looked at herself in the mirror and discovered the old woman looking back at her, it sent shivers up her spine. When Elle says that perhaps the dog believes that she had done something bad to Monsieur, she suggests that she is the cause for the end of the relationship. This section does somewhat stifle the forward momentum, but perhaps it is a necessary break from the confessions of the protagonist. It may even be seen as a somewhat comical interlude included specifically to lighten the mood before the drive towards the excruciating ending. I believe that Poulenc insisted that the section be kept in because he knew

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128 Waleyckx, 331. Denise Duval complained that this section induced boredom among the audience and that she found it particularly difficult to keep their attention, ultimately convincing Poulenc to cut it from the live performances. He agreed to the change, but insisted it be reinserted for the recording. This section remains in the published score.

129 Please refer to the discussion of the cuts from the play.

130 Poulenc, 52.
instinctively that the audience and performer alike needed a moment of respite before the coming onslaught.\textsuperscript{131}

The dog interlude is cut off by another interference on the line (Telephone Trouble 3), which causes Monsieur to become angry with the interrupting party and Elle to fall back into her "Old Habits." Elle realizes that she has been speaking to her lover in same manner she had during their relationship and abruptly cuts off the conversation. In the following lines she elucidates the problems associated with communicating solely on the telephone (mm. 646-58):

Dans le temps, on se voyait. On pouvait perdre la tête, oublier ses promesses, risquer l'impossible, convaincre ceux qu'on adorait en les embrassant, en s'accrochant à eux. Un regard pouvait changer tout. Mais avec cet appareil, ce qui est fini est fini. / In that time, we saw each other. We could lose our cool, forget our promises, risk the impossible, convince those we adored by embracing and holding onto them. One look could change everything. But with this telephone, what is over is over.\textsuperscript{132}

Elle becomes acutely aware that she is running out of time and for a moment it seems that she is out of ideas. In desperation, she suggests to him that sometimes it is necessary to lie ("Lies 2"). She tries four times to get her message through to him, suffering one last disconnection. Her lover does not respond to her subtle prompting and she finally gives in to the finality of the moment.

In the closing moments, Elle no longer attempts to have Monsieur admit to his deceptions ("Conclusion: Farewell"). She realizes that he will never tell her the truth. The couple wade through a torturous few minutes of conversation comprised of small talk. Despite realizing the end is near, she continues to hold onto him, going so far as to wrap the telephone cord around her neck. As she puts it, she has wrapped his voice

\textsuperscript{131} Waleckx, 345, Note 16.
\textsuperscript{132} Poulenc, 59-60.
around her throat, as though somehow to feel closer to him, or that their voices are now one.

When he tells her that he will be going to Marseille (supposedly on his honeymoon) Elle asks one more thing of him: that he not go to the hotel where they used to go, as she does not want to imagine him there with another woman (mm. 736-51). When he promises her that he will do as she asks, she seems to become very calm. It is not until the last few lines that her anxiety returns and she hands over the control of her life to Monsieur (mm.770-78):

Je suis forte. Dépêche-toi. Vas-y. Coupe vite! Je t'aime, je t'aime, je t'aime, je t'aime... t'aime. / I am strong. Hurry. Go on. Hang up! Hang up quickly! I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you... love you. 133

Nothing is resolved, but the end of the libretto rings with a finality that is never in question. Not once throughout the entire libretto does Elle have control over anything: the telephone, her lover, the nature of the conversation, or the fate of her relationship. If Elle had been a tragic heroine, she would not have been able to govern her fate either. She would have command over the direction she would take between conflicting imperatives, but no matter what, she could not sway the outcome. This is an example of how a there is a fine line between tragedy and melodrama with a sad ending. Both types of protagonists are incapable of outrunning their fates, but the difference is that the tragic hero/heroine is divided and controlled by conflicting inner forces, and the melodramatic hero/heroine is whole, and acted upon by forces beyond him/herself, over which he/she have no control. Both types of protagonists are acted upon by something, and both are at the mercy of fate, but instead of being instructive

133 Poulenc, 70-1.
and cathartic, the audience is compelled to feel empathy for Elle's situation because of her suffering.

From the beginning we know things are not going to end well for Elle, and yet, she remains true to her nature. She does not waver and she does no one any harm but herself. Elle proves herself to have been and to still be single-minded in her desire, despite its self-destructive nature. Only when she realizes that her pursuit is fruitless does she ask her lover to hang up. Much like Coelina who must remain virtuous, and therefore remain true to her nature in the face of the perilous third act in order to be accepted back into Dufour's household, so must Elle remain true to her obsessive nature until then end.
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*Table 2. A breakdown of the phases and their respective measures.*
CHAPTER IV

The Score

4.1 The Score of La Voix humaine in the Literature

Scholars have approached La Voix humaine from many angles, exploring such topics of interest as the inclusion of autobiographical elements, homosexual camp, and the role of the telephone. The music of the opera, though, has received little attention. Two scholars, Poulenc biographer Wilfred Mellers and Denis Waleckx have offered extensive analysis of the score. Only Waleckx has dealt with one of the most fascinating aspects, the use of motives.

Waleckx approaches the opera from a straightforward point of view, reporting on the creation of the play and the opera, and the roles of Poulenc, Cocteau, and Duval in this process. By quoting a letter from Poulenc to Hervé Dugardin in which the composer claims to have “found...all [his] themes,” Waleckx acknowledges that the opera was composed using a series of motives. Of course, in his correspondence Poulenc does not label all the motives he used but does tell us that two of them are “extravagantly erotic.” In this same letter, he goes on to indicate that another one has “a whiff of incredible 1920s Parisian jazz,” and further, that “the theme of the lie ...is horrible.” He also describes the music of the ending as “coming from a

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136 Waleckx, 333.
138 Schmidt, 423.
distance.” In a letter to Pierre Bernac, Poulenc mentions one more motive, that in which Elle “tells of her overdose to the rhythm of a sad, Sibelius-like Waltz.”

Waleckx provides a list of what he considers to be fourteen ‘leading motives’ upon which the score is built. Interestingly, he does not include one of the themes mentioned by Poulenc, that of the music coming from some “Boeuf Sur le Toit” bar, the Parisian jazz music mentioned above. He argues that it does not warrant listing among the ‘leading motives’ because it does not recur.

I find Waleckx’ list curious. I feel that there are too many motives listed as ‘leading.’ In my opinion, only three of them are worthy of being labelled as such, by virtue of the number of appearances they make throughout the work. The others should be considered as ‘secondary motives’. There also appear to be some redundancies amongst the ‘leading motives.’ It is fairly clear that some of the motives listed are simply transformations of one another. In fact, Waleckx fails to see one of the most obvious examples of transformation between his ‘On Edge’ motive at RH 12 and his ‘The Lie’ motive at RH 94. The two motives share a similar rhythm (oscillating quarter-note chords against off-beat eighth notes in the bass voice) and the highest voices of the chords are separated by semitone. The differences between them are in the harmonic material and the bass line. Since this is the most prevalent motivic material to be found in the opera it seems natural that the harmonic make-up of this motive would change throughout to provide musical interest. Where the bass line is concerned, the oscillating semitone and the arpeggiated figure are used interchangeably.

139 Schmidt, 423.
141 Waleckx, 336-338.
One of the most problematic aspects of Waleckx' discussion is that he supports neither the choice of motives on the list nor the titles given to them by referring to the libretto. This is a particularly important observation because a performer relies on observing associations between text and music when preparing a role. Waleckx makes only vague associations with the material of the libretto as it relates to the motives. With the exceptions of the ‘Suicide’ motive, ‘The Lie’ motive, and the ‘Farewell’ motive, all the other labels do not hold up to scrutiny because the motives appear in so many other circumstances in which the label applied to the first appearance does not adequately describe later ones.  

Previously, I have pointed out the symmetrical structure of the libretto. Since the musical motives are always representative of particular topics in the libretto, we may then surmise that the score will build upon the arch structure of the libretto. In the discussion below, I will examine the most important motives appearing in this score and discover whether this hypothesis is correct. I approach the score of La Voix humaine from a performer’s perspective, examining the score and text of the libretto together and making observations about the many appearances of the motivic material chosen for analysis. I will focus on three motives I consider to be ‘leading’ by virtue of the number of measures they occupy and the importance of the topics they illustrate. Two ‘secondary motives’ will also be discussed. Finally, I will consider the material of the aria, which constitutes the middle section of the opera.

4.2 The Score: A Performer’s Perspective

As in Dialogues des Carmélites, Poulenc associates character traits and abstract concepts in this opera with particular motives. He tends to treat these motives accumulatively rather than developmentally; in other words, they generally appear in

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142 Waleckx, 337-8.
similar manifestations each time they recur, rather than being employed as the basis for symphonic-like development.\textsuperscript{143} The motives Poulenc employs are generally quite short lasting from two to eight beats. The brevity and general lack of development creates an interesting effect. The motives, by their very nature, both support the fragmentary quality of the libretto—short themes appearing here and there—and help to provide dramatic unity between the ever-changing topics of conversation by recurring when similar themes come back in the text. For the performer, recognizing the relationship between a characteristic or theme and a motive is very important. It not only helps the performer to understand how Poulenc envisioned Elle, therefore aiding in the actualization of the character, but it also assists in the memorization of the score because patterns and structure may then be recognized.

If \textit{La Voix humaine} can be reduced to one overriding theme it would be the inability to communicate. In a previous chapter, I indicated that melodrama is inherently about expression, particularly the characters' unwillingness and/or inability to adequately (or accurately) express themselves. The breakdown of communication inherent in the end of a relationship is illustrated here by the frequent telephone problems. It is also demonstrated by the lies told by both Elle and her lover, and Elle's subsequent failed attempts to get him to admit to his deceptions. Poulenc responded to this theme by stating a particular motive every time Elle lies, when she discovers that her lover has been lying, when she admits to her lies, and when she suggests to him that lying is sometimes necessary. I have labelled this motive 'Lie/Truth' (fig. 4.1). It is appropriate that Poulenc used the same motivic material for both the telling of lies and the revealing of truth since there is often a fine line between these concepts.

\footnote{143 The operas of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss are an example of the latter method.}
The ‘Lie/Truth’ motive appears in 137 of the 781 measures of this opera. It is second only to the number of measures Elle sings a cappella (186 measures), a strong indication of the importance of this theme. The motive itself generally consists of two different quarter note chords in the upper voices of the orchestra played on the beat, and a bass line made up of two single notes sounded on the offbeats. The top voice of the chords is separated by a semi-tone and the bass notes appear in one of two ways: either a semitone apart or leaps of a minor third.\(^{144}\) With the use of the semitone motion in the bass, the top and bottom voices of the motive generally move in contrary motion (fig. 4.2). However, there are exceptions. At RH 36 when Elle flirts with her lover, saying that she can “see” him, the bass line of the motive consists primarily of leaps of a minor third, but the top voice follows no distinct pattern. There are also a few occasions when the motive has been extended to three chords. In those cases, the top voice rises by semitones while the bass line descends by a semitone followed by a leap of a fourth.\(^{145}\)

Another important observation to make about the nature of this motive is that the two quarter-note chords generally oscillate between types of chords that are not clearly related to each other in a particular key, which creates a sense of harmonic ambiguity. The chords fail to resolve, and instead keep repeating around themselves. The motive is sometimes composed of seventh chords (two measures before RH 11), and occasionally chords that come close to being clusters of notes (five measures before RH 27). These examples and other uses of the motive leave one with the impression that it has no forward momentum. The lack of forward motion reflects the situation in which Elle finds herself. She desperately wishes to move forward with her

\(^{144}\) The minor third may appear in its complement, the major sixth.
\(^{145}\) For example, three measures after RH 55.
lover but is first impeded by the telephone troubles and her inability to be truthful, and second, by her unsuccessful attempts to make him confess his deceptions.

Not only does Poulenc use this motive to bring out an important dramatic topic, but he also employs it to make associations between important sections of the opera. This motive, along with ‘The Lover’ motive, delineates the overall form of the work. The ‘Lie/Truth’ motive appears at both the beginning and ending of the opera in a similar manner. At the outset of the opera, Elle tells her lover four lies: “I just got home ten minutes ago;” “Last night I tried to go to sleep but could not so I took a sleeping pill;” “Martha had breakfast with me and then I did some errands;” and, “I got dressed to go to Martha’s for supper.” Towards the end of the opera, Elle makes four attempts to get her lover to admit to his lies: “There are times when lies are useful;” “If, for example you were not at home…;” and two similar statements, “If you lied to me out of kindness and I discovered it, I would only love you more.” These statements of the ‘Lie/Truth’ motive are both the first four and final four appearances of this material. From a structural standpoint, they occur at the beginning and ending of the body of the opera. Given their respective positions they appear as a mirror image of each other, which brings out the symmetrical structure of score.

Earlier, I indicated that a fine line sometimes exists between a lie and the truth. Poulenc illustrates this point beautifully. At RH 12, Elle lies to her lover about her activities of the previous evening, insisting that she only took one pill before going to sleep (fig. 4.2). At RH 57, Elle launches into her confession, admitting that she had been anxiously waiting for his telephone call and that the waiting made her crazy (fig. 4.3). This confession leads to her admission of the attempted suicide. Poulenc uses

146 I consider the opera to have an Introduction (the top of the opera to no. 8), Body of the Opera (no. 8 to no. 100), and Conclusion (no. 100 to the end).
147 The first statements are sounded following the Introduction (to RH 8), and the last occurrences just before the Conclusion (at RH 100).
exactly the same harmonic versions of the ‘Lie/Truth’ motive for both passages.\(^{148}\)

This particular version of the motive consists of two minor triads, e\(\exists\)6 and c\(\exists\)6.\(^{149}\)

Nowhere in the score does this particular triadic sequence occur than in these two places, making a strong musical connection between these two sections of the libretto.\(^{150}\)

The second ‘leading motive’ I would like to discuss is labelled ‘Elle’ (fig. 4.4). This motive not only occupies a relatively large portion of the score (72 measures) but it is only one of two that are used throughout the opera from close to the top all the way to the end.\(^{151}\) The ‘Elle’ motive appears in a variety harmonic configurations, favouring a succession of major ninth chords. Each statement maintains a similar interval sequence in the melody in one of two configurations: ascending minor second plus ascending perfect fifth (then descending minor sixth to start the motive anew), or descending minor sixth, ascending minor second (followed by ascending perfect fifth ending on the same note it began).

I have applied the title ‘Elle’ to this motive because the varied manifestations of the material highlight several of the emotional responses she experiences while speaking to her lover. The lush and romantic sound of the chords lends itself to supporting strong emotions in a traditionally theatrical manner. The harmonic make-up of this motive is somewhat similar to the secondary motive ‘Suffering,’ that I will discuss below, which also illustrates powerful sentiments.

The first statement of the ‘Elle’ motive at RH 20 (fig. 4.4) accompanies Elle telling her lover that she understands that it is difficult for them to see each other now

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\(^{148}\) The motive continues in the same configuration for two more measures before it begins to break down as a symbol of the overwhelming emotions Elle experiences.

\(^{149}\) The c\(\exists\)3 of the second chord is enharmonically spelled with a d.

\(^{150}\) The text at RH 12 is one of Elle’s lies to her lover, and the text at RH 57 is the beginning of her confessions. The use of the same harmonic configuration of the motive in these two places makes a strong musical connection between the telling of lies and the revelation of truth.

\(^{151}\) ‘The Lover’ motive also appears several times from the beginning to the end of the opera.
and that he should not apologize because it is very natural to feel that way. The
motive highlights the pain Elle experiences at the thought of seeing her lover again,
knowing their relationship is over. A variation of this version of the motive appears at
RH 41 (fig. 4.5) and RH 48, two related sections. At RH 41 Elle tells her lover that
she was joking about her earlier remark concerning the way he used to describe her
face. Immediately following this, Elle says that it is fortunate that he loves her and is
not a malicious person because, if he were, the telephone would become a frightening
weapon. This same variation appears at RH 48 when Elle says goodbye to Joseph
after learning that her lover had lied to her about his whereabouts.152 In this moment,
Elle realizes that her lover did use the telephone as a weapon against her.

