THE OBOE'S EVOCATION OF THE LAMENTING VOICE IN BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S "NIOBE" AND POULENC'S *SONATA FOR OBOE AND PIANO*

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The oboe, as an orchestral and solo instrument within Western art music, has often acted mimetically as an imitator of some kind, whether that of other instruments, bird song, Morse code, or the human voice. This thesis investigates the vocality of the oboe as a nonliving, nonhuman instrument, as viewed through lament in these two oboe solo standards: Francis Poulenc's *Sonate pour hautbois et piano* (FP 185) and the movement “Niobe” from Benjamin Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* (Op. 49). “Niobe” is named after the tragic Greek mythological character who brought death upon her family through her hubris. Britten’s subtitle for “Niobe”—“who, lamenting the death of her fourteen children, was turned into a mountain"—underlines the mournful aspect of the myth and, by extension, the movement. Additionally, Poulenc's *Sonate*, which was composed in 1962, is dedicated to the memory of Sergei Prokofiev, Poulenc's once close friend; and is Poulenc's last completed work before his death in 1963.

These much-beloved pieces provide the oboist with opportunities to perform in an emotional modality, drawing out sympathetic feelings of pain, sorrow, grief, and anger. The slow lyrical passages in these pieces demand dynamic shaping in performance, while also providing opportunities for more iconic imitation of the cries and anguish of the human voice. Beyond generally imitating the sorrowful voice, both composers evoked specific musical conventions of the operatic lament tradition. Through a hermeneutic and generally interpretative analysis of these movements, supported by awareness of their engagement with the Western tradition of composed lament and with social and psychological experiences of grief as written about by Judith Butler

and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, this study seeks to investigate the manner in which the oboe is used to imitate the voice, times in which the mimicry is and is not present, as well as the emotions that are interpreted and thus mediated by the performers and then portrayed to an audience, as an approach to understanding the social and psychological aspects of grief that appear in these two lamenting pieces.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

I would like to begin by acknowledging the important academic influences in my scholarship. Thank you to Olivia Bloechl for taking me on as an advisee in your first years here at the University of Pittsburgh, working through this content with me over a span of two semesters, and inspiring me to a level of academic scholarship that I had only imagined. Thank you to Deane Root, for always taking time out of your busy schedule with the many hats you wear to talk to me about my work. And thank you to Jim Cassaro, with your never-ending knowledge of the library and eternal willingness to support each and every music student here at Pitt. Additionally, thank you to Danielle Fosler-Lussier, professor of musicology, and Charles Atkinson, professor emeritus of musicology, both at Ohio State University, for encouraging me to enter this field, as well as the strong foundational undergraduate education that lead me to this point in my life. A special thank you to Robert Sorton, professor of oboe at Ohio State, Cynthia Warren, instructor of oboe at Pitt, and Kathleen Gomez, of the Grand Rapids Symphony. The oboe is special to me, in the way that principal instruments tend to be, and I am very grateful for each lesson spent honing my skill and gaining a performer's perspective on this music.

I would also like to thank my beloved family. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for your never-ending support and love, along with the packages of banana cookies sent to help me along. Thank you to my brother Joe for bringing me down to Earth and sending me pictures of our dog when I need cheering up. And finally, thank you to so many of my dear friends for all that you do: Lucas Scarasso, Kassy Karaba, Mari Visser, Bianca Kumar, Steffani Rondfelt, Laura Schwartz, and Karen Brown.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The oboe, as an orchestral and solo instrument within Western art music, has often acted mimetically as an imitator of some kind, whether that of other instruments, bird song, Morse code, or the human voice.[1] The latter has proven to be a trait shared by only a few other Western canonical instruments.[2] Among the solo repertoire for the oboe, certain pieces and movements stand out as utilizing the emotive power of the instrument. This can be in reference to the oboe's ability to mimic the human voice, as well as to call on the topic of lament and to convey the depth of life-shattering sorrow. This pain can be either programmatic or autobiographical of the composer.

This thesis investigates the vocality of the oboe as an instrument, an object far in mechanism from the natural production of the human voice, as viewed through lament in these two oboe solo standards: Francis Poulenc's *Sonate pour hautbois et piano* (FP 185) and the movement "Niobe" from Benjamin Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* (Op. 49). Vocality in this case refers to sounds that the oboe can create that have a quality of being vocal and of calling

[1] There is a tradition in oboe pedagogy of thinking through phrases with upbow and downbow inflections, as seen in Martin Schuring, *Oboe Art and Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52-53. Additionally, the oboe has been used to mimic birds in many pieces, of which some of the more well-known are Wagner's *Siegfried* from the Ring Cycle and Beethoven's Symphony no. 6, movement II. The imitation of Morse Code is perhaps a more extreme example, found in Karel Husa's *Music for Prague 1968*, originally for symphonic band and later transcribed for orchestra.

[2] Other instruments that historically have been viewed as close to the human voice are the glass harmonica and the alto flute, as discussed later in the study.

upon the sounds that a human voice can make. The oboe can use its vocality in many different situations, though calling upon the sound of the voice can be especially poignant in a lamenting context. While there are many pieces for the oboe that could be construed as lamenting, these two stand out for their overt association with melancholic themes. "Niobe" is named after the tragic Greek mythological character who brought death upon her family through her hubris. Britten's subtitle for "Niobe"—"who, lamenting the death of her fourteen children, was turned into a mountain"—underlines the mournful aspect of the myth and, by extension, the movement.[3] Additionally, Poulenc's *Sonate*, which was composed in 1962, is dedicated to the memory of Sergei Prokofiev, once Poulenc's close friend; and it is Poulenc's last completed work before his death in 1963.[4] This study seeks to investigate the manner in which the oboe is used to imitate voice, times in which the mimicry is and is not present, as well as the emotions that are interpreted and thus mediated by the performers and then portrayed to an audience. It does so through a hermeneutic and generally interpretative analysis of these movements, supported by awareness of their engagement with the Western tradition of composed lament as an approach to understanding the social and psychological aspects of grief that appear in these two lamenting pieces.

The solo oboe repertoire is often neglected in historical musicology, which tends to discuss this instrument mainly in conjunction with orchestral or operatic works. This neglect is not unique to the oboe, but is often found in the literature on instrumental music featuring wind instruments. There are, of course, a few exceptions to this, and the oboe as an instrument has been written about frequently. Analyses and criticism of solo oboe pieces can most often be found published as articles in The Double Reed, the journal of the International Double Reed Society by scholars such as

[3]Benjamin Britten, *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952), 3.
[4] Carl Schmidt, *Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc* (Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2001), 462.

