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Exploration of Fauré's "Poème d'un jour" Through Recital and Lecture

On October 14, 1814 Schubert composed “Gretchen am Spinnrade” giving birth to a new form of song, the art song. What began as a musical movement in Germany, soon found its way to France. Thus began the development of French art song, also known as the *mélodie*. Helping the development of the French *mélodie* was the decline in the artistic level of another song form, the romance. Romances were 18th century French songs that were usually simple, strophic, and based on a tragic poem.¹ Composers could only do so much with the romance since it was so simple, usually featuring only basso continuo in the accompaniment.² Schubert’s lieder being introduced in France also influenced the development of the *mélodie*. His works were widely published and disseminated which encouraged and inspired the French to make their own version of the art song.³ The final part in the development of the *mélodie* is that new Romantic French poetry was being written. Just as the Germans developed lied through new poetry and literary movement, the French followed suit with a variety of new poetry to set to music.⁴

The first French *mélodie* is attributed to Jean Paul Martini and his composition “Plaisir d’amour”, written in 1748.⁵ *Mélobies* were serious art songs characterized by legato, sensuality, sensitivity, precision, intelligence, taste, and clarity of expression. The French *mélodie* was the art of suggestion. Their aim was never to express precise emotions but instead express moods and impressions. With the development of the French *mélodie* came a host of new composers. No composer of the French *mélodie*, however, may be as well known as Gabriel Fauré. A composer during the Romantic period, Fauré is considered by some to be the composer who perfected the *mélodie* to become a true form of art song.⁶ His works expressed more variety, which propelled the *mélodie* and French art song to new heights.

Born May 12, 1845 in Pamiers, Fauré’s growth and development as a composer can be traced throughout his life as a musician. He was the youngest of his six siblings and the only one to show a natural inclination and talents for music. He began his musical training at the Ecole Niedermeyer when he was nine years old.⁷ The school itself was quite strict and had a curriculum based heavily on music written before 1750 including Renaissance polyphony.⁸ Thus, the training he received from the school was in many ways preparing him for a job as church musician. Niedermeyer himself was considered to be a leader in bringing polyphonic music to the forefront again.⁹ This training in counterpoint is seen in his compositions because they are harmonically structured horizontally rather than vertically.¹⁰

¹ Carol Kimball, “French Song” in *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2006), 161.

² Kimball, “French Song”, 160

³ Kimball, “French Song”, 160

⁴ Kimball, “French Song”, 160

⁵ Kimball, “French Song”, 161

⁶ Carol Kimball, “Gabriel Fauré” in *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2006), 180.

⁷ Robert Gartside, “The Art of Gabriel Fauré” in *Interpreting the Songs of Gabriel Fauré*, (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle Publications, 1996), 19.

⁸ Gartside, “The Art”, 19.

⁹ Nectoux, Jean-Michel. *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 6.

¹⁰ Gartside, “The Art”, 19.

It was also during this time he won a prize for first place in a composition competition and received two awards for literature.¹¹ Some scholars have suggested that this early sensitivity for poetry and words may have influenced his compositional relationship between music and poetry.¹²

However the school also sheltered Fauré, and its other students, from certain music and certain composers. Some of these composers included Chopin and Schumann, whose works were considered “unsuitable” by the school.¹³ He was also sheltered from the happenings in music that existed outside the walls of the school. During the Second Empire in France, theatre and opera reigned supreme, while the church music being produced was considered to be of the lowest quality.¹⁴

Perhaps his greatest influence from the Ecole Niedermeyer, was his teacher and mentor Camille Saint-Saëns. In addition to teaching at the Ecole Niedermeyer, Saint-Saëns was also a composer. While the school offered rigorous training Saint-Saëns introduced Fauré to composers like Schumann, Liszt, Weimar, and Wagner.¹⁵ This introduction of contemporary composers was considered scandalous amongst the other teachers at the school.¹⁶ It was under the disciplined and watchful eye of Saint-Saëns that Fauré began composing. With Saint-Saëns as a guide, Fauré spent years in the company of great composers and the aristocratic supporters of the arts. Saint-Saëns arranged two personal meetings for Fauré with the composer Franz Liszt, who even asked to see some of Fauré’s compositions.¹⁷

Saint-Saëns’s influence can be seen in the lightness and brilliant qualities of Fauré’s music.¹⁸ Both elements were considered hallmarks of Saint-Saëns’s style. The ability to take a short phrase of text and create long passages and musical phrases that sometimes span multiple pages was another technique Fauré learned from Saint-Saëns.¹⁹

Throughout his life Fauré spoke of Saint-Saëns as a friend and is on occasion referred to as “the guardian angel watching over Fauré’s career”.²⁰ After Fauré’s departure from the Ecole Niedermeyer at age twenty he worked as both an organist and a choirmaster.²¹ However, neither position was enough for him to make a sustainable living. On his return to Paris, it was Saint-Saëns who helped Fauré receive the position of maître de chapelle at the Church of Sainte Madeleine.²² Fauré also supplemented his income by teaching music lessons around Paris.