The appearance at RH 22 underscores Elle’s vehement denials that she is
putting on an act for her lover (fig. 4.6). This version appears in a rhythmically
modified form towards the end of the opera (RH 89, fig. 4.7). Elle feverishly explains
to her lover that, in the past, a single look between them could change everything, but
now, because they are forced to speak only on the telephone, and not face to face, she
understands that “what is over is over.” At RH 89, Poulenc uses the motive many
times over nine measures. The way in which he maintains interest is by gradually
modulating the motive up by half-step. This is the same technique Poulenc applied at
RH 57 with the ‘Lie/Truth’ motive. At both places in the score, Elle experiences
mounting tension that builds in intensity through ascending modulation of the motive.

Figures 4.8 and 4.9, which are versions of the ‘Elle’ motive, demonstrate even
more clearly how this motive is used to highlight contrasting emotions. They are both
employed to illustrate moments of calmness and moments of heightened emotion. For
example, the version presented in figure 4.8 first appears when Elle and her lover talk

152 The statements at RH 41 and RH 48 are the only two instances in the opera when the motive appears
in reverse and have been expanded by two chords, one on either side of the motive.
of their future plans. It later occurs attached to the end of several statements of the 'Lie/Truth' motive (two measures before RH 58), which is one of the most impressive statements of this motive. As Elle's confessions reach their first climax with the word "folle! / crazy!" the 'Elle' motive is sounded. This statement both covers a wide range and is marked by a fortissimo dynamic. The version of the 'Elle' motive in figure 4.9 presents a variation of the motive as heard in figure 4.8. The first appearance, at RH 68, accompanies Elle's flirtatious and suggestive description of the sound of her lover's voice in the receiver. The markings in the score indicate that the music should be played/sung very calmly and voluptuously, and there is a ppp dynamic indication for the orchestra. However, this variation of the motive is later used two measures before RH 100 to accompanies the words, "Mon amour... mon cher amour. / My love... my dear love." At this point in the opera Elle has just come to the realization that her lover is not going to admit his deceptions. In this instance, the motive is sounded fortissimo, likely a reflection of Elle's inner turmoil.

The final 'leading motive' is employed to refer to Elle's lover. This motive occupies 75 measures of the score and, like the 'Elle' motive, 'The Lover' appears in several variations. It is unique among the motives discussed by virtue of the fact that it is the only one that makes its first appearance in the orchestral introduction. In fact, I believe that most of the material of the introduction falls under the umbrella of 'The Lover' motive. I consider the three measures at RH 1 to be the prime version of the motive (fig. 4.10). The prime version may be recognized by the masculine quality of the rising, surging melodic line, which is a combination of minor and major seconds, as well as the dotted eighth/thirty-second note combination.153

153 Other examples of 'masculine' motives that follow a similar shape to 'The Lover' are to be found in Richard Strauss' Don Juan and in Richard Wagner's Ring cycle (the 'sword' motif).
The orchestral introduction is evocative, serving primarily to set the mood of the opera ("angoissé / anguished"), and because it exhibits qualities akin to the seventeenth-century French overture.\(^{154}\) The pervasive dotted rhythms in a slow tempo ("lent / slow")\(^{155}\), a contrasting middle section of music featured at RH 1, and the return of the opening material at the end of the introduction, are all typical elements of the French overture style.

I would now like to consider the musical material of mm. 1-7 and mm. 14-16 (fig. 4.11) as a variation of 'The Lover' motive and speculate on Poulenc's use of the motive to compose the bulk of the introduction. First, we must recognize how the material in question relates to the music at RH 1. At both the beginning and ending of the introduction, 'The Lover' motive has been embellished with thirty-second notes above the primary melodic line. Once the embellishments are removed, a rhythmic similarity to the material at RH 1 may be observed as well as the prevalence of the rising minor second (a#-b).

If we accept that all of this material is related, then we must ponder the reason Poulenc chose to open the opera in this manner. The motive as it appears in mm. 1-7 and mm. 14-16 is supported by a trill. Michal Grover-Friedlander observes that the trill represents the ringing of the telephone and suggests that the prevalence of the minor second in the score is a constant musical reminder of the telephone's presence.\(^{156}\) Throughout the opera, the repeated notes played by the xylophone represent the actual ringing of the telephone. However, during the introduction, the trill is not played by the xylophone, therefore, it is only a figurative representation of the ringing telephone. Dramatically speaking, the juxtaposition of the trill and 'The

\(^{154}\) The orchestral introduction, therefore, may be considered an homage to Lully like the quasi-arioso style of recitative Poulenc employs throughout the opera.

\(^{155}\) Poulenc, 1.

Lover’ motive evokes a sense of what has been torturing Elle before the opera starts. She waits for two things: the ring of the telephone and the sound of her lover’s voice.\(^{157}\)

The prime version of the motive makes several appearances throughout the opera, to announce the lover’s impending presence on the telephone and to indicate his heightened emotions, including surprise, anger, and frustration. For example, the motive appears at RH 56 for only one measure indicating the lover’s somewhat menacing response at learning that Elle has been lying to him for a quarter of an hour. The motive is sounded in a relatively low register and the interpretive markings Poulenc provides here are “Lent / Slow” and “pesant / heavy” with a fortissimo dynamic. Part way through Elle’s confession (four measures before RH 59), she tells her lover that she had intended to take a taxi to his home to wait under his window. ‘The Lover’ motive is then played twice, the second time one octave higher, at a fortissimo dynamic (a strong contrast to the preceding measures of piano). Elle’s response suggests that he has asked her rather angrily what she would have been waiting for.

The final statement of the prime version occurs at RH 99 after Elle’s fourth attempt to get her lover to admit to his lies. From RH 94 to RH 99, Elle tries four times to get her lover to tell her the truth concerning his whereabouts. From her responses following each of these attempts her lover appears to become increasingly offended by the suggestion that he has been lying to her. After the fourth attempt, it is

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\(^{157}\) When the prime version of the motive returns at RH 4, it has been strategically used in order to replace a section of the original play that Poulenc cut from the libretto. In the play, when the telephone first rings, it becomes obvious that Elle’s lover is among those on the party line, but in the opera, the text that Poulenc left in the Introduction phase does not lead us to believe that he is among the callers. Poulenc uses ‘The Lover’ motive to indicate his presence on the line to the audience. Similarly, the motive is not present before the second time the telephone rings, therefore, we know he is not on the line. The motive only returns at RH 8, which is directly before Elle and her lover finally get a clear connection.
clear from the marking in the score over the statement of the motive ("très violente et vite / very violent and fast") and a dynamic marking of fortissimo, that he is angry because he knows that she thinks he has been lying to her.

Another version of this motive is at RH 10 (fig.4.12). The music at RH 10 falls into a group of variations that all employ thirty-second note embellishments. These embellishments are generally in the form of upper and lower neighbour notes. These versions of the motive appear primarily when Elle’s lover is politely speaking with her. For example, at RH 10, it underscores Elle’s monosyllabic answers to his questions. Presumably, her lover is making small talk since this is the beginning of the conversation.

The last version of ‘The Lover’ motive, one that has not been employed previously, appears in the final measures of the opera. This variation is first stated at RH 107 in full and utilizes both an ascending and descending melodic line in the upper voice of the orchestra (fig. 4.13). When it returns one measure after RH 108 only the ascending portion of the figure appears, this time in the bass, taking, for the moment, a subordinate position in relation to the final statements of the ‘Elle’ motive, which appears in the upper voices (4.14). For the first time, both characters’ motivic material appears at the same time. The ‘Elle’ motive is sounded fortissimo with accents and tenuto markings, and it covers a wide range. As the statement of the ‘Elle’ motive is completed, ‘The Lover’ motive is sounded in the bass, also fortissimo, with staccato and tenuto markings over each note. This pattern repeats only once, and at RH 109, ‘The Lover’ motive takes over the musical landscape completely. Just as ‘The Lover’ motive dominated the orchestral introduction, so now, does it control the

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158 The statements of ‘The Lover’ motive at nos. 13, 17, 29, 60, 3 measures before 67, 3 measures before 73, 3 measures after 85, 3 measures before 86, and at no. 88 are all members of this group.
159 Although, as we have seen in the introduction, these embellishments have also included large leaps.
conclusion. Because ‘The Lover’ motive concludes the opera, it suggests that thoughts of her lover continue to torment Elle even after the conversation has ended.

The two ‘secondary motives’ I will discuss were selected because they represent Elle’s emotional responses to specific situations. The first, ‘Suffering’ (fig.4.15), makes only three appearances and is characterized by a sweeping, lyrical melodic line underscored by lush and romantic sounding harmonies. The first statement is at RH 26, which follows Elle’s attempt to take all the blame for her current misery. It accompanies her remembrance of a trip to Versailles. Thanks to the musical material, one’s first impression is that perhaps this is a “happy memory,” however, the text that follows suggests otherwise. Elle continues her reminiscing by reminding her lover that the trip was all her idea, and that she had convinced him that “it” did not matter to her (“tout m’était égal.”). We never learn what “it’ was that could have upset Elle, but knowing there was something unusual about their trip tells us this is not a happy memory. In this instance, the harmonic make-up of the motive (rich f#7 and e#7 chords that dominate the motive) suggests a bittersweet quality to the memory, as though it pains her to remind him of the trip.

The second statement at RH 73 is the longest and the most developed appearance of the motive. Elle’s confession has just taken place and at this point, she first pleads with her lover for forgiveness because she knows that the scene she is making is “intolerable,” but then she asks him to understand that she is suffering greatly because the only tie she has left to him is the telephone wire. This is only one of two places where she tells her lover exactly what she is feeling in the present moment. There are occasions when she tells him how she felt in the days prior to his call and how she may feel in the future, but it is in this moment, when she is at her

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160 Waleckx, 337.
161 At the end, Elle tells her lover that she is strong so he should hang up the telephone quickly.
most vulnerable, that she tells him how much she is suffering. In this case, the romantic lyricism of the motivic material is undercut by the obvious suffering of the heroine. That the motive is developed through extension, variation, and modulation is unique in this opera and gives one the impression that Elle is overcome by uncontrollable pain.

The final appearance of this motive is at RH 104 and the orchestral material is stated in a similar manner to the first occurrence, because it is used to recall a past romantic trip. Elle has just learned that her lover will be going to Marseilles the day after next, presumably with another woman. Elle clearly feels a strong emotional attachment to Marseilles because she hesitantly asks her lover for one last favour. She requests that he not stay at their usual hotel. Interestingly, the vocal line consists primarily of repeated b-naturals, unlike the previous two manifestations of this motive, in which the voice often doubled the orchestra. Poulenc used the ‘Suffering’ motive to accompany her request in order to represent both another bitter-sweet memory of happier times with her lover and to demonstrate the pain she feels at the mere thought of him at the hotel with another woman.

The opera’s conclusion begins at RH 100. Elle has abandoned hope that she will ever manage to get her lover to admit to his lies. This section of the opera begins with brand new material that reflects her feeling of despair that I have titled, ‘Hopelessness,’ (fig. 4.16) and it appears only one other time, at RH 106, as Elle prepares to say goodbye to her lover. The motive is in \( \square \) and is characterized by a relentless figure composed of eight eighth notes. The first group of four eighth notes follows the same intervallic pattern in every measure: three repeated notes plus an ascending semitone. The second group of eighth notes generally follows an intervallic

\[ ^{162} \text{In the opera, we are not actually told that her lover is getting married to another woman the next day.} \]
pattern based upon some combination of a major third, a major second, and a minor second. Because the first part of the motive is always the same, the two parts together create the illusion that it remains unchanged from one measure to another. This motive is reminiscent of the ground bass that supports Dido’s lament aria at the end of Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. The repetitiveness of the ground bass figure in the Purcell and that appearing in *La Voix humaine* expresses the unending misery of both heroines. The instances of chromaticism in both the vocal line and orchestral accompaniment also suggest a lament. The comparison between these two heroines is not without cause: both women love men that ultimately leave them, causing them to feel that suicide is the only answer, the difference being that Elle was unsuccessful.

The first appearance of the motive accompanies Elle telling her lover that she knows it is time to say goodbye but that it is “atrocious” and that she will never have the courage to do it. She continues by saying that the telephone creates the illusion of being physically close to him, but that all of a sudden one becomes aware that a whole city separates them. With these words, Elle not only expresses her fear of ending the conversation but for the first time in the opera, with the line, “toute une ville entre soi / an entire city between us,” we have a clear understanding of her immense loneliness. At RH 106, there is nothing left to say except goodbye. The ‘Hopelessness’ motive accompanies Elle’s admission that she almost automatically said to her lover, “à tout de suite / until next time.” As the orchestra continues to play the motive, it becomes clear to the audience that both Elle and her lover have run out of things to say to each other.

Another interesting feature of this motive is that each appearance is sounded over the course of ten measures. No other motive covers exactly the same number of measures every time it is used, let alone so many measures. Both appearances may be
divided into two equal parts of five measures each. The material of the second half of each of the two statements is at the same pitch level and supported by the same harmonic material, which adds to the whole feeling of unending, overwhelming sorrow.\textsuperscript{163} The second statement of the ‘Hopelessness’ motive leads directly into the final measures of the opera.

There is one more section of the opera worthy of discussion. The one and only aria in the opera, beginning at RH 61 (‘Suicide,’ fig. 4.17), divides into two halves. The first half ends at RH 63, and the aria concludes at RH 66. The aria is particularly interesting because of Poulenc’s unique handling of the chord progressions and because it contains the longest segment of uninterrupted lyrical singing in the entire opera in which the orchestral music is subservient to the vocal line. At the beginning of the aria, there is a clear sense of tonality, which is maintained through most of it. Since the aria presents the longest sections of tonally stable music in the opera, its harmonic structure merits closer examination. Such an analysis is important to the performer because the lure of tonal stability is great, but in a work from the twentieth-century it may also be a trap. A performer may assume that the composer followed a traditionally ‘tonal’ chord progression, and later find that the assumption causes problems in the learning process. It is valuable to understand the progression of the harmonies so that one may not be surprised by ‘unusual’ harmonic and melodic motion.

The aria begins in the key of C minor and the music between RH 61 and RH 62 progresses through a relatively traditional chord progression to a prominent V9 four measures before RH 62 that resolves to the tonic in the next measure. As the aria continues through RH 62 to RH 63, the music travels through a succession of keys (b-
flat—e-flat—b-flat—d) leading to a dominant pedal three measures before RH 63, which becomes an implied V7 of C one measure before RH 63. The V7 resolves to the key C major as the second half of the aria begins. Thus far, the music of the aria has followed a fairly traditional tonal path; however, the music that falls between RH 63 and RH 64 does not.

The first three measures of the second half of the aria follow the exact same chordal pattern: I-vii°7/V-V7 in C major. Beginning in the fourth measure after RH 63, the music no longer presents a stable sense of tonality, favouring an oscillation between two different chords in each of the following three measures: B-flat / a°7, c / d°, and d / e-flat. The two measures before RH 64 primarily presents a b°7, which is not resolved in a traditionally satisfying manner. It is left hanging as the voice sings a cappella. The tonally ambiguous second half continues at RH 65 with a single descending chromatic line in the bass supporting the vocal line. The oscillating chords return five measures after RH 65, but seem to have a tonal function this time. At this point in the aria there is a progression from the dominant to the tonic of C major across three measures, but as soon as a sense of tonality is established once again, Poulenc reintroduces the oscillating chords, culminating in another b°7 one measure before RH 66, when the aria abruptly ends. Again, this diminished chord does not resolve in a traditional manner.

