

A Rosary Among the Roses:  
Tracing Pastoral Allusions and Spiritual Resonances in  
Chamber Music by Mel Bonis

by

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## Abstract

The French woman composer Mel Bonis (1858-1937) remains little known, despite a considerable oeuvre comprising over three hundred works in a variety of instrumental and vocal genres. Recent efforts to rediscover her life and work have resulted in new editions of scores, performances, and recordings of her work, as well as a biography, but few have even heard her name outside of her native France.

Although she lived through almost four decades of the twentieth century, Bonis' works invite analysis within the historical contexts of late nineteenth-century French nationalism and Romantic nostalgia. In addition to her cultural milieu, her own personal circumstances also left their traces. Bonis' strict Catholic upbringing led to internal conflicts with her religious identity throughout her adult life.

This thesis shows some of the ways in which Bonis responded to these national and individual circumstances. In particular, I analyze two of her *mélodies* for voice with piano – *Élégie sur le mode antique* (Op. 110, 1918) and *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* (Op. 55, 1901) – as well as her instrumental *Scènes de la forêt* (Op. 123, 1928) as case studies from Bonis' vast chamber music repertoire. I argue that Bonis' works are better understood when considered in relation to her life events, including her fraught relationship with her Catholic faith. I speculate that the influence of Bonis' Catholicism can be felt in her secular as well as sacred works. To this end, I propose new extensions of music analysis techniques that build on theories of harmony and of musical meaning. I situate my analytical approaches by drawing on literary ideas of the pastoral and on the fin-de-siècle French historical context for the kind of nostalgia that is inherent in the pastoral sensibility.

I hope that my work will provide a new way of understanding the complex relationships between music and religious identity in late nineteenth-century France, and that this work will help to make Mel Bonis and her music more accessible to Anglophone readers and listeners.

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## Introduction

Described in 1881 by her professors at the Paris Conservatoire as “the strongest student in the class,” the composer Mel Bonis (1858-1937) is surprisingly little known. Given that her classmates included Claude Debussy, Gabriel Pierné, and Ernest Chausson, this was indeed high praise.<sup>1</sup> Her obscurity is all the more puzzling given her considerable oeuvre: over three hundred works in a variety of instrumental and vocal genres. Recent efforts to rediscover Bonis’ life and work have resulted in new editions of scores, performances, and recordings of her works, the publication of the first biography, and the foundation of an *Association Mel Bonis* all within the last twenty years, but the composer remains little known, especially outside of her native France. In addition to the large amount of music she left behind, Bonis’ life story also sets her apart from other composers of her era, as compared to both the men and women composers of fin-de-siècle France. Raised by working parents who did not encourage her music, Bonis continued to face challenges in her adulthood, including an arranged marriage to a man she did not love, the responsibility of raising eight children, a clandestine love affair resulting in the secret birth of an illegitimate child, and a conflicted relationship with her Catholic religious identity and faith.

This thesis suggests that the relative neglect of Bonis and her music might be attributed in part to her “failure” to conform to the teutonic and modernist ideals of

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<sup>1</sup> See Christine Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 2ème édition, Univers Musical (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 2009), 36, 38. Though some might wonder, given the practice of separating certain Conservatoire courses by gender at this time, whether or not Bonis would have been in classes with her famous male contemporaries, Conservatoire class rosters show that Mel Bonis was in some of the same classes as Debussy. They had accompaniment and composition classes together with Auguste Bazille; the pertinent Conservatoire class rosters are reprinted in John R. Clevenger, “Debussy’s Paris Conservatoire Training,” in *Debussy and His World*, ed. Jane F. Fulcher (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 312-313. In addition, Géliot notes that Bonis often visited organ classes unofficially, and likely would have been in contact with her male contemporaries on more informal terms, in addition to the classes they did have together.

some of her critics, both during and after her lifetime. While some of her contemporaries, such as Debussy, were eager to dramatically break down existing formal and harmonic conventions, Bonis remained wary of innovation merely for the sake of newness, preferring to follow her own sense of good musical taste: she wrote that “[t]he fear of banality is a kind of nonsense that has cost very gifted artists the loss of their true personality” and that “novelty...is a virtue that is distinct from value.”<sup>2</sup>

It could be precisely because Mel Bonis was wary of newness for its own sake that her compositions – while, in fact, quite innovative and original – do not compromise her own sense of good taste. For Bonis, novelty was always relative, as captured by her statement that “works of art can only ceaselessly tend toward an ideal perfection that is always evasive.”<sup>3</sup> Bonis’ work, while indebted to the influences of music that came before her, is nonetheless original and reflective of the composer’s own stylistic and aesthetic choices. Further, as I will argue, Bonis’ music may best be considered within the context of her life events, and particularly in relation to her struggle with her Catholic religious identity. Bonis’ unique musical contributions and life circumstances, I argue, make her an important and interesting figure in music history deserving of more scholarly attention than she has yet received. In addition,

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Dorothea Schenck, “*Très douée, bonne musicienne*” : *die französische Komponistin Mel Bonis (1858-1937)* (Oldenburg: BIS, Bibliotheks-und Informationssystem der Univer, 2005), 61-62. (“*La peur de la banalité est une sottise qui a coûté à des artistes bien doués la perte de leur vraie personnalité.*”; “*La nouveauté...est un mérite distinct de la valeur.*”) All translations in this thesis are mine unless otherwise indicated. Schenck takes these quotes from a collection of Bonis’ writings compiled under the title *Les souvenirs et réflexions de Mel Bonis*, of which the only two surviving copies are currently held by the Association Mel Bonis in Les-Alluets-le-Roi, France.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 63. (“... *les oeuvres d’art ne font que tendre sans cesse à une perfection idéale qui se dérobe toujours. Il est permis de chercher le mieux et par conséquent le nouveau, ce à quoi les génies s’évertuent.*”)

Bonis exemplifies certain musical trends that lead me to theorize potential spiritual resonances even in her secular works.

*Reviving Mel Bonis and her music: A Rationale*

Scholars have recently become interested in rediscovering the music of forgotten women composers, including studies of some French women composers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Recent dissertations, articles, and books have focused on Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944), Louise Farrenc (1804-1875), Loïsa Puget (1810-1889), and Augusta Holmès (1847-1903), among others.<sup>4</sup> However, and as I will show, Mel Bonis' life and work set her apart from many of her *compositrice* contemporaries.

As interest in history's forgotten women emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, some feminist writers have cautioned against potentially problematic methodologies in scholarship on these figures. Most notably, they have warned that attempts to assess "greatness" may neglect the social, historical, and cultural contexts that surrounded – and often worked against – these women. While these critics certainly agree that women's stories deserve research and retelling, they argue that these figures cannot be understood without knowledge of their historical and social contexts.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Florence Launay, *Les compositrices en France au XIXème siècle* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2006); Bea Friedland, "Louise Farrenc, 1804-1875: Composer-Performer-Scholar" (City University of New York, 1975); Jann Pasler, "The Ironies of Gender, or Virility and Politics in the Music of Augusta Holmès," in *Writing through Music: Essays on Music, Culture, and Politics* (Cary, GB: Oxford University Press USA, 2007), 213–48; and Sun-Young Oh, "The Piano Works of Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944)" (D.M.A. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music, 2000).

The art historian Linda Nochlin, for example, in a 1971 essay entitled “Why have there been no great women artists?”, criticizes scholars who, in their efforts to assert women’s potential for artistic *greatness*, “dig up examples of insufficiently appreciated women artists throughout history...to rehabilitate modest, if interesting and productive careers.”<sup>5</sup> While Nochlin agrees that the work of bringing attention to previously neglected women artists is “well worth the effort,” she argues that even to question the lack of great women artists fails to take into account the institutional oppression and exclusion that women historically have faced. Nochlin was a pioneer in showing that narratives of individual “genius” or “greatness” are themselves problematic as they privilege men, who did not face the sexist discrimination that prevented women from even accessing technical training and institutional support. As is now widely recognized, Nochlin explains, the canon of supposedly *great* artists constitutes a club with a strong male bias.<sup>6</sup>

Nochlin argues, “things remain stultifying, oppressive, and discouraging to all those – women included – who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, Nochlin asserts that those who rely on examples of neglected women’s artistic productivity to prove that these female figures deserve the status of “greatness” have failed to consider the structural oppression that has hindered their success and fame, as compared to their male counterparts. Indeed, she writes that it is a “miracle” that women have made any

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<sup>5</sup> This essay, begun in 1971 and first published in the art magazine ARTNews, was revised and published in 1973 as the first of a collection of essays on the subject of women in the arts: Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” in *Art and Sexual Politics: Women’s Liberation, Women Artists, and Art History*, ed. Thomas B. Hess, and Elizabeth C. Baker (New York: MacMillan, 1973), 1–39, on 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

progress at all in the face of the “overwhelming odds” against them, which have longstanding roots in the “institutions and education” enforced by societal norms.<sup>8</sup> Art historians, according to Nochlin, who neglect these important historical, cultural, and sociological contexts thereby fail in their studies of these women, despite the feminist intentions that often underlie their work.

The late composer, accordionist, and experimental music pioneer Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016) tackled a similar problem from a musical perspective in an article that appeared in the *New York Times* in 1970, which she very powerfully entitled, “And Don’t Call Them ‘Lady’ Composers.”<sup>9</sup> Like Nochlin, Oliveros presents the question, “Why have there been no ‘great’ women composers?” and concludes that “[t]he answer is no mystery” given the historical institutions and gender role expectations that effectively relegate women to domestic work and subservience to men.<sup>10</sup> Oliveros also criticizes problematic attempts to discover forgotten women’s compositional “greatness.” Oliveros encourages all people to participate in musical creation as a means of communication and expression, regardless of whether or not they achieve “great composer” status: she explains, “critics do a great deal of damage by wishing to discover ‘greatness.’ It does not matter that not all composers are great composers; it matters that this activity be encouraged among all the population, that we communicate with each other in non

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 6. From the world of visual art, Nochlin gives the example of the exclusion of women art students from classes that involved work with nude models through much of the nineteenth century, a time when the technique of painting and drawing nude figures was considered an essential part of an artist’s training, and the nude a highly respected visual art genre. She discusses this particular type of institutional exclusion on pages 24-25 of her essay.

<sup>9</sup> This article – which preceded Nochlin’s essay by about three months – was later printed in a collection of Oliveros’ writings called *Software for People*: Pauline Oliveros, “And Don’t Call Them ‘Lady’ Composers,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80* (Baltimore, MD: Smith Publications, 1984), 47–51.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 47.

destructive ways. Women composers are very often dismissed as minor or light-weight talents on the basis of one work by critics who have never examined their scores or waited for later developments.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, Oliveros argues, women and their work are worthy of careful study, even if it does not make sense to project ideas of “greatness” onto female figures who have been historically marginalized. With the aim of having women composers be taken seriously, Oliveros criticizes the “cute or condescending language” that leads some writers to label these women as “lady composer[s]” and asserts that “self-respecting women composers” have every right to find this terminology problematic and offensive.<sup>12</sup>

Nochlin similarly criticizes those who propose “a different kind of greatness for women’s art than for men’s” by attempting to base their studies on “a distinctive and recognizable feminine style.”<sup>13</sup> For Nochlin, women artists and writers throughout history show more commonalities with others from their time period – regardless of gender – than they do as a group of women, eliminating the possibility of an innately *feminine* artistic style.<sup>14</sup> She cites examples of women artists who have been able to succeed, either through their connections to influential men, or – starting in the late nineteenth century – through their own independent efforts, though not without difficulties. Although she labels these remarkable independent women as “successes,” Nochlin insists that these women possessed “a certain unconventionality” and succeeded “only by adopting, however covertly, the ‘masculine’ attributes of single-mindedness, concentration, tenaciousness, and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>13</sup> Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

absorption in ideas and craftsmanship for their own sake.”<sup>15</sup> As I will show, this claim is especially pertinent in considering Mel Bonis and her compositional career.

Oliveros calls upon men to “seek out women and encourage them in all professional fields.”<sup>16</sup> She insists that “[l]ibraries of women’s music should be established.”<sup>17</sup> And finally, in her discussion of the future of scholarship on women composers, Oliveros proclaims, “critics can quit being cute and start studying scores.”<sup>18</sup>

Mindful of the cautions Oliveros and Nochlin present, I do not see the recent research on Mel Bonis as a problematic case of praising a forgotten but minor female figure; rather, it represents an exciting discovery of the life of a remarkable – and highly productive – composer, her music, and her life history, which does include her status as a woman and the associated difficulties that faced her.

I will not search for musical *femininity* in Bonis’ work, and I will not make claims about Bonis as a composer that neglect her social circumstances. Rather, in thinking critically about my approach to studying Mel Bonis and her music, I aim to consider her as a composer in her own right. This includes categorizing her among both her male and female compositional contemporaries, rather than unfairly relegating her to the realm of “lady composers”.

Nonetheless, the demands on her as a woman (daughter, wife, lover, and mother, variously) make Bonis’ large compositional output even more impressive, especially given the oppressive institutions that made music composition particularly

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>16</sup> Oliveros, “And Don’t Call Them ‘Lady’ Composers,” 49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 49.



difficult for women. At the same time, I acknowledge the importance of the masculine contributions that enabled Bonis' success. For example, it was Bonis' relationship with Amédée Hettich, her lover, that enabled her to make valuable contacts with musicians and music publishers who performed and sold editions of her works; it was thanks to Albert Domange, her wealthy husband, that Bonis had the financial means to frequent concert halls and spend leisure time playing the piano and composing music throughout her adult life; and it was because of the masculinized pseudonym "Mel" that Bonis was able to have her works readily published and performed. I believe these realities are important to keep in mind while undertaking work that contributes to the rediscovery of Bonis, or of any seemingly "forgotten" woman composer. The impressive and interesting body of work Bonis produced is worthy of careful study on account of her exceptional musical and compositional skills. Bonis' remarkable life story further serves to emphasize her importance, and it gives me great delight to be part of the recent efforts to better understand her life and work.

Though efforts to rediscover Mel Bonis' music have been ongoing since the late 1990s, she is not very well known outside of her native France; especially in America, and throughout the Anglophone world, Bonis remains virtually unknown. The two currently existing biographies of Bonis are written in French and German,<sup>19</sup> and most English-language writing on Bonis is relatively short, lacking the detail and breadth of these French and German sources.<sup>20</sup> With this study, I hope to contribute to

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<sup>19</sup> See Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*. (In French); and Schenck, "*Très douée, bonne musicienne*" : *die französische Komponistin Mel Bonis (1858-1937)*. (In German).

<sup>20</sup> Jenna Daum's D.M.A. dissertation on Bonis' flute music, for example, provides a brief introduction to Bonis to contextualize her flute music but does not go into as much depth as other French and

Anglophone knowledge of Mel Bonis, making her music and life story more accessible to English-speaking readers, performers, and researchers.

Notwithstanding the existing biographies, Mel Bonis' music itself has not been analyzed in detail in any language. The American flutist Jenna Daum's D.M.A. dissertation on six of Bonis' flute works examines these pieces, but her analysis focuses on description and performance suggestions.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, an article by Géliot provides a great summary of the vastness and variety of Bonis' oeuvre but does not undertake close analytical study of particular works.<sup>22</sup> One aim of this study is to provide the first detailed analyses of chamber works by Bonis, to shed light on this important but currently little known composer.

My study will draw on established analysis methodologies that are pertinent to the music of fin-de-siècle France, examining harmony, form, and topical references in Bonis' work. At the same time, I believe that Bonis' music can best be understood within the contexts of Bonis' own life and of French history and culture in the late nineteenth century. In particular, my study will examine how Bonis' music can be understood in relation to her Catholicism, and how traces of the composer's complicated relationship with her religious identity may manifest themselves in her music, whether or not consciously intended.

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German sources: see Jenna Daum, "Mel Bonis: Six Works for Flute and Piano" (Arizona State University, 2013). In addition, the Grove Music Online article on Mel Bonis is quite short, and misrepresents Bonis' childhood, claiming that she began piano lessons at a short age, which is false: see Judy Tsou, "Bonis, Mélanie," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.*, accessed April 18, 2017. Bonis also receives a two-page summary in Susan Hayes' dissertation surveying fin-de-siècle flute and vocal music, but this information about Bonis is brief: see Susan Nanette Hayes, "Chamber Music in France Featuring Flute and Soprano, 1850-1950, and a Study of the Interactions Among the Leading Flutists, Sopranos, Composers, Artists, and Literary Figures of the Time" (University of Maryland, 2006), 354-355.

<sup>21</sup> Daum, "Mel Bonis: Six Works for Flute and Piano."

<sup>22</sup> Christine Géliot, "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis, French Woman Composer, 1858-1937," *Journal of Singing: The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing* 64, no. 1 (September 2007): 47-57.

Like many of her contemporaries, Bonis wrote sacred and liturgical music, but interestingly, traces of her Catholicism are also evident in her secular works. Though others have considered the complex relationships between music and religious identity, as I will show, existing studies have largely neglected to examine how a religious subtext might be evident in the non-sacred work of a composer whose life story indicates religion as an important and influential force. In the analytical case studies presented here, my goal is not only to elucidate interesting musical aspects of this composer's chamber works, but also to propose a new method of reading her Catholicism in this music, thereby extending music theory methodologies in new ways. In particular, I will focus on techniques of nostalgia through pastoral modes, medievalist allusions, and harmonic dualisms, which leads to speculation about spiritual resonances in the selected case studies.

### *Chapter summaries*

Chapter 1 introduces Mel Bonis and discusses the current state of knowledge about the composer. Following relevant historiographical information, a biographical introduction will highlight unique and remarkable aspects of Bonis' life. I argue that Bonis' particular life circumstances, including her family's social class and her Catholicism, as well as the current lack of detailed analyses of her work, make her chamber music especially interesting as a subject of analytical study.

Chapter 2 provides relevant historical contexts and current theoretical approaches to late-nineteenth century chamber music; I propose the methodologies that can best elucidate interesting aspects of Bonis' music and the musical traces of

her Catholicism, drawing on work in the fields of historical musicology and music theory. Specifically, I place Bonis' music into the closely related contexts of French Romanticism, nationalism, and medievalist nostalgia; my aim is to link these cultural phenomena to Bonis' work and their manifestation in her self-expression, using certain topical references and modes of musical signification.

The music analysis techniques I employ draw on established methods of identifying nostalgia in music, of understanding harmonic ambiguity, and of examining musical topical references in Romantic music. The chapters that follow (Chapters 3 and 4) present representative case studies from Mel Bonis' chamber music repertoire that are especially well-suited to these kinds of analysis. Following studies of Bonis' *melodies*, *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* (1901) and *Élégie sur le mode antique* (1918), for mezzo-soprano voice and piano, I examine her instrumental *Scènes de la forêt* (1928). I believe that these case studies best exemplify Bonis' uses of musical nostalgia, pastoral allusions, and remarkable harmonic chromaticisms, which are congruent with their historical and cultural contexts. I also argue for an interpretation of these secular works that draws on Bonis' difficult relationship with her Catholicism.

## Chapter 1: Background and Historiography

*Mel Bonis est une personnalité complexe. L'écriture est double .... Sainte et pécheresse, désespérée et folle de joie, Mel Bonis ne se sent pas en conformité avec l'image idéale d'elle-même.*

*Mel Bonis is a complex figure. Her writing is double.... Saint and sinner, desperate and mad with joy, Mel Bonis does not feel that she conforms to the ideal image of herself.*

— Christine Géliot<sup>23</sup>

Though the music of Mélanie Hélène Bonis, known by the pseudonym “Mel” Bonis, showcases her compositional skill and can be analyzed on purely musical terms, I believe further insights can be gained by considering Bonis’ works within the historical contexts of her life events and of fin-de-siècle France. Bonis is a remarkable figure with regards both to her life story and the fact that she was only recently rediscovered despite leaving behind a large set of works that received high praise from her teachers, contemporaries, and listeners. This chapter provides a biographical overview of the aspects of Mel Bonis’ life that best inform my analyses of her work, and also reviews the current state of knowledge about this surprisingly little-known composer. Mel Bonis’ biographer and great-granddaughter Christine Géliot distinguishes between compositions that “express the torment of her soul” and those that are more “light, ... written with pleasure.”<sup>24</sup> I argue that both types of works need to be read within the context of the composer’s life story, and her fraught relationship with her Catholic faith.

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<sup>23</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 89-90.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90. (“*qui expriment le tourment de son âme,*” and “*légères, ...écrites avec plaisir.*”)

*Historiography: the recent (re)discovery of Mel Bonis*

After Mel Bonis' death in 1937, her work remained mostly forgotten until the late 1990s, when her descendants began serious efforts to study her life and work. They began this work following an inquiry in 1997 from the German cellist Eberhard Mayer, who contacted Bonis' granddaughter Yvette Domange wanting to learn more about the composer.<sup>25</sup> Mayer had seen her B-flat quartet in a collection of chamber music and was eager to learn more about its unknown writer. After ten years of unsuccessful inquiries to publishers and archives, Mayer turned to Bonis' own descendants in a last attempt to find more information.<sup>26</sup> His interest led Bonis' heirs to begin the process of researching her life and sorting through the old scores and manuscripts that had been taking up space in relatives' basements for years.<sup>27</sup> Since then, research on Bonis and her music has led to the publication of several scores, some in new editions, and others published posthumously for the first time. This work is ongoing – indeed, a new and previously unpublished Bonis score, the *Symphonie Burlesque* (Op. 181 posthumous) for “*instruments ludiques*” including toy percussion and wind instruments, was just released in September 2016.<sup>28</sup>

Efforts to reconstruct Bonis' life story have also caused interesting pieces of information about her to come to light for the first time; it wasn't until the late 1990s, for example, that the secret birth of Bonis' illegitimate child, named Madeleine, was revealed publicly in the biography written by her great-granddaughter Christine

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<sup>25</sup> Christine Géliot, “Mel Bonis,” *Traversières magazine*, First 2004, 33.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 34. and Géliot, “Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis, French Woman Composer, 1858-1937,” 47-49.