Geoffrey Burgess. However, these pieces are taken up most frequently in oboists' DMA dissertations. The close analytical readings in these studies provide a performer's point of view of these pieces from highly trained oboists. They are used together with musicological scholarship on Western instrumental and operatic lament of the common practice era and composers for the oboe to form a strong basic understanding of the musical characteristics of these pieces. I also draw on social and psychological studies about grief to enrich our understanding of the oboe's tendency to imitate the human voice as an expressive technique. This approach works to incorporate performers' understanding of their repertoire and instrument, historical and biographical background explored by music historians, as well as a theoretical reflection on grief and the process of grieving in human experience.

These much-beloved pieces provide the oboist with opportunities to perform in an emotional modality, drawing out sympathetic feelings of pain, sorrow, grief, and anger. The slow lyrical passages in these pieces demand dynamic shaping in performance, while also providing opportunities for more iconic imitation of the cries and anguish of the human voice. Contrastingly, faster passages allow the oboe to sound as a nonhuman instrument, expressing emotion through technical display of fingerings and articulations. These pieces also suggest a transformation of emotional and physical state, whether programmatic or autobiographical, through which the lament is heard and socially acknowledged by the listeners of the work as well as other implied witnesses in programmatic works (such as "Niobe").

Overall, these two pieces are juxtaposed in this study because they both use the oboe and its ability to imitate the sound of the human voice as an expressive vehicle for instrumental lament. Each composition was also composed in Western Europe during the post-WWII period--"Niobe"

in 1951 and the *Sonate* in 1963--and each has a permanent, uncontested place in the solo oboe repertoire.

When we think of lament in the Western tradition, we tend to think of sonic practices that are part of "mourning rites for the dead," and as such are "predominately vocal expressions of grief."[5] Lament thus is a sonic or musical action, while mourning is a social or otherwise nonmusical act. Both normally draw on the feeling of grief. Each society has its own traditions and expectations when it comes to lament.[6] In European ritual lamentation, it has generally involved "weeping, sobbing, and cries of grief" as well as song-like sections typically performed by women at funerals and memorials.[7] In Western art music, which departs significantly from ritual lament traditions, the lamenting quality can take form in different ways.

Historically, a lament modality has been conveyed through the use of a lamenting vocal text, through topical conventions such as the descending tetrachord figure, through an appropriate musical affect or mood, and/or extramusical associations with mourning or grief. In the case of instrumental lament, however, composers cannot call on a vocal text to support the lamenting quality of a piece. Instead, they must use a variety of other means to communicate aspects of lament. One of these ways is to draw topically on musical figures or processes long associated with vocal lament, such as the descending tetrachord and "sigh" motive.[8] Additionally, using distant modulations or harsh dissonances in tonal music, mournful melodic lines, and other musical

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[5] Porter, James. "Lament." *Grove Music Online*. 16 February 2018. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000015902.

[6] For further discussion on lament in other societies, see writings such as: Yuk-Ying Ho, "Bridal Laments in Rural Hong Kong," *Asian Folklore Studies* 64, no. 1 (2005): 53-87., Ali Jihad Racy, "Lebanese Laments: Grief, Music, and Cultural Values," *World of Music* 28, no. 2 (1986): 27-40., and Sharon Girard, *Funeral Music and Customs in Venezuela* (Tempe, AZ: Center for Latin American Studies, Arizona State University, 1980).

[7] Porter, op. cit.

[8] William Caplin, "Topics and Formal Functions: The Case of Lament," in *The Oxford of Topic Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 416.

features that are not topoi helps create a mood that suggests pain and grief. This could include interaction between instruments, moments of constructed failure, repetition of phases, and dynamic and pitch contrast. Finally, a composer can draw extramusical associations through a title, subtitle, dedication, or a program attached to the composition. Each of these elements can, and often does, work together to intensify the expression of grief or other states in such works. This study takes each of these musical methods into account, as the pieces call upon these various aspects as needed.

After establishing the lamenting quality of the work, I mine these elements for their significance in terms of social and psychological meaning. In Judith Butler's essay, "Violence, Mourning, Politics" (included in her 2004 book *Precarious Life*), she describes mourning as "agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance" (emphasis original).[9] Transformation, thus, is a key element to mourning. This idea, also found in musicological literature, can be expressed musically in lament, which according to James Porter, "embodies notions of transition to another state or world."[10] Butler also stresses that loss changes an individual, because what is actually lost with the death of a human is not always fathomable. Additionally, the griever, who in these pieces becomes the lamenter, is restrained by social politics, and can never be free from their relationality to others. Mourning--and, by extension, lament--is social, and its meaning is inherently shaped by the relationships of the lamenter to those that they are lamenting, as well as (in many cases) by those who witness the act of lament. For Butler, the social connectivity of mourning and its function within society is primary, and this study thus draws on her phenomenology and

[9] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), 21.
[10] Porter, op. cit.

description of experience to interpret the social and public act of mourning that these pieces represent.

Additionally, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, the Swiss psychiatrist, introduced the now-popular model of five stages of grief, consisting of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.[11] Later in 2005, she expounded on these stages by writing that each mourning individual may experience these stages in varying intensities and orders, or may skip one or more altogether.[12] She intended for these stages not to be a linear progression, but a series of five large-scale categories to define certain types of reactions and emotions.[13]

While there are limitations to the use of the Kübler-Ross model as a basis for musical interpretation, it has become a fixture of Western popular psychology and, as such, informs the way many individuals view the process of mourning, as well as how grief can be viewed and heard in modern music. Viewing the Britten and Poulenc pieces through Kübler-Ross's model, I maintain, opens a hermeneutic window into the way modern oboists envision their portrayals of grief and lament through the emotions they may be trying to evoke and the human sounds they may be trying to imitate. Each performer certainly brings a nuanced idea of the emotion and general mood they wish to highlight, as I know from my own experience as a trained oboist and a longtime participant in lessons and master classes in the U.S. Between the extramusical association

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[11] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy, and Their Own Families* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 11-36.
[12] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (New York: Scribner, 2005), 7.
[13] The original version of Kübler-Ross's model seemed to describe each stage as something that must happen in a specific order. After a critical response from scholars on psychology, especially Robert Kastenbaum, she revised the model to include room for individuality, where each stage may be experienced differently, in another order, or not appear at all. It is rare for an individual to fully experience each emotion within their process, and the term "stage" implies a beginning and end, where emotions are much more fluid. It is purely a model that provides an idea of emotions that are common when one is grieving, and is particular to Western culture.

and clear delineation of moods in these works, however, there seems to be a strong consensus of general emotion for specific sections.