Another interesting observation to make about this aria is that the first and second halves are differentiated by their distinct accompaniments. The first half has a typical waltz accompaniment (Poulenc’s “sad, Sibelius-like waltz,” fig. 4.17), while the second half contains solid chords played against an undulating eighth note bass line (fig. 4.18). The aria is composed of music not heard elsewhere in the opera except

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164 This is a motivic figure that appears throughout the opera that suggests a lament, much like the ‘Hopelessness’ motive.
for a short reference later at RH 91 when Elle assures her lover that she will not try to commit suicide a second time. The music at RH 91 presents a shortened version of the aria. It is in two distinct sections (RH 91 and RH 92), like the aria, and each part consists of similar accompanimental patterns found in the first and second halves of the aria. Dramatically speaking, Elle's demeanour is completely different in the aria than elsewhere in the opera. As she recounts the events of the previous evening that led to the attempted suicide, she seems to relive the experience. Nowhere else in the opera does she relive past events like she does in this moment.

The discussion presented here of the score of *La Voix humaine* is intended to be a guide for future performers to aid in the preparation of the role of Elle. This role poses difficulties because of the fragmentary nature of the libretto and the score. On first glance, it seems that it would be easier for the performer if the score had been through-composed instead of built on a succession of short motives. However, by recognizing that the most important motives are all clearly associated with a characteristic or theme, it is easier to learn this score than one would imagine. Also, we have begun to see the motives employed to clarify the large-scale structure of the opera. I have observed that 'The Lover' motive opens and close the opera, that the 'Lie/Truth' motive appears as “bookends” of the body of the opera, and that the aria appears right in the middle of the score, all of which supports the hypothesis that the opera outlines an arch, both dramatically and musically. The scope of this chapter does not allow for a complete analysis, but the hope is that future performers of this opera may find the observations herein interesting and useful.
Table 2: Leading and Secondary Motives

'Lie/Truth' motive

4.1 Two measures before RH 11

4.2 RH 12

4.3 RH 57

4.4 RH 20

4.5 RH 41: 'Elle' motive in reverse

4.6 RH 22

4.7 RH 89
Table 2 (cont’d)

4.8 Five measures before RH 30

‘The Lover’ motive

4.9 RH 68

4.10 RH 1

4.11 Opening measures of the introduction

4.12 RH 10

4.13 RH 107

4.14 RH 108
Table 2 (cont’d.)

'Suffering' motive

4.15 RH 26

'Hopelessness' motive

4.16 RH 100

'Suicide': The Aria

4.17 RH 61

4.18 RH 63
CHAPTER V

The Production

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the new production created for *La Voix humaine*. I chose to set this production in the 1950s because this is the last credible decade in which to set the opera due to the telephone problems experienced by the protagonist. Also, the 1950s was the time during which the Hollywood melodrama reached its apex. It was at this time that theatre and film director Douglas Sirk worked for Universal International directing primarily melodramas to which he added his own “handwriting” in order to reflect on society’s problems as he saw them.

The chapter begins with a description of propaganda and key events that have created for later generations a particular image of the 1950s in America. Thanks in part to the exportation of Hollywood films this version of American society in the 1950s had a profound influence on cultures around the world. I recognize that Poulenc’s opera is a French work with a character created from the history of French drama and the French people; however, since melodrama is said to have originated on the French stage and since the young film critics in France during the 1950s upheld the Hollywood melodrama as a genre to be emulated, I have chosen to develop a production inspired by the colour melodramas of Douglas Sirk. The intent is not to reproduce the style of Sirk in any tongue-in-cheek way, rather to draw inspiration from his creativity. In so doing, the hope is that the production will have universal appeal and speak to all members of the audience, eliciting a sense of pathos, rather than of humour, as is so often the case when one is confronted with a deliberately

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165 The film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* and its young film critics Jean-Luc Goddard and François Truffaut were largely responsible for this scholarly interest in American melodrama.
dated artefact, like Todd Haynes' *Far From Heaven*, which is an interpretation of Sirk's 1956 film *All That Heaven Allows*.

5.1 Women in the 1950s

For anyone born after 1960, the 1950s seemed to be populated with happy suburban families, like those found on the hit sit-coms "Leave it to Beaver" and "Ozzie and Harriet," in which the mother happily stayed at home raising the children, keeping the house in order, preparing meals, chauffeuring the children to various activities, doing volunteer work in the community, all the while looking her best at every hour of the day, keeping a smile on her face, and apparently living only to please her husband, who was, after all, the breadwinner. The saccharine-sweetness of the dialogue and the constantly pristine homes with all of their time-saving devices leave one with the impression that the 1950s were years during which America had managed to create a utopian environment based in the suburban home. The reality of the 1950s was far more complex than those of us who came later are given to understand.

When the United States finally entered World War II, thousands of women were left behind after able-bodied men went off to fulfill their patriotic duty. With the need for labourers in factories to build machinery for the war effort, women entered the work force in greater numbers than at any other previous time in history. Although their skills were needed in these factories, they were not paid equal scale for their work and were often segregated from the men, given work "appropriate" for women. Still, the country applauded their efforts during the war. When the fighting stopped, women in the workforce were seen as a threat to the American way of life. Women were encouraged to return to their homes, get married and have children, in order to foster a sense of security that had disappeared with the bombing of Pearl Harbour. In
1946, an article appeared in Vogue magazine instructing women to get back on their
"pedestal" and to

...stop making decisions...stop driving the car...develop a sudden inability to
balance a checkbook...memorize once more the age-old formula for a
woman: a utensil whose potentialities for good hard wear are artfully
disguised in a smoke screen of frivolity.\(^{166}\)

In an effort to regain some sense of normality after years of uncertainty, men
and women were encouraged to return to their pre-war sex-roles and make a
commitment to the family as a buffer against the confusion of a changing world.\(^{167}\)
Women who did not marry or who preferred to work outside the home were
considered to be aberrations. A decidedly anti-feminist book by psychiatrist Dr.
Marynia Farnham (with Ferdinand Lundberg) published in 1947, *Modern Woman:
The Lost Sex* argued that women could only find true happiness and satisfaction in the
home and that should a woman turn away from her “natural vocation” she would
become increasingly unhappy and neurotic.\(^{168}\) Farnham claimed that the independent
woman “is a contradiction in terms,” stating that those that chose to remain single or
to not bear children were “abnormal.”\(^{169}\) She also recommended preventing unmarried
women from teaching children suggesting that “a great many children have
unquestionably been damaged psychologically by the spinster teacher, who cannot be
an adequate model of a complete woman for boys and girls.”\(^{170}\)

The year 1947 also saw the advent of Christian Dior’s “New Look,” which
was to have a profound effect on women’s fashion through the 1950s. Using the shape

\(^{166}\) Barbara Heggie, “Back on the pedestal, ladies,” in *Vogue* 107, no. 2 (January 15, 1946), p.118.
quoted in Barbara Schreier. *Mystique and Identity: Women’s Fashions of the 1950s*. (Virginia: The

\(^{167}\) Schreier, 6.

\(^{168}\) Schreier, 6.

\(^{169}\) Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*. (Chapel Hill:

\(^{170}\) Byars, 84.
of a flower as his inspiration, he envisioned an exaggerated feminine figure, with emphasis on three areas: a small waist accenting a full bosom and hip area. To create the perfect hourglass figure, Dior built special corsets into his dresses that cinched the waist and pushed up breasts, while padding and stiffened linings kept the fullness of the skirts intact. Dior dropped hemlines to twelve to fourteen inches from the floor and designed full skirts that used up to twenty metres of fabric. This was an outrage to those who had been forced to be thrifty during the war. Despite some initial protests, Dior’s “New Look” was fully embraced by the following year. The new hourglass silhouette along with the extravagant fashions of this era helped to re-feminize women that had been in the workforce during the war, which aided in the re-placement of women onto a figurative pedestal, all in an effort to reconnect with pre-war sex-roles.

Hollywood also had a profound effect on women’s fashion during the 1950s. As part of film advertising campaigns, fashion layouts appeared in women’s magazines that employed the female stars “emphasiz[ing] the film’s visual elements as sites of emulation for the female spectator.” Advice for home décor was also provided by the films’ set-decorators, “promoting a connection between film décor/star fashion and the average home décor/female self-image.”

On the surface, the return to domesticity was a marker of the new post-war prosperity in America. With the rise to prominence of the middle class, the American Dream was not so much a dream as a reality; at least, that is what the propaganda of the 1950s would lead us to believe. The truth of the matter is, that although the United States and the rest of the Allies had successfully put an end to WWII, the means by which the Americans quelled the resistance from the Japanese put fear into the minds of every person on Earth. The threat of all-out nuclear war loomed over the 1950s,

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172 Klinger, 59.
and "by 1959, two of every three Americans considered the possibility of nuclear war the most important national problem."¹⁷³ A great sense of anxiety existed under the veneer of normality in suburban America.

5.2 America in the 1950s

Thanks in part to Eisenhower, the overriding ideology of the 1950s was one built on "an optimistic faith in capitalism, political pluralism, and the uniqueness and perfectibility of American Society."¹⁷⁴ This "perfectibility" was evident in the supposed economic equalization among the social classes that created a mythological middle-class in which everybody had an equal chance to succeed. The reality was that the 1950s saw a large consumer boom that was supported by several factors. Thanks to wartime rationing and the scarcity of goods, consumers had amassed considerable savings. The post-war increase of working wages encouraged consumer spending and the mass move to suburban developments created the need for goods, like home appliances and automobiles.

Underscoring the optimistic ideology of middle-class existence was a growing wave of discontent that manifested itself both publicly and privately. The intense fear of Communism and the possibility of nuclear conflict with Communist countries helped foster an atmosphere of suspicion and terror. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the anti-Communist crusade of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the Senate Internal Subcommittee led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. He first garnered attention when he announced that Communists had infiltrated the Department of State. Over the next four years, McCarthy made similar grandiose accusations, encouraging those accused to "inform" on others.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Byars, 78.
¹⁷⁴ Quart, 41.
¹⁷⁵ *McCarthyism* is a term employed to any accusation of subversive activities without evidence.
The 1950s were also subjected to social movements leading to great change throughout the decade. The Civil Rights movement began to take shape. Black protests in Southern cities became a regular occurrence and it was at this time that Martin Luther King Jr. became the national leader of the Civil Rights movement. The Beat movement marked another important resistance to the ideology of white middle class America. Led by poets like Jack Kerouac and Alan Ginsberg, the beatniks attacked "middle class conformity, the hypocrisy of the Eisenhower years, and the elite literary culture of the universities." They endorsed anti-conventionalist notions that included 'free love,' "contempt for authority, and spiritual exploration." Particularly exceptional, beatniks embraced people of all colours and sexual orientation.

5.3 Sexuality in 1950s Media

The 1950s were also marked by a proliferation of highly visible discussions on sexuality. The situation comedies reinforced the ideal of traditional sex roles and middle class values; the film genres of "maternal melodramas" and the "adult films" offered an alternative view. As a result of the 1948 Supreme Court Paramount case, these films contained more explicitly sexual themes than was allowed on television. This decision not only forced the complete restructuring of the studio system in Hollywood but also relaxed the rules governing subject matter. The censorship of sexual material in other forms of media was relaxed as well. For example, the two Kinsey reports, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (1953) both spent several months on the New York Times Best Seller List. They were considered scandalous at the time because they demonstrated that "traditional moral norms" were inadequate for describing the actual sexual life of

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176 Quart, 43.
177 Quart, 43.
the average American. Also, 1953 saw the first publication of *Playboy*, a magazine that encouraged extra-marital pleasure for men and placed a particular emphasis on "the image of the sexually available, always ‘ready’ woman." More widely available were paperback novels with sexually explicit subject matter that was central to the plot and whose cover art often featured scantily clad women in provocative positions. Despite the apparent relinquishing of sexual conservatism in the media, several of these successful novels were subject to obscenity charges "from the House of Representative’s Gathings probe into paperback publication for portrayal of explicit sexual encounters."

5.4 The Maternal Melodrama and the Adult Film

The ‘maternal melodrama’ and the ‘adult film’ both fall under the general heading ‘woman’s film,’ a genre that film scholar Maria Laplace describes as being "distinguished by its female protagonist, female point of view and its narrative which most often revolves around the traditional realms of women’s experience." Historically, women made up the majority of the audience of film melodramas and Laplace indicates that the woman’s film was incredibly successful in the 1930s and 1940s. She also points to Hollywood research into the tastes of its female audience. Based on the results of surveys, a set of criteria was created in order to continue to attract women to the cinema. “It was concluded that women favoured female stars over male, and preferred, in order of preference, serious dramas, love stories, and musicals.”

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178 Klinger, 53.
179 Klinger, 53.
180 Klinger, 53.
181 Maria, Laplace. “Producing and Consuming the Woman’s Film,” in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 139.
182 Laplace, 138.
There appears to be little consensus among film scholars about the labelling of film categories, especially in respect to the woman’s film, but it seems to be generally accepted that what distinguishes an adult film from a maternal melodrama is the pervasiveness of adult themes in the former (sexuality, alcoholism, etc.). The adult film was also marketed in a different way than the maternal melodrama. Great emphasis was placed on the shock value of the behaviour of certain characters in the film, acting as a counterpoint to the ‘correct’ behaviour of the characters in a more sedate maternal melodrama. Ultimately, the adult film is every bit as much a woman’s film as a maternal melodrama, since the protagonist is most often a woman. In the case of films where a man is the focus of the film, the male character is emasculated, exhibiting the traits of a typical female character.

Although the promise of sensationalism in the advertisement of films was not new in the 1950s, labelling a film as ‘adult’ was the means by which Hollywood responded to certain industry changes and competed with media that threatened the domination of films as a viable form of entertainment. The introduction of mature narrative themes into film plots was a direct result of the Paramount case and the new rules governing censorship. It was also a means of competing directly with the newest form of mass entertainment, the television. Suddenly, news programs, situation comedies, soap operas and advertisements entered the home, as they never had before. Radio was out; television was in.

By the end of the decade, the average television consumer spent as much time watching television as they did at their jobs. This had a detrimental effect on audience attendance at the movies and in an effort to encourage people to travel to urban centres to see films, more and more adult themes infiltrated the plots of film melodramas. Foreign films, which historically allowed more adult situations in their
plot lines, were also becoming more of a box office threat to Hollywood. The response to this threat was to give the audience what they could see in a foreign film in their native language and with stars they recognized.

In general, the woman’s film could be said to be the twentieth-century’s response to classical melodrama. Jackie Byars calls attention to the many film melodramas that centre upon “communities of women and children,” in which “the absence of a patriarchal figure motivates the narratives.” The overriding theme of the woman’s film is the ability of the principal character to overcome the great obstacles blocking her happiness, which, in 1950s Hollywood melodramas, entailed the successful marriage of a man and a woman, thereby creating a ‘normal,’ functional, heterosexual couple that, with the addition of children, would become a happy family. The female character could be a young, working woman or a widow with children. In both situations, the woman would be depicted as lacking completeness until the romance played to its inevitable conclusion. The imperative of the heterosexual coupling most often leads to an improbable, but necessary happy ending. When the desires of the female characters are not fulfilled in this manner, the implication is that the woman will live a life alone, forced to repress her sexual longing, for if she does not, it will certainly lead to her demise. Excessive emotions dominate the woman’s film narrative, and music appropriate to the emotions and plots twists punctuate the film in a deliberately manipulative manner. Lush set décor and costuming, as well as the use of Technicolor, work in conjunction with the other elements to create the Hollywood melodrama. Especially in the hands of Douglas Sirk, every aspect of the melodramatic mise-en-scène (story, music, décor, costumes, 

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83 Byars, 147.
lighting, and camera angle) was carefully orchestrated according to the director's vision of both the story itself and the society for which it was intended.

5.5 Douglas Sirk

Film and theatre director Douglas Sirk was born Hans Detlef Sierck in Hamburg to Danish parents, on 26 April 1897. His father was a newspaperman and while a student, Sirk worked for the same paper as his father in order to finance his studies. In his youth, Sirk discovered the plays of Shakespeare, taking a special interest in the history plays, and started to attend the cinema on a regular basis. In 1919, he began to study law at Munich University, but gradually his interests shifted to philosophy and art history. Political unrest forced Sirk to leave Munich for Jena where he continued his studies, although he finally completed his degree in Hamburg.