Fauré’s work at Sainte Madeleine and his teaching, coupled with little personal wealth prevented him from composing full time.²³ Thus the venues for his compositions were mainly the Parisian salons and the Société Nationale de Musique. Fauré was a founding member of the Société, which included Claude Debussy, Cesar Franck, Camille

¹¹ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 6.

¹² Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 6.

¹³ Gartside, “The Art”, 19.

¹⁴ Gartside, “The Art”, 19.

¹⁵ Gartside, “The Art”, 19.

¹⁶ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 10.

¹⁷ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 10.

¹⁸ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 11.

¹⁹ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 11.

²⁰ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 12.

²¹ Gartside, “The Art”, 19.

²² Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 19.

²³ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 20.

Saint-Saëns, Henri Duparc, Jules Massenet, and other composers.²⁴ Here, Fauré's compositions were often heard in the Société concerts. It was Saint-Saëns who introduced Fauré to society and salons, and in doing so Fauré found an audience who appreciated his music.²⁵ A majority of his works included small musical forms such as melodies, piano, and chamber music, ideal for an intimate setting like the salon.²⁶ Many of his songs were first sung in salons and the salons because a generous source of patronage for him. However, some believe this patronage also lessened his reputation as a composer, stating that his entire output was simply "salon" music.²⁷

One salon in particular Fauré visited was that of Pauline Viardot, an aristocratic supporter of the arts. In frequenting her musical salons, Fauré became friends with Pauline Viardot and her husband Louis.²⁸ This friendship also introduced Fauré to their daughter Marianna. The two became engaged, but the engagement was broken after only four months.²⁹ This failed relationship was said to be a hardship and emotional time for Fauré. It may have been the inspiration for some of his Middle Period works, including the "Poème d'un jour". Pauline and Louis were also responsible for convincing Fauré to attempt writing an opera.³⁰ Since opera was most popular at the time, it may have been a more lucrative venture and a way for Fauré to find a larger audience while earning an income. Fauré would spend twenty year composing his first opera "Pénélope", which he dedicated to Saint-Saëns.³¹ The influence of Wagner is very prominent in Fauré's operas.³² However, Fauré never outwardly expressed a great liking for the composer. He also detested the verismo style of opera favored by composers like Puccini.³³

Financial success came later at the age of 51 when he became a professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire.³⁴ He was later given the position as the director of the Conservatoire.³⁵ As director he was able to institute a number of reforms and the income allowed him to take two months away from Paris each summer where he could focus on composing.³⁶ The position also gave his work the necessary exposure, which gained him fame and attention.

Just as his work was gaining momentum, Fauré encountered more hardship when he started going deaf in 1901.³⁷ His ability to hear certain qualities in music diminished. He reported hearing double sounds, high notes became sharp, and low notes became flat.³⁸ The distortions he heard in sounds due to his deafness are suggested as a possible reason for why his Late Period compositions are all composed within a mid-range.³⁹ In

²⁴ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 20.

²⁵ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 20.

²⁶ Gartside, "The Art", 19.

²⁷ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 21.

²⁸ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 22.

²⁹ Gartside, "The Art", 19.

³⁰ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 25.

³¹ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 25.

³² Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 26.

³³ Gartside, "The Art", 20.

³⁴ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 27.

³⁵ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 28.

³⁶ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 28.

³⁷ Gartside, "The Art", 21.

³⁸ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 34.

³⁹ Gartside, "The Art", 21.

order to continue composing he had to avoid writing in areas of the voice that were too painful to hear. Despite the limitations his deafness created, Fauré continued composing until his death in 1924.⁴⁰

Like other composers, Fauré used a repertoire of compositional techniques and stylistic aspects present in many of his songs. This style vocabulary helped define the aesthetics of Fauré's music. When looking at the style of Fauré, one can't help but notice its inherent lack of virtuosity. Many of his works do not allow for the singers or pianists to embellish in an attempt to show off their vocal prowess.⁴¹ His son Philippe said "In short, his rule is: make little noise but say much."⁴² While he wrote some "big" songs, they never matched that of a composition by Strauss or Liszt. This also can be seen in his very limited use of rubato.⁴³ However, this simplicity and subtle emotive expression does not translate into the harmonic structure of his works.