It is important to note that these theories--Butler's critical theory of mourning and Kübler-Ross's psychological theory of grief--are not coming from the same place intellectually. As such, there is a discrepancy between the two in terms of how they approach the feeling of grief and the act of mourning. Despite this discrepancy, I find that, in combination, they can productively reveal different sides of the instrumental laments discussed here. The Kübler-Ross model offers a broad and more universal framework that points out the similarities between an individual's pain and that of many others, while Butler's social critique of "grievability" and mourning highlights its situatedness and the particular relationships that form and are formed in this painful process. In this study, these theories, as framed by Kübler-Ross and Butler, are set in dialogue with one another to further an understanding of grief and transformation through a cycle of mourning the loss of loved ones.

It is also worth noting that this thesis is certainly not the first to identify specific emotions tied to grief as relevant to sections of a musical work. For example, Suzanne Cusick found certain stages of grieving in Baroque operatic laments in her well-known discussion of Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna*.[14] Another example, though an instrumental lament, is Susan McClary's chapter "Unruly Passions and Courtly Dances: Technologies of the Body in Baroque Music." She describes the different nuances of emotion composed in Marin Marais's "Tombeau pour M. de S^{te} -Colombe," pointing out sections that bring "a modicum of relief" or "moments of too-poignant

[14] Suzanne Cusick, "'There was not one lady who failed to shed a tear': Arianna's Lament and the Construction of Modern Womanhood," *Early Music* vol. 22, no.1 (February 1994): 21-44.

grief."[15] While these arguments pertain most immediately to early modern music, the tendency of composers to portray grief and mourning in disparate sections each depicting a different emotion is not unique to these pieces, nor a specific era or repertoire.

As a final introductory note, and in the interest of self-reflexivity, I wish to say a bit more about my own positioning vis-à-vis this repertory. Throughout I draw on my own intimate relation to this instrument and its performance practice, as a trained oboist, to drive my insights about these pieces and the performance of human vocality. I seek to join my musicological training with my insider's knowledge of oboe pedagogy and performance, garnered through over a decade of lessons with well-respected teachers and performers. The angle of social analysis is melded with performance knowledge, or what it takes to play the music on the page. This enriches the understanding of the evocation of the human voice of this instrument. It also works, I hope, to highlight the agency of the performer in the decisions they make and the difficulty they may face with these pieces technically, as well as provides an idea of their conceptualization of the emotions they are portraying.

1.1 THE OBOE AS A VOICE

The oboe as an instrument has a long history, with many predecessors, such as the shawm. In its modern form, it first appeared in France before migrating to other European countries.[16] It has

[15] Susan McClary, "Unruly Passions and Courtly Dances: Technologies and the Body in Baroque Music," in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 106.
[16] Philip Bate, *The Oboe* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1975), 28-31.

been prized specifically for its timbre, with its sweet dark sound, which is evocative of poignant melancholy, as well as its "flexibility of tone."[17] It is hard to establish at what point in history that the oboe started to become defined by its ability to imitate the human voice. Early method books and treatises focus on the technical aspects of learning the instrument, and only describe desired tone and timbre in short passages, if mentioned at all. For example, in J. P. Freillon Poncein's treatise *On Playing Oboe, Recorder, and Flageolet*, originally published in 1705, the sound the instruments are supposed to produce are not described at all, much less in comparison to one another.[18] Additionally, the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*, which was published under the direction of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert between 1751 and 1772 does not mention anything related to tone is its article on the *hautbois*, the Baroque oboe used in Europe.[19]

However, composer George Frideric Handel is cited by Leon Gossens, the late prominent English oboist, as likening the sound of the oboe to the human voice.[20] Gossens claims that Johann Mattheson, author of the 1713 *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (*The Newly Established Orchestra*), quotes the composer Handel.[21] While this quote has proven difficult to locate in the text cited, Mattheson does call the instrument "eloquent" in terms of its ability to speak.[22] While there are

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[17] Apollon M.R. Barret, *Complete Method for Oboe* (London: Jullian, 1850), 1.
[18] J. P. Freillon Poncein, *On Playing Oboe, Recorder, and Flageolet*, trans. by Catherine Parsons Smith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
[19] Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*, Vol. 8, Denis Diderot and Jean de Rond d'Alembert, ed. (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Robert Bénard, 1765), 69-70.
[20] Johann Mattheson, *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: Benjamin Schillers, 1713), 268. Paraphrased in English in Leon Gossens and Edwin Roxburgh, *Oboe* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1977), 99. In the sources that I have been able to view, I have been unable to locate this quote.
[21] Gossens, 99.
[22] "Gleichsam redende" as eloquent, translated by Bruce Haynes in "Baptiste's *Hautbois*: The Metamorphosis from Shawm to Hautboy in France, 1620-1670," in *From Renaissance to Baroque: Change in Instruments and Instrumental Music in the Seventeenth Century: Proceedings of the National Early Music Association Conference held, in association with the Department of Music, University of York and the York Early Music Festival, at the*

minor differences in style of instrument construction between the French and German Baroque oboes, the ideas of tone and technique seem to be fairly similar because of the way the *hautbois* evolved in France and was then exported to other countries, such as Germany and England who were "recovering from wars that had devastated their musical infrastructures."[23] The instrument cited by Mattheson and perhaps Handel is a far cry in tone and technique from the modern oboe, but it does appear as if this instrument was associated with vocality (by composers at the very least) as early as the Baroque era.

Despite the haziness in history regarding this aspect, modern oboe performers strive to achieve the ability to mimic human vocal sounds at will. Pedagogically, it is emphasized during a student's private lessons that they should aim to be able to sound as close to the voice as possible when that effect is desired. This is different, however, from the pedagogical practice of imitating how a voice might phrase something, or other instances in which the voice is invoked to help a student master a passage or technique. While this is a practice that most musicians, including oboists use, it is the timbre that serves as a starting point for the comparison between the instrument and the voice. That is, the oboe has an additional level of connectivity to the sound of the human voice, cultivated through its unique timbre (described below), which highly skilled oboists then utilize in conjunction with phrasing musical passages in the same way that a vocalist might sing them to add to the overall aesthetic of the sound.[24]

University College of Ripon and York St. John, York, 2-4 July 1999, eds. Johnathon Wainwright and Peter Holman (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 31.

[23] Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes, *The Oboe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 40.

[24] Amy Galbraith, "The American School of Oboe Playing: Robert Bloom, John de Lancie, John Mack, and the Influence of Marcel Tabuteau," (DMA diss., West Virginia University, 2011), 19, 29.
Oboists such as Marcel Tabeateau, Leon Gossens, and Robert Bloom are especially known for their ability to imitate the phrasing of operatic singers and to make their playing as close to the human voice as physically possible.