In Hamburg, Sirk began his work in the theatre taking the position of second dramaturg (director) at the Deutches Schauspielhaus, one of the most celebrated theatres in Germany. In 1922, he was given an opportunity to stage his first play, Hermann Bosdorf's *Bahnmeister Tod*. It was a great success particularly with the critics. Although the theatre was then willing to take a chance on the newcomer, it would not allow him to stage the pieces he wanted to direct, namely Shakespeare's plays and other classics, so he left for Chemnitz where he had been offered the position of first director.

Sirk learned his craft in Chemnitz, and although he was allowed to direct whatever he wanted, box office receipts were of the utmost importance. After awhile, Sirk directed almost exclusively comedies and melodramas, both of which made money. From Chemnitz, Sirk left for Bremen to take on the same position there. Before he officially took over in Bremen, Sirk had an interim job in the set-design
department for a movie studio in Berlin, but he did not consider making the move to film directing at this time.

Following his many successes at the theatre in Bremen, Sirk went to direct at the Altes Theater in Leipzig. Unfortunately this move came right at the beginning of the Great Depression as well as the rise in power of the Nazi Party. Times were difficult for everyone in the arts. Fortunately for Sirk, Leipzig remained relatively free of the influence of the Nazis for some time and he was allowed to stage plays that had been banned elsewhere. When the Nazis finally did come into power, Sirk was only able to keep his position at the theatre because the Mayor of Leipzig, Dr. Goerdler (a member of the Hugenberg group, later executed for the attempt on Hitler’s life in 1944), was a friend to Sirk and very close to Hitler at that time. Sirk needed many friends at this time because he was constantly being reprimanded in newspapers for having staged works by playwrights condemned by the Nazis.

One play in particular got him into a lot of trouble: Der Silbersee, by Georg Kaiser and Kurt Weill, both of whom were known to be leftist. What is more, Weill was a Jew. It is a play of harsh social criticism about hunger and poverty. Sirk’s career and personal safety were threatened if he did not drop the play. Sirk, Kaiser, and Weill decided to go ahead with the play, as it was a time for standing up for one’s beliefs. Despite all that the Nazis did to disrupt the performances, it was a great success.

In 1934, Sirk got an offer to direct Twelfth Night in Berlin and he hoped that someone in the film industry would take notice. Two days after the opening, producers from Ufa (the major German film company) attended a performance, after which Sirk had an interview and was hired to direct. This was an unusual move for Ufa since at that time, stage directors did not become film directors. Sirk’s reason for
wanting to become a film director was to escape his political past, and somehow it worked. Ufa was still a privately owned company and not yet under the influence of the Nazis, so at that time, the situation in the film industry was much better than that of the theatre business.

Sirk began his career at Ufa by directing three short films before making his first feature, *April, April*, in 1934. This film was actually filmed twice, once in German and once in Dutch, with different casts and different locales. The practice of filming the same movie two or three times in different languages was common at Ufa since they had a successful market abroad. Sirk followed this film with *Schlussakkord* (1936), *Zu neuen Ufern* and *La Habanera* (both in 1937). These last two helped to establish Sirk as the master of the melodramatic genre. In all, Sirk made eight feature length films at Ufa before looking for a way out of Nazi Germany. Since he did not have a passport, and at that time one had to have permission to obtain a passport, Sirk needed an excuse to acquire one. The most important reason for his hasty departure was that Sirk's second wife, Hilde Jary, was Jewish. Since his first wife had just publicly denounced Sirk's second marriage, he and Hilde felt it was time to get out of Germany.

Sirk had become a big star in the German film industry and could ask for whatever he liked. He suggested to the studio that *La Habanera* be shot on location in Tenerife, for which he obtain travel documents, but not a passport, therefore, Sirk returned to Germany to edit the film. While he was editing *La Habanera*, he was also preparing for another Ufa project and requested permission to scout out locations. Permission was granted and this time he was given a passport.

The Sirks escaped first to Zurich, and then moved to Paris with the prospect of work. Later, while shooting a picture in Holland, Sirk received an offer to shoot a
remake of Zu neuen Ufern for Warner Brothers in Hollywood, which he accepted. He was signed on a short-term contract and although he spent much time revising the earlier script, the studio decided in the end not to make the film due to the political climate. Around that time, Sirk was approached by the San Francisco Opera to direct, but unfortunately the attack on Pearl Harbour permanently shelved the project. Paul Kohner, Sirk’s agent, then persuaded him to sign a seven-year contract with Columbia to be a writer. It was not until he was approached to film Hitler’s Madman (not a Columbia project) that he had his first chance behind the camera in Hollywood. The picture was purchased by MGM after Louis B. Meyer had previewed the film. He was so impressed by it that he wanted to hire Sirk to direct for MGM, but this was not to be.

From 1944 to 1949 Sirk directed six films for Harry Cohn at Columbia and United Artists before getting fed up with his contract and the system, and returned to Germany in 1949 to attempt to resurrect his European career. Since the Americans had completely dismantled Ufa following the war, Sirk had to return to Hollywood. In the interim, his contract with Columbia had been dissolved. When he returned to the United States in 1950, he made one more picture for United before signing on with Universal International, where he made twenty-one films before leaving Hollywood for good. During his time at Universal, Sirk made his most memorable films.

In 1959, Sirk left the United States forever, relocating to Locarno, Switzerland. From 1963 to 1967, Sirk directed several plays in Munich under the name Detlef Sierck. In the mid-seventies, he agreed to Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s offer of a visiting lectureship at the Munich School for Film and Television. During his time there he worked on three short films with his students. Douglas Sirk passed away on 14 January 1987 in Ruvigia, Switzerland.
5.6 Sirk’s Mature Style

Sirk’s style is best discussed in light of some of the most memorable melodramas from his time at Universal Studios in the 1950s. Three films from the second half of the decade will be explored as examples of Sirk’s mature style: All That Heaven Allows (1955), Written on the Wind (1957), and Imitation of Life (1959). Since the reader may not be familiar with Sirk’s films, I will provide a lengthy, scene by scene discussion of All That Heaven Allows, because it is the first of his films that displays his mature style. It is important to have a frame of reference in order to discuss the similarities between the three films examined in this part of the chapter.

For All That Heaven Allows, I will focus my commentary on Sirk’s use of colour to represent the character’s states of being, his use of mirrors to capture emotional responses of the characters or as a means of framing them for the purposes of commenting on their lives, and his use of the changing seasons to reflect the progression of a relationship. I will also discuss interesting uses of lighting, and point out Sirk’s use of camera angles to create a desired effect. I will elaborate upon these points in the discussion of the two later films.

All That Heaven Allows

The script for Sirk’s 1955 film All That Heaven Allows was as close to a sequel as possible to Sirk’s 1954 success, Magnificent Obsession. Three of the same actors, Jayne Wyman, Rock Hudson and Agnes Moorehead, appear in both films. All That Heaven Allows arrived in Sirk’s hands a typical melodramatic story to which he added his own “handwriting.” The plot follows the lives of Cary Scott (Jayne Wyman), a wealthy suburban widow, and her “gardener,” Ron Kirby (Rock Hudson)

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185 Behind the Mirror: A Profile of Douglas Sirk, (excerpts) produced by BBC, 60 min. included on All That Heaven Allows. (Universal Pictures Co, 1955).
who lives very simply and according to the teachings of Thoreau. Cary falls in love with Ron, a younger man. Although she desires to follow her heart and rebel against the wishes of her children and the expectations of her friends, she is gradually worn down. It is only after she becomes ill from suppressing her desires and a serious accident injuring Ron that she decides to go ahead with the relationship.

Sirk often took on projects because he liked the titles of the scripts. If he found meaning and weight in the title, then he felt he could say something meaningful in the film. The title, *All That Heaven Allows*, is very much a double-entendre. It refers of course to the literal Heaven and all that God allows for our happiness and success in this life. It also refers to a figurative Heaven, that of suburban life as it was promoted in the 1950s. Suburbia was equated with the idyllic lifestyle of small town living and was viewed as the antidote to the big city. *All That Heaven Allows* therefore refers to the social constraints of the small town in which Cary Scott resides. The title seems to indicate that what is fated for the protagonists is in stark contrast to what the town would allow.

The film opens with a shot of the town square and clock tower from atop the trees. It is early autumn and the leaves are just beginning to change colour. Station wagons, the typical 1950s family car, drive into view and the camera follows one of them down a quiet street, swinging in for a close-up as it stops in front of a large family home. In the foreground, Sara (Agnes Moorehead), Cary’s friend and a happily married woman with red hair wearing a vibrant blue outfit, gets out of the car and heads toward the side of the house, where Cary, dressed in a conservative grey suit, has prepared an outdoor lunch. In the background of this shot is Ron Kirby, pruning trees. The difference in Sara and Ron’s respective social classes is indicated by his diminished presence in the shot.
Early on in the film it becomes apparent that although Ron has been working at Cary’s house every spring and fall to tend to her trees, she has been oblivious to his presence. It was Cary’s husband that had made the arrangements with the nursery, and after his death, the service continued. Sara cancels her lunch date but insists that Cary come to the club that evening. Cary tries to refuse the offer for reasons of propriety (apparently she is still in mourning), but Sara does not back down and Cary reluctantly gives in.

Ron, who wears earthy colours (beige trousers and a dark red plaid shirt), offers to carry a box of dishes that Sara was returning. To thank him, Cary invites Ron to share her lunch, which she has set out on a patio table. He accepts the invitation but prefers only coffee and a roll. This is significant because although Cary has prepared a large meal, this is the first indication of Ron’s simple lifestyle. In this scene, Ron is in the prominent position in the foreground of the shot and seems larger than life compared to Cary, who appears cautious and uncertain. As they eat, Cary tries to engage Ron in small talk, but he seems resistant to her efforts, offering only cryptic responses. Only when he begins to talk about his dream of growing trees, does their relationship progress. When he speaks of the silver-tipped spruce, she asks if she has any on her property. He says that she does not, but points to a Chinese “Golden Rain Tree.” As he clips off a branch for her he tells her that it is said that it only grows near a home where there is love.

The next scene opens with an over-the-shoulder shot of Cary grooming herself at her vanity. Although Cary is reflected in the mirror, she is not looking directly in the mirror, but at the clipping Ron gave her earlier that day, which she has put in water. The use of the mirror to frame Cary and capture her thoughts returns later in the film. Cary’s children Ned and Kay arrive home for the weekend from college to
discover Cary getting ready to go out to the club and that she will be accompanied by
Harvey, an older, respectable gentleman. The first time we see the children, they, and
their mother are framed in Cary’s vanity mirror, like a family portrait. The mirror
brilliantly captures the small, insulated universe that Cary inhabits. Both Ned and Kay
wear shades of grey, in the same manner as their mother, and from the beginning one
has the sense that the children are carbon copies of their parents, at least in the manner
in which they dress.

The children approve of the match between Cary and Harvey, each in their
own way: Ned by suggesting that he will make his special martinis saying, “Harvey
likes my martinis,” and Kay by quoting Freud’s theory on sex and aging.

I like Harvey. He’s pleasant, amusing, and he acts his age. As Freud says,
“When we reach a certain age, sex becomes incongruous.” I think Harvey
understands that.

Kay further indicates her approval by telling her mother that she has never believed in
the ancient Egyptian custom of walling up a widow in the tomb with her dead
husband. She explains that a dead man was expected to be buried with all of his
possessions, his wife being one of them, and that she was supposed to die right along
with him, adding, “Of course, the community saw to it that she did.” Kay then
comments rather innocently that this custom does not happen anymore, to which Cary
responds, “Doesn’t it? Well, perhaps not in Egypt.” Ned and Kay approve of Harvey
because he is a sensible, older gentleman who would provide Cary with
companionship, which is the only thing they think she desires, and although Kay says
she does not believe that a widow should “die” alongside her husband, she desires
only a socially acceptable mate for her mother. In other words, a man close in age to
her mother, preferably a widower that is established in the community. Cary’s
response to Kay's story speaks volumes about social convention and small community mentality. Clearly she feels that the community around her would like to see her mourn her husband indefinitely.

Cary dons a vibrant red cocktail dress that elicits very different responses from her children. Kay whistles her approval, saying that it was about time Cary wore something other than black and in the next scene, Ned's ultra conservatism becomes evident when he expresses his concern about the neckline of his mother's dress, stating that she will frighten Harvey away. This scene takes place in the living room, which in its décor gives one a clear sense of the mausoleum-like feeling of the house. The living room, like the bedroom, is decorated with white furniture and hard surfaces. The coffee table has a highly polished top that is reflected in the highly polished black piano and especially in the white mantelpiece surrounded by mirrors. The mantle itself is home to several statues and a very large trophy in the centre that belonged to Cary's dead husband. The room has one other important décor element: flowers. A vase of flowers is located on the coffee table and on the table behind the couch. In a later scene, several more floral arrangements are in evidence in the living room. For Sirk, flowers have a funereal air, and what is becoming evident throughout this film is that Sirk envisioned the suburban family home as a tomb, especially for widows. The primarily white décor, hard surfaces and flowers certainly give one the impression that Cary has, in a sense, been entombed with her dead husband.

When Harvey arrives, we see a glimpse of what Cary's future life may be like. Cary inquires after Harvey's recent trip to Florida and he responds by saying that he found a wonderful doctor that had "cured one of [his] eternal colds, like that," and snaps his fingers. That Harvey is often ill and for long periods of time is intended to indicate that he is old and frail, which was an effect that social convention had on
widowed men and women who lived according to very conservative expectations. Later in the film, Cary will experience a strange illness because she reluctantly concedes to convention, and breaks off her relationship with Ron.

The next scene opens with a shot of the sign outside the club. Two things are striking about this image. First, the name of the town is prominently displayed at the top of the sign: Stoningham. This is a wonderful Sirkian name that elicits images of a hard, impenetrable, unbreakable, and eternal object, which is exactly what the town and the socially correct townspeople are like. This will become important later in the film when Ron attempts to infiltrate Cary’s world. Second, below the town’s name is the phrase, “For members exclusively,” which refers not only to the club but to the town and its social circles as well. Anyone attempting to break into this society will hit a stone wall.

The colour of Cary’s dress was a deliberate choice. It immediately draws the audience’s attention, as she is the only woman at the club in red. Not only does the audience focus on her, but everyone at the club notices her as well, and given that she has not been there in a long time, the colour of her dress ensures that people will take note of her presence.\footnote{One other woman at the club wears a colour appropriate for her character: Joanne, Mr. Allenby’s date for the evening. She is a young, blonde, southern woman who wears a white gown, appropriate for depicting her genteel nature and her youth.} Both Mona (the town gossip) and Howard (the local philanderer) take the colour of Cary’s dress to mean she is on the prowl. Mona is a wonderful character and has some great lines. For example, when she first notices Cary she exclaims,

It’s \textit{indecent} to have two grown children and look as young as you do, isn’t it? Of course, there’s nothing like \textit{red} for attracting attention, is there? I suppose that’s why so few widows wear it. They’d have to be so \textit{careful}.


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\footnote{One other woman at the club wears a colour appropriate for her character: Joanne, Mr. Allenby’s date for the evening. She is a young, blonde, southern woman who wears a white gown, appropriate for depicting her genteel nature and her youth.}
Mona represents public opinion in this film. Her power in the community is her ability to weave innuendo and spread gossip based on her very astute observations. Because Cary is bothered by Mona’s propensity for gossip, we come to understand that the community’s opinion is important to her. It is because of this that she will ultimately decide to break off her relationship with Ron. As for Howard, he asks Cary to dance and as soon as he gets her into his arms, it is apparent that he has ulterior motives. Howard leads Cary outside and forces himself on her saying, “Why don’t we meet in New York. I know a place.” Cary very calmly refuses him, and he apologizes for his actions. In Sirk’s melodramatic world, colours hold great weight and were it not for Cary’s red-hot dress, Mona would have had little to say to Cary about her sudden appearance at the club and Howard would not have assumed that she was interested in an affair.