Fauré had a preference for using complex harmonies within his songs. As a composer, he enjoyed beginning relatively simple before continuing to increase the complexity throughout a piece.⁴⁴ Often times he would use non-functional harmony, dissonances, and modulations within the middle of a song. As he entered his Late Period he developed a complex harmonic vocabulary that focused on the third and sixth scale degrees.⁴⁵ He was known to use cadences that moved from the median to tonic rather than the standard tonic to dominant.⁴⁶ Some authors have suggested that these techniques gave his music more fluidity that mimicked better the sensuous legato of the French language.

Fauré also used the tritone (augmented fourth or diminished fifth) in many pieces. Tritones tend to have a jarring quality with a distinct intervallic sound that is easily identifiable to the trained listener. When added to Fauré's music, tritones can cut through, thus keeping the texture of the song from becoming too rich, sweet, or overly emotional.⁴⁷ On the subject of intervals, Fauré rarely used intervallic leaps that were large. There is only one song in which he uses a leap larger than an octave.⁴⁸ Often when you see a larger leap in Fauré's music the text is usually conveying feelings of love.⁴⁹

Fauré's pieces also feature many triplets and variations of two against three rhythms. These have been dubbed "sexy triplets" for they add an element of sensuality to the music.⁵⁰ The subtlety of this rhythmic choice can be seen in Fauré's use of the device for the most textually erotic moments in his songs.⁵¹ For Fauré it was always about being subtle and almost nothing from him is overly dramatic or explicit. His songs are filled with small subtle nuances that prevent his songs from being overtly emotive.⁵² His songs

⁴⁰ Gartside, "The Art", 21.

⁴¹ Robert Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional Techniques" in *Interpreting the Songs of Gabriel Fauré*, (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle Publications, 1996), 23.

⁴² Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 23.

⁴³ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 24.

⁴⁴ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 23.

⁴⁵ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 23.

⁴⁶ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 23.

⁴⁷ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 24.

⁴⁸ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 23.

⁴⁹ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 23.

⁵⁰ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 23.

⁵¹ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 23.

⁵² Kimball, "Gabriel Fauré", 181.

deal with sentimentality and feeling rather than literal meaning.⁵³ The emotion comes from the setting of the text rather than the text itself, a characteristic that is unique to French music.

Many pieces by Fauré have a focus on long legato line. His melodies have a natural rise and fall created long arches within the vocal line. This legato quality was quite common in French art song. The French language relies heavily on being sensuous and legato. Fauré's choice of poetry was always more about character and feeling than what the words were literally saying.⁵⁴ Though the French language was naturally smooth, he would often times ignore accents or stressed syllables in order to keep his musical line legato and fluid.⁵⁵

In discussing his compositional vocabulary it is worthy to note that scholars have placed Fauré's music into three distinct compositional periods. Each period is marked by a change in style or aesthetic, which evolved during his life as a composer. According to Carol Kimball, his early Period was 1860-1865. The Early Period is characterized by his heavy use of Parnassian poetry and the sonorous sentimentality typical of early French song and composers such as Gounod.⁵⁶ His Middle Period is 1880-1904. While he continued using Parnassian poets, Fauré discovered his affection for the Symbolist poets, in particular Paul Verlaine. During this period his songs developed by using more modality, subtler harmonies, motives to link elements, and a slightly larger emotional scope.⁵⁷ His Late Period, 1906-1922, can be characterized by lean and sparse textures, more harmonic complexity and manipulation, and the beginnings of some tonal ambiguity.⁵⁸ These songs lack the same charm of those from his Early Period and tend to be more introspective.⁵⁹

It was during his Middle Period that Fauré composed his first song cycle "Poème d'un jour". The three pieces in this cycle are *Rencontre*, *Toujours*, and *Adieu*. The texts for this cycle are poems by Charles Grandmougin.⁶⁰ Grandmougin was born in Vesal in 1850.⁶¹ He often wrote poetry specifically for mélodie and was very influenced by Wagner. He was most successful a librettist for opera and oratorio.⁶²

The purpose of a song cycle is to create a collection of songs that are in someway connected by theme, music, or text. Some say the connection in "Poème d'un jour" comes from shared musical elements and material. For example, the opening vocal line of *Rencontre* and the beginning of the mid section *Adieu* in the accompaniment both use a similar descending motive.⁶³ The arpeggiated pattern in the accompaniment of *Toujours* is also reflected in the arpeggiated pattern in the accompaniment of the mid section of

⁵³ Kimball, "Gabriel Fauré", 181.

⁵⁴ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 24.

⁵⁵ Gartside, "Fauré's Compositional", 24.

⁵⁶ Kimball, "Gabriel Fauré", 182.

⁵⁷ Kimball, "Gabriel Fauré", 183.

⁵⁸ Kimball, "Gabriel Fauré", 185.

⁵⁹ Kimball, "Gabriel Fauré", 185.