It seems, however, that it is mostly emphasized through the oral tradition of private lessons, as method books and treatises written by oboists either mention it in passing, or not at all. It may be a "fact" that is viewed as common sense and thus not elaborated on in detail to save space and effort for other sections of the works, or simply an aspect that is not thought about until the performer is evoking this technique. There are a multitude of possibilities, but there is a large gap in literature of professional oboists discussing this "common knowledge" characteristic of their instrument. For example, Gossens describes the tone of various oboes as "dark," "heavy," "light," or "sweet," but never against the yardstick of the human voice.[25] He personally places the human act of "singing" as coming more from vibrato production, anthropomorphizing the sound as having a "soul" through this technique, though later quotes Handel as describing the Baroque oboe as having a voice-like tone quality.[26] In other sections, Gossens does describe the oboe as "singing" in certain pieces.

Curiously, in one of the definitive method books, *A Complete Method for the Oboe* (1850) by Apollon Barret, late professor of oboe at the Royal College of Music, the author actually assigns the title of "most human" sounding instrument to the English horn, an instrument in the same family that sounds a fifth lower than the oboe.[27] Barret does not investigate the relationship between the two instruments as closely related family members and the impact that it might have on the ability to sound human, but instead moves on into a discussion about other closely-related instruments. In his much later method book published in 2009, *Oboe Art and Method*, Martin

[25] Gossens, 86-87.
[26] Ibid., 87, 99. It is particularly interesting that Gossens quotes Handel in his discussion about the Baroque oboe because, as the author notes shortly later, oboists in the Baroque era did not use vibrato but rather played with a straight tone. Gossens himself does not remedy this contradiction in his work.
[27] Barret, 2.

Schuring, esteemed oboist at Arizona State University, similarly passes through the topic without a real investigation. In his preface, he mentions that the oboe can "sing and speak effortlessly," evoking two modes of vocality while describing the general difficulty of the instrument.[28]

One major outlier is an article by oboist Jiri Tancibudek titled "The Oboe and the Human Voice," where the author explores the relationship between the oboe and the soprano voice in terms of sound and tone production as well as air stream.[29] This is a unique article where a performer speaks from their own point of view about this connection. Its publication date of 1980 also situates this article with a modern perception of the instrument, confirming what the general consensus regarding the oboe seems to assume about the instrument.

Orchestration treatises and modern encyclopedias also do not always mention or linger on this trait of the oboe. Albert Lavignac's 1927 volume of *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnarie du Conservatoire*, titled *Technique Instrumentale*, has a section on the oboe. However, it only mentions in passing that the oboe and its predecessors may have looked to imitate bird song.[30] There are some key examples throughout the common practice era that do describe it. In Johann Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Kunste*, published in 1793, he claims that the oboe is "one of the best" instruments because it is the "most capable of imitating the human voice."[31] Hector Berlioz, in his treatise *Grand Traité d'Instrumentation et d'Orchestration Modernes*, notes that the oboe expresses "marvelously well in *cantabile*."[32] He, however, joins

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[28] Schurring, viii.
[29] Jiri Tancibudek, "The Oboe and the Human Voice," *The Double Reed* 3, no. 1 (1980): 6-8.
[30] Albert Lavignac, "Hautbois," *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire*, vol. 8 (Paris: Librarire Deflagrave, 1927), 1432.
[31] Johann Sulzer, "Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Kunste," trans. Nancy Baker and Thomas Christensen, in *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition in the German Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 97.
[32] Hector Berlioz, and Hugh Macdonald. *Berlioz's Orchestration Treatise: A Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 104. Original passage in French: *Il les exprime à merveille dans le*

Barret in his estimation of the English horn, describing it as a "melancholy, dreamy voice, dignified too."[33] Berlioz cites his own *Symphonie Fantastique* as using both the oboe and English horn in dialogue with one another, "like the voice of a young country boy in dialogue with his girl."[34]

Musicological writings about the history of the oboe have also addressed this topic. In Bruce Haynes's book *The Eloquent Oboe: A History of the Hautboy 1640-1760*, the author describes the manner in which the *hautboy* or predecessor to the oboe used in France and England was "sometimes compared to the voice." For example, the oboe has been described in the past as sounding like "a singer with poor diction," or as having a "hoarse" tone.[35] The instrument is also described as sounding like a "best-instructed voice" by the abbe Michel de Pure in 1668.[36] Clearly, music scholars have been able to trace this phenomenon at least back to the Baroque era.

There are also more modern examples of musicological writing about the oboe and the human voice. In his book on the instrument, Philip Bate attributes the following quote describing the tone of the oboe to a "H.S. Williamson":

> The bitter-sweet oboe which is first heard marshalling the orchestra to tune, continues, as the music proceeds, to assert its small but inexpressibly poignant voice whether it is heard singing plaintively to a hushed accompaniment or whether under the passionate surge of the strings it is heard calling, as it seems, from the innermost secret passages.[37]

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cantabile. Hector Berlioz, *Grand Traité d'Instrumentation et d'Orchestration Modernes* (Paris: Schonenberger, 1844), 104.

[33] Ibid., 109. Original French: *C'est une voix mélancolique, rèveuse, assez noble . . .* Hector Berlioz, *Grand Traité d'Instrumentation et d'Orchestration Modernes* (Paris: Schonenberger, 1844), 124.

[34] Ibid., 110. Original French: *Dans l'Adagio d'une de mes Symphonies, le Cor anglais, aprés avoir répéré à l'octave Basse les phrases d'un hautbois, comme ferait dans un diaougue pastoral la voix d'un adolescent répondant a celle d'une jeune fille en reid lesfragments (à la fin de morceau) acev un sourd accompagnement de quatre timbales, pendant le silence de tout le responte de l'orchestre.*
Hector Berlioz, *Grand Traité d'Instrumentation et d'Orchestration Modernes* (Paris: Schonenberger, 1844), 126.

[35] Bruce Haynes, *The Eloquent Oboe: A History of the Hautboy 1640-1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 191.

[36] Bruce Haynes, "Lully and the Rise of the Oboe as Seen in Works of Art," *Early Music* 16, no. 3, (August 1988): 324.

[37] Bate, 3.