At the end of the evening, Harvey takes Cary home refusing her offer of a nightcap saying, “It’s been a wild night for me.” Harvey then brings up the possibility of Cary remarrying, suggesting that he would be a good candidate by assuming how Cary feels about romance and sexual intimacy.

Of course, I realize I’m not very romantic or impetuous. Then, you’d hardly want that sort of thing. I’m sure you feel as I do, that companionship and affection are the important things.

Throughout, the camera stays on Cary, capturing all her reactions to what Harvey has to say. When Harvey suggests she does not want romance, she looks down, suggesting that is exactly what she wants, but perhaps feels that she should not want it, and when he indicates what he thinks is important for a mature relationship she looks intently in his direction, as though she looks through him, contemplating what a life with Harvey would be like. The scene ends by first focussing on Kay
kissing a young man underneath her mother’s bedroom window, and then by capturing Cary looking out of her bedroom window, before she closes the window and the shear, suggesting that she has accepted that she will never again have what her daughter enjoys at that moment. But we know that is not the case, since the final shot of the scene is a close-up on the clipping of the Golden Rain Tree.

The next scene takes place two weeks later. Ron has returned to finish pruning Cary’s trees, and as Cary gets out of Sara’s car, we see her in a light beige coloured coat, significant because it is in Ron’s colour palette, not hers. In this scene, Ron wears a deep red plaid shirt, the colour he most often wears. When Ron tells Cary this is the last time he will be working at the house, she appears to be disappointed, but wishes him well. Ron invites Cary to his home to see the silver-tipped spruce they spoke of the last time, and her first reaction is to say no. She begins to walk away, but then changes her mind and agrees to go with him. Ron helps her into his truck, which is also in shades of brown, and they drive to his home in the country. The following scene is split between two locations: Ron’s room, which is attached to a greenhouse, and an old mill. Many red-coloured plants, representing the growing attraction between Cary and Ron, dominate the greenhouse scenery.

When Cary enters the old mill, she finds a broken Wedgwood teapot and expresses her love for this kind of porcelain. Ron says the teapot was probably discarded because the broken pieces were missing. The teapot is an obvious symbol of Cary’s incomplete life since the death of her husband: she, too, has been discarded because she is only part of a whole. While Cary looks around the abandoned mill, she sees a fireplace and suggests that with some fixing up it would make a wonderful home for Ron and the girl he would settle down with in the future. The hearth is a typical symbol of the happy family home of the 1950s. Cary starts to climb a set of
stairs to the loft but is frightened by a bird, and she falls into Ron’s arms, the perfect set up to their first kiss. Here, as in other instances, Cary looks out of the shot to indicate the turmoil she feels within. Ron takes Cary home and informs her that he is going out of town but that he will see her soon. Again, her first instinct is to refuse this advance, but her resistance quickly washes away.

The next scene opens with a wide-angle shot of Sara approaching Cary’s house on foot and it is the first time we get a proper look at the exterior of the home. It is a grand, regal white house with great Romanesque columns. It reminds one of a marble mausoleum, which is in keeping with Sirk’s image of the tomb-like family home. We are also given to understand that more time has passed since fewer leaves appear on the trees.

The next image is an over-the-shoulder shot of Cary’s reflection in the piano as she. As with the earlier image of Cary at her vanity, she does not look straight on but wistfully out of the frame. Cary wears another grey outfit that perfectly matches the white, grey and black of her home décor. She hears the doorbell and goes to the door to let Sara in and the bulk of their conversation centres on the subject of television. Sara suggests that Cary get a television for something to do rather than always be alone in such a large house. Cary dismisses her suggestion because she knows that with Ron in her life, she has him to keep her occupied. A ring of the doorbell cuts off the conversation. Ron is at the door with an invitation to go with him to visit some of his friends. Sara excuses herself and once she is gone, Cary accepts Ron’s invitation, which leads to a pivotal scene in the film.

Ron drives Cary to his friends Mick and Alida’s home, and like Ron, they live outside of town, although not quite as far out as Ron. Mick and Alida both wear earthy colours and they immediately invite Ron and Cary to stay for the party they are
giving that evening, at which any number of friends and neighbours may drop by. The four enter the home and a very large hearth made of brick and pale wood dominates the shot. A warm and inviting space is suggested by the reds and browns used to decorate the living room. Mick and Ron go off to get supplies for the party while Alida begins her preparations. At this moment, Cary notices an open book lying on a side table and begins to read a passage aloud:

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it’s because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured, or far away.

It is a passage from Thoreau’s Walden and it turns out that the entire film hinges on this section of text. Alida makes a reference to it being Mick’s bible and Cary suggests that it must be Ron’s as well, but Alida says she does not believe that Ron has ever read it, that he just lives it. Alida goes on to describe how she and Mick arrived at the happiness they now experience. She tells Cary that only a few years earlier they were headed for divorce because they were caught in the trap of “keeping up with the Jones’.” Only when Mick was recovering from a war injury did he have the chance to reflect on life and realize that Ron’s way of life was the better choice. Ron lives simply, not wanting or needing more than he has, nor feeling a need to live according to society’s conventions. Alida tells Cary it took them a long time to understand what would make them happy but that they are better for it. This is critical because it also takes Cary a long time to understand that Ron is happy with his life, that he will not change and that she will be happier if she accepts his way of life.

At this point, a young vibrant girl with blonde hair rushes out of the house. She is Alida’s young cousin, MaryAnn who has decided not to stay for the party, but when she discovers that Ron will be there she regrets her decision. Cary witnesses
their exchange and surmises that the young woman is attracted to Ron. The camera registers Cary’s distress, but then people begin to arrive for the party. Good food and wine, along with spontaneous dancing and singing fill this happy home. Cary clearly has a great time and feels very welcomed by her new friends.

The passage of time in the next scene is indicated again by a change of season, this time with a heavy snowfall. This snowfall is accompanied by the fateful arrival of the television salesman. Thanks to Cary’s friend Sara, he arrives to try to interest her in a television. She adamantly refuses to speak to him not only because she is on her way out the door but also because she is really not interested in a television set since she is no longer a lonely widow.

In the next shot, Cary arrives at Ron’s home wearing a brown fur coat and an entirely brown outfit. The colours Cary wears are indicative of her involvement with Ron. Her total acceptance of his colour scheme demonstrates the intensity of her feelings for him. Cary enters the old mill to discover a roaring fire in the once unusable fireplace and other improvements to the abandoned structure. Not only has Ron begun renovations on the mill, but Cary also sees that he found all the pieces of the Wedgwood teapot and has repaired it. This is very clearly a symbolic indication of the “repairs” Ron has made in Cary’s life, but as we shall see, the teapot, like a person’s life, can be fragile and susceptible to great damage.

Ron and Cary admit their love for one another and Ron proposes marriage. In a beautifully framed and lit shot, Cary moves to a large window and looks out over the land where the snow is still falling. She says that marriage is impossible and Ron accuses Cary of running away. She tries to explain to him that to think of marriage is “absurd” but he does not accept this, and so she ends their affair.
As she collects her coat and gloves, she accidentally knocks over the Wedgwood teapot, smashing it beyond repair, to which she says, "The hours you've spent mending it!" and Ron, defeated, responds, "It doesn't matter." Cary begins to leave but discovers that she cannot. She changes her mind, deciding to accept Ron's proposal, a path that she thinks will be difficult to follow. Cary allows social convention to stand in her way until it is almost too late. Following this scene the second half of the film continues forward with many similar scenarios to the first half.

As in the first scene, Cary and Sara are the focus of the next scene. We discover the two in Cary's kitchen discussing her relationship with Ron. As in previous scenes at Cary's home, she is dressed in grey, whereas Sara sports a bright red skirt. Sara tries to convince Cary that she has made a terrible mistake agreeing to marry Ron by pointing out that people will assume the worst about Ron.\(^{187}\) She suggests that people will say that their relationship began even before her husband's death and that because Cary is a wealthy widow, Ron is only interested in her money. Sara has the opposite role of Mona: she acts as the voice of reason, rather than that of public opinion, and although Cary refuses to give in, Sara remains her friend. Sara then proposes that Cary bring Ron to her cocktail party so that people of the community can meet Ron, and perhaps accept him.

Cary's children arrive home for the weekend on the evening of Sara's party, and Cary chooses to tell them about her engagement to Ron.\(^{188}\) Cary wears a black cocktail dress in this scene, an interesting choice, since it does not reflect her current happy state, but rather foreshadows the coming trouble at the party. Cary has been putting some things away in the basement when Ned arrives and they both go upstairs.

\(^{187}\) In the film's opening scene, Sara convinces Cary she needs to start getting out again, with an appropriate suitor.

\(^{188}\) This scene is the complement to that in which Cary prepares to go out to the club.
to Cary’s bedroom where they discover Kay applying nail polish. Cary approaches the subject of remarriage carefully and the children react in a congenial manner because they assume that she will be marrying Harvey, their pre-approved suitor. When Cary tells them she will be marrying Ron, Ned gets very angry and Kay tries to analyze her mother’s actions. Cary asks her children to give Ron a chance and requests some of Ned special martinis, to which he snaps, “This is no time for martinis.”

Ron arrives wearing a suit that places him in Cary’s world rather than his own. The children greet him in the living room in a barely civil manner. Small talk ensues, and Ron asks Kay if she likes social work, to which she replies, “Well, at least you learn to deal with all sorts of people,” and Ned is only concerned with whether or not Ron can make a lot of money. His distaste for Ron is clearly evident, especially when he discovers that Cary has put away his father’s trophy. That is too much for Ned, who takes his anger out on his mother. Kay, still trying to be objective by analysing the situation, tries to tell Ron that what her mother really seeks is acceptance from the community at large, which is what all women want. When the discussion turns to future living arrangements, Ned makes a scene and complains about losing the family home. The children cannot take any more and make a hasty retreat. When Cary and Ron leave for the party, Cary looks at Ron’s truck and suggests they take her car, indicating that she is not completely comfortable with Ron as he is. He asks her if it matters, and she replies, “It shouldn’t.”

189 Kay, who until this point has appeared to be the voice of contemporary psychology and educated reason, now appears to be changing thanks to her relationship with Freddy (the young man we saw with Kay near the beginning of the opera).
190 Remember that at the beginning, Ned happily made martinis for Harvey.
191 Later, when Cary has left Ron, Ned rather cavalierly announces that of course, his mother will sell the family home because both Ned and Kay will rarely be home.
At Sara’s home, the guests await Cary’s arrival with great anticipation. The women, all dressed in much more fancy clothing than Cary, wonder about what Ron looks like, and the men discuss his choice of career. The town doctor surprisingly asks the men, “You think that material success is the only end worthy of pursuit of man?” When Cary and Ron arrive, Howard complains that Cary’s earlier refusal of him was apparently all an act, and Mona laughs at him. When Cary approaches Mona, she has the most stinging lines: “Oh my dear, he’s fascinating! And that tan! I suppose from working outdoors. Of course, I’m sure he’s handy indoors, too.” And, as at the party at the club, Howard approaches Cary, but this time to accuse her of playing him. Cary and Howard move closer to the bar and the shot composition features a mirror, reflecting an image of Ron and Sara’s husband, George, on the left, and Cary and Howard on the right. As Howard moves toward Cary to kiss her, the mirror too, frames them, and all four characters are momentarily in the same frame. The technique of framing all the characters in the mirror allows the audience to see both Howard’s aggressive behaviour and the reaction of the other two characters all at the same time. The audience does not have to split their attention between the two groups therefore it misses nothing important. The mirror allows the audience to see Ron’s reaction to Howard’s assault. This time, instead of quietly refusing Howard out of sight, Ron pulls Howard away from Cary, threatening to hurt him in front of everyone at the party. Cary and Ron quickly depart.

Ron takes Cary home, but she does not invite him in. The camera focuses on Ned framed in the living room window anxiously awaiting Cary’s return. Ned tells Cary that he wants to discuss her “situation” and in a beautifully composed shot, Ned traps Cary between a room divider screen in the living room and his body.

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192 The doctor plays an important role later in the film.
193 Cary and Ron also greet Joanne and Mr. Allenby (now engaged), and Joanne insinuates that Ron is after Cary’s money.
Throughout, Ned is most often in shadow or lit with blue light (which in Sirk’s universe represents not only nighttime, but also death). Sirk uses brighter lighting to illuminate Cary’s expressive eyes. Ned gives Cary an ultimatum, saying that if she goes forward with her marriage to Ron that he will no longer come home because he would be too ashamed. Ned’s ultimatum causes Cary to become more aware that the society in which she lives will not willingly accept her marriage to Ron. Sirk traps Cary between Ned and the screen to physically represent the obstacles she must overcome in order to be happy. The scene ends with Ned heading toward the door with the intention of leaving and the camera capturing him through the screen as Cary says, “Ned, we mustn’t let this come between us.” The screen represents Ron as the obstacle that separates Cary from her children and from the society in which she lives.

What follows is a complementary scene involving Kay. It is the day after Sara’s party and Cary is on the telephone with Sara discussing the aftermath of their sensational appearance when Kay arrives home from the library and is visibly upset. She runs into her room, which is lit with red and pink as an indication of extreme emotion, and Cary follows her. This is Kay’s first emotional outburst in the whole film and because of her earlier insistent objectivity, her extreme display is very effective. Kay tells Cary that some people at the library were spreading rumours about Cary and Ron, and although Kay does not believe the rumours to be true, she is no longer able to remain objective. Kay tells her mother that despite all her study of human behaviour she really does not understand why people do the things they do, which tells Cary that she does not even have Kay’s support, even though Kay had previously told her that she does not believe widows should be entombed with their dead husbands. It is clear by the end of the scene that Cary decides she can no longer fight her children and society, and must break off her relationship with Ron.
Later that day, Cary drives out to see Ron to tell him about the children’s reactions. Before the scene is played out we are aware that it will not end well by the way Ron is dressed and by the lighting in the old mill. Ron wears a navy blue shirt and aside from the suit he wore to Sara’s party, it is the first time in the film that he does not wear a shade of red or brown. The main room of the old mill is lit to reflect the coldness outside and the impending end to the relationship. Although a fire has been lit in the hearth, the room is primarily lit by blue light. Cary tells Ron that given the reaction of the townspeople and her children it would be best if they waited to be married, in order to give everyone a chance to get used to Ron. Ron understands this to mean that if they wait, then he can slowly be integrated into Cary’s society, which is something he does not want to do. Cary asks Ron if he intends her to choose between him and her children. He responds by saying that since she is the one that made it about choosing between their love and her children’s happiness, she must decide. The camera then focuses on Cary and her decision is clear. She tells Ron that it is over between them, but she clearly does not do this in anger, rather in defeat. She departs and Ron is left alone. A close-up of Ron’s face shows his devastation.

It is a couple of days later, and the next scene opens with Sara and Cary in Cary’s bedroom. Sara wears a burnt orange coloured dress and Cary is again dressed in grey. Sara tells Cary that, although she thinks Ron is a “darned nice guy,” Cary did the right thing, and that she will make sure Cary is taken back “into the fold.” Sara asks Cary if she has told the children and she says that yes, Kay was very happy and that she had a call into Ned to tell him. When Cary does speak to Ned, he spends only a few seconds on the phone with her, saying that he is happy about her decision and that he has a class to go to. The brief time allotted to the children’s reactions indicates that as long as they got their way, they could easily forgive their mother’s actions.
A brief introduction to the following scene has Cary waiting in vain at the train station for her children to arrive. She encounters the doctor to whom she says that she has been experiencing some strange headaches and that she would like to see him about this. Then the telegram operator arrives with a message from the children indicating they will not be home for the weekend. Cary shows her disappointment by absently dropping the telegram in the snow. When Cary was agonizing over whether or not to marry Ron she worried that her children would no longer visit her if she decided to go ahead with their plans. Now that she is no longer with Ron, they do not come to visit her anyway.