<sup>28</sup> The *Association Mel Bonis* posted the news of this publication on their website in September 2016 at the following address: <http://www.mel-bonis.com/actualite.htm#sb>

Gélot. Before the publication of this book, Madeleine's status as Bonis' daughter had remained a secret within the family.

But despite efforts to put on performances of Bonis' music and publish scores and recordings, the composer still remains relatively unknown outside of her native France, and hard to access by Anglophone scholars and listeners. Musical analysis of her work has not hitherto featured prominently in the scholarship on Mel Bonis. My thesis presents case studies that have not yet been analyzed in detail, proposing new extensions of current music analysis techniques to these works and, more generally, to Mel Bonis' oeuvre.

### *Biographical sources*

Most of the information available about Mel Bonis' life story relies on Christine Gélot's biography, which was translated into German by Ingrid Mayer, the wife of the cellist Eberhard.<sup>29</sup> Gélot acknowledges that her writing cannot be considered completely impartial: she explains that she found it "difficult...to conform to the strict rules of biography practiced by musicologists" and that she "gave in to the temptation to set [her] characters in scenes in order to make this work at once the story of a life that deeply moved [her] and the study of an oeuvre and of its conception."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gélot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*. Published in German translation as: Christine Gélot, *Mel Bonis: Leben Und Werk Einer Außergewöhnlichen Frau Und Komponistin*, trans. Ingrid Mayer (Kassel: Furore Verlag, 2015). Gélot drew on Bonis' own writings for information, as well as documents from Bonis' family members and stories passed down orally among descendants.

<sup>30</sup> Gélot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*, 19. ("difficile...de me conformer aux règles strictes de la biographie telle qu'elle est pratiquée par les musicologues", "j'ai cédé à la tentation de mettre mes personnages en situation pour faire de cet ouvrage le récit d'une vie qui m'a bouleversée en même temps que l'étude d'une oeuvre et de sa conception.") Daum also notes this

Indeed, chapters in Géliot's biography alternate between biographical writing, with clear citations and facts, and imagined narrative vignettes (titled "*Imaginons*")<sup>31</sup> intended to help the reader (and, perhaps, the writer) better understand and relate to Mélanie Bonis. Géliot ends the book with an imagined scene of Bonis joining God and several deceased family members in heaven, who sing her Mass together.<sup>32</sup>

A 2005 biography by Dorothea Schenck, in German, also presents a study of the composer and her life, building on Géliot's text and drawing on quotations from Bonis' writings to support claims about her life, her work, her philosophy and aesthetic.<sup>33</sup> Schenck's biography is organized more thematically than chronologically, with chapters dedicated to Bonis' writing for particular instruments, as well as subjects such as "nature" and "religion."<sup>34</sup>

Several of Mel Bonis' writings, compiled as the *Souvenirs et réflexions de Mel Bonis*, were published in 1974 by Éditions du Nant d'Enfer; today, only two copies of this text exist, both of which are held by the *Association Mel Bonis* in France.<sup>35</sup> Géliot also edited a collection of letters received by Mel Bonis,<sup>36</sup> including correspondence from the composer Charles Koechlin (1867-1950), the flutist Louis Fleury (1878-1926), the composer and eventual Paris Conservatoire director

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inability to be completely unbiased in Géliot's writing: see Daum, "Mel Bonis: Six Works for Flute and Piano."

<sup>31</sup> Meaning, "let's imagine," the first-person plural imperative form.

<sup>32</sup> Specifically, Géliot describes these "characters" singing the *Gloria* from Bonis' *Messe à la sérénité*: Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*, 278-282.

<sup>33</sup> Schenck, "*Très douée, bonne musicienne*": *die französische Komponistin Mel Bonis (1858-1937)*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> As I learned through email correspondence with Christine Géliot in 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Christine Géliot, ed., *Correspondance choisie de Mel Bonis*, Série "Correspondance" (Les amis de la musique française, 2007).



Théodore Dubois (1837-1924), the composer Charlotte Sohy (1887-1955), and Bonis' own daughter Madeleine.<sup>37</sup>

Bonis' grandson Michel Domange authored a 1990 book entitled *Ah! mes aïeux*, which traces the Domange family's history through stories of his ancestors and their interactions with notable figures including Émile Zola and Alexandre Dumas.<sup>38</sup> He notes that “the lady of the house was the composer Mel Bonis” and that, in his memories of visits to his grandparents' home, “[her] music sufficed to characterize the ambiance, in the way that particular smells generally do.”<sup>39</sup> According to Domange, Camille Saint-Saëns, Gabriel Fauré, and Gabriel Pierné all praised Bonis' work.<sup>40</sup> Domange provides a brief biographical overview of Bonis, placing emphasis on her career as a pianist and composer.<sup>41</sup> But for Domange, this description of Bonis was but a small part of the larger project of tracing his family's history.

Géliot also published articles in the French Flute Association's journal (*Traversières*) and the *Journal of Singing* (an American publication) that provide brief biographical information on Bonis and introduce readers to some of her compositions through brief descriptions.<sup>42</sup> Géliot is also the current (and first) president of the *Association Mel Bonis*, which she runs from her home in Les-Alluets-

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Michel Domange, *Ah! Mes aïeux--: 1830-1945, Alexandre Dumas, Emile Zola, Marcel Pagnol, Jean Renoir ... et d'autres moins connus, mais non moins pittoresques vus au fil d'une chronique familiale* (Évian: Éditions du Nant d'Enfer, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 31-37. (“*La maîtresse de la maison, c'est le compositeur Mel Bonis*” and “*sa musique suffisait à caractériser l'ambiance, comme généralement y suffisent certaines odeurs particulières.*”)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Géliot, “Mel Bonis”; Géliot, “Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis, French Woman Composer, 1858-1937.”

le-Roi in north-central France; the *Association* publishes a regular bulletin, organizes concerts of Bonis' music, and owns several of Bonis' manuscripts and letters.<sup>43</sup>

Like her great-grandmother, Géliot is a pianist and studied at the Paris Conservatoire. She currently teaches piano at the Conservatoire d'Asnières-sur-Seine and also gives private lessons out of her home studio, where a portrait of Mel Bonis by Charles Auguste Corbineau hangs prominently on the wall of the *salle d'audition*<sup>44</sup>:



**Figure 1:** Photograph of the *salle d'audition* of Christine Géliot's house, published on the *Association Mel Bonis* website

In addition, Géliot and Eberhard Mayer have both written notes to accompany Bonis scores.<sup>45</sup> Eberhard and Ingrid Mayer eventually founded the Ensemble Mel Bonis in Germany, a group comprised of six musicians dedicated to performing and promoting Bonis' music.

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<sup>43</sup> As I have learned through email correspondence with Christine Géliot, who wrote to me that the Association holds "all kinds of very interesting Mel Bonis archives, letters, photos, a painting, old scores, etc" ("*toutes sortes d'archives de Mel Bonis très intéressantes, lettres, photos, tableau, partitions anciennes etc*")

<sup>44</sup> This photo appears on the website of the *Association Mel Bonis* at the following address (accessed March 16, 2017): <http://www.mel-bonis.com/coursplano.html>

<sup>45</sup> As in, for example Mel Bonis, *Les mélodies, Volumes I, II, et III*, ed. Christine Géliot (Paris: Éditions Fortin-Armiane, 2013) and *Scènes de la forêt pour flûte, cor en fa, et piano* (Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 2001). French notes accompanying these scores are by Géliot, with German notes by Eberhard Mayer.

*Publishers of Bonis' music*

During Bonis' lifetime, her works were published by the French publishers Leduc, Demets, and Hachette while the Italian publisher Vittorio Carrara published her organ works.<sup>46</sup> In recent years, new editions of Bonis' scores have been published by Éditions Fortin-Armiane, by the German publisher Furore Verlag (a publisher dedicated to the works of women composers), and by the German Edition Kossack. Many of these works were published for the first time after Bonis' death, despite evidence that many were performed – and praised – during her lifetime.<sup>47</sup> This provides evidence of practical challenges that particularly affected women composers.

*Recent interest in Mel Bonis*

Recent writings attest to a contemporary interest in the rediscovery of Mel Bonis. In 1999, Véronique François completed the first Master's-level thesis on Mel Bonis at the Université Paris-Sorbonne.<sup>48</sup> The French singer and researcher Florence Launay includes Bonis in a book on French women composers of the nineteenth century and published an article in German on Mel Bonis as part of an essay

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<sup>46</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*, 66, 135-6, 158, 265-6.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>48</sup> See Véronique François, "Mel Bonis (1858-1937) : une vocation de compositrice contrariée" (Mémoire de maîtrise, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1999).

collection on women composers.<sup>49</sup> There is a brief entry on Bonis in Joël-Marie Fauquet's *Dictionnaire de la musique en France au XIXe siècle*.<sup>50</sup>

Though she is best known in her native France, American writers are beginning to take interest in Mel Bonis as well. Jenna Daum, for example, examines six Bonis works for flute and piano in a D.M.A. thesis, focusing on performance-related concerns but also highlighting interesting aspects of the composer's life story and late-Romantic compositional style.<sup>51</sup> Susan Hayes likewise provides brief information on some of Bonis' chamber music for flute and other instruments.<sup>52</sup> Mary Frech McVicker devotes a section to Mel Bonis in her *Women Composers of Classical Music: 369 biographies through the mid-20th century*.<sup>53</sup> Given this increased attention over the last fifteen years, we might speculate that Bonis will soon be better recognized in the U.S. I hope, in my thesis, to contribute to this trend.

#### *A biographical introduction to Mélanie Bonis*

Mélanie Hélène Bonis was born in Paris on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1858 to lower-middle-class working parents, who raised her and her sister in their apartment in the fourth arrondissement.<sup>54</sup> Unlike many other French composers of her time, young Mélanie did not receive any musical encouragement from her parents. Though the

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<sup>49</sup> See Launay, *Les compositrices en France au XIXème siècle* and Florence Launay, "Mel Bonis (1858-1937)" in *Annäherung, an Sieben Komponistinnen: Mit Berichten, Interviews Und Selbstdarstellungen* (Kassel: Furore Verlag, 2001), 58–78.

<sup>50</sup> Joël-Marie Fauquet, *Dictionnaire de la musique en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> Daum, "Mel Bonis: Six Works for Flute and Piano."

<sup>52</sup> Hayes, "Chamber Music in France Featuring Flute and Soprano, 1850-1950, and a Study of the Interactions Among the Leading Flutists, Sopranos, Composers, Artists, and Literary Figures of the Time."

<sup>53</sup> Mary Frech McVicker, *Women Composers of Classical Music: 369 Biographies through the Mid-20th Century* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 100.

<sup>54</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*, 27. and Domange, *Ah! Mes aïeux*, 33. There was also a third Bonis sister who died at the age of two.

family owned a piano, the Bonis parents never intended for their daughter to study music or become a composer; they believed Mélanie was destined for work as a seamstress and marriage to a suitable husband.<sup>55</sup>

Following what must have been a natural musical curiosity, Bonis remained a self-taught pianist until the age of twelve, when a family friend finally convinced her parents to let her begin piano lessons, arguing that musical ability might make Mélanie a more desirable wife.<sup>56</sup> Bonis ultimately entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1876 at the age of 18, where her professors included Ernest Guiraud (1837-1892), Auguste Bazille (1828-1891), and César Franck (1822-1890).<sup>57</sup> As noted above, Bonis' teachers had great respect for her work. She won an honorable mention in harmony in her second year (1877), a second prize in accompaniment two years later (1879), and a first prize in harmony the following year (1880).<sup>58</sup> Guiraud even described Bonis as “among those students whom one can only ever praise.”<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, she was held back by what her teachers described as “fear”: a report card from 1881 describes Bonis as “the strongest student in the class, but fear paralyzes her.”<sup>60</sup>

It is intriguing to speculate what was meant by fear, beyond the usual nerves, insecurity, and performance anxiety. That same year, Bonis began to sign her works as a composer with the shortened name of “Mel” Bonis as her pseudonym, apparently

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<sup>55</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 30-31.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 31. and Domange, *Ah! mes Aïeux*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 33-36. Though Bonis was not officially enrolled in Franck's organ course, evidence demonstrates that she attended his classes, which Géliot shows. A quotation from Bonis' writings in which she mentions Franck's teachings also appears in Dorothea Schenck, *“Très douée, bonne musicienne” : die französische Komponistin Mel Bonis (1858-1937)* (Oldenburg: BIS, Bibliotheks-und Informationssystem der Univer, 2005), 63.

<sup>58</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 36, 38, 40.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. (“*de celles auxquelles on n'a jamais que des éloges à faire*”)

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* (“*la plus forte de la classe mais la peur la paralyse.*”)

hoping that her music would be taken more seriously with a less feminine-sounding name attached to it.<sup>61</sup> But in November 1881, Bonis was forced to leave the Conservatoire by her parents, who disapproved of her romantic relationship with a classmate, the singer and music critic Amédée Landely Hettich (1856-1937).<sup>62</sup> Following her parents' wishes, in 1883, Bonis married a man twenty-two years her senior, the wealthy businessman Albert Domange (1836-1918), raised his five children from a previous marriage, and gave birth to three more of his children, while continuing her musical career.<sup>63</sup>

Bonis encountered Hettich again in Paris sometime during the late 1880s.<sup>64</sup> Though the details are not well known, Géliot speculates that Bonis must have seen the articles he published in the periodical *L'Art musical*, and that the two likely met again at one of the Parisian concert halls or musical events that they would have both frequented, for social as well as musical reasons. Through his work as a music critic, Hettich was well connected, and introduced Bonis to publishers and musicians he knew, including Alphonse Leduc, who eventually published several of Bonis' pieces and enthusiastically encouraged her as a composer.<sup>65</sup> The two also began to collaborate regularly on musical projects; Hettich would give Bonis poems to set to music as *mélodies*, and Bonis would play piano as an accompanist for Hettich and his students in rehearsals.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 49-59.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 66, 81, 135.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 79.

In addition to their musical collaborations, Hettich and Bonis eventually resumed the romance that had begun in their Conservatoire years, even though both were, at this point, married to other people.<sup>67</sup> Though the exact details regarding their relationship remain vague, we know that their affair began in the early 1890s, a period that corresponds to a time when Bonis started composing more seriously, writing and publishing music more, and faster, than before, even as the Domange family grew larger and likely required more of Bonis' time and energy.<sup>68</sup> Géliot also notes that this forbidden romance troubled Bonis' conscience and that she regularly confessed to a Catholic *directeur de conscience* at a Parisian church in her effort to deal with her conflicting feelings about the musical and romantic aspects of her relationship with Hettich.<sup>69</sup>

This clandestine love affair between Bonis and Hettich ultimately resulted in the secret birth in 1899 of a child, Madeleine, whose status as Mel Bonis' daughter first publicly came to light in 2000.<sup>70</sup> After becoming pregnant at the age of 41, Bonis managed to hide the pregnancy from her entire family. Nonetheless, her family did notice that she was sick and seemed depressed. Eventually, Bonis went into hiding, telling her family that she was seeking medical treatment in Switzerland when she was actually living alone with a former servant. Though the details of where Bonis was living are not fully known, there is a record of Madeleine's birth in Paris on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1899 in the presence of both Bonis and Hettich; on her birth

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 88-90.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 84. Géliot does not cite a source for the description she gives of Bonis' visits to the *directeur de conscience*, but I am assuming that existing documents and information have allowed her to deduce that this is true.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. Géliot notes on the back cover of the book that her biography is revealing this secret publicly for the first time.

certificate, Madeleine's name is given as Madeleine Verger and her parents are not named.<sup>71</sup> She was raised, until the age of fourteen, by the family of a former maid of the Domange household.<sup>72</sup>

Though the details of Madeleine's childhood are not well known, accounts from family members and surviving documents indicate that Hettich and, later, Bonis both began regularly visiting Madeleine and her adoptive parents, introducing themselves to her as "godparents."<sup>73</sup> A collection of Madeleine's memoirs entitled "Histoire d'un berger pas comme les autres" survives in her descendants' archives, and Géliot draws heavily on this text to reconstruct the events of Madeleine's life. In her descriptions of Mélanie's visits, Madeleine notes that Bonis "made a strong impression" on her, and that Bonis was both "surprised" and "very happy" to learn that Madeleine loved music.<sup>74</sup> Like her mother, Madeleine eventually went on to study the piano, and the Conservatoire professor Isidore Philipp (1863-1958) eventually became her teacher.<sup>75</sup>

When Madeleine's adoptive mother died in 1914, her "godparents" Hettich and Bonis continued to stay in contact with her and offer support. Bonis eventually invited Madeleine on a vacation with the Domange family to their chateau in Etretat. In the midst of the First World War, an orphaned child probably attracted less attention on a family vacation than might have been the case during times of peace,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 120-122.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 174. ("*faisait sur moi une forte impression*"; "*très surprise*", "*très contente*")

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 176.



but the emotional burden of the secret must have been considerable, as only Hettich and Bonis knew that they were Madeleine's parents.<sup>76</sup>

Eventually Mélanie had to reveal to Madeleine, and to her other children, that Madeleine was her biological child. By 1919, when Madeleine was twenty years old, she had become very close to the Domange family and had fallen in love with Mélanie's son Edouard. The two were both at a good age to marry and, not knowing they were half-siblings, were surprised when Mélanie did not approve of their proposed marriage plans. In the aftermath of Mélanie's revelation, Edouard ended his relationship with Madeleine and married another woman (Françoise Duroyaume). Madeleine was devastated by this knowledge and by the loss of the man she had loved.<sup>77</sup> The other members of Mélanie's family were also shocked to learn this truth, and Mélanie's daughter Jeanne, who had formed an especially close friendship with Madeleine, refused to accept her as a sister.<sup>78</sup> Madeleine eventually married Pierre Quinet when she was 24 years old.<sup>79</sup> Mélanie and her family remained close with Madeleine and the Quinet family, though many of the Domange family members had no idea of the biological relation between the Quinet family and their own.<sup>80</sup> Little is known of the impact on Mélanie's relationship to her husband, or thereafter concerning Hettich.

Mélanie's continued writing and publishing music throughout her life, even as her health deteriorated with age. In the later period of her life she wrote several

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 173-189.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 240-248. Interestingly, and as Géliot notes, Madeleine and her mother Mélanie both loved men whom they were not allowed to marry.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 254.

chamber works, as well as a proportionally large amount of sacred and spiritual music, including choral music and organ works. She continued to have works published all the way through to 1937, the year she died (on March 18<sup>th</sup>, in her home in Sarcelles).<sup>81</sup>

### *Religious influence*

Catholicism was an especially important part of Bonis' life, and was manifest in her musical output. Like many of her contemporaries, she composed several sacred works – a *Messe à la sérénité* (Op. 164 posthumous), a *Kyrie* (Op. 170 posthumous), several choral and organ works with religious themes, and *mélodies* setting sacred texts, such as *Regina coeli* (Op. 45, first published 1899) and *O salutaris* (Op. 188 posthumous, manuscript 1893). More unusually, her religion, perhaps because of her social class, seems also to have influenced her secular and instrumental music.

Bonis' parents emphasized religious teachings in order to raise their children in what they believed to be the right way.<sup>82</sup> Their education included such didactic children's books as *L'Imitation pour les tout petits*; and, the family prayed twice daily, attended Mass each Sunday, and went to weekly confession.<sup>83</sup> Being active and practicing Catholics helped the Bonis family to shore up their social standing. As noted above, the Bonis family's ownership of a piano was rather vexed.

By the mid-nineteenth century, people of a certain social standing, starting slightly above the laboring class of *ouvriers*, commonly had pianos in their homes. For the growing *bourgeoisie*, the piano (and the opera) demonstrated prosperity and

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 28-30.

cultivated taste: middle-class Parisian girls learned the piano in order to be more eligible for marriage.<sup>84</sup> Mel Bonis' parents were lower middle-class skilled factory workers, who chose to have a piano in their apartment for these reasons, rather than for Mélanie to play professionally, or even for pleasure. On a few occasions, Bonis' mother even closed the lid on her daughter's hands.<sup>85</sup>

As part of her Catholic education, Bonis was taught that her parents' wishes served as extensions of God's will; consequently, her piano playing, in violating her mother's wishes, defied Divine will.<sup>86</sup> Bonis' relationships with music, Catholicism, and her family came into conflict throughout her life. In the days leading up to her marriage, Bonis took a spiritual retreat to her childhood parish church, seeking comfort in prayer in order to better deal with the fact that she was about to marry a man whom she did not love.<sup>87</sup> Because the marriage was arranged by her parents, Bonis may have considered this marriage to be God's will.<sup>88</sup> If this were the case, it would be reasonable to conjecture that Mélanie would have experienced feelings of religious guilt whenever her will defied her parents' wishes. Bonis' husband refused

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<sup>84</sup> Anne Rousselin-Lacombe describes these phenomena in Anne Rousselin-Lacombe, "Piano et pianistes," in *La musique en France à l'époque romantique (1830-1870)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 125–66. Additionally, Michel Domange, a descendant of Mel Bonis, also notes that all people of a certain social standing had a piano at this time, even if they were not musicians, in Domange, *Ah! Mes aïeux--: 1830-1945, Alexandre Dumas, Emile Zola, Marcel Pagnol, Jean Renoir ... et d'autres moins connus, mais non moins pittoresques vus au fil d'une chronique familiale*, 31.