⁶⁰ Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes. "Grandmougin and Poème D'un Jour." in *Gabriel Fauré: The Songs and Their Poets* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 121.

⁶¹ Johnson and Stokes, "Grandmougin", 121.

⁶² Johnson and Stokes, "Grandmougin", 121.

⁶³ Mario Joseph Serge Gérard Champagne, "The French Song Cycle (1840-1924): With Special Emphasis on the Works of Gabriel Fauré." (PhD Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1994), 159.

Adieu.⁶⁴ This theory has been mostly dismissed since these moments are few and fleeting. However, the strongest connection is the text. “Poème d’un jour” or “Poems of a day” follows a relationship from beginning to end within the span of a single day. Reminiscent of Schumann’s “Frauenliebe und Leben”, the songs in this cycle are connected through text by a single poet and feature a single narrator beginning with the song *Rencontre*.

Rencontre

J'étais triste et pensif quand je t'ai rencontrée,
Je sens moins aujourd'hui
mon obstiné tourment;
Ô dis-moi, serais-tu la femme inespérée,
Et le rêve idéal poursuivi vainement?

Ô, passante aux doux yeux,
serais-tu donc l'amie
Qui rendrait le bonheur au poète isolé,
Et vas-tu rayonner sur mon âme affermie,
Comme le ciel natal sur un cœur d'exilé?

Ta tristesse sauvage, à la mienne pareille,
Aime à voir le soleil décliner sur la mer!
Devant l'immensité ton extase s'éveille,
Et le charme des soirs
à ta belle âme est cher;

Une mystérieuse et douce sympathie
Déjà m'enchaîne à toi comme un vivant lien,
Et mon âme frémit, par l'amour envahie,
Et mon cœur te chérit,
sans te connaître bien!

Meeting

I was sad and pensive when I met you,
I sense less today
My persistent torment
Tell, were you the girl I met by chance,
The ideal dream I vainly sought?

A passer-by with gentle eyes,
Were you the friend
Who brought happiness to a lonely poet,
And did you shine upon my vacant heart,
Like the native sky on an exiled spirit?

Your shy sadness, so much like my own
Loves to watch the sun set over the sea!
Your delight awakened before it's immensity,
And the evenings spent
With your lovely soul are dear to me;

A mysterious and gentle sympathy
Already binds me to you like a living bond;
My soul trembles with overpowering love,
And my heart cherishes you,
Knowing you hardly at all!

In *Rencontre*, we have the narrator first meeting the woman of his affections. This idea of love at first sight is often linked closely with youth and naivety, like that in Shakespeare's “Romeo and Juliet”. The text reflects this sense of youthfulness, excitement, and anticipation. This sense of joy and elation is present in the piano's continuous pattern of arpeggiated eight notes. They give the song a sense of forward movement, which thus propels the voice in a long arching line, characteristic of Fauré's style.⁶⁵ The pattern also lends a sense of excited energy to the song, which also gives it that youthful quality. This energy and pulsation was something that up till this piece hadn't been seen in Fauré's songs.⁶⁶ When the singer follows the rise and fall movement of the vocal line, the textual inflection becomes more natural and present.

However, along with the mood of excitement and anticipation, there is also a sense of underlying unease and uncertainty. The narrator is very open about declaring his

⁶⁴ Champagne, “The French Song Cycle”, 159.

⁶⁵ Robert Gartside, “Poème d’un jour” in *Interpreting the Songs of Gabriel Fauré*, (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle Publications, 1996), 87.

⁶⁶ Gartside, “Poème”, 87.

love for this woman he's only met and yet he questions it throughout the song. It is always "could you be the one" rather than "you are the one". This mood play is typical of some French music.⁶⁷ Creating moments of melancholy that are surrounded by an atmosphere of joy and elation. This unease is reflected in the piano through constantly shifting harmonies. The piece is quite complex harmonically and never fully resolves until the end of the song coinciding with the narrator's final declaration of love.⁶⁸ Fauré makes use of constant diminished chords, tritones, and shifts from major to minor keys.

The song itself is strophic with the vocal and piano increasing in intensity and dynamic with each verse. The intensity reaches its culmination on a high A-flat, which is held and marked with a crescendo. Both these elements are rare directions in pieces by Fauré that allow the singer for freedom to be a little show-offish and virtuosic.⁶⁹ This initial meeting of lovers is then followed by the tumultuous *Toujours*.

Toujours

Vous me demandez de ma taire,
De fuir loin de vous pour jamais,
Et de m'en aller, solitaire,
Sans me rappeler qui j'aimais!

Demandez plutôt aux étoiles
De tomber dans l'immensité,
À la nuit de perdre ses voiles,
Au jour de perdre sa clarté,

Demandez à la mer immense
De dessécher ses vastes flots,
Et, quand les vents sont en démente,
D'apaiser ses sombres sanglots!