Following this, Cary goes to a Christmas tree lot where she runs into Ron. It is his friend Mick’s lot and he is simply helping out. Both Cary and Ron are clearly happy to see each other and as a result, Cary asks the person helping her to find her a silver-tipped spruce. Alida’s cousin MaryAnn shows up to collect Ron, and Cary assumes that Ron has moved on. Cary then refuses the spruce, taking instead a tree she had previously described as “not very pretty.” Cary departs and the camera follows Ron’s gaze as he watches Cary walk out of sight.

The scene that follows has no dialogue and relies on visual and musical cues for its poignancy. Cary is shown to be wearing a long housecoat in a red and black tartan decorating her Christmas tree, alone. The colour of Cary’s clothing is interesting considering that every time Cary has been in her house she has worn grey. As Cary decorates, she hears children’s voices outside singing the Christmas carol, “Joy to the World.” It is snowing heavily as the children pass by on a horse-drawn sleigh and the living room window frames Cary’s emotional reaction. There is first a close-up of a child sitting on the horse wearing a bright red toque, which is

\[194 \text{ With the exception of her lingerie which have been very pale blue and pink.}]
striking because he is the only child wearing this colour. It is intended to indicate not only the direction of Cary’s gaze but also her continued love for Ron. The child with the red toque passes her by just as Ron’s love for her has. The camera shows Cary trapped, alone, within her tomb-like home, tears streaming down her face.

It is Christmas day in the next scene and Cary is surrounded by the colour red: Kay’s red dress, red flowers behind the sofa, red decorations on the tree and a giant red bow on Cary’s Christmas present from the children. Cary herself wears black, as though she is once again in mourning. Kay wears red because she is in love with Freddie and they have just become engaged to be married. It is only now that Kay understands what love is that she feels remorse for her reaction to Cary’s engagement and encourages her mother to find Ron and be happy.

As they wait for Cary’s present to arrive, Ned announces that Cary will now sell the house because Kay is to be married and he will be going overseas for a job. Cary realizes she will be left all alone and has another one of her headaches, which is Sirk’s method of representing the effect of romantic and sexual repression. Cary’s present arrives: it is a television set. The children thought that since they would no longer be coming home to visit that their mother needed some diversion. Mr. Weeks, the television salesman explains that all Cary must do is, “Turn that dial and you have all the company you want….Life’s parade at your fingertips.” Cary’s distraught reaction to the gift is beautifully captured as a reflection in the television screen.

The next brief scene occurs later in the winter and finds Ron and Mick out hunting. Ron again wears a red coat, which indicates that his feelings for Cary have not changed and Mick wears his usual beige. Mick tells Ron he should go to Cary and somehow win her back because Ron has been no good to anyone since he and Cary
broke up. As the scene closes we are left with the feeling that Ron is thinking about his friend’s advice.

The next scene complements the previous one. Cary visits the doctor to discuss her headaches, wearing the brown fur coat that represents her feelings for Ron. The doctor, like Mick, wears brown, an indication of his progressive views on love and marriage, and life in general. The doctor tells Cary that there is nothing physically wrong with her and that her headaches are a result of her decision to run from life. The doctor points out that Cary’s sacrifice for her children was in vain now that Kay was married and Ned was abroad. He also tells Cary that she was ready for a love affair, but not for love and then instructs her to go to Ron and marry him. Cary is clearly not happy with what the doctor has said, but he has managed to make her think about the possibility of reconciliation.

As Cary leaves the doctor’s office, she runs into Alida who passes on the news of her cousin MaryAnn’s upcoming nuptials to a young man from New Jersey. Cary realizes that she was in error when she presumed that Ron was in a relationship with MaryAnn and her joy at this discovery is written clearly on her face. As Cary gets into her car, she clearly makes a decision that is confirmed in the next scene: Cary decides to go to Ron.

Cary’s car is seen driving up beside the old mill and as Cary gets out of the car to look for Ron, he is on a cliff overlooking his property and sees Cary’s car. Although she drove all that way, she changes her mind and decides to leave. It seems for a moment that their reconciliation will not happen. As Ron tries to get her attention, he falls off the cliff and lies unconscious in the snow. Ron’s accident is the deus ex machina that will lead to the all-important happy ending.
That evening, as the snow falls heavily once more, Cary paces around her dark living room. She seems to be trying to make a decision: she goes to the telephone, picks up the receiver, and then puts it down. Then, Alida arrives at Cary’s home with the news that Ron has been injured in an accident. For the first time, Alida wears dark colours, a black coat, and when Cary goes to the cupboard for a coat, she also chooses a black coat, indicative of the direness of the situation. Alida drives Cary to Ron’s and when she enters the old mill she sees that it has been fully converted to a comfortable home.\textsuperscript{195} Cary realizes how much time Ron has put into the renovation and Alida informs her that Ron never gave up hope that Cary would come back. Cary holds vigil over Ron all night and in the morning, after the doctor has been to check on Ron, and a deer has appeared outside the great window, Ron wakes up, sees Cary and says, “You’ve come home.”

\textit{All That Heaven Allows} demonstrates important elements of Sirk’s mature style. He uses colour to identify characters and/or situations. When Cary is in her home she is generally dressed in grey, as are her children, but when her relationship with Ron begins, she starts to wear his colours. Ron is most often associated with brown and red, except for two instances. First, when he wears a conservative suit to Sara’s party, and second, when he wears a navy blue shirt the day that Cary breaks off their engagement. The colour red is used in this film to represent love and happiness, which Cary could have if only she would throw off convention. For at least half the film, the colour red is a torment to Cary because it reminds her of Ron.

Sirk’s inventive use of mirrors allows the audience to experience a point of view not normally available to it. By focusing on the reflection of a character’s emotional response, or by framing the characters in a particular manner, mirrors

\textsuperscript{195} Ironically, the old mill in the country now resembles a suburban family home.
create a physical and emotional distancing that traditional filming techniques do not allow. Early in the film, Sirk frames Cary and her two children in her vanity mirror in order to demonstrate the closed world Cary lives in, and later, at Sara’s party, a mirror allows the audience to see Ron’s reaction to Howard’s advances on Cary. Of course, the most important use of reflective surfaces comes in the three instances that Sirk focuses on Cary’s reflection: in the vanity mirror and in the piano (in both cases, Cary looks out of the frame as though she is unable to look directly at herself for fear of what she may encounter), and in the television screen, as she looks at it in horror, realizing the empty life before her. The effect of this scene is quite striking because this is the only time in the entire film that Cary looks straight on into a reflective surface. It is the moment Cary truly realizes the consequences of her actions and understands the life she has before her.

Sirk also uses the changing seasons to reflect the progression of Cary and Ron’s relationship. It begins in the early autumn and grows as winter approaches, but just as the season changes from autumn to winter, Cary breaks off the relationship. Winter is the season of death, and in this instance, it is the death of Cary’s happiness, but as the seasons change again from winter to spring, Cary and Ron find their way back to each other through another clichéd, but extremely important element of Hollywood melodrama, the happy ending. Although both Cary and Ron’s friends had strongly encouraged each of them to seek the other out and reconcile their differences, it is Ron’s accident that brings them back together.

*Written On the Wind*

Released in 1957, *Written On the Wind* was an adaptation of Robert Wilder’s novel of the same name. The advertising campaign for this film focused on its adult
themes and appealed to the public’s hunger for sensational topics. The principal poster described the plot as

The story of a decent love...that fought to live against the vice and immorality of an oil baron’s wastrel family...and of the ugly secret that thrust their private lives into public view!¹⁹⁶

The poster featured a prominent picture of Rock Hudson and Lauren Bacall in an embrace and a smaller image of Robert Stack “lying prostrate” and Dorothy Malone “shrinking back in horror.”¹⁹⁷ It also provided sensational descriptions of the four main characters beside a studio headshot: “‘Rock Hudson as Mitch, this woman in his arms was now the wife of the man he called his best friend!’; ‘Lauren Bacall as Lucy, faithful to her husband’s name...even if she couldn’t be to his love!’; ‘Robert Stack as Kyle, who hid his secret behind a bottle and a hundred million dollars!’; and ‘Dorothy Malone as Marylee, even a woman will find it hard to understand why she did the things she did!’”¹⁹⁸

The film follows the story of Kyle and Marylee Hadley, children of Jasper Hadley the oil baron, and founder of the town of Hadley, Mitch Wayne, Kyle’s best friend, and Lucy Moore, the woman who becomes Kyle’s wife. The alcoholic and neurotic Kyle fears his inability to live up to his father’s expectations. In other words, he fears impotence, both literal and figurative. Throughout the film, Kyle is seen attempting to flee the phallic symbols that surround him, especially oil derricks and the Hadley building, by speeding in his bright yellow sports car, flying above the “great poker table,” (i.e. the country), in his plane, and drinking too much alcohol. In an effort to demonstrate his potency to the world, Kyle marries a beautiful, intelligent woman, Lucy Moore, hoping to provide an heir to the Hadley Empire, and therefore

¹⁹⁶ Klinger, 45.
¹⁹⁷ Klinger, 41.
¹⁹⁸ Klinger, 41.
prove his worth to his father. After a year of marriage and still no pregnancy, Kyle’s fears return and he turns to alcohol once more. Kyle’s sister Marylee loves Mitch Wayne, but Mitch is in love with Lucy. Since Marylee’s sexual desire for Mitch cannot be fulfilled, she seeks release in any man she can seduce, becoming the town tramp. Mitch, meanwhile, respecting his friend’s marriage, decides to take a job with another oil company in Iran, but is prevented from leaving by the sudden death of Jasper Hadley. Lucy then discovers she is pregnant and when she tells Kyle the good news, he attacks her, suspecting her of having an affair with Mitch. Kyle’s assault causes Lucy to miscarry thereby destroying all hope of Kyle proving his potency. Kyle is accidentally killed during an argument with Mitch, and following an inquest into his death, in which Mitch is cleared of causing Kyle’s death, Mitch and Lucy leave the Hadley mansion to start a life together. Marylee, losing all hope of a relationship with Mitch, is left to run the family business.

Unlike *All The Heaven Allows*, *Written On the Wind* begins with an event that occurs near the end of the film. The film opens with the image of Kyle Hadley speeding through the town of Hadley in his yellow sports car, driving past all the symbols that remind him of his impotence: many massive oil derricks, the tall Hadley Oil Co. building, and the giant ‘H’ symbol of Hadley posted on all Hadley property. Kyle arrives at his family’s mansion, opens the front door and stumbles inside as dead leaves blow into the entry way. By revealing the ending at the beginning of the film, Sirk demonstrates to the audience that the ending is inevitable. As the title song is played (sung by the Four Aces), the camera shows close-ups of the other principal characters: Mitch is seen in a bedroom window, Lucy lies on a bed, and Marylee is also framed by her bedroom window. A gunshot is heard and Kyle stumbles out the front door, falling face first to the ground. The camera then focuses on a desk calendar
whose pages turn back the days to more than a year earlier. From this point on, the film progresses in a linear fashion until it reaches this opening moment, and then proceeds to the coroner’s inquest into Kyle’s death. In order for Mitch and Lucy to finally begin their life together, Mitch must be found to have had no direct involvement in Kyle’s death. Although Marylee threatens to accuse Mitch of killing her brother if he does not marry her, when she is on the stand, she decides to let him go and tells the truth about the circumstances of Kyle’s death. Marylee admits that Mitch made threats against Kyle but that Kyle was accidentally shot when she intervened as he attempted to shoot Mitch.

Sirk’s inventive use of colour is once again used decisively to define characters and situations. Kyle is generally dressed in grey or blue business suits, an attempt on his part to fit in to the Hadley image, but he is also associated with a yellow sports car. Not only is yellow a harsh contrast to the conservative suits, yellow is traditionally the colour associated with cowardliness. Since Kyle has spent most of his life hiding from his Hadley destiny and living in the shadow of his best friend, the yellow sports car represents his cowardly attempts to flee real life and responsibility.

Mitch on the other hand, is most often dressed in shades of brown, just as Rock Hudson’s character Ron Kirby had been in All That Heaven Allows. Whereas in the former, brown was associated with an existence free from social convention, brown is now identified with moral tenor, acceptance of responsibility, and emotional and psychological integrity. Interestingly, Jasper Hadley, a secondary character, is also associated with the colour brown. He often wears brown tweed and his environment both at the office and in his study at home are predominantly coloured brown. This is significant given that Kyle believes that his father would have preferred to have Mitch for a son.
Lucy is never associated with only one colour. She seems to adapt to those around her and the situation she is in. At the beginning of the film, Lucy wears a very conservative grey suit that compliments the grey décor of her office. At the party to celebrate her first year of marriage, Lucy has on a pure white gown, as though suggesting that she is still chaste. The day she discovers she is pregnant she sports a bright green ensemble that represents new life, and in the final scene, as she leaves the Hadley mansion with Mitch, she wears a light pink blouse, indicating her feelings for Mitch.

Marylee is often dressed in reds and pinks, which enhance her sexually charged presence on the screen. She also happens to be a blonde, and the combination of blonde hair and her red clothing/red sports car, immediately suggests to the audience that this woman is a tramp and therefore, her dreams will not be realized. In Sirk’s later films, red often suggests that something is not quite right about character’s situation. In All That Heaven Allows Cary wore a red dress to the club and was criticized by Mona and Howard imposed himself on her. Later, we saw that the colour red surrounded Cary once she had broken off her relationship with Ron.

In this case, red also represents Marylee and Kyle’s extreme behaviour, which ultimately leads to their father’s death. The most famous scene in the film shows Marylee dancing aggressively to a Cuban-inspired instrumental jazz number alternating with Jasper’s ascent up the grand curving staircase in the Hadley mansion. As Marylee dances and changes her clothes, Jasper climbs the stairs, and at the climax of the piece, Marylee is shown to be writhing on a sofa, dressed in a flowing red peignoir as Jasper clutches his heart and falls down the stairs, which happen to be covered in red carpet. At the end of film, when Mitch leaves with Lucy, Marylee suppresses her sexual desire and embraces her new life as the head of the Hadley
Empire. She wears a conservative, high-collared, grey-blue suit to represent the repression of her sexual nature and her acceptance of the fate before her.

As in *All That Heaven Allows* there are many interesting uses of mirrors. For instance, the vanity mirror in Lucy's hotel room at Miami Beach. Kyle has just finished ushering her around the suite, demonstrating the many splendours of her room. He then takes her over to the vanity where he shows her a drawer full of lingerie. The vanity mirror captures Mitch's reactions as he stands in the doorway and the shot composition implies that Mitch will always be between Kyle and Lucy. Lucy is to the left of the mirror, Mitch is reflected in the mirror (in the middle of the shot) and Kyle is standing to the right of the mirror.

In a later scene (the day Kyle and Lucy return from their honeymoon), Mitch receives a phone call from the proprietor of a dive on the wrong side of town. Dan Willis (the proprietor) informs Mitch that the "Hadley girl" (Marylee) is there associating with a shady character. The mirror behind the bar captures the image of Marylee, a wealthy society girl, seducing a man in the seedy joint. The mirror shows the audience just how out of place Marylee is: a rich girl wearing expensive clothing in the company of a blue-collar worker, drinking in a dive. Later that day, Lucy meets Marylee for the first time and as Lucy sits at her vanity, the mirror frames Marylee sitting on a fuschia coloured armchair and captures her consuming desire for Mitch as she says that he is the man for her.

Following the anniversary party for Kyle and Lucy, the family physician, Dr. Cochrane, tells Kyle that he will have difficulty getting Lucy pregnant. Kyle reacts to the news by returning to his former drinking habits, instead of telling his wife about the problem. That evening, Kyle commands Lucy, Mitch, and Marylee to appear at the country club without offering an explanation. The end of the evening finds Mitch
carrying a passed-out Kyle into the Hadley mansion on his shoulders. As they enter the house, a mirror captures the gaze of Jasper Hadley, marking both their entrance and his reaction to seeing his son in that condition. A second mirror in the hallway shows Mitch transporting Kyle up the main staircase as Lucy and Jasper look on. In this instance, the mirrors indicate to the audience how Jasper sees his own son: weak and small.