<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Géliot writes that "nothing predisposed Mélanie to a musical destiny" ("*rien ne prédispose Mélanie à une destinée musicale*"). This aspect of Mel Bonis' childhood creates a contrast with other women composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who had more supportive families growing up; for example, Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944), born the year before Bonis, had artists in her family and grew up with much more encouragement and support for her creative work. Eberhard Mayer writes that Bonis and Chaminade are similar (because they both were women pianist-composers who wrote pedagogical piano pieces) but neglects to mention this difference (see Eberhard Mayer, "Mel Bonis: La Musique De Chambre Redécouverte," *ClingKlong: Zeitschrift des FrauenMusikForums Schweiz FMF - bulletin du Forum musique et femmes suisse FMF*, no. 44 (2000): 24.)

<sup>86</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*, 30.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

to adopt her Catholic practices, which must have created further tension between them.<sup>89</sup> Bonis attempted to involve her husband in regular prayer but ultimately conceded that he would never adopt her ways of practicing Catholicism.<sup>90</sup>

Géliot dedicates a section of her biography to the composer's sense of internal conflict resulting from her affair with Hettich and the lies she had to tell to hide the secret birth of their child.<sup>91</sup> But what evidence is there that Bonis' Catholic faith, and the guilt, and anguish it must have brought her, actually influenced her musical work? And how might such consideration inform our complete understanding of her music? Perhaps the proportionally large number both of sacred pieces and of chamber works from her later years confirms that Bonis' chamber music may best be understood in relation to her faith.

### *Conclusion*

Mel Bonis was a remarkable individual. She knew and interacted with several famous musicians, composers, and publishers, and participated actively in Parisian musical life. Bonis' life story makes her particularly interesting: despite unencouraging parents, the responsibilities of raising a large family, the anxiety of a secret love affair, and a fraught relationship with her Catholic faith, Mel Bonis was a prolific composer, who produced a large body of work in a variety of instrumental and vocal genres.

In the chapter that follows, I outline relevant theories and methodologies that I find most useful for analyzing Mel Bonis' work, and in particular for studying

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 49, 53.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 49-53.

<sup>91</sup> The section of the book is entitled "Le travail intérieur": Ibid., 127-40.

representative case studies from her chamber music repertoire. My methods draw on biographical and historical contexts to situate and justify my use of the music analysis techniques that I believe provide the most interesting insights about Bonis' music. Furthermore, I build on the work of others to theorize new extensions of certain analytical methods, considered in relation to Bonis' particular life story and circumstances. This provides a framework in which to explore the resonances of Bonis' Catholicism in her music.

## Chapter 2: Theories and Methodologies

Though Mel Bonis' music is interesting on its own terms – and indeed was praised by critics of its time who knew virtually nothing about the composer's identity<sup>92</sup> – I argue that Bonis' work is best understood in relation to her life, and to relevant contextual aspects of fin-de-siècle France. I use a combination of historical context and contemporary music theory techniques, which I apply in the analytical case studies that follow (in Chapters 3 and 4). Further, I extend established music analysis techniques and philosophical ideas about music and spirituality in order to propose new methods of considering the influence of Bonis' Catholicism in her secular music, with the potential for application in the work of other religious composers.

### *Historical contexts and musical consequences of nationalism*

Bonis' compositional techniques can best be understood within the late nineteenth-century historical and cultural contexts of Romantic nostalgia, nationalism, and medievalism. Her work belongs to the era in which Romantics and nationalists turned their attention to France's imagined past.<sup>93</sup> The nineteenth-century interest in pre-modern France naturally linked French music to the Catholicism that prevailed prior to the Reformation.<sup>94</sup> The discipline of medieval studies became

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<sup>92</sup> For example, a 1905 concert review in the French music periodical *Le Mercure musicale* describes a “quartet for piano and strings by Mel Bonis” performed with “Madame Domange” (Mélanie Bonis' married name) at the piano; the author of this review clearly does not know the composer Mel Bonis' true identity: “Revue de La Quinzaine: 5 Juin – Salons de Mme Domange,” *Le Mercure Musical*, June 15, 1905.

<sup>93</sup> See Joseph Bédier, *Les légendes épiques: Recherches sur la formation des chansons de geste* (Paris: Champion, 1908-13).

<sup>94</sup> Scholars have linked nationalism, music, and Catholicism to various manifestations of French national identity in the late nineteenth century. For example, Annegret Fauser, in “Gendering the

established in the years between the end of the Franco-Prussian war and World War I (1870–1914), with the *Chanson de Roland* included in all secondary education from 1880.<sup>95</sup> Bonis may have been aware of the ongoing work at the Abbey of Solesmes, which resulted in a revival of Gregorian chant, the publication of many facsimile volumes of original sources, and “modern” editions of medieval chants; she may also have heard about the rediscovery of French medieval popular song, through initiatives in literary studies and musical archaeology dating back to the early nineteenth century.<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, there is evidence that Bonis may have participated in the prevalent nostalgia for the past.<sup>97</sup> She wrote two different chamber-ensemble versions of a *Suite dans le style ancien*, a *mélodie* entitled *Élégie sur le mode antique*, a set of piano pieces entitled *Quatre pièces dans le style ancien*, a *Rondo dans le genre ancien* for solo piano, and settings of the sacred medieval texts *Regina coeli* and *O Salutaris*.<sup>98</sup>

As was typical of late Romantics, Mel Bonis’ musical nostalgia extended to multiple periods and styles, ranging from medievalist allusions to Baroque and

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Nations: The Ideologies of French Discourse on Music (1870-1914) in *The Politics of Musical Identity: Selected Essays*, ed. Annegret Fauser (Ashgate, 2015), 71-102. See also Katharine Ellis, *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 147.

<sup>95</sup> See Léon Gautier, *Les épopées françaises : étude sur les origines et l’histoire de la littérature nationale*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Universitaire, 1892) and Gaston Paris, *La poésie au moyen âge*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1887).

<sup>96</sup> See Katherine Bergeron, “Elite Books, Popular Readers, and the Curious Hundred-Year History of the Liber Usualis,” in *Music and the Cultures of Print*, ed. Kate van Orden (Garland Publishing, Inc, 2000), Katherine Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes* (University of California Press, 1998), and Jane Alden, *Songs, Scribes, and Society: The History and Reception of the Loire Valley Chansonniers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13-64.

<sup>97</sup> Sophie-Anne Leterrier describes this kind of nostalgia in Sophie-Anne Leterrier, *Le mélomane et l’historien* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005).

<sup>98</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 310-312.

Classical stylistic references.<sup>99</sup> More unusually, Bonis sometimes combined historical references to different periods within individual works, to interesting effect. For example, though the first movement of her *Suite dans le style ancien* is arguably medievalist, in its use of modal melodies and intervals of open perfect fifths, the second movement is an eighteenth-century style fugue; the third movement evokes Church chorales; and the fourth, which Bonis calls a *Divertissement*, seems to allude to the modern-sounding music of some of Bonis' own contemporaries. As I will show, her use of different kinds of historical references, sometimes in combination, has remarkable consequences for understanding mechanisms of musical nostalgia and historicized topical references.

### *Musical meaning*

Theories of musical meaning can be used to speculatively trace the influences on Bonis' music. Remarkably, Mel Bonis herself compared music to language, revealing an appreciation for its potential to signify and communicate: she wrote, "We require, to translate the infinite need left in each of us, a language as imprecise as our aspirations without object, our desires, our tendencies towards a good that calls upon us and that evades us. This language is music, when it is worthy of its mission. ... Never will two people write the same book. It is the same for notes; combinations of notes, combinations of chords ... superposition of designs, of rhythms, of chords

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<sup>99</sup> For example, the four movements of Bonis' *Quatre pièces dans le style ancien* are written in the form of dance types with origins in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries: a Pavane, a Menuet, a Sarabande, and a Bourée. Gabriel Fauré and Maurice Ravel also wrote instrumental *Pavanes*, and Ravel's famous *menuet antique* for solo piano (1895, orchestrated by the composer in 1929) serves to further emphasize the importance of the links between these dance forms and musical constructions of French national history in fin-de-siècle France.



and suddenly we are in an infinity that could seem even more vast, if that were possible.”<sup>100</sup> In other words, Bonis would have likely agreed that some amount of meaning, even if “imprecise,” is present in all music, including hers.

My study extends current theoretical approaches to musical meaning to Bonis’ work in order to better understand its relation to her life and to its historical context. In particular, certain elements of musical topic theory, if carefully applied, have the potential to illuminate possible subtexts in Bonis’ music. Most remarkably, the musical topic of the pastoral, as well as other related pastoral topics, are particularly useful in tracing potential influences of Catholicism in Bonis’ work. Her frequent musical evocations of the pastoral, and of the outdoors, have consequences for our understanding of Bonis’ music in relation to her difficult life and her troubled relationship with her faith – whether or not this influence was conscious.

### *The Pastoral*

The pastoral has been an enduring topic not just for music, but also for literature and poetry, since Antiquity.<sup>101</sup> But its definition remains nebulous and contested, as it has been “applied to an almost bewildering variety of works.”<sup>102</sup> Paul Alpers, for example, asks *What is Pastoral?* in the title of a book first published in

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<sup>100</sup> Schenck, “Très douée, bonne musicienne” : die französische Komponistin Mel Bonis (1858-1937), 49-50. (“Il fallait, pour traduire le besoin d’infini déposé en chacun de nous, un langage imprécis comme nos aspirations sans objet, élans, tendances vers un bien qui nous sollicite et se dérobe. Ce langage, c’est la musique, quand elle est à la hauteur de sa mission. ... Jamais on n’écrira le même livre. Il en est de même pour les notes; combinaisons de notes, combinaisons d’accords, ... superposition de dessins, de rythmes, d’accords et nous voilà dans un infini qui pourrait sembler encore plus étendu s’il était possible.”)

<sup>101</sup> See Michael von Albrecht, *A History of Roman Literature: From Livius Andronicus to Boethius*, ed. Gareth L. Schmeling (New York: Brill, 1997).

<sup>102</sup> As Brian Loughrey writes in the introduction to a collection of writings on the pastoral: Brian Loughrey, ed., *The Pastoral Mode: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1984), 8.

1980 and concludes that the “central fiction of pastoral” refers specifically to representations of shepherds (“herdsmen”) and their ways of life.<sup>103</sup> Others argue for a less restricted definition of the pastoral. In his book *The Uses of Nostalgia*, Laurence Lerner claims that the term *pastoral* in poetry describes “poems that long to escape from the centre to the simpler world of Arcadia. And Arcadia, in this sense, need have neither sheep nor shepherds,”<sup>104</sup> a view also supported by Lore Metzger.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Renato Poggioli has proposed that, being allegorical, pastoral poetry “deals only rarely with shepherds in the literal sense of the term: in the main, it uses the shepherd’s disguise to give an idealized representation of the withdrawn artist, or the retired poet, of the solitary lover, or, more generally, of the man for whom private life is the highest value on earth.”<sup>106</sup> The term *pastoral* thus characterizes a constellation of interconnected subjects related to a nostalgic longing for the beauty of a lost natural realm.

For the purposes of musical analysis, the more inclusive definitions of pastoral are the most useful. Work in this area is ongoing, as witnessed by the 2009 publication of an essay collection entitled *New Versions of Pastoral*,<sup>107</sup> where fifteen different writers share their definitions and applications of the pastoral to study modern and present-day subjects. In the essays that begin and conclude the volume, writers assert the importance of codifying new ways of understanding the pastoral, citing its “multifarious” significance and function, which supports my use of an

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<sup>103</sup> Paul Alpers, *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), x.

<sup>104</sup> Laurence Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia: Studies in Pastoral Poetry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 35.

<sup>105</sup> Lore Metzger, *One Foot in Eden* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

<sup>106</sup> Renato Poggioli, “The Christian Pastoral,” in *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 105–34, 122.

<sup>107</sup> David James and Philip Tew, eds., *New Versions of Pastoral: Post-Romantic, Modern, and Contemporary Responses to the Tradition* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009).

inclusive definition of the pastoral in relation to music.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, music often conveys meaning and expression in ways that are less literal or obvious than those of written language; accordingly, adopting a less literal definition of what can be considered *pastoral* makes sense.

Music theorists have typically adopted this broader, more inclusive view of what can be considered pastoral, finding it as a recurring theme in music throughout history. The identification of topics in music, now known by music theorists as *topic theory*, was first applied to the music of the eighteenth century, as philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities in the “Classical era” were particularly conducive to the emergence of a kind of musical lexicon of topics with the capacity for semiotic signification. Following work by Wye Allanbrook, Leonard Ratner, and Raymond Monelle on signification through the use of dance types and musical topics in eighteenth-century music,<sup>109</sup> Kofi Agawu used musical topics, the concept of the linguistic sign, and rhetorical interpretations of musical form to propose methods of interpreting meaning in the music of the Classic era, which he defines as ending in 1830.<sup>110</sup> Agawu notes, though, that a Romantic-era “transformation of sign into symbol” allows for musical signification to function in the Romantic period, albeit differently from its role in earlier music.<sup>111</sup> He cautions that claims of signification, especially in this later repertoire must be treated carefully and include some amount of speculation or ambiguity. For Agawu, this ambiguity allows Romantic music to

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 13-21.

<sup>109</sup> See Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), and Raymond Monelle, *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* (Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992) and *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*.

<sup>110</sup> Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 127.

“break with the outside world,” in contrast to eighteenth-century mimetic ideals for art, “by entering into private, biographical realms in which the cryptic sign holds the key to meaning.”<sup>112</sup> According to Agawu, then, musical topics can be extended to hypothesize autobiographical self-expression in Romantic-era music, provided that an inherent semiotic ambiguity is acknowledged.

And indeed, in later work devoted to the Romantic era, Agawu himself has applied musical topics and other musical signifiers to trace meanings and musical “discourses” in the music of the long nineteenth century.<sup>113</sup> Certain aspects of the use of musical topics in the Romantic period, however, differentiate these functions from their earlier Classical roles, according to Agawu. He notes, for example, that the Romantic-era emphasis on individual expression forces analysts today to consider individual composers’ particular ways of using topics, noting that different composers may vary in their use of these topics.<sup>114</sup>

Agawu notes the importance of relationships between Romantic-era composers and the musical past. He characterizes certain musical topics as being “recognized on the basis of prior acquaintance” and notes that musical references can be purposely used in a “historical” sense, alluding to earlier Classical-era modes of employment.<sup>115</sup> These “historicized” topics contrast with those that emerged within the Romantic era itself; the *nocturne*, for example, has been theorized as a topic

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>113</sup> Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 43, 48.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 43, 42-48. Julian Horton also discusses the potential for earlier topics to become historicized in: Julian Horton, “Listening to Topics in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 643.

whose roots date from the nineteenth-century.<sup>116</sup> Given Mel Bonis' tendency to evoke multiple past eras, these studies are helpful in showing some of Bonis' topical references to be *historicized*, reflecting earlier ways of depicting pastoral subjects.

I believe that a speculative reading of potential musical signification in Bonis' chamber music is useful, even if no evidence is found to suggest the influence was conscious. The pastoral has been one of the most enduring subjects for topic theory; indeed, Kofi Agawu has compiled tables of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century musical topics proposed by numerous theorists, and a reference to the pastoral is present in each theorist's list.<sup>117</sup> Though Agawu focuses on the music of Germanic countries in his work, I believe his theories of musical signification and topics can also be applied to fin-de-siècle French music.

Raymond Monelle has extensively traced the evolution of pastoral topics and their various signifiers throughout music history, beginning in the Renaissance period and extending through Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and late-Romantic repertoires. As topic theory has most often been applied to Classical-era music, I will present important features of the musical topic of the pastoral as defined by Monelle for the Classical era; I believe these pastoral signifiers remain relevant to late-Romantic music in general, and Bonis in particular.

The musical topic of the pastoral, as it has been applied to the music of the Classical era, includes certain characteristic metric, rhythmic, and orchestrational features that link it to certain pastoral sensibilities. Monelle, among others, has characterized the triple meters 6/8 and 12/8 as typically pastoral meters, based on

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<sup>116</sup> As Horton notes in: Horton, "Listening to Topics in the Nineteenth Century," 643-645.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-47.

their historical associations with pastoral genres and dance types, explaining that, in the Classical era, 6/8 prevailed as the most characteristically pastoral meter.<sup>118</sup>

Regarding rhythmic figures that imply pastoral allusion, Monelle explains that the *siciliano* rhythm of a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note and an eighth note (as shown in Example 1) references Sicily, thereby evoking a faraway paradise.<sup>119</sup>



**Example 1:** The *siciliano* rhythm

For Monelle, long, droning notes within musical textures are typical in Classical-era pastoral music because of their association with earlier peasant and shepherd wind instruments, such as the bagpipe.<sup>120</sup> Dotted rhythms associated with popular dance types also carry these pastoral associations through their links to peasants and shepherds, who serve as idealized groups of “pure” people.<sup>121</sup> The peasant association also explains the choice of flutes and oboes for pastoral instrumental music.<sup>122</sup>

Monelle also demonstrates that these surface-level musical features relate to a broader, more abstract pastoral sensibility, with pastoral music in the Classical era best described as “naïve, simple, and popular in tone,” with an intentionally “rustic”

<sup>118</sup> Raymond Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral* (Indiana University Press, 2006), 229, 238.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>120</sup> Leonard Ratner has similarly commented on the eighteenth-century pastoral as being characterized through the use of features such as a “bourdon or drone” – a sustained, low-pitched tone or perfect fifth – accompanying a higher-pitched, faster-moving melody, evoking early wind instruments such as the *musette*; see Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 21.

<sup>121</sup> Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, 230.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 230, 240.

character.<sup>123</sup> Further, Monelle characterizes a broader “pastoral topic” of “innocence, naïve bliss, [and] the world before sin,”<sup>124</sup> which accords with the literary perspectives on pastoral concepts and ideals described above. Monelle also acknowledges the power of music to create “pastoral effects” on an abstract representational scale, citing an eighteenth-century example of flutes being used to represent birdsong and a musical representation of sunrise.<sup>125</sup> This array of classic pastoral musical signifiers, which operate on multiple levels of allusive representation, provides a useful set of features that characterize pastoral music and relate it to broader concepts related to the pastoral sensibility.

In applying these characteristic features of the Classical-era musical pastoral to considerations of later repertoires, certain precautions must be taken, as individual composers employed musical topics differently. In addition, topics in Romantic and later music can function in historicized ways; the use of a typical Classic-era *musette* reference in the work of a late nineteenth-century composer, for instance, might serve not only as a pastoral reference, but also as a kind of allusion to earlier ways of musically representing the pastoral, with the recognition that this type of reference belongs to the past.

#### *Pastoral topics in late-Romantic music*

Though musical topic theory began as a way to explain musical meaning in the music of the Classic era, I propose that musical topics – pastoral topics, in particular – are relevant to Mel Bonis’ work. Others have already extended musical

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 240.

topics, including the pastoral, to Romantic and post-Romantic music. The musical topic of the pastoral has been read in Debussy's music and even Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.<sup>126</sup> There has been extensive writing on the pastoral in relation to Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), Paul Dukas (1865-1935), and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937).<sup>127</sup> I seek to extend this aspect of topic theory to Mel Bonis' late-Romantic-style music, hoping to contribute to this recent trend in music theory research. I believe I am the first to apply this kind of analysis to a speculation about sacred resonances, and I am the first to extend these methods to the music of Mel Bonis.

As musical topic theory and new conceptions of the pastoral have already been applied to music from fin-de-siècle France, my extension of these ideas to study Mel Bonis' work contributes to an existing trend. For example, Robert Hatten has argued for interpretations of pastoral allusions in Romantic-era music, drawing on literary studies and art history; specifically, he has applied his ideas to solo piano music by Franz Schubert (1797-1828), whom Hatten describes as belonging to an emerging Romantic sensibility.<sup>128</sup> Hatten writes that in the nineteenth century, "a new pastoral *mode* begins to shape the main thematic lines and overall dramatic trajectory of works that at the same time may embrace a wider range of topics than

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<sup>126</sup> Raymond Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, 264-68 and Johanna Frymoyer, "Rethinking the Sign: Stylistic Competency and Interpretation of Musical Textures, 1890-1920" (Princeton University, 2012), 199-205. Frymoyer alludes to others (Boris Asaf'yev, Peter Hill, and Daniel Chua) who effectively speak in terms of musical topics in their analyses of the *Rite of Spring*, even if they do not explicitly claim to be using topics or topic theory. Frymoyer also references Monelle's characterization of the Pastoral as it applies to 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>-century France on page 202. See also Horton, "Listening to Topics in the Nineteenth Century."

<sup>127</sup> Geoffrey Chew and Owen Jander, "Pastoral," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.*, November 27, 2016.