This quote provides a strong evocation of the oboe as having a voice and of being able to sing in more than one way. Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes in their book *The Oboe* offer an update to Bate's 1975 monograph of the same name, in which they tackle the topic much more frequently and thoroughly. Throughout the text, the instrument is described as "the voice of prelapsarian innocence," and "nasal" in character.[38] The idea of a nasal sound is particularly compelling because of the modern oboe's French origins and the connection of this characteristic to the nasal quality of the modern French language. The authors also emphasize the oboe's connection with voice in orchestral repertoire. In the musical works of J. S. Bach and Jean-Baptiste Lully, "vocal obbligatos were the [oboe's] first solo medium, exploring the instrument's expressive potential" in both cantatas and opera.[39] This leads to an entire subsection in their book titled "The Singing Reed," where the Burgess and Haynes more fully describe "the analogy with the human voice," which has been "most enduring in the oboe's history."[40] The longevity of this metaphor does not, however, indicate a consistency in tone as one might expect, as both the preference for the sound of the oboe and the human voice has changed throughout history. Just how it has changed, though, is not specified by the authors.

Despite the fact that there is a long-standing discourse revolving around the subject of the oboe's connection to the human voice, it is a topic that is alive and well today. Upon a basic perusal of the 2017 issues of *The Double Reed*, the journal of the International Double Reed Society, one can still find many articles describing the oboe's unique relation to the human voice.[41] One example

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[38] Burgess, 7, 102.
[39] Ibid., 28.
[40] Burgess, 259.
[41] Examples of articles include "Laryngeal and Vocal Health Issues for Double Reed Players" by Valerie Trolliger and Robert Sataloff, which classify double reed players as voice users because their vibrato is often produced in the larynx, as well as “Rowland Floyd's Notes Taken During Oboe Lessons with Marcel Tabuteau: October-December 1965" by Charles-David Lehrer, which describes the way Tabuteau referenced voice in his teaching.

is a quote from the respected late oboist, Marcel Tabuteau. He states, "[r]egarding the oboe's sound, the head sound versus the chest sound is like the register factor in the human voice."[42] Performers still regularly engage with the ability to sound human-like through old and new compositions.

The oboe has been described specifically as relating to the soprano voice, not only because of its range but also due to its early association with obbligato lines in vocal works.[43] In the 19th century, the oboe stood for qualities of "delicacy, innocence, and feminine charm . . . more than any other instrument of the modern symphonic orchestra."[44] Specifically, it was the "feminine quality of sweetness" along with delicacy, power of expression, and a certain lightness that has been praised in the oboe's tone.[45] Gossens has specifically described the oboe as "a lady" in his book, stating that "[if] we lose her feminine qualities we neutralize the sound which thousands of years of history have sought to sustain and beautify."[46] Heavy tones of misogyny aside, the sound of the modern instrument has clearly been associated with femininity of sound and emotion, despite that the majority of its top performers are male.

The oboe itself is also associated generally with lamentation and funeral rites through its speculative (and probably false) descent from the aulos. The oboe's lineage is actually drawn from the shawm and not the aulos, which has much more historical grounding, with the *hautboy* or early oboe evolving from the shawm as an aesthetic preference of French composers and instrument

[42] Lehrer, 71.
[43] Burgess, 60.
[44] Ibid., 8.
[45] Gossens, 136.
[46] Gossens, 27.

makers.[47] Shawms and the *hautboy* coexisted for some time, especially in France but also in England, before the hautboy gained more support and gradually become the modern oboe.[48]

The aulos is a double piped instrument, which may have been either a flute, or a reeded pipe (single or double), that was used specifically as part of funerary laments and rites.[49] Many modern oboists draw connections from this ancient instrument to the present-day oboe. Gossens claims that "the aulos was an oboe played with a reed very much the same as we use now, although courser and larger."[50] Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes propose that this association may be driven by the pastoral connotations that each instrument has cultivated in its own right.[51] Whether this theory is true, or whether the oboe has any concrete historical connection to the aulos, the association between these two instruments has been cemented since the 20th century.[52] Its association with the aulos and the history of ritual laments, as well as its nasal and melancholy tone, as noted earlier, lends itself to the curation of an abject mood.

As noted earlier, the human voice is not the only thing that the oboe imitates. Oboists develop a personal sense of how to imagine their pieces and when certain imitation is appropriate. As Gossens notes, "the oboe family can adapt to many forms of characterization."[53] This instrument is also often used to evoke a sense of the pastoral, in conjunction with bassoon and other wind instruments.[54] It does not rest solely on its association with the human voice for its expressive power. Moreover, the oboe is not the only instrument that is known for its voice-like

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[47] Adam Carse, *Musical Wind Instruments* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1965), 125.
[48] Murray Campbell, Clive Greated, and Arnold Meyers, *Musical Instruments: History, Technology, and Performance of Instruments of Western Art Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 89.
[49] Burgess, 11.
[50] Gossens, 8.
[51] Burgess, 13.
[52] Ibid., 15.
[53] Gossens, 82.
[54] Burgess, 7.

quality. A timbre reminiscent of the human voice has been desired and sought after in many instruments. As Emily Dolan notes, this timbral quality contributed to the popularity of instruments such as the glass harmonica, which was able to "combine the tone and control of the human voice with the conveniences of a keyboard."[55] A desire for voice-like sound also spurred cultivation of particular tone qualities in other instruments that are capable of producing them, specifically, other woodwind instruments such as the flute and clarinet (typically soprano or alto). Their timbral ranges, however, create a different set of expressive associations that are not inherently directed towards sadness or lamentation. The oboe is distinctive in how and to what effects it can imitate the human voice. It is for this reason that the oboe is uniquely suited to the works discussed in this study, as well as other pieces (solo or ensemble) that wish to evoke the act of lamenting.

1.2 INSTRUMENTAL LAMENT

Instrumental lament is unique in its lack of texted music. Because the instrument cannot declaim words, as a singer can, the oboist finds other ways to communicate through their instrument, as examined in the two case studies below. Both Poulenc's oboe sonata and Benjamin Britten's "Niobe" evoke vocal lament, partially through their specific use of the oboe, as well as through using musical topics, an abject mood, and extramusical associations related to lamentation. It is fitting that both Poulenc and Britten chose the oboe as the instrument to voice a lament, because,

[55] Emily Dolan, *The Orchestral Revolution: Haydn and the Technologies of Timbre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 61.

as Geoffrey Burgess notes, this is "the reason it had been created, to convey the emotional force of words and to move its listeners."[56] The oboe, however, is only a replicator of the human voice, and as an instrumental medium its sound is often expected to smooth away the failure or strain that occur with real voices.