Mais n'espérez pas que mon âme
S'arrache à ses âpres douleurs
Et se dépouille de sa flamme
Comme le printemps de ses fleurs!

Always

You ask me to be quiet,
To flee from you forever to a distant place,
To depart alone,
Without thinking of the one whom I love!

You might more easily ask the stars
To fall from the sky,
Or the night to lift its veils,
Or the day to rid itself of its brightness,

Ask the immense ocean
To dry up its vast waters,
And, when the winds are raging dementedly,
Ask them to calm their dismal sobbing!

But do not hope that my soul
Can uproot its sorrow
And douse its flame
As springtime can shed its flowers!

In *Toujours* we have begun the next phase of this affair, where the narrator pleads words of passion to convince this woman that she cannot leave him. One could interpret that she has decided she wishes to leave or has rebuffed him in some other way. Thus his reaction is a somewhat angry and desperate plea. This may be one of the most dramatic songs composed by Fauré. It's atypical in that it is so highly emotive.⁷⁰ However, though his other song cycle "La bonne chanson" can also be characterized as dramatic, *Toujours* is much more flustered and explosive.⁷¹ "Poème d'un jour" appears to be experimentation in style for Fauré because there are elements that were outside of his typical

⁶⁷ Gartside, "Poème", 88.

⁶⁸ Gartside, "Poème", 88.

⁶⁹ Gartside, "Poème", 87.

⁷⁰ Gartside, "Poème", 91.

⁷¹ Gartside, "Poème", 91.

compositional vocabulary. In addition to the virtuosic marking in *Rencontre* and outwardly dramatic nature of *Toujours*, this song also includes a climatic high A that is held for six beats. The only other composition this is seen in is Fauré's operas.⁷² This ending like *Rencontre* offers the singer that rare opportunity to show off more. Another rare element is the use of octaves leaps.⁷³ Fauré usually reserves these for romantic declarations of love.⁷⁴ In the context of *Toujours*, it is used instead to reflect his desperate declaration of love, which may no longer be returned.

Yet like the other two song in the cycle Fauré does use elements that were more characteristic of his overall aesthetic. It features the same feeling of pulsation in the piano found in *Rencontre* but this time uses triplets and moves at a much faster pace.⁷⁵ This pattern in the piano sets a fiery mood reflected in the anguish and anger of the text. The mood is only further reflected in the constantly shifting harmonies. There is constant dissonance, often between the voice and piano that is always moving towards a resolution. The middle section features a series of measures during which Fauré wildly modulates through a wide variety of major and minor keys using triads.⁷⁶ These quick modulations give the energy necessary to paint the mood of desperation. As if the narrator is trying anything and everything to make her understand and reconsider.

The piece is modified strophic and ends with three simple F minor triads. This reflects Fauré's enjoyment of moving from harmonic simplicity to complexity and back to simplicity for the resolution. However, this simple resolution could be representative of moving towards the end of the relationship. There is no more passionate pleading because the decision has been made and the relationship has come to a close. This simple ending in F minor is the perfect transition and possible foreshadowing of the final song *Adieu*, which begins in F major.

Adieu

Comme tout meurt vite, la rose
 Déclose,
 Et les frais manteaux
 Diaprés des prés;
 Les longs soupirs, les bienaimées, fumées!

On voit dans ce monde léger changer,
 Plus vite que les flots des grèves, Nos rêves,
 Nos rêves,
 Plus vite que le givre en fleurs, Nos coeurs!

À vous l'on se croyait fidèle, cruelle,
 Mais hélas! les plus longs amours sont courts!
 Et je dis en quittant vos charmes,
 Sans larmes,
 Presqu'au moment de mon aveu, Adieu!

Farewell

Like everything that dies quickly,
 The blown rose
 The fresh multi-colored cloaks on the
 Meadows
 Long sighs, those we love, gone like smoke.

One sees in this frivolous world change,
 Quicker than the waves on the beach,
 Our dreams,
 Quicker than frost on the flowers, our hearts.

One believes oneself faithful to you, cruel,
 But alas! The longest of love affairs are short!
 And I say on quitting your charms,
 Without tears
 Close to the moment of my avowal, Adieu!

⁷² Gartside, "Poème", 91.

⁷³ Gartside, "Poème", 92.

⁷⁴ Gartside, "Poème", 92.

⁷⁵ Gartside, "Poème", 91.

⁷⁶ Gartside, "Poème", 92.