<sup>128</sup> His essay on the pastoral in Schubert is entitled "From Topic to Premise and Mode: The Pastoral in Schubert's Piano Sonata in G Major, D. 894": Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 53-67.



strictly pastoral ones.<sup>129</sup> While Classical-era topics rely on certain topical signifiers for their expressive power, the Romantic pastoral mode comprises a broader set of characteristics, enabling the “expressive significance of the work on the basis of pastoral principles and outcomes.”<sup>130</sup> Hatten defines the pastoral mode as containing the following aspects:

[A]n individual retreating from a complex and less euphoric reality... in an attempt to regain lost simplicity, innocence, happiness, or the sublime – or to imagine a similarly euphoric present or future idealized state... by inhabiting an idealized space of reflection or serenity that emulates those envisioned qualities,... and that may also evoke the monumentality of a landscape, with its poignant juxtapositions of geological time, historical time, and individual memory.<sup>131</sup>

Hatten, like others in the field of topic theory, proposes a set of several characteristic musical features of the pastoral mode that seems to align with the need for new, evolving conceptions of pastoral applicable in late-Romantic and modern works. He notes that these features do not all necessarily have to be present for a Romantic-era composition to be “pastoral” – to have the capacity to evoke pastoral allusions through the creation of stasis and simplicity. Hatten identifies as typical characteristic the use of “pedal point, slow harmonic rhythm, simple melodic contour with gentle climax, compound meter, major mode, parallel thirds, and subdominant inflection.”<sup>132</sup> Hatten references other scholars who have noted further features of Romantic-era pastoral references – “horn calls as symbols of distance,” the “*siciliano*

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<sup>129</sup> Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 53.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

rhythmic gesture<sup>133</sup>,” references to the “musette<sup>134</sup>,” and “modal<sup>135</sup> inflections.”<sup>136</sup> Finally, in describing harmonic tendencies of Romantic-era pastoral music, Hatten notes that their harmonies often function through “mollified tension and intensity,” through the use of “subdominant harmony,” and “modulation to the flat side,” i.e., to keys with more flats than the tonic tonality.<sup>137</sup> Though Bonis was a couple of generations younger than Schubert, these characteristics appear frequently in her works, and therefore form part of my analytical case studies (Chapters 3 and 4).

In addition, the features that Hatten defined as pastoral also relate to the fin-de-siècle historical contexts I outlined above. Modal melodic inflection and pedal points recall early music, perhaps influenced by the medievalist rediscovery of plainchant and medieval song in nineteenth-century France. The desire to return to the spiritual simplicity of an idealized past draws on both pastoral and medievalist references, and underpins Bonis’ music.

Explicit pastoral references appear throughout Bonis’ oeuvre: her *Suite en trio* (Op. 59, 1903) for piano, violin, and flute includes a *Pastorale* movement; there is a *Pastorale en sol* (Op. 15, 1933) for the organ; a *mélodie* entitled “Noël Pastoral” (Op. 20, 1892, on a text by Amédée Hettich), which clearly evokes pastoral religious imagery; and an *Églogue* (Op. 12, 1898) for solo piano.<sup>138</sup> In addition, Bonis wrote

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<sup>133</sup> The *siciliano* rhythm appears in compound-meter works and consists of a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note followed by an eighth note. The *siciliano* has historically been associated with the pastoral.

<sup>134</sup> The *musette* is an early instrument whose music is characterized by long droning bass notes with faster-moving higher-pitched melodies above. The *musette* has historically been associated with the pastoral.

<sup>135</sup> *Modal*, in this case, refers to the church modes of early music.

<sup>136</sup> Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes*, 56.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>138</sup> Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*, an acknowledged example of a fin-de-siècle musical pastoral, was based on an eclogue by the poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898).

several works whose titles recall typical pastoral concepts, even if they are not explicitly entitled *pastorales* or *églogues*: her *Idylle* (Op. 179, date unknown) for organ; her piano piece *Aux champs* (Op. 13, 1889) which later became the basis of her organ *Pastorale* (Op. 15, 1933); and a pedagogical piano piece entitled “Au temps jadis”.<sup>139</sup>

Bonis had strong views on musical interpretations of nature: in her *Souvenirs et réflexions* she cautions against excessive literal sonic imitation of natural and animal sounds in music, writing that she finds music especially powerful when it includes a “musical translation” of the sounds of nature that “acts discreetly to produce an effect,” musically conveying impressions and moods associated with nature without resorting to excessively literal word-painting.<sup>140</sup> The extension of the definition of pastoral to include idyllic evocations of nature makes the *Scènes de la forêt* (Op. 123, 1928) a particularly appropriate case study (in Chapter 4).

I am not the first to consider pastoral concepts relevant to understanding the music of Romantic-era France. In his examination of works by Claude Debussy (Mel Bonis’ contemporary and Conservatoire classmate), Raymond Monelle theorized a new kind of pastoral topic.<sup>141</sup> In Debussy’s *Syrinx* (1913, L. 129) and *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* (1894, L. 86), Monelle finds the composer’s use of the flute and horn (in the *Prélude*), as well as Debussy’s frequent and obvious use of pentatonicism and chromaticism, indicative of a “fin de siècle pastoral” trend then

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<sup>139</sup> The titles of Bonis’ works are listed in: Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 285-296.

<sup>140</sup> As quoted in: Schenck, “Très douée, bonne musicienne” : *die französische Komponistin Mel Bonis (1858-1937)*, 59.

<sup>141</sup> Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, 264.

current in French poetry, art, and music.<sup>142</sup> Monelle suggests that the musical features of this version of the pastoral serve to evoke an ancient, lost, bucolic landscape.<sup>143</sup> In a chapter devoted to the hunt, as a musical topic often signified by horn calls, Monelle defines a type of “pastoral horn” topic, noting that nineteenth-century critics such as E.T.A. Hoffman linked the sound of horns to the ability to “transport us instantly into the forest.”<sup>144</sup> Monelle adds that the forest conveyed by the horn “is situated in the countryside and contributes to the pastoral image of rustic innocence, as well as possessing a mysterious and bosky atmosphere that would contribute to Romantic-era evocations of magic and danger.”<sup>145</sup> In other words, Monelle links the use of pastoral forest imagery to Romantic representations of the supernatural.

Monelle also associates the horn with night time,<sup>146</sup> proposing a new nineteenth-century topic of “the *horn of nocturnal mystery*,” which he links to French medieval legends about Roland, who supposedly used a horn to communicate with Charlemagne when confronting enemies in the mountains; as noted above, this legend had particular influence in nineteenth-century France, and became incorporated into a standard education. A nocturnal and pastoral horn topic, referencing a medieval legend, may have been part of broader nostalgic sensibilities, but it has particular relevance to Bonis’ work, most of all to the *Nocturne* movement of her *Scènes de la forêt*. Like Debussy and other composers of Romantic-era pastoral music, Bonis employed the flute and the horn in her *Scènes de la forêt* (discussed in detail in

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 264-268.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 264-67.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>146</sup> Monelle cites scene from Hector Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette* (1839) and Felix Mendelssohn’s *Nocturne* from his incidental music for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1842); Ibid., 104-105.

Chapter 4). In addition, she sometimes draws on a distinct melodic language (using collections of pitches that are modal, or *other*-sounding) to suggest a faraway pastoral landscape whose “ancient”-sounding quality is perhaps imbued with religious symbolism.

*Spiritual resonances in the pastoral?*

For a religious Catholic composer, the fin-de-siècle pastoral posed a problem. If the idealized pastoral had been rendered inaccessible by the fall of man then the musical pastoral would also be stained with original sin. As Johanna Frymoyer has noted, one can read both “nostalgia” and “apprehension” in the musical pastoral in nineteenth- and twentieth-century repertoires.<sup>147</sup> She bases this claim on Monelle’s argument that, in Debussy’s musical use of the pastoral topic, “the image of innocence, of happy love” typically associated with the pastoral “is rendered crystalline, is slightly colored with risk” because of the potential for pastoral evocations to be used disingenuously or impersonally.<sup>148</sup> In other words, the musical topic of the pastoral in late nineteenth-century music has the potential to evoke a complex set of meanings that include not just an innocent, idealized past, but also an anxiety about one’s present circumstances. Monelle briefly considers the idea of a “religious pastoral” in his writing on the pastoral topic, but does not develop this idea in much depth and limits his discussion to concerns of shepherd references in the Bible and select pastoral poems, some of which allude to shepherds’ music.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Johanna Frymoyer, “Rethinking the Sign: Stylistic Competency and Interpretation of Musical Textures, 1890-1920” (Princeton University, 2012), 202.

<sup>148</sup> Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, 268.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-200.

Interestingly, literary scholars have more explicitly theorized connections between the pastoral mode and Christian belief and expression. For example, Renato Poggioli, a scholar of comparative literature, proposed a definition of “the Christian pastoral” to describe the religious implications of the pastoral in literature.<sup>150</sup> Poggioli cites a longstanding historical tradition of attempts “to translate the ancient, pagan pastoral into new, Christian terms” in literature, scholarship, and the arts.<sup>151</sup> To support this claim, he outlines elements of Christ’s story that have been perceived to align with pastoral ideals: for example, he references common depictions of Christ’s childhood community as an “idyll,” the fact that Christ was “born in a stable, like a lamb,” the fact that the first people to learn of Christ’s birth were “the shepherds watching their flocks at night in the fields nearby,” Christ as the Lamb of God, and parallels between the Christian idea of the Messiah and the pastoral ideal of a “Golden Age.”<sup>152</sup>

In addition, Poggioli traces some of the history of Christian appropriations of the pastoral to fit Christian religious ideas. He devotes particular attention to Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue – a pastoral poem dating back to ancient Rome – to describe how the pastoral has been received and utilized by Christians. Perhaps most interestingly, he notes that Christian interpreters of Virgil readily excused pagan references – including the allusions to Pan and to a Goddess that appear in the text – that might seem to contradict their Christian faith; instead of finding problems with these pagan references, Poggioli explains, Christian interpretations of the Eclogue have treated

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<sup>150</sup> Poggioli, “The Christian Pastoral.”

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-112. Interestingly, Poggioli notes an important temporal difference between the Messiah (who will bring a “Golden Age” in the *future*) and the nostalgic longing for a lost “Golden Age” that remains in the distant *past*.

these allusions as metaphors, as allegories, or simply as historically important features of the pastoral poetic tradition.<sup>153</sup> My reading of pastoral topics in Mel Bonis' work is thrown into sharp relief by these definitions of the Christian pastoral, especially when her works are considered within the context of her faith. These links between Christian faith and the pastoral references to seemingly non-Christian topics (including nature and ancient Greek and Roman gods) provide a useful grounding for the arguments I will make below about similar references in Bonis' work.<sup>154</sup>

If Bonis' pastoral is both "nostalgic" and "apprehensive," this might also describe her Catholic faith, with a nostalgic desire for the innocence of her past, and an apprehensive need to escape from an anxiety- and guilt-ridden present. It is not hard to imagine both of these feelings in a composer whose religious and social conscience prevented her from being with her true love, or raising their child.

#### *Catholicism in Bonis' music*

Given the contexts outlined above and the importance of religion in Mel Bonis' life, a full understanding of her music must examine her Catholic faith and the conflicts brought on by her beliefs and upbringing. Though the spiritual influence is most obvious in her sacred and liturgical works, I extend the examination to include secular and non-religious music as well. I begin by outlining the established approaches to tracing influences of spirituality in music. The shortcomings of these

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

<sup>154</sup> As I will present in the case studies in Chapters 3 and 4. In particular, I make this comment with the *Scènes de la forêt* in mind, given its forest inspiration, the presence of an allusion to the Greek goddess Artemis, and an "invocation" that might seem, at first, to be a prayer to nature; given what Poggioli has described above, I argue that these seemingly non-Christian references can be used to serve Christian purposes, which makes sense given Mel Bonis' particular relationship with her faith.

techniques – with regards to the study of Bonis’ work – lead me to theorize new approaches that draw on existing work both within and outside of music studies.

As indicated in Chapter 1, Catholicism was an important part of Mel Bonis’ childhood and remained important to her throughout her life. Similarly, her conflicts with Catholic religious teachings troubled Bonis throughout her life. As she wrote the largest proportions of both chamber music and religious music during the same years,<sup>155</sup> I argue that her Catholicism is a valid analytical lens through which to consider her chamber works.

Bonis herself connected music both to the divine and to personal expression, writing that to “understand one another, in music, is to be of the same spiritual family. And so are created connections, profound sympathies between people separated in time or in space... Music is like the essence of the soul.”<sup>156</sup> Bonis’ linking of music to spirituality, to the soul, to interpersonal relationships, and to geographically and temporally distant realms, is unusual. It is for this reason that I suggest Bonis’ music should be considered in relation to her faith.

### *Existing approaches to Catholicism in music*

The complex relationships between music and Catholic religious identity in fin-de-siècle France have been of considerable interest to scholars. In his study of the music of Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), for example, Carlo Caballero asked how Fauré’s religion influenced his musical career and how the composer’s music reflected his

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<sup>155</sup> As Géliot notes in: Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 257.

<sup>156</sup> Schenck, “*Très douée, bonne musicienne*” : *die französische Komponistin Mel Bonis (1858-1937)*, 28. (“*Se comprendre, en musique, c’est être de la même famille spirituelle; alors se créent des liens, des sympathies profondes entre gens séparés dans le temps ou dans l’espace. ... La musique est comme de l’essence d’âme.*”)



beliefs.<sup>157</sup> As a case study, Caballero uses an analysis of the song cycle *La chanson d'Ève* (1906-1910), on a set of poems with the same title by Charles van Lerberghe, to reveal ways in which Fauré's musical choices depended on his concurrent turn away from Catholicism in favor of pantheistic and atheist sensibilities.<sup>158</sup>

Though Caballero's analysis shows evidence of Fauré's changing relationship to Catholicism through his musical choices, and the inclusion (or exclusion) of certain poems from van Lerberghe's text, it relies heavily on the fact that the *Chanson d'Ève* is a biblical reference to Eve. Fauré's musical setting of Eve's story is distinct because of its omission of references to original sin, and its emphasis on Eve's agency and acceptance of her own inevitable death; indeed, Caballero notes that Fauré's musical interpretation of this biblical story diverges from Jules Massenet's more traditional *Ève* (1875).<sup>159</sup> Caballero's study provides a valuable example of how one might read a composer's relationship to Catholicism in a non-liturgical and non-sacred musical work.

Annegret Fauser has recently considered the French woman composer Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)'s relationship to Catholicism.<sup>160</sup> But Boulanger's Catholicism differed from Bonis' in several ways. While Bonis' parents followed strict, traditionalist Catholic teachings, Boulanger grew up with a more eclectic, open-minded kind of Catholicism, broad enough to include the Eastern influences that would inspire her *Vieille Prière Bouddhique* (1914).<sup>161</sup> These different varieties of

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<sup>157</sup> See Chapter 5, "Fauré's religion: ideas and music" in: Carlo Caballero, *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> "Composing as a Catholic" in Annegret Fauser, *The Politics of Musical Identity: Selected Essays* (Ashgate, 2015), 309-316.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 310, 316.

Catholicism are likely linked to the social class differences between the Bonis and Boulanger families. In her study of the effects of Boulanger's Catholicism on her music, Fauser focuses on her religious music.

Mel Bonis' Catholicism did not resemble either Fauré's pantheistic atheism or Boulanger's spiritual open-mindedness. It is for this reason that I examine Bonis' secular, non-sacred and non-liturgical chamber works, to trace the extent of its influence. Fortunately, there are scholarly precedents for tracing the influences of religion and spirituality in secular music. The pianist and writer Charles Rosen (1927-2012) considered certain aspects of non-religious instrumental works by Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) evocative of spiritual expression. In *The Romantic Generation*, Rosen draws on Mendelssohn's life story and musical oeuvre to characterize him as "the inventor of religious kitsch" in music.<sup>162</sup> In his descriptions of instrumental works, Rosen notes that nineteenth-century developments in musical instrument technology allowed for new expressive possibilities, so that Mendelssohn's soft *pianissimo* passages might connote "hushed piety."<sup>163</sup> Rosen even argues that a certain cadence in Mendelssohn's E-minor fugue (Op. 35, No. 1b) "evokes the quiet folding of hands in prayer."<sup>164</sup> And, in describing combinations of contrapuntal writing with chorale textures, Rosen describes "a soft atmosphere of devout reverence, a beautiful expression of sincere repentance and genuine submission to divine will" that has the capacity to "evoke... a sense of religion and piety which dispenses with the unnecessary and inconvenient trappings of dogma and ritual" because "it conveys... the emotional satisfaction that religion can give, the

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<sup>162</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 590.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 591.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 591.

pleasure that is the aftermath of participating in a religious rite, of making a confession, of contemplating the traditional Sunday service.”<sup>165</sup> Rosen even extends these religious metaphors to claim Mendelssohn’s listeners as “worshippers.”<sup>166</sup>

Rosen’s metaphors need to be handled carefully. His claims of religiosity are based on his own experiences and feelings as a pianist and listener. But his ideas about music’s potential to create a pious or reflective atmosphere are useful.

Margaret Notley has studied the late-Romantic – and devoutly Catholic – Austrian composer Anton Bruckner (1824-1896), linking certain of the composer’s symphonic slow movements to his spirituality.<sup>167</sup> She identifies certain characteristic features as having spiritual significance. In particular, she describes a sense of “unending melody,” blurred boundaries between formal sections, “cadences...on weak beats,” and “tentative introductory” material as contributing to an “unfolding aural image of uncertainty, change, and eventual transfiguration.”<sup>168</sup> For Notley, Bruckner’s use of formal elision, ambiguity, and development of motifs through “spinning-out” (rather than traditional means of restatement) has spiritual implications. In assessing Bruckner’s orchestrational techniques, Notley writes that “extremes in register” might “bring to mind the enormity of the universe.”<sup>169</sup> She also describes certain signifiers of spiritually inflected church music – such as “chains of suspensions” and “quasi-modal writing”; these characteristic features recall a

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 592-593.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 594.

<sup>167</sup> She does so in the following book chapter: Margaret Notley, “Formal Process as Spiritual Progress: The Symphonic Slow Movements,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner*, ed. John Williamson (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 190–204.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 190-193.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 194.

Catholic Christian past, in Notley's view.<sup>170</sup> Interestingly, Notley notes that the significant power of the "unending melody" unfolds gradually over time, while features such as orchestration and modal inflection can function as more immediate spiritual references.<sup>171</sup>

Scholarly interest in Catholic religious resonances in secular music also extends to the domain of popular music. In particular, Andrew Greeley describes Madonna's "Like A Prayer" as a critique on the Church.<sup>172</sup> Madonna's ability to describe her hostility towards her Catholic upbringing, and Catholic ideas concerning sexuality contrasts sharply with the silence that Bonis must have had to endure, a century earlier.

In uncovering sacred resonances in non-sacred music, these scholars provide useful models for my considerations of the spiritual subtexts in Mel Bonis' work. In what follows, I present relevant philosophical and theological perspectives on the role of spirituality in music and art. I draw on these approaches to form my own methods of understanding Catholicism and music as they relate to Mel Bonis and her chamber music. The new methodologies I propose attempt to address the shortcomings of existing methodologies with regards to Bonis' work.

### *Philosophical and theological approaches*

Remarkably, religious philosophers, writers, and theologians have been interested in relationships between music and spirituality throughout history. In the

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>172</sup> Andrew M. Greeley, "Like a Catholic: Madonna's Challenge to Her Church," in *Desperately Seeking Madonna: In Search of the Meaning of the World's Most Famous Woman*, ed. Adam Sexton, 1993, 96–100.

fifth century, Saint Augustine of Hippo questioned the issue of music in relation to his Catholic faith, famously declaring that “*cantare amantis est*” (“singing belongs to one who loves”).<sup>173</sup> In the domain of visual art, the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) wrote a theoretical text to describe his views of Christian spirituality in relation to art.<sup>174</sup> Interestingly, this work has also been titled *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*, perhaps evoking a musical metaphor. While Kandinsky writes from a painter’s perspective, he describes the musical features of works by Wagner and Debussy,<sup>175</sup> asserting that good artworks should “call forth corresponding vibrations of the soul.”<sup>176</sup> Music also plays a role in Kandinsky’s more general characterizations of spirituality in art: he sees Debussy as “deeply concerned with spiritual harmony, for in his works one hears the suffering and tortured nerves of the present time.”<sup>177</sup> In my view, Kandinsky’s ideas recall pastoral ideas as well as Christian faith in redemption. He describes works of art, literature, or music created during difficult times as showing “the importance of what at first was only a little point of light noticed by few and for the great majority non-existent.... they turn away from the soulless life of the present towards those substances and ideas which give free scope to the non-material strivings of the soul.”<sup>178</sup>

For a composer like Mel Bonis, whose life circumstances posed great difficulty, and who is known to have sought solace in her Catholic faith despite her

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<sup>173</sup> This saying continues to resonate with modern-day Catholic leaders, as evidenced, for example, by the fact that Pope Benedict XVI cited and responded to this St. Augustine saying in a recent article: Benedict XVI, “The Font of Song Is Love,” *Sacred Music* 134, no. 3 (2007): 55.

<sup>174</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. Michael T. H. Sadler (London: Tate Publishing, 2006, first published 1912).

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

fraught relationship with Catholicism, Kandinsky's conception of art as introspective spiritual expression seems particularly pertinent. In addition, the pastoral connotations of some of Kandinsky's ideas are congruent with the French Romantic-era's nostalgic sensibilities.

Building on Kandinsky's ideas about spirituality in art and music, I propose that Mel Bonis' music can be considered a means of introspective reflection in the face of difficult circumstances. Further, it might be considered a kind of spiritual meditation, or, at the very least, a means of seeking peace with her faith.