What is particularly striking in these lamenting pieces is the absence of the kinds of failing or imperfect vocal sound we might expect of a grieving person. When a living being is in great distress, either mentally or physically, the sounds they make are not perfect or consistent, but rather are full of pain, break in unusual places, and are often at the extreme ends of their pitch or dynamic ranges. In contrast, difficult passages of these works are meant to sound technically flawless. In "Niobe," even though the last note is simultaneously the highest and the quietest, it is still expected to sound full and beautiful. Niobe's weeping cries are beautiful and wholly constructed. Poulenc also requires performers to perform beautifully at every turn, where even very difficult passages and very soft sustained notes in extreme registers are expect to speak and move smoothly. There is no point in either of these pieces where the music should sound spontaneous or rough. The mediation of these works smooths out any potential raw edges, presenting a clean, though still melancholic, grief.

Quasi-vocal failure is allowed when it is written into the score by the composer, and is sonically implied even if the music is performed properly. In "Niobe," the sonic failure allowed is that which is built by Britten, in terms of rests that break the melodic line, and breath marks in specific places almost as if to imitate the deep inhale before a loud sob when crying. These small

[56] Burgess, 28.

gaps of silence make the music sound hesitant and unsure, despite being technically correct.[57] Poulenc's sonata also has sonic elements of failure with the grace notes before chords in the piano. As discussed later, this creates the illusion that the oboist and pianist are not together, despite the intense concentration and communication it takes to execute this figure. These failures are carefully composed and notated, and excruciatingly practiced until correct.

Here, the composed nature of these laments establishes a physical and affective comportment that the oboist performs as part of the work of conveying meaning. There is also a standard of performing behavior that the performer enacts while on stage, that of quiet and reserved actions (even when moving in an expressive manner, as often seen in violinists) and embodied mental stillness. Each level of the performance is mediated, to create a scene that is almost incomparable to a person genuinely lamenting the death or otherwise loss of a close loved one in their life.

There is also an association of both lament and the oboe (as described earlier) as feminine. Women take the role of lamenter in many societies, including modern and ancient Eurasian cultures.[58] In Britten's "Niobe," these two associations are used together to create the scene of Niobe's demise, while Poulenc's work draws upon a different and specifically male tradition of lamentation. Britten is not alone in his work or associations, with composers such Ludwig Beethoven, Richard Wagner, and Gustav Mahler drawing upon similar ideas. Beethoven, for

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[57] Britten is very specific about the breath marks in this piece. Throughout the movements, there are several times when he indicates that he would like the performer to breathe specifically during a notated rest, despite the natural impulse to breathe during these times anyway. This is not present in all of his works, such as the voice and wind parts in his War Requiem.

[58] For a discussion on women as lamenters in specific European societies, see works such as Anna Caraveli-Chaves, "Bridge between Worlds: The Greek Women's Lament as Communicative Event," *The Journal of American Folklore* 93 (1980): 129-157., and Elizabeth Tolbert, "Women Cry with Words: Symbolization of Affect in the Karelian Lament," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 22 (1990): 80-105.

example, uses the oboe in act II of Fidelio, where the instrument represents the heroine, which "brings promise of hope as the tears shed by the lamenting instrument become the redeeming tears of a self-sacrificing woman."[59] The oboe in these works provides "symbolic poignancy by acting as an instrumental corollary to the woman's voices, representing the essence of the expression of their loss; it stands for desire that gains its psychic force from being configured as lost, absent, dead, or otherwise irretrievable."[60] This instrument is a part of these woman's voices and also serves as a mediation, either strengthening her words or taking their place when she cannot speak.

What must be taken into account is that, in composed vocal laments, women have usually been seen (or heard) as most beautiful at their lowest emotional point, distraught and destroyed. However, oboes are not appealing in states of disrepair, and in fact are most beautiful at their most polished, performed by musicians who have given years of life to the study of their performance. This results in few differences between vocal laments and laments composed for the oboe. Despite the fact that female personas in vocal laments are often tragically broken, they often have some of the most beautiful music in the repertoire, and singers' performing technique must still be at a very high level, despite the abjection of their characters. Instrumental laments make comparable demands on players are, but there is a greater degree of abstraction between the oboist and the persona of lament. Unlike with modern singers, there is no expectation that an oboist act as if they are truly lamenting.

In conclusion, the oboe has been associated with both the human voice and melancholic sounds since at least the Baroque era. Composers like Britten and Poulenc called upon this association in their pieces as a way to facilitate lament. The instances where this occurs helps to

[59] Burgess, 227.
[60] Ibid., 223.

solidify the social and psychological interpretation of these works, as examined in the following analyses.

2.0 BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S "NIOBE"

The movement "Niobe" from Benjamin Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* serves as the first case study for the oboe's human-like vocality as used in instrumental lament. Britten set this movement as part of the unaccompanied suite for solo oboe. He wrote this work in 1951 for an oboist of his acquaintance, Joy Boughton, who was the daughter of his friend and fellow composer, Rutland Boughton.[61] There appears to be no specific biographical rationale for the piece; rather, the composer offered it as a gift to Joy for her to perform at a music festival. (It also let him explore his interest in classical mythology through another genre different from the more modern mythologizing in his operas.)[62] This work is "certainly the archetype of solo oboe works with underlying poetic text" and consists of "single-line character pieces" for the unaccompanied oboe.[63] Each movement focuses on a different myth taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and each "showcases a different aspect of the oboe's character."[64]

The stories of Pan, Phaeton, Bacchus, Narcissus, and Arethusa focus on either the transformation or the newly minted object. The first movement shows the god Pan experimenting with the reeds that the nymph Syrinx was turned into after praying to the gods for help escaping from Pan's relentless advances. The last movement is similar, focusing on the sound of the fountain that Arethusa was turned into after fleeing from the unwanted love of Alpheus. From a feminist

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[61] Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber Inc., 1992), 296.
[62] George Caird, "*Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* and the Influence of Classical Mythology on Benjamin Britten," In *Benjamin Britten: New Perspectives on His Life and Work*, ed. Lucy Walker (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2009), 50-52. Radmila Paunovic Stajn and Slobodan Lazarevic, *The Mythological in the Operas of Benjamin Britten* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2014), 10.
[63] Burgess, 292.
[64] Ibid., 213.

perspective, these movements are more than tragic, but this sensibility is not reflected in Britten's music. In terms of the other movements, the second movement "Phaeton" sonically evokes the sound of the horses pulling the chariot of the sun and then Phaeton's descent into a river and death after being struck down by the gods. There is no mourning for him. The fourth movement "Bacchus" is more about the feasts and parties of the famous god, rather than a specific metamorphosis, while the fifth movement "Narcissus" is about the title character peacefully existing as a flower after falling in love with his own reflection. While there are certainly tragic elements to the other five movements, "Niobe" stands as the most mournful musical setting, focusing as it does on the grief of the persona, and her "weeping is captured equally well by [the oboe's] lyrical qualities."[65]