Adieu, unlike the first two songs in the cycle, lacks complexity. The affair has calmed both parties are going their separate ways and all that is left is the simplicity of goodbye. This song offers a sense of permanence in their parting. In the French language “adieu” means farewell in the sense that you will never see this person again unlike the more commonly used “au revoir” which means you will see the later or again soon.⁷⁷ Therefore use of “adieu” here alludes that there is no chance of reconciliation, nor perhaps a chance that they will every meet again.

The song is modified strophic and uses simple diatonic harmonies and quarter notes. Unlike the constant shifting harmonies of *Rencontre* and *Toujours*, *Adieu* only modulates from F major to F minor and back to F major.⁷⁸ Everything about the song is very straightforward, with little dissonance to distract from the calm mood. This calmness is also found in the sweet and gentle curving of the vocal line. The simplicity of this piece reflects the idea that this parting is simply part of life. In the end it is inevitable just like the changing of flowers or waves. The narrator even states that this is a goodbye without tears; there is no passionate pleading or declaration like in the first two songs. It’s ironic in that, even what we romanticize as the strongest and most lasting of all things like love and passion are in reality fickle and can have an ending. The piece ends with a mezza voce on a high F, soft and sustained there are again no dramatics or passionate displays, nothing but this unavoidable and final farewell.

While Fauré never chose humorous texts, these poems do offer a slight humor in their irony. In the first piece we encounter the narrator who speaks great words of passion and of feeling bonded with this woman though they have only just met. The second song *Toujours* follows the narrator as he expresses his reasons for why she cannot simply ask him to leave. Finally the cycle ends with their parting, the narrator continuing on with simple acceptance. The irony here is that the affair begins with such passion and declamations of love, feeling bound to this individual. Yet it end almost nonchalantly without dramatics or tears from the narrator. For a relationship that supposedly began with that much passion it’s hard to believe it could end so simply, unless the ending is expected because the idea of love at first sight is so unbelievable. Love can be so passionate and yet at the same time it is so fleeting.

Some claim that this text is meant to be sincere in its dramatics and that the ending while simple is still quite sad. Others have interpreted this cycle to be about an extra marital affair between two married individuals. In France during 1817, divorce was still frowned upon and the only way two married people from a respectable class would have been able to carry out a secret affair is if it was brief and non-committal.⁷⁹ Yes, there would still be the seduction and claims of passion, but out of necessity the affair would need to remain short and somewhat emotionally detached. Fauré was known to have quite a few extra marital affairs, as his own marriage was an unhappy one.⁸⁰ Therefore, some suggest that his affairs were the inspiration for his composing the cycle.

There is still continued debate about the reason Fauré chose to set this text and compose this song cycle. One popular theory is that he wrote it as an emotional reaction

⁷⁷ Gartside, “Poème”, 93.

⁷⁸ Gartside, “Poème”, 94.

⁷⁹ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 30.

⁸⁰ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré*, 30.

to his broken engagement with Marianna Viardot.⁸¹ Like the cycle their affair was short lived and Fauré was undeniably heartbroken when it ended. Thus there is good reason to suggest writing this cycle may have been a way to channel his feelings. There are those who disregard this theory, however, and say that the ironic nature of the affair makes it appear that the narrator doesn't take the relationship that seriously. They would argue that therefore Fauré's emotional state would have been too complex and sincere for him to choose these poems as a representation of his emotions.⁸²

Another theory is that he wrote this cycle as a reaction against the music of Jules Massenet. Fauré didn't particularly like Massenet's work, thinking it saccharine and overly sweet.⁸³ Yet others disagree with this reasoning, stating that though Fauré may have disliked Massenet's music, Fauré could hardly deny the financial success of Massenet and thus he would not have mocked the composer.⁸⁴ The simplest, and perhaps most plausible, explanation for his reasoning may be that Fauré simply wanted to composed a commercially viable song cycle as a way to earn income and gain more notice for his works.

⁸¹ Champagne, "The French Song Cycle", 159.

⁸² Champagne, "The French Song Cycle", 159.

⁸³ Johnson and Stokes, "Grandmougin", 118.

⁸⁴ Johnson and Stokes, "Grandmougin", 118.

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Composer: Gabriel Faure
Dates: 1845-1924
Birthplace: Pamiers, France
Period: Romantic

Rencontre

Poet: Charles Grandmougin
Dates: 1850-1930

Vocal Range: Eb4 – Ab5

Tessitura: Ab4 – F5

Key: Db Major

Pertinent Comments on the Vocal Line, Melody, and Text:

- Mostly step wise with continuous rise and fall.
- Melody is very fluid and legato typical of the French *mélodie* style.
- Natural crescendos through line leading to the climax on the A flat. Illustrates a sense of elation and excitement over meeting this new someone.
- The melody and line gives it a youthful feel. Something new, innocent, and exciting.
- The piece is modified strophic.
- Increase in dynamics with an increase in pitch, decrease in dynamic at the end of climaxes and before the build up.
- More expressive emotionally in both the vocal line and accompaniment than pieces from his Early Period.