Catholic theologians have devoted significant time and energy to considerations of music in relation to the divine. Jeremy Begbie (b.1957)'s 1991 book *Voicing Creation's Praise* attempts to codify theological means of understanding art<sup>179</sup>; he draws on historical views of beauty and art in relation to Christ and God before finally proposing his own conception of what he calls a "philosophy of art" based in "a rigorous concentration on the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God."<sup>180</sup> In *Theology, Music and Time*, Begbie again asserts that understanding art – or music – can bring a person closer to understanding God.<sup>181</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) describes music as an incarnation of divine love because of its inherent "union of the undiscoverable and the highest plausibility."<sup>182</sup>

These philosophical and theological ideas about introspective self-reflection, the passing of (musical) time, and human relationships with the divine, lead me to speculate about the potential spiritual content of Bonis' chamber works. Finding

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<sup>179</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (New York: T&T Clark, 2001).

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>181</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

passages that pass slowly, with frequent repetition, might imply a kind of spiritual reflection or meditation, while a work characterized by instrumental melodies that are simple, yet fragmentary enough to musically resemble human speech might recall a confession. These ideas are explored in Chapters 3 and 4. For now, my conclusion is that composition and performance provided Bonis with the means of expressing herself out loud in an era when religious and societal norms made verbal expression of feelings dangerous or inappropriate. Music allowed Bonis to be herself.

### *Musical nostalgia*

Bonis' pastoral and spiritual allusions can also be understood as part of a broader nostalgic yearning for a lost past. This relates to the topic of distance, and its musical manifestation, particularly as understood through dualistic harmonic theories. Harmonic dualism is based on oppositions between plagal and "authentic" harmonic systems, and has been linked to musical representations of distance and *otherness* in nineteenth-century music. Musical distancing through oppositions between plagal and authentic harmonies, as well as the sense of relative stasis created by plagal progressions, recall the nostalgia of the pastoral sensibilities outlined above.

In examining musical representations of nostalgia, scholars have looked for corroboration in composers' biographies. Halina Goldberg, for example, identified features of Frederic Chopin's mazurkas that musically convey nostalgia, linking them to "invocations of nostalgia for the spatially and temporally distant."<sup>183</sup> In other words, according to Goldberg, Chopin used musical techniques that sound *other* to

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<sup>183</sup> Halina Goldberg, "Nationalizing the Kujawiak and Constructions of Nostalgia in Chopin's Mazurkas," *19th Century Music* 39, no. 3 (March 1, 2016): 223–47.

convey longing for the distant Poland of his past.<sup>184</sup> In tracing what she identifies as “musical vocabularies of nostalgia”, Goldberg lists “auditory distancing...in the form of echoes or the simultaneous presentation of temporally distinct musical languages,” and “distortion” or the dissolution of typical forms and harmonies.<sup>185</sup> According to Goldberg, then, a composer can convey nostalgia through the concurrent use of musical styles from multiple time periods, and through harmonic and formal ambiguity. This relates to the Romantic concept of *Sehnsucht* and also colors our understanding of Chopin’s illness and sense of alienation.<sup>186</sup>

I argue that these nostalgic musical evocations are equally pertinent to studying the music of Mel Bonis. In referencing the *style ancien*, she conveys temporal musical distance. She also expresses spatially distant musical styles, as, for example, in her *Suite orientale* trio (Op. 48), an *Orientale* for solo piano (Op. 32), and a *Mazurka* (Op. 26) and *Mazurka-ballet* (Op. 181) for solo piano.<sup>187</sup> In addition to her musical evocations of distant times and places, Bonis’ use of harmonic ambiguity, formal ambiguity, and pastoral topical references enable her to convey a nostalgia that aligns not only with Romantic concepts of nostalgia, as Goldberg found in Chopin’s work, but also with the fin-de-siècle nostalgic and nationalist interest in France’s musical past. Like Goldberg, I argue for an understanding of these nostalgic musical references within the context of the composer’s life. In the case of Mel Bonis, I conclude not just that the composer participated in a nostalgic trend, but also that

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 237-238, 243-245.

<sup>187</sup> Géliot lists all of the titles of Bonis’ works in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 285-296.



these nostalgic evocations help us to better understand her Catholicism and its manifestations in her music, both sacred and secular.

In particular, I extend Goldberg's idea of a "musical vocabulary of nostalgia" to include plagal harmonic systems – or, musical passages in which motion from subdominant- to tonic-function chords best characterizes important structural harmonies – as a source of musical distance in Bonis' work. This choice follows from my observations of seemingly atypical and ambiguous harmonies in Bonis' work that are best explained by theories of harmonic dualism.<sup>188</sup> In addition to using these theories to explain harmonic function and nostalgic allusion in Bonis' music, I hope to contribute to existing work relating the use of plagal harmonic systems to musical distancing in the work of other late-Romantic composers.

Margaret Notley has already linked plagal harmonic systems to a sense of musical distance in the music of Johannes Brahms (1833-1897). She characterizes musical moments dominated by plagal systems as connoting *other*-ness based on the fact that, in certain instrumental works, Brahms employs these plagal sections as temporary diversions from the more conventional authentic tonalities that dominate the particular piece.<sup>189</sup> Notley argues that dualistic harmonic theories that oppose authentic and plagal systems were already in widespread use across Europe, as witnessed by the writings of the German music theorist Hugo Riemann (1849-

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<sup>188</sup> As, for example, in the work of Daniel Harrison, who bases this distinction on historical precedents including theories by Hugo Riemann in: Daniel Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents* (University of Chicago Press, 1994). I use *harmonic systems* to describe the motions between harmonies; this includes the study of the functions of different chords (or other vertical sonorities) within a particular piece.

<sup>189</sup> Margaret Notley, "Plagal Harmony as Other: Asymmetrical Dualism and Instrumental Music by Brahms," *The Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 90–130, 92-94.

1919).<sup>190</sup> According to Notley, passages that explore plagal harmonic relations stand out relative to the more conventional authentic-functioning harmonic areas that surround them.<sup>191</sup> Notley ultimately concludes that the sections of Brahms in which plagal harmonic systems dominate carry connotations of “otherworldliness, distance, timelessness, possibly even alienation.”<sup>192</sup> She even speculates that plagal harmonies, lacking the typical harmonic direction found in authentic systems, “might suggest timelessness and therefore eternity.”<sup>193</sup>

If plagal harmonic systems are able to convey “distance” and “timelessness” they too contribute to the kinds of musical nostalgia discussed above. Fin-de-siècle nostalgia, then, can be identified in a variety of pastoral devices that impact texture, rhythm, instrumentation, and titles; in explicit references to past musical styles; in harmonic stasis; and finally, in the deliberate avoidance of authentic harmonic systems, whether through subdominant-functioning harmonies, chromatic and modal inflections, or dualistic harmonic language.

### *Harmonic functions and dualistic harmonic systems*

Though Notley’s application of dualistic theories focuses on Brahms, other scholars are beginning to extend these ideas to late-Romantic French music. Daniel Harrison’s 1994 study includes an analysis of a work by César Franck (one of Mel

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 90-93. Harrison traces a longer, more complex and detailed history of theories of harmonic dualism in part II of his book: Daniel Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 215-322.

<sup>191</sup> Notley uses the term *markedness*, which she borrows from the field of linguistics, in particular, George Lakoff; she also cites Robert Hatten’s earlier musical applications of *markedness* in his analyses of works by Beethoven: Notley, “Plagal Harmony as Other: Asymmetrical Dualism and Instrumental Music by Brahms,” 92-93.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 111.

Bonis' teachers at the Paris Conservatoire).<sup>194</sup> In response, Kevin Swinden extended Riemann's and Harrison's ideas to propose a new theoretical model of functional mixture that draws on works by Franck, Ravel, and Debussy.<sup>195</sup> In addition, Andrew Pau has presented a study of plagal systems in songs by Fauré and Duparc.<sup>196</sup>

In order to analyze plagal harmonic systems as they appear in Mel Bonis' work, I will present an overview of the pertinent theoretical aspects of harmonic dualism and of theories of harmonic function that draws heavily on the work of Daniel Harrison.<sup>197</sup> In addition to his presentation of dualistic harmonic theories of function, which have roots in the work of Riemann and his contemporaries, Harrison proposes terminology to explain harmonic function that is especially pertinent to late-Romantic music.

While Harrison both acknowledges earlier dualistic theories preceding Riemann's and adds his own original contributions to the theory he presents, he credits Riemann with remarkable innovations and contributions to the field of music theory. Harrison acknowledges the widespread influence and fame of Riemannian theory in the nineteenth century and today.<sup>198</sup> The Riemannian ideas that inform

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<sup>194</sup> Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents*.

<sup>195</sup> Kevin J. Swinden, "When Functions Collide: Aspects of Plural Function in Chromatic Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 249–82.

<sup>196</sup> Andrew Pau, "Plagal Systems in the Songs of Fauré and Duparc" (Paper presented at the thirty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory, Vancouver, BC, Canada, November 6, 2016).

<sup>197</sup> Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents*.

<sup>198</sup> In particular, he discusses Riemann's historical importance in a chapter devoted to the theorist: Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents*, 252–293.

Harrison's theory therefore make it especially well-suited to analysis of late nineteenth-century music.<sup>199</sup>

Riemann is especially well remembered for his theories of harmony, which are based in the dualistic theories that he presents in his theoretical writing.<sup>200</sup> Even some writers and teachers who neglected or rejected the dualistic origins of Riemann's harmonic ideas nonetheless depended on his ideas of harmonic function in their own work.<sup>201</sup> Despite criticisms from those who disagreed with his theories, Riemann's ideas achieved great success and influence in his own time and today.

The popularity of Riemann's ideas in late nineteenth-century France is evidenced by the use of Riemannian dualist ideas in Vincent d'Indy's transcribed and collected lectures, *Cours de composition musicale* (first published 1912).<sup>202</sup> The criticisms of Riemann published between 1904 and 1906 by the French critic Jean Marnold, which cite Riemannian dualist ideas as being widespread in France, further establish his importance and relevance in this period of French musical history.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Harrison is not alone in articulating the importance of Riemann's theory and its nineteenth-century reception. Riemann has been acknowledged as an exceptionally prolific writer who made great efforts to have his work circulated and to ensure his own fame and influence; consequently, he was widely read – and widely criticized – throughout Western Europe during his lifetime; see Ludwig Holtmeier, “The Reception of Hugo Riemann's Music Theory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Neo-Riemannian Music Theories*, ed. Alexander Rehding and Edward Gollin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–54.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. See also Henry Klumpenhouwer, “Dualist Tonal Space and Transformation in Nineteenth-Century Musical Thought,” in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 456–76.

<sup>202</sup> As Rémy Campos discusses in an article on d'Indy's *Cours de composition* in: Rémy Campos, “Le cours de composition de Vincent d'Indy,” in *Théories de la composition musicale au XXe siècle*, ed. Nicolas Donin and Laurent Feneyrou (Lyon, France: Symétrie, 2013), 67–92, and as Kieffer discusses in: Alexandra Kieffer, “Riemann in France: Jean Marnold and the ‘Modern’ Music-Theoretical Ear,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 1–15.

<sup>203</sup> As Alexandra Kieffer discusses in: Kieffer, “Riemann in France: Jean Marnold and the ‘Modern’ Music-Theoretical Ear.”

Perhaps the most striking influence of Riemannian theory in France, with regard to Mel Bonis, is the fact that she likely learned it in her Conservatoire classes. Ideas based on Riemann's ideas appear in the 1862 *Traité d'harmonie* written by the French composer Napoléon Henri Reber (1807-1880).<sup>204</sup> The Paris Conservatoire eventually adopted this textbook for use in its harmony courses, and historians have noted that Claude Debussy used Reber's text in his coursework while he was a conservatory student there.<sup>205</sup> Since Mel Bonis' years at the Conservatoire (1876-1881)<sup>206</sup> fall within Debussy's time there (1872-1883),<sup>207</sup> Bonis must have encountered Reber's text or, at the very least, would have interacted with and heard music by others who knew it. I argue, therefore, that a consideration of plagal and authentic systems in Bonis' work is not only a useful means of describing her harmonic techniques, but also a somewhat historically informed way to approach her work.

I use terminology developed by modern-day music theorists that builds on Riemannian ideas with the intention of establishing a framework for analyzing late nineteenth-century European music. In particular, I am interested in applying the aspects of Harrison's dualistic theory of harmonic function that best relate to Mel Bonis' work, which include those that create effects of stasis and of *otherness*, related to the pastoral and nostalgic sensibilities that I find especially striking in her work.

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<sup>204</sup> As Andrew Pau has noted, citing musical examples in Reber's text that use Riemannian dualistic concepts to derive harmonies: Pau, "Plagal Systems in the Songs of Fauré and Duparc."

<sup>205</sup> Clevenger notes that Debussy was at the Conservatoire from 1872-1883 and references his use of Reber's text in Clevenger, "Debussy's Paris Conservatoire Training." and John R. Clevenger, "Debussy's Rome Cantatas," in *Debussy and His World*, ed. Jane F. Fulcher (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9-98.

<sup>206</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*, 21-23.

<sup>207</sup> As outlined in: Clevenger, "Debussy's Paris Conservatoire Training."

Drawing on the dualistic ideas of Riemann and of others prevalent in nineteenth-century Europe, Harrison establishes several dualistic concepts. Beginning with the duality of the major and minor modes, Harrison extends dualistic ideas to align characteristic semitone movements, chord functions, cadence types, and alterations. The table below provides my adaptation of Harrison's dualistic concepts.<sup>208</sup>

Major	Minor
$\hat{7} - \hat{8}$ semitone	$\hat{6} - \hat{5}$ semitone
Dominant	Subdominant
Authentic cadence (Dominant-Tonic)	Plagal cadence (Subdominant-Tonic)
Sharp	Flat

**Figure 2:** Table of dualistic concepts, adapted from Daniel Harrison's *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music*

Harrison also emphasizes the importance of *function* as a driving force behind harmonic and cadential motion. He builds on Riemann's theories by extending function to describe tendencies of individual notes, whereas for Riemann function related only to chords (usually triads). Harrison maintains the three principal function types proposed by Riemann: these are Tonic (I), Dominant (V), and Subdominant (IV).<sup>209</sup> In applying these functions to individual notes, Harrison considers these tones as scale degrees in relation to the tonal center of the key of a musical work or passage

<sup>208</sup> Based on Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents*, 27.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37, 42-52.

(the tonic, notated  $\hat{1}$ ). By designating functions to the individual tones of the scale, Harrison establishes a framework that can also account for chords and vertical harmonies: he describes chords as “assemblies” of the individual notes that constitute them.<sup>210</sup> In this way, Harrison’s system can describe the functions of various diatonic triads, as well as chords with added extensions, nonharmonic tones, or additional pitches with seemingly ambiguous function.

To ascribe functions to the tones of the diatonic scale, allowing analysts to discern harmonic function, Harrison provides a chart assigning scale degrees to Tonic (T), Subdominant (S), and Dominant (D) functions. In addition, his system offers different levels of functional strength: he proposed the terms *base*, *agent*, and *associate* to describe the functional elements of chords.<sup>211</sup> Harrison’s concept of *base* describes the tone with the strongest functional role for a particular function (T, S, or D), while the functional *agent* is the next-most crucial element. He explains that, if the *base* is not in the bass of a vertical harmony, then the *agent* must be present in addition to the *base* in order for the harmonic function in question to be effective. The *associate* is relatively “unimportant” from a functional point of view, but Harrison reminds us that one scale degree can have multiple potential functions, requiring analysts to take context into account and make judgments. The first scale degree ( $\hat{1}$ ), for example, has the potential either to serve as a tonic base or a subdominant

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>211</sup> This – and all terminology relating to the function of individual notes that follows – comes from the section of Harrison’s book entitled “Functional Roles of Scale Degrees”: Ibid., 45-57.

associate, depending on context, as indicated in the table below, which is an adaptation of a table in Harrison's book presenting the functions of scale degrees.<sup>212</sup>

	<b>Subdominant</b>	<b>Tonic</b>	<b>Dominant</b>
<i>associate</i>	$\hat{1}$	$\hat{5}$	$\hat{2}$
<i>agent</i>	$\hat{6}$	$\hat{3}$	$\hat{7}$
<i>base</i>	$\hat{4}$	$\hat{1}$	$\hat{5}$

**Figure 3:** Table of scale degree functions adapted from Harrison's *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music*

The presence of certain scale degrees with certain levels of Tonic, Subdominant, or Dominant functions enables Harrison – and analysts who employ his theories – to deduce the ultimate harmonic function of a particular vertical chord. Understanding harmonic functions and movements between different functional harmonies allows us to understand what kinds of cadences – and thus, what kind of harmonic systems – dominate a particular musical passage or work. Plagal systems are characterized by the importance of plagal cadences (movements from Subdominant to Tonic functioning harmonies) in articulating tonality and structure, while authentic systems are based in authentic cadences (motions from Dominant to Tonic.) Though authentic systems were more common in the Classical era, thereby earning “privileged” status, Harrison notes that dualistic systems (accounting for both plagal and authentic cadences as agents of harmonic motion, including, in particular, Riemann's theories) had become widespread by the late nineteenth century, making

<sup>212</sup> Like Harrison, I use the conventional notation for scale degrees, using Arabic numerals with caret marks above them. This table is adapted from: *Ibid.*, 45.



Harrison's theoretical ideas especially well suited to the analysis of late-Romantic chromatic tonal music.<sup>213</sup>

Harrison also defines both the "authentic cycle" and the "plagal cycle" to demonstrate characteristic movements between particular chord functions and scale degrees.<sup>214</sup> He describes the functional harmonic progression underlying plagal systems as T-D-S-T. This contrasts with the more traditional authentic system, which is T-S-D-T.

Harrison's terminology provides useful means of describing harmonic ambiguity in chords with added tones or seemingly unclear functions. A chord that, while functioning within a tonal context, contains both Subdominant and Dominant functional elements is difficult to analyze with other harmonic analysis methods; Harrison's theory allows analysts to acknowledge these seemingly ambiguous chords as functionally mixed. In other words, a single chord may contain certain Dominant and Subdominant functional elements in combination, which resolve in certain characteristic ways.<sup>215</sup> Harrison also explains how best to account for modulations between key areas within a piece.<sup>216</sup> While aspects of Harrison's theories become relevant in my case studies (Chapters 3 and 4), I continue to find helpful the more traditional roman-numeral harmonic analysis notation when explaining some aspects of Bonis' harmonic choices and function.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 15-35.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>215</sup> Harrison discusses Subdominant/Dominant functional mixture in: Ibid., 70-72.

<sup>216</sup> He describes these in a section devoted to analytic techniques: Ibid., 127-212.

### Chapter 3: Case Study 1. The *mélodies*

*La musique traduit toute beauté, toute vérité et toute ardeur.*

*Music translates every beauty, every truth and every ardor.*  
— Mel Bonis<sup>217</sup>

The genre of the *mélodie* – a French art song genre that emerged in the nineteenth century – remained important through much of Mel Bonis’ life and compositional career. Indeed, during the first ten years of her marriage (1883-1893), a period during which she composed relatively little, she wrote at least eight *mélodies*, revealing that songs were a continued presence in her life even in difficult times.<sup>218</sup> The fact that Amédée Hettich was a singer and a poet may have led Bonis to have a special appreciation for vocal settings of poetry. This chapter considers two Bonis *mélodies* as representative case studies of her vocal chamber music. I analyze Bonis’ compositional techniques in the context of her life events, uncovering traces of her Catholicism in these non-religious works. The song texts Bonis chose also provide useful insight into Bonis’ conception of pastoral, medievalist, and nostalgic themes.

#### *Background: Mel Bonis’ mélodies*

Like many French composers of her time, Mel Bonis was a prolific writer of *mélodies*, a French genre of art song for one or more vocalists accompanied usually by the piano, sometimes with other instruments in addition.<sup>219</sup> Bonis’ complete *mélodies* – thirty-nine songs in total – were recently published in three volumes by

<sup>217</sup> As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 192.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-60.

<sup>219</sup> Her song *Élève-toi, mon âme* (Op. 22, 1894), for example, requires a cello part in addition to the piano and vocal parts.

Éditions Fortin-Armiane.<sup>220</sup> These new editions include previously published songs as well as new editions made from Bonis' manuscripts, in consultation with Christine Géliot, who also contributed introductory notes that briefly describe each of the songs.

As noted above, Bonis composed *mélodies* throughout her career. Bonis' earliest *mélodies* were first published in 1884, when she was 26 years old, and the latest date to the early 1930s, the last decade of Bonis' life. In addition, there are no large time gaps between songs; rather, they span most of her lifetime.<sup>221</sup> It was only in the last years of her life that Bonis focused instead on religious music, piano pieces, and chamber works.

The poets whose texts Mel Bonis set include such famous names as Victor Hugo and Leconte de Lisle, but she also set texts by people she knew personally, including her friend Madeleine Pape-Carpantier,<sup>222</sup> and her lover Amédée Hettich. She also set seven poems by Edouard Guinand, perhaps revealing a particular admiration for his poetry, and there are a small number of texts that she wrote herself. Some of her sacred songs set medieval Latin texts.

Géliot's describes a remarkable variety of musical styles and poetic subject matter in Bonis' *mélodies*. Only nine have sacred themes, while the other thirty are non-religious, ranging, in subject matter, from declarations of love, evocations of nature, and prayer to the search for a lost cat. The table in Figure 4 presents Bonis'

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<sup>220</sup> Mel Bonis, *Les mélodies* (Paris: Fortin-Armiane, 2013–14). I count each version of songs that exist in multiple versions (different keys) in the overall number of songs.