The historical and mythological basis for this work is important background to the way the oboe is able to lament, as well as the manner in which it is able to call upon human sounds. The movement "Niobe" is based upon the ancient Greek myth memorialized in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Niobe was the daughter of a Phrygian king and married to Amphion, the king of Thebes. She made a speech challenging the worship of the gods, comparing her wealth of children (seven daughters, many sons, and soon to be in-laws) to the two children of Latona, which were the god Apollo and the goddess Diana. Apollo and Diana killed all of Niobe's sons first, and then her daughters as revenge for the slight against their mother. Her husband committed suicide as a response. Niobe, frozen in grief, was turned into a mountain, and continually weeps in the form of streams.[66] As George Caird points out, the movement "Niobe" also hearkens back to the sound of the aulos.[67] Its

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[65] Burgess, 213.
[66] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid.* Trans. William Anderson (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 125-147.
[67] Caird, 52.

slow-moving harmonies and held notes create sonic associations with the ancient Greek instrument that had a deep and longstanding connection with musical lament, as well as with mourning rites.

"Niobe," as a movement based upon a myth, makes the most sense when interpreted as a narrative, and the musical process supports this. Britten's subtitle itself gives a sense of trajectory ("who, lamenting the death of her fourteen children, was turned into a mountain"). It begins with a lamenter who then gets transformed into a mountain. Not all movements in the suite are like this. "Pan" and "Arethusa" are more impressionistic, with sonic depictions of the object that is the result of the transformation. These movements are through-composed and have a few main melodic motives that are somewhat developed. "Niobe" and "Phaeton" are different, with forms featuring return of melodic material and a clear sonic evocation of the "before" and the "after."

"Niobe" has an ABA' form, with the B section presenting a contrasting mood to the A sections. While the first two sections are roughly equal in length (A section = 9 mm., B section = 10), the A' section is shorter (mm. 21-26), evoking the mythical scene where Niobe is turned to stone and her lamentation is cut short. Additionally, the movement is static in its harmony, with the unaccompanied oboe elaborating one chord at a time, drawing out the individual tones, and often spending a full measure or more outlining the notes of a chord. With a tempo marking of a quarter note equals 60 beats per minute, "Niobe" immediately catches hold of the listener's ear as deliberately slow and unhurried in its rendition of grief. Despite its brevity, the movement takes over two minutes to perform, depending on artistic choice in length of fermatas and rests. This creates a sense of the eternity of grieving that Niobe is assigned in her myth, and it also provides a strong contrast to the faster movements in the rest of the suite.

In general, there are many aspects of the movement that evoke the human voice. For example, the movement's pitch range is set squarely in the middle range of the instrument (e^1 to d-

flat^{3}), which as a vocal register would correspond to a soprano voice.[68] (The highest note, d-flat^{3}, is certainly up there in range, but it is still viable for a modern soprano.[69]) In addition, the movement is marked *piangendo*, or weeping, a sound that is conventionally taken as human in nature. The oboe itself cannot physically weep, but it does its best to replicate the sounds of those who can.

With the formal elements in mind, certain stages of Kübler-Ross's model are evident in the way Niobe mourns. Understanding the possible stage of grief elicited by sections of this work can inform the human and inhuman sounds that we expect to hear and that the performer chooses to curate. However, it has no causal relation to the narrative in this movement as composed, as Britten would not have been familiar with it. Rather, it has the potential to structure modern listening and interpretation. For example, the subtitle indicates that the movement commences after Niobe comes to face the lifeless bodies of her family and begins to turn towards what modern psychology might describe as a depressive state. The music begins with a melodic line filled with sighs, descending dotted eight note - sixteenth patterns. This suggests a feeling (and perhaps the stage) of depression because of its connotation with weeping and sobbing, as seen in Figure 1.

[68] The octaves of each pitch are designated following the Chicago Manuel of Style, 17th edition, section 7.72. Middle C is c^{1}, with the octave below denoted with lowercase letters. Each octave above is indicated with a superscript number.

[69] Britten is normally associated with vocal music for the tenor voice type, specifically written for his partner Peter Pears. This movement, however, is set solidly in the soprano range.

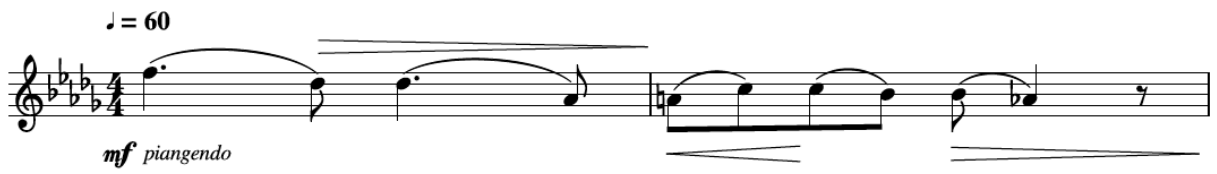

Figure 1: Benjamin Britten, "Niobe," Six Metamorphoses after Ovid (1951), Op. 49 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952), mm. 1-2.

This motif is not new to Britten, but rather was established in the Baroque operatic traditions.[70] Drawing upon the vocal gesture of the sigh, the melodic line "sobs" over and over through the oboe, which sounds distraught through the whole A section. Even when the line is not directly following the dotted sigh motif, the melody is almost always descending, often ending a fifth lower than where it originally began.

Niobe can be interpreted as beginning in the state of depression beyond just her initial feelings of grief, which is evoked through this constant descent and sighing vocality. The oboe often begins its line on f^2, again and again returning to the same idea just as a mourning person might. As Ana Dopica points out in her article on Edward Said's work, repetition is "deeply connected both to the work of mourning and to a daily reinvestment in agency."[71] Repetition of phrases or traditions when mourning a person, or in the case of Said's work, a homeland, helps to process grief while giving the mourner agency to repeat themselves (in language or in action). Repetition is also frequently used in mourning literature (such as poems, prose, and theatrical works). Nouri Gana writes that "the figure of repetition" is part of the "master trope" of melancholy

[70] Caplin, 416.
[71] Ana Dopico, "The Recourses of Necessity: Repetition, Secular Mourning, and Edward Said's Inventories of Late Return," *Social Text* 24, no. 2 (June 2006): 111.

and trauma in the poetics of mourning.[72] The repetition of this melodic material is both a gesture seen in art generally, as well as a phenomenon seen in the real lives of human beings.