A week following the death of Jasper, Lucy asks Mitch to take her to town. It is the day she discovers she is pregnant, and as they leave the house, Marylee suggests to Kyle (both of whom observe their departure) that Lucy has “had” Mitch. Kyle slaps Marylee across the face then turns to a bureau where he pours himself another drink. A large mirror hangs over the bureau and as Kyle is about to take a drink he sees his pathetic reflection in the mirror and throws the liquor at his reflection. Throughout the opera, Kyle uses his family’s wealth to avoid confronting his inadequacies. This is another example of Kyle’s attempt to escape himself.

The final significant use of a mirror image in the film does not in fact employ a mirror in the literal sense. The second last shot of the film shows Marylee seated at her father’s desk in his study at the Hadley mansion. She wears the conservative suit described previously and handles a model oil derrick. She sits directly underneath a portrait of her father, seated at the very same desk, dressed in a similar manner and colour, proudly holding the model oil derrick. Marylee has become a reflection of her dead father.

*Imitation of Life*

Sirk’s final film at Universal was also his last for Hollywood. *Imitation of Life* was released in 1959 and is a remake of John Stahl’s 1934 film of the same name. Both films are adaptations of Fannie’s Hurst’s best-selling novel *Sugar House*, which
had originally been published as a serial, then later in its entirety as *Imitation of Life* (1932-33). The two films uphold the spirit of Hurst’s original story by maintaining the essential aspects of the story. A single white woman and her daughter, and a single black woman and her daughter of mixed races meet and become a family, dependent on each other for financial success and emotional support. But where the Stahl version was a straightforward retelling of Hurst’s story about the two women going into business together to support themselves and their children, Sirk’s primary interest in the script was what he called the “race angle,”\(^{199}\) therefore he shifted the relationship between the white woman and the black woman to reflect the prominent racial problems that plagued American society at that time. Instead of partners in a successful pancake business, the lead white female, Lora Meredith (Lana Turner), is a single mother who becomes a star, and the lead African American woman, Annie Johnson (Juanita Moore) who becomes a companion and, in many ways a servant, is a single mother whose child is of mixed races.

The film has two chief storylines. The first concerns Lora’s rise to stardom and the financial success she reaps on the Broadway stage. Only after years of catering to her ambition and neglecting her daughter Susie’s (Sandra Dee) emotional needs does she realize that money cannot buy happiness. Only the love of a man and the community of family can provide what is missing. The other deals with Annie’s daughter Sarah Jane (Susan Kohner) and her inability to accept that she is black and therefore “born to be hurt.”\(^{200}\) Sarah Jane rejects everything associated with her race, including her mother, going so far as to run away, and thereby permanently cutting Annie out of her life. Annie dies of a broken heart and it is only after her death that

\(^{199}\) *Behind the Mirror: A Profile of Douglas Sirk* (excerpts) produced by BBC, 60 min. included on *All That Heaven Allows*, (Universal Pictures Co, 1955).

\(^{200}\) Annie uses these words to describe the both her daughter’s fate and the plight of African American people in America after she discovered that Sarah Jane has been “passing” at school.
Sarah Jane finally realizes that she cannot hide who she is. It is through the loss of her mother that she discovers that the acceptance she so desperately sought by society at large had always been there in the ‘family’ that Lora and Annie had created.

Every one of the four leading women wants more than they have, with disastrous consequences for themselves and others. Lora’s ambition to be a star on Broadway blinds her to her daughter’s most important needs. It also prevents her from seeing that the path of true happiness stands before her in the form of Steve Archer, a photographer who gives up on his artistic aspirations and takes an executive position in a large company in order to take care of Lora and Susie. Although on the surface Annie seems to be content with her life as Lora’s friend and apparent housekeeper (her exact position in the household is never firmly established), she wants her daughter to accept her race and be happy with a black middle-class lifestyle. Susie, packed off to boarding school as Lora’s fame grows, desires more attention from her mother, and then the love of Steve Archer, her mother’s former boyfriend who makes a reappearance after a ten-year absence. Of course, Steve, while fond of Susie, only has eyes for Lora. Finally, from the moment we are introduced to Sarah Jane we see the discontent she feels about her race and her desire to be just like Lora: successful and ‘white.’

As previously mentioned, Sirk had a special interest in the titles of his films. *Imitation of Life* refers to the art of acting, be it on stage or trying to pass for white. The title could also be interpreted as referring to one of Sirk’s favourite décor pieces, the mirror. Mirrors reflect only an “imitation of life;” they are not life itself. There is a great use of figurative mirrors rather than literal mirrors to represent the “imitations of life” that the characters engage in. Much like the mirror image Marylee Hadley
created as she sat in front of her father's portrait at the end of Written On the Wind, so does each character reflect one another, in different combinations.

At the beginning of the film, the most obvious configuration of mirror images is Lora/Annie and Susie/Sarah Jane. The two adult women seem so alike, despite differences in race and colour, and the same holds true for the children. Both older women seem to be fine mothers, and the children happily play together. Early in the film, differences between the pairs emerge and we realize that the initial mirror image configuration will soon be replaced by a more significant one.

When Susie offers Sarah Jane a black doll to play with, Sarah Jane makes a scene and insists on having the white doll. Her negative reaction to the doll is the first indication that Sarah Jane is unhappy with her race. When Lora shows Annie the back room where she and Sarah Jane will stay, Annie is thrilled, while her daughter pouts, asking, "Why do we always have to live in the back?" At that moment, Sarah Jane drops the black doll on the floor, an action that is accompanied by a menacing minor third motive on the low notes of a piano. The next morning, Lora comes out to say good morning to the children and kisses Susie on the cheek. Sarah Jane also wants a kiss, as though pretending she is Lora's daughter, not Annie's. Meanwhile, Annie has been up long enough to wash Lora's laundry, make coffee and start cooking breakfast. Although not employed by Lora to do these things, Annie falls into a comfortable role, and Lora makes little effort to prevent her.

Differences of class and race begin to emerge in the opening scenes demonstrating a shift in the dynamic of the mirror image pairings. Sarah Jane is not content to be black and therefore tries to erase the difference between herself and Susie by denying her skin colour. We also start to become aware that Annie, unlike

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201 This motive returns whenever Sarah Jane expresses her resistance to being black.
her daughter, is content with her station in life and more importantly, that she is skilled in the art of nurturing, a skill that we slowly become aware that Lora lacks.

As Lora’s fame grows and the children age, the original configuration of mirror images completely shifts. In both dress and hairstyle, Susie reflects her mother instead of Sarah Jane. Susie’s appearance suggests that she is trying to be just like her mother. When Steve comes back into their lives, Susie imitates her mother in another respect: she falls in love with him, despite the fact that her feelings are not returned. Instead of discussing this with Lora, she turns to Annie who has always had time for her and who has become a surrogate mother over the years. In this respect, Annie has become what Lora now wishes she had always been: a good mother.

Previously, Lora’s fame had eclipsed Annie’s achievements, evidenced by her scarce appearances in the montage detailing Lora’s rise to fame. As the second half of the film unfolds and Annie’s health fails, Lora slowly becomes aware of Annie’s triumphs in the face of her (Lora’s) own failures. Annie was on friendly terms with “hundreds” of people, was a member of the Baptist church and several lodges, and she had been indispensable to Lora over the years. Lora, on the other hand, is depicted as cold and unfulfilled, her ambition coming between her and every possible close relationship, until Steve returns. When it becomes clear that Annie’s death is imminent, we get the distinct impression that Lora wishes she could have been more like Annie.

As for Sarah Jane, her desire to be white consumes her completely. She ultimately leaves her home and returns to New York City under the guise of taking a job at the public library. Sarah Jane actually finds work as an entertainer in a seedy club. When Annie finds her and informs the manager that Sarah Jane is actually black, she loses her job and runs away. She ends up in Hollywood working as a chorus girl.
in a show that uses larger than life props that imitate real life objects. With Steve’s help, Annie tracks down her daughter one last time and Sarah Jane asks her to never come after her again, denying her race to the point of refusing to acknowledge her own mother should she accidentally pass her in the street. Sarah Jane’s attraction to the entertainment business and her profound need to be “white” shows how she upholds Lora as her example success and happiness. By the end of the film, we become aware that instead of wanting to be famous, Lora wants to be like Annie, that Susie desires independence and, too late, Sarah Jane no longer wishes to be like Lora and accepts her race. As for Annie, she does not want to be anyone except herself, but throughout the whole film, Annie desperately wishes that Sarah Jane was happy being a reflection of her.

Unlike All That Heaven Allows and Written On the Wind, this film only has two significant uses of reflective surfaces. In the second half, Sarah Jane goes out one evening to meet her white boyfriend, Frankie, in the village. She waits for him in an alley, in front of an abandoned bar. The location of this scene suggests that there is trouble ahead. When he arrives, Frankie accuses Sarah Jane of lying to him about her race and proceeds to brutally beat her. The beating is captured in the large window of the bar and seems even more menacing than when the camera points directly at the two actors. The other example also involves Sarah Jane. When Annie tracks down her daughter at her hotel in Hollywood, she asks Sarah Jane if she is happy. She replies by saying that she is somebody else and that she is, “white … white…white!” As she says this line, she looks directly at her reflection in the mirror. By the third utterance of the word “white,” Sarah Jane has completely bowed her head, unable to look at herself in the mirror.
Much like the previous two films, Sirk makes excellent use of colour in *Imitation of Life*. At the beginning of the film, when Lora and Annie’s financial positions are similar, they wear clothes in similar colours. Lora often wears grey suits while Annie generally wears shades of blue. The two women also tend to blend in with their environment, the cool colours of the cold-water flat. In the early part of the film, the children’s clothes do not seem to carry any meaning. Later, as Lora’s fame grows, her wardrobe changes drastically. From this point on, Lora is often dressed in white or pastel colours in her day to day wear, which belies her fierce ambitious nature. These colours also reflect the décor of her new home in the country. The interior of the living room, the kitchen and Lora’s bedroom are all primarily in white. Her eveningwear also changes. There is a scene early in the film when Lora goes to Alan Loomis’ (an agent) office to attend a party with him. She wears a simple black cocktail dress with a string of pearls. When Lora becomes a famous actress, her evening attire favours expensive gowns in light colours and many rhinestone accessories. Annie’s clothes, on the other hand, remain in darker colours throughout. The final scene in the film, Annie’s funeral, is flooded with the colour black, which is a strong contrast to most of the scenes in the film.

Susie, as a reflection of her mother, wears similar colours and fashions in almost every scene she shares with her mother. As for Sarah Jane, she is associated with stronger colours than either Lora or Susie. At the premiere of Lora’s final play, Sarah Jane wears a vibrant orange gown, and the night Frankie attacks her, she dons a canary yellow dress, which is a harsh contrast to the dark night. When Sarah Jane performs in the New York City dive, the venue is decorated in dark colours and she

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202 Sirk also dresses Lora in lighter colours and surrounds her in white décor as an obvious symbol of her race, which is in counterpoint to Annie’s darker skin and darker colours. The colour white is used differently here than we have seen in the previous two films. In *All That Heaven Allows* Cary’s home, her personal mausoleum, was white, and in *Written On the Wind* white was used to symbolize Kyle’s inability to get Lucy pregnant.
wears a provocative black costume. At the Moulin Rouge in Hollywood, whose décor is also in dark colours, she wears a costume in yellow and green. When Annie tracks her down at her hotel, Sarah Jane wears a black cocktail dress. Sarah Jane wears colours and costumes that are the complete opposite of Lora’s, which suggests that she can never escape her race.

One final observation on the use of colour must be made. In the three films discussed here, Sirk uses the colour red in a very specific and different ways. In All That Heaven Allows, red was employed as a reminder of the love that Cary gave up when she broke up with Ron. In Written On the Wind, red was associated primarily with Marylee and her sexually charged nature. In this film, the colour red is associated primarily with Sarah Jane and her desire to be white. Red is especially used to make this point in the first half of the film. The “black” doll Susie offers to Sarah Jane is dressed in a red outfit. To demonstrate her disgust with the doll and with being stuck in the back room of Lora’s apartment, Sarah Jane throws the doll to the floor. In the next scene, Susie and Sarah Jane play in the living room. Sarah Jane sits on the couch and next to her is a bright red cushion. This is the scene in which Sarah Jane asks Lora for a kiss, pretending to be Lora’s daughter; therefore, white.

A few months later, Annie goes to Sarah Jane’s school to deliver her red galoshes and as she arrives, a large red fire hydrant is highlighted in the foreground of the shot. Sarah Jane tries to hide from her mother’s gaze when she arrives at the classroom, and it is then that Annie discovers that her daughter has been “passing” for white at school. Sarah Jane runs from the room, out of the school, and as she does, the fire hydrant is again prominently displayed in the shot. When Annie catches up to her, Sarah Jane stands in front of a large red sign advertising Christmas trees. Annie asks Sarah Jane why she did not tell anyone that she is black and Sarah Jane responds by
saying that since they did not ask, she did not tell them. Then she asks Annie, “Why do you have to be my mother? Why?”

In a later scene, it is Christmas time and Annie tells the children about the birth of Christ. Sarah Jane again wears her red housecoat. When Sarah Jane asks what colour Jesus was, Lora tries to deflect her question by telling her it does not matter, that he is the way you imagine him. Susie points out that he was a real man and then she repeats Sarah Jane’s question. Sarah Jane then offers an answer: “He was white—like me.” This scene is the last in which red is so obviously associated with Sarah Jane’s discontent, but in the second half of the film, Sarah Jane is still associated heavily with the colour red, or shades thereof. The bulk of her wardrobe and her room are in shades of orange, and both of the nightclubs she works in are decorated and lit in shades of red.

5.7 La Voix humaine: The Production

Cary Scott, Marylee Hadley, Lora Meredith, and Sarah Jane Johnson all have at least one thing in common with Elle: they all desire more in life than they have. Cary Scott lives only for her children following her husband’s death, not realizing that she wishes to find love again. When she meets Ron Kirby, she realizes what her life is missing. She must fight the conservative attitudes so deeply ingrained in both the town and herself in order to be free to accept Ron’s love. Marylee Hadley has everything money could buy except the one thing she truly desires: the love of Mitch Wayne. Marylee’s illicit behaviour is a direct result of her inability to attract the only man capable of bringing her life happiness and fulfillment. Since she is unsuccessful in her quest, she is stripped of her femininity and forced to suppress her sexual urges. Lora Meredith’s ambition to be a famous Broadway actress comes between her and everyone she loves. She believes that acting will give her a sense of fulfillment and
purpose, but she is so blinded by her ambition that she is incapable of seeing that the key to her happiness is directly in front of her: the love of her daughter, Susie, and that of Steve Archer, and most of all, the ‘family’ she and Annie Johnson have created. Only after ten years of success in the theatre does Lora realize that something is missing in her life. Miraculously, Steve returns and offers himself to her once again. Finally, Sarah Jane Johnson has the most unattainable desire of all these women: she desires to be white. She attempts to hide or run from her identity. She denies the mother that gave birth to her and the ‘family’ that has loved her regardless of her skin colour. Only when it is too late and her mother has died does she realize the terrible mistake she has made and the time she has wasted.

For five years Elle lived only for her lover. For five years she waited in anxious anticipation to see him, fearing that he was dead if he was delayed, and then fearing that once he arrived that he would leave again. Elle desired the happiness that only her lover could provide, and for five years, she had it, from time to time. Now that the relationship is over, she is at a complete loss as to what to do. When the opera begins, Elle anxiously awaits the promised telephone call from him, knowing that as long as she is able to keep him on the telephone, she stands a chance of keeping their relationship alive. In the end, when her lover has said everything he needs to say to Elle, she musters the courage to ask him to hang up. Elle is left to live alone.