<sup>221</sup> For some *mélodies*, the manuscript's date is known; for others, only the first date of publication is known. For my purposes, I treat whichever date is known (as indicated in the new editions of the scores and in Géliot's Bonis biography) as the date attached to the composition.

<sup>222</sup> Géliot describes Pape-Carpantier's friendship with Bonis in: Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et "compositeur" (1858-1937)*, 157-158.

*mélodies* in chronological order. Tracking the main themes of Bonis' songs over time, one can observe that the themes of nature, religion, and love recur throughout her life, suggesting that these are indeed key indexes to understanding her music. I argue that the appearance of themes related to childhood on multiple occasions might also relate to the nostalgic longing for innocence inherent in the pastoral sensibility.

**Figure 4:** Chronological table of Mel Bonis' *mélodies*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Opus number</b>	<b>Poet</b>	<b>Voice part indication</b>	<b>Theme of text</b>
<i>Sur la plage</i>	1884	3	A. L. Hettich	<i>voix graves</i>	Nature; Love
<i>Villanelle</i>	1884	4	A. L. Hettich	<i>voix élevées</i>	Love
<i>Le Moulin</i>	1886	191	Edouard Guinand	<i>soprano, contralto</i>	Windmill
<i>Invocation</i>	1887	5 posthumous	Edouard Guinand	<i>voix moyennes ou élevées</i>	Nature; Love
<i>Trois mélodies: I Viens! Ou Barcarolle</i>	1888	6 posthumous	Edouard Guinand	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Love; Nature
<i>Trois mélodies: II Mirage</i>	1888	171 posthumous	Edouard Guinand	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Love; Nature; Grief
<i>Trois mélodies: III Chanson de printemps</i>	1888	171 posthumous	Edouard Guinand	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Nature; magic
<i>Noël Pastoral</i>	1892	20	A. L. Hettich	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Religion; Christ
<i>Des L'Aube</i>	1893	18	Edouard Guinand	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Love
<i>Berceuse</i>	1893	17 posthumous	Edouard Guinand	<i>voix moyennes ou élevées</i>	Child; Lullaby
<i>O Salutaris</i>	1893	188 posthumous	(Medieval text)	<i>ténor et baryton</i>	Religion; Christ
<i>Élève-toi, mon âme</i>	1894	22	A. L. Hettich	<i>voix moyennes ou élevées and cello</i>	Love
<i>Le Ruisseau</i>	1894	21-1	A. L. Hettich	<i>soprano, alto</i>	Nature; Adventure
<i>Regina Coeli (en sol majeur)</i>	1899	45 (harp adaptation by Huguette Géliot)	(Medieval text)	<i>soprano 1 and soprano 2 ("deux voix égales")</i>	Religion, Mary
<i>Regina Coeli (en fa majeur)</i>	1899	45	(Medieval text)	<i>soprano 1 and soprano 2 ("deux voix égales")</i>	Religion, Mary

<i>Boléro</i>	1900	190 (under pseudonym Juan Sanchez)	Jules Ruelle	<i>soprano, deux voix de mezzo ad libitum</i>	Dance
<i>Madrigal</i>	1901	53	Madeleine Pape Carpentier	<i>soprano, contralto, and soprano solo</i>	Love; Nature
<i>O Salutaris</i>	1901	50	(Medieval text)	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Religion, Christ
<i>Pourriez-vous pas me dire ?</i>	1901	55	A. L. Hettich	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Love; Nature
<i>Reproche Tendre</i>	1901	49	A. L. Hettich	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Love; Child
<i>Noël de la vierge Marie; Berceuse</i>	1901	54	Madeleine Pape Carpentier	<i>voix moyennes ou élevées</i>	Religion, Mary
<i>La Mer; en sib majeur; mélodie italienne</i>	1903		Mel Bonis (under pseudonym Léon de Poul ar Feuntun)	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Nature; Divine love
<i>La mer; en réb majeur; Mélodie italienne</i>	1903	58-A	Mel Bonis (under pseudonym Léon de Poul ar Feuntun)	<i>voix élevées</i>	Nature; Divine love
<i>Allons prier ! Hymne à Marie</i>	1905	73	l'Abbé Léon Rimbault	<i>voix moyennes ou élevées</i>	Religion, Mary, prayer
<i>Ave Maria</i>	1905	68	(Medieval text)	<i>voix moyennes ou élevées</i>	Religion, Mary
<i>Un Soir</i>	1906	77	Anne Osmont	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Love; Nature
<i>L'oiseau bleu</i>	1907	74	A. L. Hettich	<i>soprano, alto</i>	Bird
<i>Épithalame</i>	1907	75	Victor Hugo	<i>soprano, alto</i>	Love; Child
<i>Le Dernier souvenir</i>	1909	79 posthumous	Leconte de Lisle	<i>voix de basse</i>	Death
<i>Immortelle Tendresse</i>	1910	88	André Godard	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Love
<i>Chanson d'amour</i>	1912	94	Maurice Bouchor	<i>voix moyennnes</i>	Love
<i>Le Chat sur le toit; en si mineur; Nocturne</i>	1912	93, no. 2	R. du Costal	<i>voix moyennes (le ton original est pour ténor)</i>	Cat
<i>Trois mélodies: III - Songe (Vers le pur amour)</i>	1913	91-3 posthumous	Maurice Bouchor	<i>ténor (ou soprano)</i>	Love
<i>Trois mélodies: II - Sauvez-moi de l'amour</i>	1913	91-2 posthumous	Maurice Bouchor	<i>ténor (ou soprano)</i>	Love
<i>Trois mélodies: I - Viola</i>	1914	91-1 posthumous	Maurice Bouchor	<i>ténor (ou soprano)</i>	Love
<i>Élégie sur le</i>	1918	110	Georges	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Grief

<i>mode antique</i>			Rivollet		
<i>Le Chat sur le toit; en do # mineur; Nocturne</i>	1925	93, no. 1	R. du Costal	<i>voix élevées</i>	Cat
<i>Cantique à Marie</i>	1927	122 posthumous	Mel Bonis (?) <sup>223</sup>	<i>voix élevées</i>	Religion, Mary
<i>Couboulambou à Paris</i>	1930	135 posthumous	Mel Bonis (under pseudonym Jacques Normandin)	<i>voix moyennes</i>	Paris; contrasting urban and rural life
<i>Chanson Catalane</i>	1931	137 posthumous	Mel Bonis	<i>voix moyennes ou élevées</i>	Love

I use two *mélodies* – *Élégie sur le mode antique* and *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* – to test the theories and methodologies described in Chapter 2. In particular, I investigate Bonis’ ability to convey nostalgia through the distancing effect of dualistic harmonic systems and seek links between her pastoral allusions and the historical context.

### *Élégie sur le mode antique*

Mel Bonis’ *Élégie sur le mode antique* (Op. 110, first published 1918) exemplifies the applicability of dualistic, scale-degree-based theories of harmonic function in her work, showing the potential for plagal harmonic systems to convey nostalgic effects. Bonis’ *Élégie*, written for “medium voices” and piano, sets a text by the French playwright and novelist Georges Rivollet (1852-1928). Though Rivollet considered the text to be poetry, it is actually excerpted from one of his plays, a 1905 verse drama entitled *Les phéniciennes* (*The Phoenician Women*), based on Euripides’

<sup>223</sup> Géliot indicates that this text is likely by Mel Bonis but that this is not known with certainty: Ibid., 288.

eponymous play.<sup>224</sup> Rivollet's play premiered at the Comédie-Française with incidental music by the composer Laurent Léon.<sup>225</sup> The plot involves famous Greek tragic characters including King Creon, his sister Jocasta, Jocasta's son Oedipus, Oedipus and Jocasta's daughter Antigone, and Creon's son Menoecus.

In the original Rivollet play, the text later set by Bonis is spoken by King Creon (responding to the Theban citizens who arrive bearing flowers at the funeral procession of his son Menoecus).<sup>226</sup> Not only is Bonis' *mélodie* for a woman's voice, Bonis adds the historical distancing effect of the title of *Élégie sur le mode antique* (*Elegy on the antique mode*).<sup>227</sup> The addition of this title removes the sense of direct speech, with the categorical designation of *elegy* referencing events located in the distant past.

The title *Élégie sur le mode antique* is ambiguous. Bonis' interest in the musical past and her explicit evocations of the *style ancien* in other works suggests a reference to the historic Church modes. But an alternative interpretation would link her elegy to an antique *mode de vie* (way of life). Given that the *mélodie*'s text is adapted from a play based on a Euripidean Greek tragedy, and that the *elegy* as a poetic form has origins in Antiquity, the allusion cannot be accidental. In French, the expression *sur le mode antique* is commonly used to describe methods of doing things in an ancient or older style, and an *élégie sur* some object or idea describes an elegy praising that thing; accordingly, it would make sense to understand an *élégie*

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<sup>224</sup> Georges Rivollet, "Les phéniciennes: drame en quatre actes, en vers," in *L'Illustration*, Supplément au No. 3153 (1903). Digitized by Google Books and accessed online March 15, 2017.

<sup>225</sup> As described in: Peter Lamothe, "Theater Music in France, 1864-1914" (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008), 57.

<sup>226</sup> Rivollet, "Les phéniciennes: drame en quatre actes, en vers."

<sup>227</sup> Interestingly, the fourth movement of Bonis' *Scènes de la forêt* – entitled *Pour Artémis* – also references Ancient Greece through its reference to a Greek goddess.

*sur le mode antique* as an elegy lauding earlier ways of life and using seemingly old-fashioned methods to do so.<sup>228</sup> Bonis' nostalgic tribute to the antique past uses modal musical material to create temporal distance—a reasonable device, given the lack of known music from antiquity.

Printed below is the text of Bonis' *Élégie* and my English translation. Where Bonis' text differs from Rivollet's, the changed words are indicated in bold, with Rivollet's original words in square brackets:

<b>Élégie sur le mode antique</b> [title absent in Rivollet]	<b>Elegy on the antique mode</b> [title absent in Rivollet]
N'effeuillez pas sur l'urne close, La fleur d'Aphrodite, la rose <b>Mon fils</b> [ce mort] n'a pas connu l'amour	Do not toss petals onto the closed urn Of Aphrodite's flower, the rose <b>My son</b> [this dead man] has not known love
<b>N'effeuillez</b> [Ne jetez] pas non plus sur elle La fleur des vieillards, l'immortelle <b>Mon</b> [Cet] enfant n'a vécu qu'un jour	<b>Do not throw petals</b> [do not toss] onto it Of the old men's flower, the Immortelle <sup>229</sup> , either <b>My</b> [this] child only lived one day
Si vous voulez qu'au noir séjour Son <b>âme</b> [ombre] descende fleurie Cueillez tous les lauriers dans les bois d'alentour	If you want his <b>soul</b> [shadow] To descend into the grave covered in flowers, Cut all the the laurels from the nearby woods
<b>Mon fils est mort</b> [repetition absent in Rivollet] Mon fils est mort pour la patrie	<b>My son died</b> [repetition absent in Rivollet] My son died for his country

As Géliot notes, Bonis adapts Rivollet's text to describe "the drama of a mother who has lost her son to war."<sup>230</sup> Géliot also notes that Bonis wrote this piece

<sup>228</sup> Interestingly, an 1871 collection of *Mémoires & comptes rendus* of the *Société scientifique et littéraire d'Alais* (available in Google books) includes an "Élégie sur le mode antique" written by a member of the group named Joseph Lisbonne. This "élégie," however, has nothing to do with music, but instead is a written poem praising ways of life that its author associates with Greek antiquity. In this case, *le mode* refers not to a collection of musical pitches, but to a *mode de vie*, or way of life. Whether or not Bonis had any way of knowing about Lisbonne's "Élégie," the existence of this late nineteenth-century French "Élégie sur le mode antique" demonstrates that this kind of nostalgia for antiquity was prevalent in her time.

<sup>229</sup> The Immortelle (or *l'immortelle* in French) is a common name for a specific type of so-called "Everlasting Flower" belonging to the taxonomic genus *Helichrysum*.



during the First World War, in which two of her sons fought.<sup>231</sup> Bonis' song gives Rivollet's text an interpretation that serves her own expressive purposes. Bonis' adapted text is more emotionally charged than Rivollet's original, perhaps reflecting worries about her own sons at war.

Bonis' *Élégie* is also remarkable for its harmonies, which use plagal and authentic systems to contrast one another and create musical distancing that is in keeping with the nostalgia for the *antique* styles of music and life implied by the title.

From the beginning of the song, Bonis establishes a dualistic juxtaposition of authentic and plagal harmonic systems, as shown in Example 2. Piano chords in the first two measures establish the piece's overall G-minor tonality through authentic-system motions between tonic and dominant triadic harmony.<sup>232</sup>

g:      i                      v                      i                      v  
          Tonic                      Dominant                      Tonic                      Dominant

**Example 2:** *Élégie sur le mode antique*, piano part, measures 1-2, annotated with Roman numeral analysis symbols and with Riemannian harmonic functions

<sup>230</sup> In her comments preceding the scores in: Bonis, *Les mélodies, Volume I: Voix moyennes et graves*. (“*Elle décrit le drame d’une mère qui a perdu son fils à la guerre.*”) Géliot also considers Bonis’ use of “mode antique” to refer to the music of the past, and does not consider the potential dual meaning of the word *mode*.

<sup>231</sup> Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et “compositeur” (1858-1937)*, 186.

<sup>232</sup> Although the dominant-functioning chord here is a minor-quality triad, weakened slightly by its lack of raised leading tone, the function of the chord is still clearly dominant, as evidenced by the motion in fifths between the bass notes G and D, and the inclusion of the fifth, second, and seventh scale degrees in the chord. This minor dominant chord, while functioning within this authentic harmonic system, evokes modal Aeolian minor harmony (rather than the more typical harmonic minor mode of common-practice-era harmony, which has a raised seventh scale degree to enable the formation of major-quality dominant chords); perhaps this modal inflection also serves to evoke earlier musical styles.

But the first entrance of the voice is accompanied by chords that function in a plagal system. Example 3 gives a harmonic reduction of these chords that makes their functional relationships clear, indicating the functions of each vertical sonority (Tonic (T), Subdominant (S), or Dominant (D)) relative to the tonic of G.

T - D - S - T plagal system

g: i          v          i          v          iv          I

Tonic          Dominant          Tonic          Dominant          Subdominant          Tonic (parallel major)

**Example 3:** Harmonic reduction of *Élégie sur le mode antique*, mm. 2-5, annotated with Roman numeral analysis symbols and with Riemannian harmonic functions

Throughout the song, Bonis continues to employ contrasts between authentic and plagal systems. Following Harrison's assessment of authentic systems as "more privileged"<sup>233</sup> and Notley's idea of an "asymmetrical dualism,"<sup>234</sup> Bonis' song is ultimately dominated by authentic-functioning harmony. It is through authentic Tonic-Dominant relationships that Bonis establishes the tonality in the song's first measures, and in the concluding measures of the piece, Bonis draws again on harmonies functioning as an authentic system in order to give the piece closure, giving an authentic cadence the final word in the harmonic discourse she has established.

There are also passages of functional mixture that are best described as employing parallel, rather than functional, harmonies. But these do not detract from her remarkable use of plagal systems in this song. In particular, Bonis uses plagal

<sup>233</sup> Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music: A Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents*.

<sup>234</sup> Notley, "Plagal Harmony as Other: Asymmetrical Dualism and Instrumental Music by Brahms."



The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system, labeled 'Voice' and 'Piano', shows a voice line with the lyrics 'Mon fils est mort pour la patrie' and a piano accompaniment. A 'Plagal cadence' is indicated above the voice line, corresponding to a subdominant chord in the piano accompaniment. The second system, labeled 'Vo.' and 'Pno.', shows a voice line with a whole rest and a piano accompaniment. An 'Authentic cadence' is indicated above the voice line, corresponding to a dominant chord in the piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment in both systems features block chords and moving bass lines.

**Example 5:** *Élégie sur le mode antique*, mm. 48-54, annotated to indicate plagal and authentic cadences

Bonis' plagal harmonies create an effect of distance appropriate not only to the text's original ancient Greek inspiration but also to the mourning of a lost son. As others have noted, the use of plagal systems in *marked* positions makes these harmonies particularly noticeable and expressive. The juxtaposed plagal and authentic systems create a sense of musical distance and *otherness* that in this case can be understood as nostalgia for the past and for the *mode antique*, perhaps as it describes both music and life.

Bonis' *Élégie sur le mode antique* provides an exemplary case study of a Mel Bonis work that lends itself well to analysis in Daniel Harrison's terms, given its use of chromaticism and harmonic dualism. In addition, we might speculate about the significance of the *Élégie* as it relates to Bonis' Catholicism. Her slight modifications to Rivollet's original text place special emphasis on the concept of the soul. In

addition, the changes to the text also give a new importance to a parent's grief at the loss of a child, which recalls the Biblical tale of David's lament at the death of his son. Bonis' concern for the soul of the lost child references both Christian redemption and the tradition derived from Roman times of using laurels to symbolize victory over death.

The case study of the *Élégie sur le mode antique* serves to establish analytic techniques that also illuminate the next *mélodie* I will analyze, *Pourriez-vous pas me dire*. This *mélodie* includes harmonies that are best described according to Daniel Harrison's terms for understanding late-Romantic chromatic music. At the same time, *Pourriez-vous pas me dire*, unlike the *Élégie*, contains pastoral references both in its text and in its musical content, as another layer of nostalgia, with, as I will show, an even more remarkable connection between its poem and the composer's life.

#### *Pourriez-vous pas me dire*

In the notes accompanying the score of *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* (Op. 55, first published in 1901), Géliot alludes to its "charm" and "humor" and briefly notes that these aspects are surprising given difficult events in Bonis' life around the time of its composition.<sup>235</sup> It is a setting of a poem by Bonis' lover Amédée Hettich for piano and mezzo-soprano voice in the key of B minor with the tempo marking *andantino con moto*. Despite its minor-key tonality, the song has a light character, as Géliot has observed.<sup>236</sup> Géliot also describes this song as "pastoral."<sup>237</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>235</sup> Bonis, *Les mélodies, Volume I: voix moyennes et graves*.

<sup>236</sup> Musical features that contribute to this lightness of character include the song's strophic form, which links it to popular music, and a lilting, pastoral 6/8 meter which may recall popular dances, especially given the piece's moderate tempo marking.

pastoral evocations are found in the song's words as well as in its music. Below is the text of Hettich's poem alongside my English translation:

Pourriez-vous pas me dire Quel mal trouble ma raison ? Il est né d'un sourire, Au temps de la fenaison !	Couldn't you tell me What ill troubles my senses? It was born from a smile, In haymaking season!
Le ruisseau, dans sa course lente, Prend à l'iris un long baiser Jamais la lèvre d'une amante Sur mon front ne vint se poser.	The stream, in its slow course, Takes a long kiss into its eyes Never has the lip of a lover Come to land on my forehead.
Pourriez-vous pas me dire Quel mal trouble ma raison ? Il est né d'un sourire, Au temps de la fenaison !	Couldn't you tell me What ill troubles my senses? It was born from a smile, In haymaking season!
Des soupirs, en de lents murmures, Font palpiter la paix des bois ; Il fait donc bon sous les ramures, Quand on y va deux à la fois ?...	Sighs in slow murmurs Make the peace of the woods palpitate So, the weather is fine beneath the branches, When you go there two at a time?...
Pourriez-vous pas me dire Quel mal trouble ma raison ? Il est né d'un sourire, Au temps de la fenaison !	Couldn't you tell me What ill troubles my senses? It was born from a smile, In haymaking season!
Pourriez-vous pas me dire Quel mal trouble ma raison ?	Couldn't you tell me What ill troubles my senses?

Most obviously, the text's affectionate references to nature and the outdoors link it to pastoral imagery: the refrain mentions the "haymaking" season, and verses describe a stream, the woods, the sense of "peace" found in the forest, and the tree branches beneath which people might take refuge "two at a time." The nostalgic longing and anxiety in Hettich's text echos the anguished fin-de-siècle pastoral

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<sup>237</sup> Géliot, notes accompanying Bonis, *Les mélodies, Volume I: voix moyennes et graves*.

theorized by Monelle.<sup>238</sup> Here, the smiles of haymaking season led to the pain currently “troubling” the speaker’s “senses,” the stream recalls a kiss never received, and the woods palpitate with “sighs and slow murmurs.” This vision of the outdoors may be idealized, but it is inflected with apprehension and anxiety.

Though the piece is light in character, perhaps out of nostalgia for the strophic straightforwardness of a simpler time’s songs, a close reading of Bonis’ harmonic language in *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* reveals subtle evasions and ambiguities. These elusive harmonies are remarkable in their own right, perhaps revealing the composer’s desire to express herself through subtler means.

Though B minor is eventually established as the tonic key of *Pourriez-vous pas me dire*, a root-position tonic chord is not heard until the second beat of m.5.<sup>239</sup> Following a series of parallel first-inversion triads implying dominant harmony and establishing the motive that will form the basis of the sung melody, the harmonies accompanying the first measure of the song’s refrain (measure 4) are subtly ambiguous, more complex than their light, simple rhythms might suggest:

The musical score shows two systems. The first system is for measures 4 and 5. The voice part (treble clef) has the lyrics "Pour - riez... vous pas... me di - re". The piano accompaniment (grand staff) features a series of first-inversion triads in the right hand and single notes in the left hand.