Pertinent Comments About the Accompaniment and Harmony:

- Accompaniment's interaction with the vocal line is very similar to the approach of Lieder composers, like Brahms and Schumann.
- Arpeggiated chords in the accompaniment give the piece a fluid movement and like the vocal line a natural rise and fall.
- The arpeggios also illustrate the sensation of breathlessness when you see someone and fall in love for the first time with him or her. It really captures the youthfulness and excitement of the speaker in the poem.
- Subtle harmonic shifts that help change the color of the phrases.
- Texture is rich and full and continues in complexity through the first two pieces until the resolution of "Adieu"

Text Translation:**Rencontre**

J'étais triste et pensif quand je t'ai rencontrée,
 Je sens moins aujourd'hui
 mon obstiné tourment;
 Ô dis-moi, serais-tu la femme inespérée,
 Et le rêve idéal poursuivi vainement?

Ô, passante aux doux yeux,
 serais-tu donc l'amie
 Qui rendrait le bonheur au poète isolé,
 Et vas-tu rayonner sur mon âme affermie,
 Comme le ciel natal sur un coeur d'exilé?

Ta tristesse sauvage, à la mienne pareille,
 Aime à voir le soleil décliner sur la mer!
 Devant l'immensité ton extase s'éveille,
 Et le charme des soirs
 à ta belle âme est cher;

Une mystérieuse et douce sympathie
 Déjà m'enchaîne à toi comme un vivant lien,
 Et mon âme frémit, par l'amour envahie,
 Et mon coeur te chérit,
 sans te connaître bien!

Meeting

I was sad and pensive when I met you,
 I sense less today
 My persistent torment
 Tell, were you the girl I met by chance,
 The ideal dream I vainly sought?

A passer-by with gentle eyes,
 Were you the friend
 Who brought happiness to a lonely poet,
 And did you shine upon my vacant heart,
 Like the native sky on an exiled spirit?

Your shy sadness, so much like my own
 Loves to watch the sun set over the sea!
 Your delight awakened before it's immensity,
 And the evenings spent
 With your lovely soul are dear to me;

A mysterious and gentle sympathy
 Already binds me to you like a living bond;
 My soul trembles with overpowering love,
 And my heart cherishes you,
 Knowing you hardly at all!

General Interpretation or Comments:

This song cycle is about the cycle of love as if it happened all in one day. The first piece "Rencontre" translates to "Meeting". The text speaks about an individual who was sad, lost, and introverted, until they one day happen to meet this wonderful other. They are so enraptured by these new feelings that are so different from what they are normally feeling. There is definitely youthfulness in the text because we often associate love at first sight with those who are young and naïve and haven't become as cynical or jaded.

I think the speaker also feels they have found a kindred spirit, someone who was also lost until they met each other. It is unclear as to whether or not the speaker is in love from afar or if the person he has met returns his feelings. The emotional expression can only be taken so deeply since the entire affair only takes place within one day, how true can passion be when it is also so fickle and fleeting.

Composer: Gabriel Faure
Dates: 1845-1924
Birthplace: Pamiers, France
Period: Romantic

Toujours

Poet: Charles Grandmougin
Dates: 1850-1930

Vocal Range: F4-Ab5 Tessitura: F4-F5 Key: F minor

Pertinent Comments on the Vocal Line, Melody, and Text:

- Vocal line is quarter notes against triplets in the piano, giving the illusion of a slower more legato vocal line.
- Energy continuously builds towards the end of phrases before accenting and usually ending on a high note.
- Melody reflects the text through its fiery nature.
- Melody contains lots of high and often held notes, which are unusual in Fauré's works.
- Explosive, overtly dramatic, and emotive.
- Vocal line contains some larger intervallic leaps, used in an uncommon way compared to other works by Fauré.

Pertinent Comments About the Accompaniment and Harmony:

- Constantly shifting harmonies reflect the anger and despair of the text.
- The triplets are paced rapidly and evoke the image of fire/fames, lending to the fiery and angry mood of the piece.
- There is constant dissonance, often between the voice and piano that is always moving towards a resolution.
- The middle section features a series of modulations through a wide variety of major and minor keys using triads. These quick modulations give the energy necessary to paint the mood of desperation. As if the narrator is trying anything and everything to make her understand and reconsider.
- Texture is rich and full and continues in complexity through the first two pieces until the resolution of "Adieu"
- Moves from complex to simple. Simple ending on F minor triads may be foreshadowing the end of the relationship and *Toujours* relationship to *Adieu*.