The Sirkian elements I have employed in creating this production are his use of mirror images, colour, lighting, and weather. Basing this production on the premise that the fundamental desire of all women in the 1950s (at least that which the propaganda machine was putting out at the time) was to be a wife and mother, I decided to set the opera in the living room of Elle’s home. The focal point of the room is a hearth, the most poignant symbol of the happy family home I could devise. The
fireplace is white with marble tiling accent, suggesting a funereal air. There will not be a lit fire, nor will there be even the elements necessary to create a fire. This is one of the symbols of the romantic and domestic destitution in which she lives.

Over the hearth is a large mirror, leaning on an angle so as to reflect as much of the action of the opera as possible. The mirror will be employed passively for the most part, but there are some instances where it will be used actively to capture Elle’s reactions and emotional state. Specifically, I will look briefly in the mirror during the musical introduction; when I sing the words, “Hier, je me suis trouvé nez à nez avec une vieille dame.../ Yesterday I found myself face to face with an old lady...;” and at the end of the opera, (at no. 107), I will walk slowly to the mirror as I sing, “Mon chéri...mon beau chéri./ My darling...my wonderful darling.”

Along with the physical mirror, I will decorate the set in a manner that suggests that each side of the stage is a mirror image of the other. The hearth will be placed upstage centre. Flanking the hearth will be two windows. On stage right will be two wingback chairs with a small table between them. Opposite the chairs on stage left will be a chaise longue. The intended effect of this set is that the two wingback chairs will take up as much space as the chaise longue and provide many places in which to situate the action. The mirror image set design is intended to be a physical manifestation of the symmetrical construction of the opera, which is used in conjunction with the blocking.

Since the structure of the libretto is an arch whose first and second halves are a mirror image of each other (see Table 1), therefore symmetrical in nature, I will begin and end the opera in the same position. At the beginning of the opera, I will be lying on the floor, downstage centre. In the musical introduction, the large-scale movement

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203 This particular aspect of the set will not be possible for the lecture recital presentation.
204 Please refer to Appendix 2.
will be a cross to the upstage area. The first half of the opera will begin upstage right and will continue to be played on stage right moving progressively downstage. The aria section, which is at the mid-point of the opera and the most important section, will all be played at centre stage. The second half of the opera will be played on stage left, beginning downstage and slowly working upstage. The final move will be a cross from upstage centre to downstage centre, culminating in a repeat of the first position of the opera. The blocking has been designed to be a reflection of the construction of the opera and as a means of highlighting the three most important moments: the beginning, the aria, and the ending. The intended effect of starting and finishing the opera in the same position is to indicate that despite her best efforts and the length of the telephone call, by the end, Elle is really no further ahead in her own life than she was at the beginning.

Since many of Sirk's female characters wear colours that blend with their surroundings, I have designed the set and costume to match. Taking the example of the living rooms from *All That Heaven Allows* and *Imitation of Life*, the wingback chairs and the chaise longue are a matched set and both have light silver-grey upholstery. The costume consists of a peignoir and chemise set in very pale silver-blue. From my observations it seems that in Sirk's universe white, grey, and silver are used to signify a 'lack' of something: Cary wears grey because she lacks the love of a man; Lucy Moore wears white because after a year of marriage Kyle has been unsuccessful at getting her pregnant; Lora Meredith wears white because she lacks depth. These very bland colours were also employed in the décor of Cary's home to indicate how Sirk viewed the typical 1950s family home: a mausoleum. In the opera, everything Elle has ever desired is lacking in this scene: her relationship is over, there is no further possibility of love in her life, and her dreams of marriage and family
have been torn from her. As a result, her home has become her tomb. Silver-blue, in Sirk’s films, is most often associated with the night, a time of day when negative events occur. For example, Ned presents Cary with an ultimatum after Sara’s party, Lucy discovers that Kyle sleeps with a gun on their wedding night, and Alan tries to take advantage of Lora in the evening after their first meeting. The colour of Elle’s costume and her surroundings is intended to be yet another way of symbolizing what she has lost with the end of the relationship.

It seems that hair colour plays an important role in determining the level of happiness Sirk’s leading female characters enjoy and whether they will end up being happy in the end. Blonde hair is reserved for the ‘bombshells,’ the strong women who know their own minds, but although they may experience some measure of happiness, blondes seem to be the big losers in the end. Marylee loses Mitch, Lora loses Annie, and Susie loses Steve. The brunettes (Cary and Lucy) seem to have the most luck finding lasting happiness, even if they must overcome obstacles along the way. Given that Elle’s relationship lasted several years and taking into account her reaction to the end of the affair, and I have decided that Elle should be a redhead. The fragility of her psyche prevented me from making her a blonde, and since the opera does not have a happy ending, I could not make her a brunette. I also felt that since Sirk clearly held the colour red in particular esteem as a colour with symbolic power, making Elle a redhead is an effective way of indicating the misery she feels inside but only rarely expresses in words. There will also be red coloured adornments on the set as a torment to Elle, symbolizing the elusive happiness Elle sought for five years. For example, a red cushion on the chaise longue, a vase of red flowers on the telephone table, etc.
As for the most important prop, the telephone, instead of having a telephone that matches the décor of the set (as telephones were frequently colour coordinated to the room they occupied), it will be black. Black is associated with death and funerals. The telephone, through its constant breaking, down represents the 'death' of the relationship, and a black telephone on a light coloured set will draw the attention of the audience. Finally, I will use time of day and the weather to reflect Elle’s emotional state. Through the windows that flank the hearth, the lighting will reflect the time of day by using blue lights to give the impression that it is night. As the curtain rises and the musical introduction is played, snow will fall heavily, symbolizing the great anxiety of the character. The snow will slow to a stop early in the opera, but will return for the aria, and then again for the ending.205

205 This entire effect will be impossible for the lecture recital, given the venue and the resources available.
CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

As I was contemplating a subject for this thesis, there were certain criteria to fulfill. In the last several years I have focussed my energy on learning the craft of opera performance, therefore it was of utmost importance that I choose an operatic subject. I was particularly concerned with finding one that would involve a significant and challenging role for me to perform as a means of demonstrating all that I have learned in the last twelve years, both in school and in the professional arena. It was very important that I decide upon an opera that contained a role that was suitable for my voice, since I have the unique privilege of having a voice that is difficult to categorize. I thought it might also be appropriate to choose an opera with a French libretto because, thanks to former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, I began public school in the year that bilingualism in Canada came into effect. I studied the French language in a full immersion program for fourteen years. The subject also needed to be an opera that has stood the test of time, one whose subject matter continues to captivate audiences.

Several years ago, I was fortunate enough to attend a student performance of La Voix humaine, and, as I searched for a short opera to be the subject of my thesis, my thoughts returned to that performance. Despite the many interesting operas I encountered in my research, Poulenc’s work remained at the forefront of my thoughts. Ultimately, I decided to propose this opera as the subject of my thesis after I took the time sing through it to ensure that it would be appropriate for my voice.

The process of researching and developing this thesis has given me an appreciation of the challenges of creating a new operatic production. While a good portion of the effort that has gone into this thesis is work that I would normally do
when preparing a role, for example, studying the source material and comparing it to the libretto as well as an in depth examination of the score as it relates to the libretto, there were many elements that I would, quite simply, not have considered.

I am as guilty as the next person of using the terms ‘tragedy’ and ‘melodrama’ colloquially, even though I had a previous understanding of what truly entails a ‘tragedy.’ I am thankful that I was put in a position to have to discover all that the word ‘melodrama’ encompasses, especially since opera, from the beginning of the nineteenth-century, has been strongly influenced by this dramatic genre in subject matter (especially 'good versus evil'), excessive emotion, and staging techniques. The genre study shed light on the character ‘Elle’ and helped me to understand her from a dramatic point of view, which adds to my personal understanding of her motivations. Having an understanding of the development of melodramatic heroines from their earliest days on the stage to the present will have a profound impact on the way I prepare roles in the future.

As for the production itself, I have designed a set that, at first glance, is very traditional in the sense that it has a focal point upstage centre, and three primary spaces in which to perform: the two chairs on stage right, the open area at centre stage, and the chaise longue at stage left. Although I had many different ideas about the kind of production I could design for this thesis, I felt that it was important to use the skills I have learned as a performer and those I learned in a graduate staging seminar since I am still considered to be a young performer. If I had more experience, especially in the area of ‘concept’ productions, I would have created a completely different production.

There is great value in creating a set that an audience can relate to, particularly for an opera that the general public may not be familiar with. Despite the fact that the
musical language of this opera is by no means as progressive as others composed
during the twentieth-century, the fragmentary nature of the music and libretto,
coupled with the largely recitative-like writing for the voice would be enough to put
off the average opera-goer. That having been said, I was fortunate enough to be
guided toward the brilliant 1950s melodramatic films of Douglas Sirk as a means of
informing this production. Sirk was a master of transforming what had become a
formulaic genre into potent commentaries on the state of the society in which he
lived. Sirk's style was particularly helpful as a means of justifying and explaining the
extreme reactions of the heroine.

By setting this opera in the 1950s, thereby subjecting it to the varied
influences that shaped the decade, I was able to infuse Elle with concrete reasons for
the way she behaved. For example, women of the 1950s were subjected to a massive
propaganda effort that made them feel that to be single was to be abnormal and that
the way to happiness lay in the realm of a 'normal' heterosexual marriage and
suburban life. Throughout the opera we become aware that Elle has put five years of
her life into a relationship that does not culminate in a marriage and family.
Therefore, the best way to justify her extreme emotional response to the loss of her
lover is to suggest that Elle has bought into the propaganda of the day, despairing that
she would never have a 'normal' life. By designing the set and the staging of the
opera based on Sirk's mise-en-scène, I was able to visually represent Elle's current
emotional and personal situation (the colours of the set and costume), and to surround
her with a visual reminder of what she has lost (using the colour red as 'tormentor').
The large mirror over the fireplace allows me to highlight Elle's lonely existence by
framing her in the mirror (like a 'live' photograph) throughout opera.
With this thesis, I hope to have provided a significant contribution to the understanding of this opera, especially for future performers. I trust that the observations made about the differences between Cocteau and Poulenc's heroines will prove useful to both performer and director alike. Similarly, understanding Elle within the history of melodrama will also prove to be a useful tool to performers of this role.

As for the score, it is my hope that the associations made between text and motive, as well as the observations made as to how the motives are used to construct the opera will help future performers to understand Poulenc's 'vision,' thereby aiding in the preparation of this role for performance.
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Articles


Books


**DVDs**

*Behind the Mirror: A Profile of Douglas Sirk.* (excerpts) produced by BBC, 60 min. included on *All That Heaven Allows*. Universal Pictures Co, 1955. DVD.


## APPENDIX I

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<td>The phone rings. Elle is connected to her lover. Pleasantries are exchanged. Elle lies about her activities since he left: she says she has just returned from dinner with Martha, she tells him that she only took one sleeping pill that night before, and she says that she spent the previous day with Martha. [She tells him she has put their letters in a bag.] Elle then lies about Martha collecting her for dinner and about her wardrobe. [She denies having smoked a lot that day.] She inquires about him and there follows a moment of phone trouble. Elle tells her lover he can collect the letters at his convenience. She tells him she understands how difficult their situation is and that she didn’t know she could be so brave.</td>
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(1st time) does not want to keep the dog and that Joseph should come to collect him.]  

Fetishist Phase 63 [Her lover tells her he has left a pair of gloves behind. Elle says that she has not seen them even though does have them, holding them and caressing them. Elle asks her lover to burn their love letters and requests that he return the ashes to her in the little box she had given to him. She then says in a foreign language that she burned some of his sister’s papers.]  

Telephone Problems (2nd Time) 64 Their connection is momentarily interrupted. (Telephone Trouble 2) [The operator comes on the line. Elle complains about the phone service.]  

Easing the Tension 65 Elle tells her lover that the phone does not sound like his, then she tells him that she can “see” him and what he is doing. When he tries to play along she tells him she does not want him to see her and that she now avoids looking at herself in the mirror. “Seeing”/ Flirting 65 She tells him she is lucky that he is so kind because he could use the phone as a terrible weapon against her. Telephone as Weapon 65  

Telephone problems (3rd Time) 66 They are cut off. The phone rings; it is the operator. She offers to ring the lover's number. Elle hangs up. (Telephone Line Cut 1) [The phone rings; it is the wrong connection. Elle asks the operator to try again.] She waits; she is connected to her lover's home.  

Realisation of his Lie 66 Elle speaks to Joseph who informs her that ‘Monsieur’ is not in for the evening. Elle immediately understands that her lover has lied to her about his whereabouts. She hangs up. Revelation 66  

Truth Phase 66 Her lover calls back. While Elle decides what to do with the information, she denies that anything is wrong. Elle decides to tell her lover the truth about her earlier lies. She recounts her severe anxiety that led her to attempt suicide. She tells him she was afraid to die alone, that she called Martha and she arrived with a doctor. [She tells him that she did not intend to end things between them this way.] Truth 66 She begs him speak to her. She tells him that speaking to him on the telephone reminds her of speaking to him in bed. Aftermath 69  

Bravado Phase 69 [She denies that he was a coward and says again that she knew the end was imminent. She recounts how she found out what the woman looked like by seeing her photo in a magazine weeks earlier. She tells him that she did not want to ruin their last weeks together.]  

Paroxysm of Suffering 69 Hearing music in the background, Elle is reminded of his lie. She tells him the doctor will return to check on her. She asks him to forgive her for making a scene, saying that she is suffering and that the telephone is last link to him. Suffering 69
Dream Phase 70 [Elle describes the dreams she had the night of the break-up. The telephone came to represent various means of torture.]

Despondency Phase 71 Elle explains to her lover that she loved only for him for five years and explains her suffering in that time as well. She explains that although she slept the first night, she has not slept since, and finds her days unbearable. [She says she feels like a fish out of water and has only been distracted from her suffering when she visited the dentist, who touched a nerve.]

Dog Phase (2nd Time) 72 Elle again describes the dog’s odd behaviour. [Her lover suggests leaving the dog with Martha. Elle asks him to send Joseph for the dog, otherwise she will leave it with someone that can care for it.]

Aunt Jeanne 73 [Elle recounts the story of how Aunt Jeanne reacted at the news of the death of her son.] She tells him that perhaps the dog is afraid of her because he witnessed her destroying all her photographs. [She then tells him that she no longer wishes to travel for fear of running into him.]

Telephone Problems (4th Time) 73 A woman interrupts the conversation offering her opinion of the lover. The lover and the woman share an angry exchange. Elle tries to soothe her lover.

Social Isolation 74 [Elle tells her lover that she encountered an old acquaintance that inquired about a marriage announcement for her lover in the newspaper. She says that she has let all of her old friends go.] She tells him that people do not understand what they do not know and that she does not care what others think.

Realisation of the Total Void 75 Elle realizes they have been speaking as they once did, that in the past they could resolve all disputes with one glance, but with the telephone it is not possible. She assures him she will not attempt suicide again.

Last Hope 75 Elle tries to get her lover to admit his lies, pointing out that sometimes lies are useful especially if one wishes to spare another from pain.

The line goes dead and Elle becomes distressed that he will not call back. The phone rings; it is her lover. Despite her efforts, her lover does not admit his lies.

Farewell Phase 76 Elle knows she must say goodbye but does not have the courage. Her lover informs her that he will be travelling to Marseilles the day after next. She asks him not to stay at their usual hotel. She tries to say goodbye, then tells him she is strong, that he should quickly hang up. She cries into the phone that she loves him.

Table 4: Chart comparing Waleckx and Stringer’s phases.
Artist rendition of the Sirk inspired set.
APPENDIX III

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
Recital Hall
Saturday, September 17, 2005
8:00 p.m.

DOCTORAL LECTURE-RECITAL*

SANDRA STRINGER, mezzo-soprano

La Voix humaine (1959)  
Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

‘Elle’: Sandra Stringer  
Piano: Richard Epp  
Production and Direction: Sandra Stringer

- INTERMISSION -

Lecture: ‘Melodrama in the 1950s: A New Production of Francis Poulenc’s La Voix humaine’

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree with a major in Voice Performance.