**Example 6:** *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* mm. 4-5.

<sup>238</sup> Raymond Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral* (Indiana University Press, 2006), 268.

<sup>239</sup> My measure numbers reference those of the 2013 edition, which considers the first measure to be the nearly-empty measure that serves as an eighth-note anacrusis into what follows: Bonis, *Les mélodies, Volume I: voix moyennes et graves*.

I believe the harmonies in measure 4 are best described with regards to their prevailing harmonic functions (following Harrison), as added notes would obscure more traditional roman-numeral analysis. Example 7 provides a reduction of this passage in short score with simplified rhythmic values.

**Example 7:** Reduction of *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* mm. 4-5

Interestingly, the first two chords (measure 4) seem harmonically ambiguous because they are functionally mixed; while the first harmony is ultimately subdominant in function, the presence of the dominant functional base ( $\hat{5}$ , or F-sharp) and agent ( $\hat{7}$ , or A) – to use Harrison’s terms – in strong and emphasized positions within the 6/8 meter in the vocal line contributes dominant-function elements. I argue that, given the presence of the subdominant scale degree in the bass and the longer durational values of the elements of the subdominant triad (E, G, and B), this chord is still ultimately subdominant in function; nonetheless, the presence of dominant-function elements contributes a level of functional mixture and ambiguity.

The second chord also includes functional mixture. While this sonority is best characterized as having tonic function (due to the presence of the tonic functional agent of  $\hat{3}$  in the bass, as well as the presence of scale degrees  $\hat{1}$  and  $\hat{5}$ ), the appearance of scale degree  $\hat{7}$  in a strong metric position in the vocal line, as well as the presence of scale degree  $\hat{6}$ , contributes elements to the chord that do not serve tonic functions, making the harmony less stable.



Following its ambiguous beginning, the refrain becomes harmonically clearer. The following measure (measure 5) begins with a second-inversion dominant seventh chord that resolves to the tonic triad in a perfect authentic cadence, finally presenting the tonic triad for the first time. The remainder of the refrain (continuing through measure 11) proceeds with more typical and easily understood harmonic syntax. Overall, the refrain takes the form of a parallel period, with its first phrase ending in a half cadence and its second phrase ending in an imperfect authentic cadence that elides with the transitional passage that follows it. Example 8 provides a transcription of the refrain, annotated with Roman numerals<sup>240</sup> at its structural cadences to make its period-form structure clear:

Half Cadence

Voice

Pour - riez vous pas me di - re Quel maltrou-ble ma rai - son? Il

Piano

b: ii V

Authentic Cadence

5

Vo.

est né d'un sou - ri - re, Au temps de la fe - nai - son!

Pno.

N<sup>6</sup> V i

**Example 8:** *Pourriez-vous pas me dire*, refrain (mm. 4-11) annotated at cadences

<sup>240</sup> I have chosen not to indicate the inversions of the chords, as the harmonies themselves (rather than the bass lines) are what interest me here, so figured-bass symbols are absent (with the exception of the indication of the Neapolitan sixth chord as N<sup>6</sup>).

Despite its initial harmonic ambiguities, the refrain is easily understandable as a parallel period form (with antecedent and consequent phrases matched to half- and authentic cadences). The verses, in contrast, venture into more distant harmonic territory. Like the refrain, each verse consists of two four-measure phrases, using the same melody and accompaniment, in strophic form. The first phrase begins with the major mediant triad (D major), moving to the dominant seventh chord (F-sharp), then resolving to a root-position tonic triad, which is followed by the minor dominant (v) triad.

Though minor dominant chords are not atypical – they are commonly found within Phrygian half-cadence progressions, or as substitutes for the major-quality dominant triad in situations emphasizing modal language through the use of the subtonic ( $\flat\hat{7}$ ) – the use of the minor v chord in this song does not seem to serve any of these functions, but rather provides harmonic color to end the first phrase of the verse. The second phrase uses a chord that seems like the dominant of the dominant to arrive on a first-inversion d-sharp minor triad (iii) borrowed from the parallel major key, before parallel chromatic motion leads ultimately to a third-inversion dominant (V) seventh chord that effectively ends the verse on a half-cadence, thereby preparing for the return of the refrain:

The image shows a musical score for the verse of the song "Pourriez-vous pas me dire" (mm. 13-20). The score is in G major and 6/8 time. It consists of four systems, each with a Voice line and a Piano accompaniment. The piano part features a descending chromatic line in the right hand and block chords in the left hand. The voice part has a melodic line with some chromaticism and rests.

**Example 9:** Verse (notated without text) of *Pourriez-vous pas me dire*, mm. 13-20

Though the relatively faraway harmonies of the verse's second phrase can be understood in relation to the tonic key, as I have done above, this harmonic progression is not functional. Rather, the harmonies of this second phrase are best understood as chromaticisms, moving through parallel descending motion in the three

lowest voices before arriving at dominant seventh harmony in the last measure of the verse (see the harmonic reduction in Example 10):

**Example 10:** Harmonic reduction of *Pourriez-vous pas me dire*, measures 13-20, revealing descending parallel thirds (mm. 14-20, bottom staff) and stepwise descents (mm. 17-20, bottom voice of upper staff)

Consideration of *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* in relation to the events of Bonis' life may offer an additional interpretative lens. In particular, I argue that Bonis' use of certain musical techniques attests to her fraught relationship with her Catholic faith. As noted by Géliot, *Pourriez-vous pas me dire* was first published by Éditions Alphonse Leduc in 1901, soon after the secret birth of her illegitimate daughter Madeleine (in September, 1899).<sup>241</sup> In this context, the question “*Quel mal trouble ma raison ?*” could allude to Bonis' secret pregnancy, and the consequences of the youthful “haymaking.” The pastoral allusions in both text and music certainly contribute to a nostalgic sensibility and longing for lost innocence. We might read this as an expression of Bonis' wish to turn the clock back, to escape from the consequences of the actions – condemned as sins by her Catholic faith – of her adult life.

<sup>241</sup> As Géliot notes. (“*Curieusement, cette pièce légère, destinée à plaire, est publiée dans le contexte le plus dramatique de la relation de Mel Bonis avec Hettich, moins de deux ans après la naissance de leur enfant secrète.*”)

### *Conclusion*

As the case studies in this chapter have shown, the musical and biographical features of Mel Bonis' *mélodies* are remarkable. Her use of harmonic complexities (including dualism and chromaticism), pastoral allusions, and text-music relations give her varied means by which to convey musical nostalgia, with consequences for our understanding of how her music relates to the difficulties she faced throughout her life.

#### Chapter 4: Case study 2. *Scènes de la forêt*

*Oh! La nuance seule fiance  
Le rêve au rêve et la flûte au cor!*

*Oh! Only nuance brings  
Dream to dream and flute to horn!*  
— Paul Verlaine, *Art poétique* (1885)

As much as the *mélodie* evokes the musical *salon* gatherings of Mel Bonis' time, textless instrumental music draws on a long tradition of referencing nature. Bonis' *Scènes de la forêt* (*forest scenes*, Op. 123, 1928),<sup>242</sup> builds on this tradition in its evocations of nature and the outdoors. Though the four movements of Bonis' *Scènes* present distinct kinds of musical forest imagery, they all exemplify the kinds of pastoral references, nostalgic allusions, and harmonic systems outlined in Chapter 2. I also argue that all four of these movements can – and should – be considered in relation to Bonis' life events, especially Bonis' relationship with her Catholicism. In this chapter, I analyze each movement of the *Scènes* employing the methods described in Chapter 2 to consider how the four *Scènes* each might reveal biographical and spiritual influences.

##### *Historical background: The Scènes de la forêt*

The *Scènes* comprise four movements: *Nocturne*, *À l'aube* (*at dawn*), *Invocation*, and *Pour Artémis*. Bonis' *Scènes* were first published posthumously in 2001, as part of her descendants' recent efforts to bring her works to light. The manuscript from which the 2001 edition was made dates from 1928, though researchers speculate that this version was an updated version of either an earlier

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<sup>242</sup> Recently published as: Bonis, Mel, ed. Christine Géliot. "Scènes de la forêt pour flûte, cor en fa, et piano." Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 2001.

(now lost) *Suite* that won the 1905 prize of the Société des Compositeurs à Paris, or of a lost three-movement suite performed at the Salle Pleyel in Paris in 1907.<sup>243</sup>

Given that the three movements of the 1907 *Suite* were entitled *Prélude*, *La Source*, and *Nocturne*, it seems more likely that *Scènes de la forêt* originated in this suite.<sup>244</sup>

Bonis' forest *Scènes* align not only with general Romantic-era pastoral sensibilities, but also with multiple composers' musical references to forests in particular. Robert Schumann (1810-1856)'s *Waldszenen* (forest scenes, Op. 82, 1850) for solo piano include a *Jagdlied* (hunting song). This may have inspired the fourth movement of Bonis' *Scènes*, which uses hunting horn calls and represents the hunting Goddess Artemis. Among French composers, Gabriel Fauré wrote a *mélodie* entitled *Dans la forêt de Septembre* (Op. 85, 1902); Charles Koechlin (1867-1950) gave one of his *Deux nocturnes* (Op. 32bis, 1897-1907) for flute, horn, and piano the title *Dans la forêt*; Ernest Chausson wrote a song entitled *Dans la forêt du charme et de l'enchantement* (Op. 36, no. 2, 1896-98); and Eugène Bozza wrote a famously challenging piece for solo horn with piano accompaniment entitled *En forêt* (Op. 40, 1942). Mel Bonis' *Scènes* thus participated in a trend of French forest-themed chamber music featuring "pastoral" instruments (particularly the flute and horn).

### *Nocturne*

John Field (1782-1837) pioneered use of the term *nocturne* in the early 1800s for piano pieces that evoked the night. Its expressive potential suited Romantic-era composers and led to its rapid adoption by Chopin, Liszt, d'Indy, Satie, Debussy,

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<sup>243</sup> See Christine Géliot's notes accompanying the score: Bonis, Mel, ed Christine Géliot. "Scènes de la forêt pour flûte, cor en fa, et piano." Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 2001.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

Massenet, and Fauré.<sup>245</sup> Bonis' *Nocturne* followed this French Romantic trend.<sup>246</sup> Interestingly, several French contemporaries of Bonis wrote *Nocturnes* that share notable features with Bonis': Charles Koechlin wrote a two-nocturne set, *Deux nocturnes* (Op. 32bis), for piano, horn, and flute between 1897 and 1907 whose first *nocturne* is entitled *Dans la forêt*. Bonis' *Scènes de la forêt* similarly link a nocturne with pastoral and forest imagery, and with the use of the flute-horn-piano instrumentation. Bonis was on friendly terms with Koechlin and his wife, Koechlin greatly respected Bonis' work, and even gave her a few orchestration lessons.<sup>247</sup> We might speculate, then, that the two composers could have influenced one another.

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)'s 1911 *Nocturne*, for piano and solo violin (or flute) shares certain musical characteristics with Bonis' *Scènes de la forêt* Nocturne, notably a constant repetition of a single pitch class in different octaves. This texture allowed both composers to create a sense of stasis in their musical evocations of the night.

The overall form of Bonis' *Nocturne* can be described as A-B-A', with a four-bar introduction preceding the central body of the form and a four-bar coda, during which music fades away. Bonis' *Nocturne* is particularly striking for its use of repetition, which I suggest contributes to a sense of suspended time. In the A sections (measures 5-27 and 45-49), the piano right-hand repeats particular pitch classes in multiple octaves at a constant sixteenth-note rhythm, alternating first between B-flat

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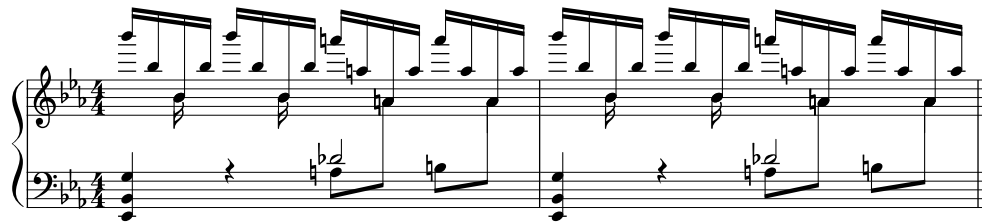
<sup>245</sup> Maurice J.E. Brown and Kenneth L. Hamilton., "Nocturne (I)." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.*

<sup>246</sup> Interestingly, and as I have described in Chapter 2, the *nocturne* has been described by some as a common Romantic-era musical topic. See Horton, "Listening to Topics in the Nineteenth Century."

<sup>247</sup> Letters between Bonis and Koechlin survive and are published in the *Correspondance choisie*: Christine Géliot, ed., *Correspondance choisie de Mel Bonis.*, Série "Correspondance" (Les amis de la musique française, 2007), 18-25.



and A in octaves (measures 1-10), then between B-natural and A (measures 11-15) before exploring other pitches, also repeated in octaves. The B section also calls for repetition of piano octaves. Example 11 provides a representative transcription of this piano texture, from the A section.

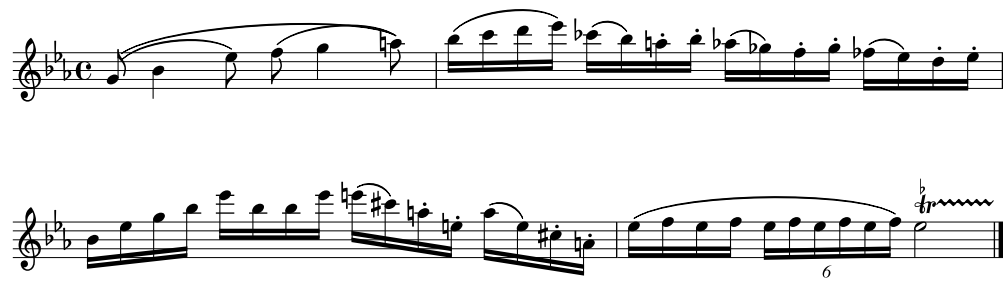


**Example 11:** *Nocturne* piano part, measures 5-6

In the left-hand part of the A and A' sections, chords alternate repeatedly between two tonal centers a whole tone apart, which one might describe as a kind of harmonic repetition. The horn part also contributes to the repetitive, or static, harmonic texture, repeating just two notes (E-flat and D-flat) throughout both A sections.

While the A sections of Bonis' *Nocturne* are in E-flat major, the B section begins in D-flat major (the subtonic, bVII) but also explores its relative, B-flat minor. Smaller subsections of A use different triadic structures: the piano part in measures 5-10 alternates between E-flat major and D-flat augmented triadic harmony and in measures 11-16, the harmony alternates between augmented triads a whole-step apart, with the notes B and F in the bass. Though these augmented triads could be read as inversions of E-flat and D-flat augmented triads, their function is ambiguous: Bonis effectively avoids "resolving" in a traditional sense, instead employing a level of chromaticism that masks functional harmonic tendencies.

The flute is the main melodic instrument in Bonis' *Nocturne*. From its first measures, modal inflection is evident because of the noticeable use of a raised fourth scale degree and other altered tones that differ from the expected kinds of chromatic alterations found in tonal harmony. Example 12 provides a transcription of the first four measures of this flute melody as a representative example of modal melodic language.



**Example 12:** *Nocturne*, flute melody in mm. 5-8

The melody is clearly crafted to sound *other*. In nineteenth-century France, the music of the past, or of elsewhere, was used to create nostalgic allusions. Bonis' flute melody avoids cadential closure. Instead, it sounds like a dreamy improvisation.

In the *Nocturne*'s B section (measures 27-44), the piano sixteenth notes give way to slow chords above low, droning perfect-fifths in the bass. The harmonic rhythm is twice as slow as that of the A section. The B section flute part is more traditionally tonal, with fewer non-harmonic tones or modal inflections. However, the B section melody's beginning (measures 27-32) contains repetition, with slight variation, of a particular rhythmic profile: a quarter note, followed by a quarter note tied to an eighth note, followed by a group of three eighth notes. This initial rhythmic repetition, before the melody's rhythm ultimately develops and evolves, contributes to the *Nocturne*'s defining characteristics, as a calm, repetitive, and meditative piece.

Bonis' use of repetition to create an effective suspension of time may reference an atmosphere of religious contemplation. The quasi-improvisatory flute melody, on the other hand, is redolent of human speech, recalling the way in which a person telling a story spontaneously relates events. This gives the flute melody an "authentic" quality. I suggest this seemingly genuine outpouring might be heard as a kind of musical confession. While many composers address the listener in a way that could be described as confessional, for a religious Catholic composer, it seems worth considering this style as possible reference to the kind of confession a Catholic makes to a priest, seeking absolution by admitting wrongdoings.

At the very least, music was evidently cathartic for Bonis, and helped her to express emotions that could not be spoken in words. The musical language of the *Nocturne* is characterized by a lack of aggressive forward drive. Though some might see this as a musical expression of femininity,<sup>248</sup> I argue instead that it may reference the practice of a confession. The pastoral topos offers further evidence of veiled religiosity in Bonis' *Nocturne*.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the musical pastoral is often evocative of a "lost pastoral realm", inaccessible since the fall of man.<sup>249</sup> Monelle has also connected pastoral nostalgia to musical effects that create a sense of stasis or suspended time.<sup>250</sup> Bonis' *Nocturne* exhibits all of these characteristics: sustained perfect fifths (in the B section), which recall the drone instruments of folk heritage associated with the pastoral, and medieval music; the horn and flute of hunting music, which Ratner has

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<sup>248</sup> For example, as in: Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>249</sup> Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, 195.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

linked to nature, the outdoors, and pastoral nostalgia,<sup>251</sup> and the harmonic stasis described above. I suggest that Bonis' *Nocturne* may reflect the composer's conscious or unconscious wish to confront, express, or escape from tensions between amorous desire and Catholic teaching. We might question whether she wishes to awaken from the dreamland of her *Nocturne*, but the next movement is a musical depiction of dawn.

### *À l'aube*

*À l'aube* is a fast-paced awakening that contrasts the preceding movement. In fact, this movement is marked by internal contrasts within its textures, rhythms, and harmonies. I suggest that these oppositions create a kind of tension between simplicity and complexity that is especially remarkable when considered in relation to the pastoral sensibilities implied by the *Scènes de la forêt*'s title and instrumentation and Bonis' difficult life circumstances.

Though its tempo is marked *Allegretto*, *À l'aube* is experienced as being quite fast because of its quick-moving note values and 12/8 meter. The piano begins directly with a continuous sixteenth-note motive that characterizes the movement.

Example 13 provides a transcription of the first measures of *À l'aube*.

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<sup>251</sup> Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*, 18-19. Evocations of the hunt are especially evident in the fourth movement of Bonis' *Scènes de la forêt*, entitled *Pour Artémis*, which references the Greek Goddess of the hunt and uses hunting horn calls as its basis.

**Example 13:** *À l'aube* piano part, mm. 1-4

Given its pervasiveness, when the sixteenth-note texture is broken, the effect is dramatic. Drawing on linguistic terminology, these exceptional moments are *marked* in relation to their surroundings, which accords them particular expressive significance.<sup>252</sup> Within the 74 measures that comprise this movement, there are two twelve-bar passages in which the piano part deviates from its characteristic pattern, as well as in the final six measures of the piece.<sup>253</sup> In each of the two texturally marked

<sup>252</sup> Robert Hatten and Margaret Notley's uses of this term are addressed above, in Chapter 2.

<sup>253</sup> Employing a change in the piano part towards the end, marking the final six bars, is not particularly surprising; in this passage, the textural change aligns with a change of pace that makes the music slow down to create a sense of finality, an effect that is not uncommon in music of Bonis' era.

twelve-bar passages (mm. 25-36 and mm. 52-63), the piano sixteenth notes become eighth notes (offset between the right and left hand), and iambic chords. The contrasts between the predominant piano pattern and these marked moments create an effective tension between relative simplicity and the complexity of textural diversions (see Example 14).

The musical score for Example 14, *À l'aube* piano part, mm. 25-36, is presented in five systems. Each system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major), and the time signature is 12/8. The first system (mm. 25-26) shows a steady sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand and eighth-note patterns in the left hand. The second system (mm. 27-28) continues this pattern with some melodic variation. The third system (mm. 29-30) introduces a more complex texture with iambic chords in the right hand. The fourth system (mm. 31-32) features a dense texture with many chords and some sixteenth-note runs. The fifth system (mm. 33-34) concludes with a final chord and a few notes in the bass line.

**Example 14:** *À l'aube* piano part, mm. 25-36

Musical markedness also impacts rhythm and meter in this movement. While the compound meter of 12/8 necessitates a triple divisions of each beat, there are brief moments of duple subdivision, generally in the flute and horn parts, and occasionally the piano. The moments of marked rhythmic complexity in the wind parts tend to occur when the piano texture is also marked. In measure 24-28, for example, the piano and flute parts reinforce the 12/8 meter, while tied eighth notes in the horn part cut across, in hemiola (see Example 15). This metric disruption, like the marked piano textures, adumbrates the tension between simplicity and complexity, which is also flagged harmonically.

The image displays a musical score for three instruments: Flute, Horn in F, and Piano. The score is divided into three systems, each containing two measures. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 12/8. The first system shows the Flute with a long note in the first measure and a melodic line in the second. The Horn in F plays a steady eighth-note pattern. The Piano part features a complex texture with sixteenth-note runs and rests, marked with '8' and '2'. The second system continues these patterns, with the Flute and Horn in F playing similar melodic lines. The Piano part maintains its intricate accompaniment. The third system concludes the passage with similar melodic and harmonic elements for all instruments.