Text Translation:**Toujours**

Vous me demandez de ma taire,
De fuir loin de vous pour jamais,
Et de m'en aller, solitaire,
Sans me rappeler qui j'aimais!

Demandez plutôt aux étoiles
De tomber dans l'immensité,
À la nuit de perdre ses voiles,
Au jour de perdre sa clarté,

Demandez à la mer immense
De dessécher ses vastes flots,
Et, quand les vents sont en démente,
D'apaiser ses sombres sanglots!

Mais n'espérez pas que mon âme
S'arrache à ses âpres douleurs
Et se dépouille de sa flamme
Comme le printemps de ses fleurs!

Always

You ask me to be quiet,
To flee from you forever to a distant place,
To depart alone,
Without thinking of the one whom I love!

You might more easily ask the stars
To fall from the sky,
Or the night to lift its veils,
Or the day to rid itself of its brightness,

Ask the immense ocean
To dry up its vast waters,
And, when the winds are raging dementedly,
Ask them to calm their dismal sobbing!

But do not hope that my soul
Can uproot its sorrow
And douse its flame
As springtime can shed its flowers!

General Interpretation or Comments:

This second piece explores the next part of the relationship and what has happened after the initial courting in *Rencontre*. I like to interpret this piece as the object of the narrator's affection having rebuffed him or questioning his affection for her. The text speaks of asking him to leave without thinking of her, so it would be a fair interpretation that this is his attempt to make her reconsider, and prove his love. There is anger and hints of desperation present throughout.

The title of this piece translates to "Always" or "Forever". This is their attempt to manipulate or persuade the object of their affection into believing that this passionate affair is for than something fleeting. They could make this last forever and always if only she would have him. Which makes the nature of the short affair, ended in *Adieu*, all the more ironic. You say "always" but that's never truly the case is it.

Composer: Gabriel Faure
Dates: 1845-1924
Birthplace: Pamiers, France
Period: Romantic

Adieu

Poet: Charles Grandmougin
Dates: 1850-1930

Vocal Range: F4-F5

Tessitura: F4-F5

Key: F Major

Pertinent Comments on the Vocal Line, Melody, and Text:

- Modified strophic form.
- Diatonic melody with simple harmonies.
- The calm and tranquil mood of the piece is reflected in the gently sweeping and curving vocal line.
- Vocal line is most quarter notes, keeping in line with the overall simplicity of the piece.
- Melody, vocal line, and accompaniment are all very reflective of the text and the irony it possesses.

Pertinent Comments About the Accompaniment and Harmony:

- Different from the first two pieces in that it is simple and less complex harmonically.
- Little to no dissonance.
- Simple modulation from f minor, to F Major, back to f minor.
- Quarter notes accompaniment like in the vocal line.
- Simplicity works well with the text. Everything has ended and the passion is gone all that is left to do is say goodbye once and for all.

Text Translation:**Adieu**

Comme tout meurt vite, la rose
 Déclose,
 Et les frais manteaux
 Diaprés des prés;
 Les longs soupirs, les bienaimées, fumées!

On voit dans ce monde léger changer,
 Plus vite que les flots des grèves, Nos rêves,
 Nos rêves,
 Plus vite que le givre en fleurs, Nos coeurs!

À vous l'on se croyait fidèle, cruelle,
 Mais hélas! les plus longs amours sont courts!
 Et je dis en quittant vos charmes,
 Sans larmes,
 Presqu'au moment de mon aveu, Adieu!

Farewell

Like everything that dies quickly,
 The blown rose
 The fresh multi-colored cloaks on the
 Meadows
 Long sighs, those we love, gone like smoke.

One sees in this frivolous world change,
 Quicker than the waves on the beach,
 Our dreams,
 Quicker than frost on the flowers, our hearts.

One believes oneself faithful to you, cruel,
 But alas! The longest of love affairs are short!
 And I say on quitting your charms,
 Without tears
 Close to the moment of my avowal, Adieu!

General Interpretation or Comments:

The final piece in the cycle is the ending of the relationship and the eventual parting of our narrator and his love. However, it is more accepting and peaceful than anything. Yes everything dies not because the world is cruel but simply because that is how things are. The world changes and so do people, so why bother getting upset with the inevitable.

The text mentions they will part without shedding tears, thus the melodies sweet and tranquil nature is appropriate. You would expect something more melodramatic and complex if the text was meant to be heavy with grief and melancholy for this lost love. “Adieu” translates into “farewell”, however in the French language this is the equivalent of “we will never see each other again”. That is why we more commonly hear French speakers say “au revoir” or “see you later”. The severity implied in this word choice gives the cycle an air of finality. There will be no more arguments, no more passion, and no more pleas. All they can do is say goodbye, knowing they may never see each other again.