**Example 15:** *À l'aube*, mm. 24-28

The harmonic rhythm is relatively slow throughout this movement. The first eighteen measures serve as a prolongation of dominant harmony, leading finally to the first root-position tonic chord on the downbeat of measure 19, which establishes B-flat major as the movement's tonal center. There are rarely more than two distinct



harmonic sonorities per measure, which serves to “mark” the few passages of faster harmonic motions. Example 16 provides a transcription of the piano part of measures 31-36; another example occurs at measure 70. A greater density of events and increased chromatic complexity provides brief diversions from the predominant simplicity and predictability of the movement’s harmonic rhythm.

The image displays a musical score for the piano part of measures 31-36. The score is written in a grand staff with two systems. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 12/8. The first system (measures 31-32) shows a complex harmonic texture with multiple chords and moving lines in both hands. The second system (measures 33-34) features a more melodic line in the right hand and a simpler accompaniment in the left. The third system (measures 35-36) continues the complex harmonic texture with dense chordal structures and chromatic movement.

**Example 16:** *À l'aube* piano part, mm. 31-36: faster harmonic rhythm

In my view, the various tensions between simplicity and complexity reinforce the pastoral themes found throughout Bonis’ *Scènes*. The use of instruments with pastoral connotations supports the broader sensibility of longing for the past, for childlike innocence, and for an idealized pastoral realm within the natural world. The dualistic musical tension between prevailing simplicity and intervening complex moments also reflects Monelle’s conception of the fin-de-siècle pastoral as having the

potential to evoke both nostalgia and anguish.<sup>254</sup> Bonis' pastoral mode is not just a celebration of an idealized past, but also an acknowledgment of present difficulties, manifest here texturally, rhythmically, metrically, and harmonically. I propose reading these marked passages of *À l'aube* as expressing pastoral anguish that may also be personal. The idyllic forest scene is inaccessible. The beauty, innocence, and peace of nature exist only in dreams. I suggest that the kind of anguish communicated by the tensions within the representation of the forest at dawn might reflect Bonis' own internal conflicts between her faith and her desires. As dawn awakens the forest, these anxieties are awakened as well.

### *Invocation*

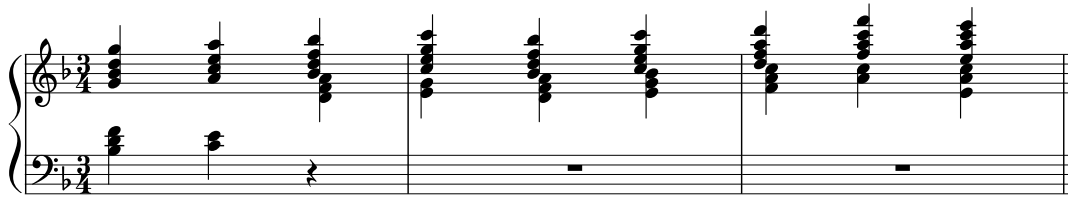
Of the four forest scenes, the *Invocation* might best lend itself to an analysis that considers Mel Bonis' spirituality. Its title recalls an act of prayer; and indeed, in the notes that accompany the recently published score, Christine Géliot describes this movement as a "prayer to nature."<sup>255</sup> Like the other forest movements, *Invocation* is deeply indebted to the pastoral topos, in its "Moderato" tempo, slow harmonic rhythm, and predominantly homophonic melody-with-accompaniment texture. In addition, though the meter is notated as 3/4, the remarkable prevalence of triplet eighth notes in both the horn and flute parts gives this movement's meter more of a 9/8 feel, typical of the musical pastoral. Its harmonic stasis recalls the idealized visions of natural landscapes that have been linked to the pastoral mode in Romantic-

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<sup>254</sup> As I have described in Chapter 2. See also Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*.

<sup>255</sup> Géliot, in *Scènes de la forêt pour flûte, cor en fa, et piano* (Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 2001). ("une prière à la nature")

era music.<sup>256</sup> The harmonies are, for the most part, nonfunctional. Bonis makes use of parallel harmonies, with chords moving through parallel motions to adjacent diatonic notes, rather than functioning within a system of tension, resolution, or typical harmonic function. Example 17 provides a representative transcription of the harmonic parallelisms that dominate the *Invocation*:



**Example 17:** *Invocation*, harmonic reduction of mm. 4-6

The frequent use of these parallel harmonies over time creates an impression of harmonic stasis. In addition, the use of large rolled chords and a wide registral range in the piano part (from Bb2 to Bb6) gives the piece a sense of vastness, perhaps evoking the kind of “monumentality” that has been observed in the pianistic and orchestral writing of other late-Romantic composers.<sup>257</sup> In Bonis’ *Invocation*, the musical features call to mind idealized visions of nature and its grandeur, while explicit musical references reinforce its place in the pastoral tradition.

A prayer to nature might recall pagan rituals, but the concept of a Christian pastoral, as defined by Poggioli (in Chapter 2), provides many examples in literature of pre-Christian references being Christianized.<sup>258</sup> Given her relationship to her Catholicism, we can speculate that Bonis might similarly use nature and the forest as

<sup>256</sup> As described in Chapter 2, and as, for example, Robert Hatten describes in: Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes*.

<sup>257</sup> For example, see Notley’s discussion of “monumentality” in Bruckner’s symphonic slow movements in: Notley, “Formal Process as Spiritual Progress: The Symphonic Slow Movements.”

<sup>258</sup> Poggioli, “The Christian Pastoral.”

symbols of the divine. I propose reading her *Invocation* as a prayer to the divine, as manifest in nature. Bonis' use of pastoral musical features serves also to evoke the idealized landscapes, simplicity, and innocence related to the pastoral as a mode, topic, and genre. For a composer with a fraught relationship with her faith, the *Invocation* might have been an attempt to escape the difficulties of the present through musical prayer.

### *Pour Artémis*

*Pour Artémis*, the fourth and final movement of the *Scènes de la forêt*, provides a marked change of pace from the slow *Invocation* preceding it. An *allegro comodo* tempo marking and *mezzo-forte* piano chords imitating hunting horn calls set up a loud horn entrance evoking the hunt and ultimately the outdoors, all in the key of E-flat major, a traditional key for hunting music.<sup>259</sup> The movement is dedicated to Artemis, the ancient Greek goddess of the hunt. As above, I argue that pre-Christian references can be understood as allegories or metaphors. Artemis serves Bonis in a number of historical and literary ways.

Like the other movements, *Pour Artémis* is marked by tensions between the prevailing light, dance-like hunting music and contrasting moments of markedly anguished-sounding seriousness accompanied by more chromatic harmonies. The piece's overall form comprises five main sections: an *Allegro comodo* opening section in E-flat major (measures 1-76), a *Poco piu lento* section in D-flat major (mm. 77-131), a *Tempo primo* section beginning in C major and moving to E-flat major (mm. 132-226), a second *Poco piu lento* slow section in E-flat major (mm. 227-262),

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<sup>259</sup> See Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, 35-94.

and a final *Tempo primo* section, also in E-flat major (mm. 263-288). Though the repeated alternating tempo indications make this form seem similar to a rondo form, it lacks a recurring refrain. Rather, the fast sections are united by their tempo indications and obvious allusions to hunting music while the slow sections are marked by more lyrical melodies and chromatic harmonic language. In what follows, I trace the ways in which pastoral topics characterize this movement, and argue that the contrasting slow sections are marked, giving them particular expressive power.

The 3/8 time signature provides a lightness of character typical of pastoral dances. The piano begins the movement with chords reminiscent of a dance, and of the hunt, using *siciliano* rhythms that have traditionally been associated with the musical topic of the pastoral, as a nostalgic evocation of Sicily.<sup>260</sup>

Whether Bonis aims to evoke Sicily as a Classical Arcadia, or to present historicized allusions to eighteenth-century musical pastoralism, or simply to employ a dance-like rhythm, the opening measures effectively set up the horn call that follows (in measure 8). Bonis' evocation of the hunt provides a musical introduction to the hunting goddess Artemis. The beginning of the movement is harmonically elusive, quickly passing through dominant, chromatic-median, and submedian tonal centers before finally arriving at a tonic chord in measure 20. Even then, the relative stability is fleeting: at measure 25 the dance-like hunting music and horn calls suddenly give way to a flute melody in the relative minor key comprised of fast, technically demanding sixteenth-note lines. This difficult minor-key flute melody contrasts the lightness of the hunting horn music that preceded it, suggesting tensions between hunting calls and moments of musical anxiety. The two wind instrument

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<sup>260</sup> As described in Chapter 2; see also Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*.

parts eventually reconcile at measure 31, when the hurried flute lines accompany horn calls in *siciliano* rhythms evoking the opening material; the horn and flute parts continue to accompany one another in counterpoint until the end of this first section at measure 77.

Section 2 provides not only a key change (to D-flat major) and a tempo change (to a slower *Poco piu lento*), but also a change to a texture dominated by a lyrical melody in the flute, with the piano and horn parts providing gentle accompaniment. Reminiscent of the human voice, this intimate song-like melody contrasts the light-hearted, dancing hunting music that began *Pour Artémis* and returns in the next section.

The dance-like rhythms return in Section 3, with grace notes in the piano part that emphasize the lightness of this music. The left-hand piano part consists of chords that obviously imitate hunting horns. But although the hunting music dances along in the piano, it is not answered by a horn call, as in the first section. Instead, the harsh reality of an anguished descending flute melody interrupts at measures 143-146, accompanied by fully-diminished seventh chords whose tonal ambiguity and unexpectedness communicate sudden drama. Though the dancing *siciliano* rhythms, hunting horn calls, and peaceful pastoral mood do return (m. 165), it is the anguished flute part that ultimately prevails in this section. Even when the flute takes up the *siciliano* rhythm (m. 185), it is clothed in a prevailing mode of anxiety. Likewise, when the horn's *siciliano*-rhythm calls return (m. 213), they are accompanied by minor-key harmonies and a hurried sixteenth-note flute part that recalls its earlier anxious expressions. Pastoral light-heartedness is here shown to also contain darker

anxiety, suggesting that nostalgia, in the form of dancing hunt music, will ultimately be destroyed by the loss of innocence.

*Pour Artémis* is also remarkable harmonically, with slow sections that exhibit a kind of harmonic complexity absent from the faster hunt-music sections, which are characterized by quick-moving, mostly triadic harmonies. Example 18 provides a harmonic reduction of the beginning of the first slow section (Section 2, mm. 77-131). In contrast to the up-tempo, diatonic hunt-music sections, the harmonic rhythm in this section is faster and involves more chromaticism and momentary modulations to distant harmonic areas.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with a treble and bass clef, a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and a 3/8 time signature. The music is characterized by dense, complex chordal structures, including triads and dyads, with frequent chromaticism and momentary modulations. The second system continues the harmonic reduction, showing further chromatic movement and complex chordal textures. The score is a harmonic reduction, focusing on the vertical structure of the music rather than the melodic lines.

**Example 18:** *Pour Artémis*, harmonic reduction of mm. 77-98

As elsewhere, Bonis here establishes a conflict between relative simplicity and complexity that reveals a tension between the pastoral ideals of nature's simplicity (represented through hunting-horn music and predominantly triadic harmonies) and the anxious recognition (represented through harmonic ambiguity) that this ideal is inaccessible. Interestingly, if we read *Pour Artémis* as a narrative, it

seems that the harmonic complexity – and, therefore, the anguish – has the final word. Though the final section uses the hunting-horn calls and dance-like *siciliano* rhythms that evoke an idealized pastoral landscape, the closing harmonies do not conform to the simplicity of the beginning. Rather, it is the kind of harmonic complexity established in the piece’s more anxious slow sections that characterizes the piece’s final bars. Example 19 shows the final measures (mm. 279-288) of *Pour Artémis*, characterized by chromaticisms and an overall descent into a quiet ending that contrasts the triumphant character associated with hunting horns – and with the beginning of this piece.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the final measures of *Pour Artémis*. The first system (mm. 279-288) features three staves: Flute, Horn in F, and Piano. The Flute and Horn parts consist of sustained notes with dynamic markings of *mp* and *dim.* The Piano part features a complex harmonic texture with chromatic descents and a final measure marked with an 8-measure rest. The second system (mm. 289-292) features three staves: Flute, Horn in F, and Piano. The Flute and Horn parts consist of sustained notes with a dynamic marking of *p*. The Piano part continues with chromatic descents and a final measure marked with an 8-measure rest.

**Example 19:** *Pour Artémis* mm. 279-288



It is interesting to speculate about the implications of Bonis' allusion to the hunt goddess Artemis. Her suitability notwithstanding, for a suite of pieces that evoke the forest, the outdoors, and the spirits of nature, it is striking that no other well-known or readily available nineteenth- or twentieth-century French work has Artemis' name in its title. Perhaps Bonis chose Artemis to represent a strong female figure – with power, strength, and agency unavailable to herself. A piece dedicated to Artemis that prominently features hunting horn calls might seem like an innocent tribute to an ancient Greek mythic figure who represents nature, the forest, and a kind of pastoral sensibility common in French music of the time. But the allusion to a hunting goddess – which carries connotations of the wild, of freedom, and perhaps of the violence of the hunt – might also reveal a desire for revenge or rebellion against the forces that kept Bonis away from her game. Conjecture aside, Bonis successfully evokes the natural world, representing tensions between relative simplicity and complexity at one with the fin-de-siècle pastoral anxiety about the inaccessibility of a lost pastoral ideal.

### *Conclusion*

Though Bonis' four *Scènes de la forêt* each present distinct representations of the forest and the outdoors, they are united by a Romantic pastoral sensibility. The use of a nature-related title, the inclusion of flute and horn, and pastoral figuration provides evidence that Bonis intended to evoke the idealized pastoral realm. But musical tensions typical of late-Romantic pastoral angst cloud this idealistic nostalgia with anxiety about its inaccessibility. Bonis' four forest scenes subtly allude to the

tensions inherent in human relationships with the natural world and with constructed ideas of the past. They are reflective atmospheres in which we might imagine the composer meditating about her own circumstances, or musically confessing her wrongdoing.

The musical representations, in Bonis' *Scènes de la forêt*, of medievalism, nostalgia, distancing via *otherness*, and harmonic stasis are united as indicators of a broader pastoral sensibility, with interesting implications in light of her personal circumstances. Within the nostalgic longing for the innocence of the past, one might perceive Bonis' wish to be absolved of guilt resulting from conflicts between her own desires and the strict rules of her society, of her family, and of her Catholic faith. We might find potential spiritual resonances in other musical effects, such as in melodies that seem to evoke human speech (perhaps recalling confession), and orchestrational or registral choices that create a sense of large landscapes (evoking a kind of "monumentality" associated with the spiritual). Given the importance of Catholicism in Mel Bonis' life, it is not unreasonable to speculate about potential spiritual resonances in her forest scenes, even if they are not explicitly religious in intent.

The case study of Bonis' *Scènes de la forêt*, along with the *mélodies* studied in Chapter 3, represents what is likely the first detailed musical analysis of these works. It is my sincere hope that research on Bonis' unjustly overlooked music will continue. In providing methods that extending historical, music-analytical, and philosophical approaches to a consideration of spiritual influences on non-religious music, I hope also to contribute towards future investigations of religious resonances in fin-de-siècle France.

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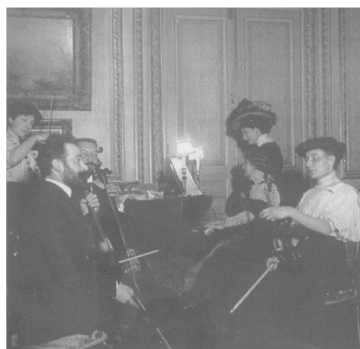
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**Appendix:** Recital program from “A Musical Salon: Mel Bonis’ World”

## A musical salon: Mel Bonis' world



An honors thesis concert by Rachel Rosenman  
Romance Languages & Literatures Highwaymen Common Room (300 High Street)  
4:30 p.m. – Wednesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017

This recital celebrates the French woman composer Mel Bonis (1858-1937), who remains surprisingly little known – even though she left behind over three hundred works.

Bonis' fascinating life story includes forbidden love, strict parents, and a troubled relationship with her Catholic faith; her music includes works in a variety of vocal and instrumental genres.

Though Bonis' compositional aesthetic is best described as late-Romantic, her music draws on diverse sources of stylistic inspiration. The pieces on this program – all written by Mel Bonis – have been chosen to represent the remarkable variety within her work.

### Program

#### *Two mélodies*

For soprano with piano

- I. *Pourriez-vous pas me dire ?* (Op. 55, 1901)
- II. *Dès l'aube* (Op. 18 posthumous, 1893)

#### *Scènes de la forêt* (Op. 123, 1928)

For flute, clarinet, and piano

- I. Nocturne

#### *Suite dans le style ancien* (Op. 127, 1928)

For flute, violin, clarinet, and piano

- I. Prélude
- II. Fuguettes
- III. Choral
- IV. Divertissement

### Performers

Julia Mitchell, soprano  
 Haeyoon Jung, flute  
 Phillip Heilbron, violin  
 Nikku Chatha, piano  
 Rachel Rosenman, clarinet & piano

### Notes

#### Two *mélodès*

The *mélodès* – a type of French art song that emerged in the nineteenth century – was a genre with particular importance for Mel Bonis. She wrote *mélodès* throughout her life. In *Pourriez-vous p asme d'ire* (*Couldn't you tell me*), Bonis provides a surprisingly light-sounding musical setting of a text by her illicit lover Amédée Hettich expressing an anguished longing for simpler times. This song was first published less than two years after Bonis secretly gave birth to Hettich's child, and the lyrics may relate to the heartache of their separation from each other and from their daughter. The 1893 song, *Dès l'aube* (*At dawn*) by contrast, is a bright homage to nature and love, excerpted from a poem by Édouard Guinand.

The texts of both songs are printed below:

Pourriez-vous pas me dire Quel mal trouble ma raison ? Il est né d'un sourire, Au temps de la fenaison !	Couldn't you tell me What ill troubles my senses? It was born from a smile, In haymaking season!
Le ruisseau, dans sa course lente, Prend à l'iris un long baiser Jamais la lèvre d'une amante Sur mon front ne vint se poser.	The stream, in its slow course, Takes a long kiss into its eyes Never has the lip of a lover Come to land on my forehead.
Pourriez-vous pas me dire Quel mal trouble ma raison ? Il est né d'un sourire, Au temps de la fenaison !	Couldn't you tell me What ill troubles my senses? It was born from a smile, In haymaking season!
Des soupirs, en de lents murmures, Font palpiter la paix des bois ; Il fait donc bon sous les ramures, Quand on y va deux à la fois ?...	Sighs in slow murmurs Make the peace of the woods palpitate So, the weather is fine beneath the branches, When you go there two at a time?...
Pourriez-vous pas me dire Quel mal trouble ma raison ? Il est né d'un sourire, Au temps de la fenaison !	Couldn't you tell me What ill troubles my senses? It was born from a smile, In haymaking season!

<p>L'aube glisse sous la feuillée Dorant la tige du roseau. La voix la première éveillée, C'est l'oiseau.</p> <p>Le soleil dans la plaine verte Met la lumière et la couleur. La corolle aussitôt ouverte, C'est la fleur...</p> <p>Le printemps sur le sol qui fume Verse un rayon où le feu court. La flamme qui d'abord s'allume, C'est l'amour.</p>	<p>Dawn glides under the foliage Gilding the reed stalk. The first voice awakened, Is the bird.</p> <p>The sun in the green plain Spreads light and color. The petals immediately opened, Are the flower.</p> <p>The springtime casts a ray On the smoking Earth where fire spreads. The flame that lights first, Is love.</p>
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### ***Scènes et la forêt: Nocturne***

This Nocturne comes from a four-movement suite of *forest scenes* originally written for flute, horn, and piano; we have adapted the horn part for the clarinet for our performance.

Though all four movements of Bonis' *Scènes* provide effective depictions of the forest, the Nocturne is especially striking for its repetitive, reflective character, and for a song-like flute melody that sounds distant and strange, perhaps evoking the music of a different time and place.

We might hear this contemplative and distant-sounding forest scene as a musical manifestation of nostalgia, a longing for a lost idyll, for a more peaceful past to contrast the composer's difficult life circumstances.

### ***Suite dans le style ancien***

This four-movement suite was originally written as a woodwind septet, and later arranged for quartet by Mel Bonis herself. Over the four movements of the work, Bonis reveals her complex relationship with the musical past through her use of various ideas of the *style ancien*.

The middle two movements – the Fuguettes and the Choral – have the clearest roots in earlier musical styles; while the Fuguettes recalls Baroque and Classical counterpoint, the Choral evokes traditional music for worship, referencing the style of a choral hymn with organ accompaniment.

The outer two movements relate differently to the *style ancien*. The Prélude draws on modal melodies and syncopated rhythms that allow opportunities harmonic and formal explorations; the Divertissement that finishes the *Suite* stands out for its playful and humorous sensibilities.

### **With special thanks to:**

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Handwritten musical score for a choral movement. The score is written on three staves. The tempo is marked "Allegro" and the mood is "Très modéré". The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff has a dynamic marking of "mf" and a "cresc." marking. The third staff has a dynamic marking of "p" and a "dim." marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

An excerpt from a manuscript version of Bonis' *Suite d'anses style ancien*, Movement 3 (Choral)



Mel Bonis, ca. 1905