Additionally, while this melody is a far cry from the descending tetrachord pattern used in many Baroque laments (e.g.,. Dido's lament, "When I Am Laid In Earth," from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*), the constant pull downwards in "Niobe" is extremely poignant. This is not only in the downwards pull, as there are other pieces and styles of music that descend without being identified as a lament. This descent is also melancholic in nature, with its articulations in terms of accents and slurs, variation in rhythm between long and short durations, dynamic contrast, and repeated notes. It also shows a constant struggle to move upwards, as it fights against the continual pull downwards. The repeated notes demonstrate this struggle as they show the battle between the character and her tragedy, the imagined Niobe fighting to rectify her situation and the oppressiveness of the tragedy weighing her down. The line struggles to even maintain the current pitch, but never ceases its aim upwards. The poignant quality becomes particularly noticeable when the downward pattern is broken in m. 7 and the oboe ends its phrase a whole step higher than where it began, accentuating this effect because of its struggle to reach upwards towards hope and redemption. This passage is the first that is able to rise, succeeding temporarily in its fight to overcome the abject situation that is depicted in the subtitle of the work, which describes Niobe as lamenting the death of her many children and turning into a mountain. In mm. 8 and 9, however, the descent returns and rectifies the brief glimmer of hope represented by the upwards turn, truly dragging Niobe down into her depression as her cries slowly fade away.

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[72] Nouri Gana, *Signifying Loss: Towards a Poetics of Narrative Mourning* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 10.

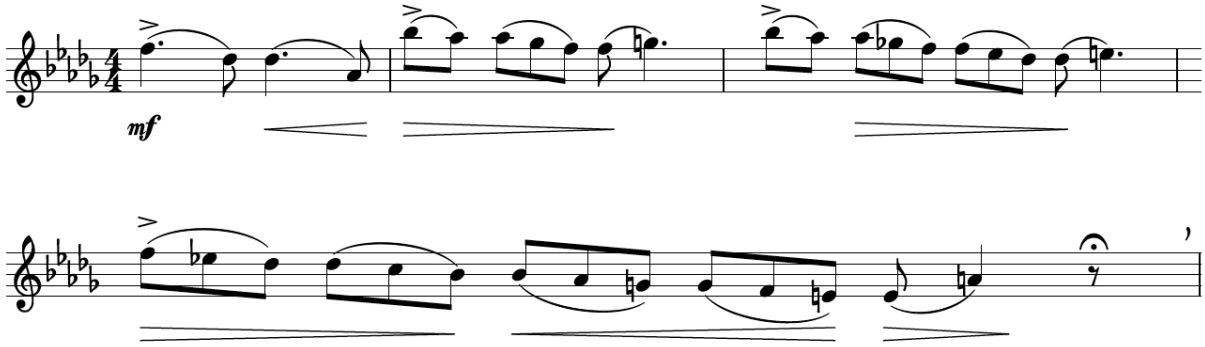

Figure 2: Benjamin Britten, "Niobe," Six Metamorphoses after Ovid (1951), Op. 49 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952), mm. 6-9.

In terms of performing this section on the oboe, the fingerings of the notes are particularly tricky. The oboe has three different common fingerings for the note F. The easiest and most in tune of these uses a "banana" key, or a small key in between the standard circular keys. Thus, it cannot be used before or after notes that require the ring finger on the right hand, such as E-flat and D-flat. The oboist must decide which of the two alternate fingerings they want to use in mm. 6, 7, and 9 of Figure 2. These alternatives are not as in tune, nor are they as physically comfortable. One is a forked fingering in the right hand, and the other requires use of a left-handed pinky key nestled in a group with three other pinky keys. However, m. 8 does not require an alternate fingering. Additionally, E-flat and D-flat cannot be played with their typical fingerings when they are in succession. Both standard fingerings use a pinky key from the right-hand group. Thus, in m. 9, an alternate E-flat fingering must be used, with a key from the left-hand pinky group instead. This section is smooth and lyrical, so the performer must be extremely comfortable with these different fingerings, and able to use any of them in the middle of a performance. If they do not use the correct fingering, the melodic line will sound clunky and unpracticed. The mental effort and potential physical strain cannot be heard through the music.

In the middle of the movement, at the start of the B section in m. 10, the music moves implicitly towards the portion of the myth where Niobe begins to bargain with the gods, picking the youngest daughter to attempt to save. This section appears to be indicative of the bargaining stage of the Kübler-Ross Model. In the mythic version, this child is already dead, but Niobe begs and prays for Diana to spare her last daughter. Britten's musical section represents, however, both stages of denial and bargaining, as Niobe is unable to accept her situation. In the myth, her frantic bargaining and praying causes her to freeze with grief, unable to move. Musically, this is represented in the contrasting B section, representing an emotional state that is distinct from her first. In m. 10, the melody in the music becomes rhythmically faster and ends on ascending lines, mimicking the rise of pitch often found at the end of questioning statements in English. These questions present a noticeable difference from the section before, which almost always landed lower than it began, as these new fragments struggle upwards towards a potential hope and a denial of the tragic situation. The first "question" in mm. 10 and 11 falls and then attempts to rise above, though settles on an e^2, one half step below the f^2 on which it began. The second iteration is more successful, and the line is able to ascend to a g^2, one whole step above the f^2 on which again it began. The effect is that the music sounds hopeful and reaching, as if the situation has the possibility of being resolved.

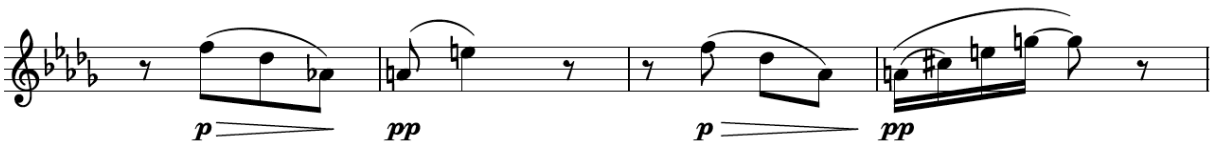

Figure 3: Benjamin Britten, "Niobe," Six Metamorphoses after Ovid (1951), Op. 49 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952), mm. 10-13.

After the oboe-as-Niobe completes its two questioning, hopeful lines and receives no response, the music begins to beg, with an "*espress[ivo] e rubato*" melodic line consisting entirely

of eighth note triplets. It suggests a denial of the gravity of the situation, as revealed through the length of this melodic line when compared to the others, as seen in Figure 4. After a drawn-out falling line in m. 14, the phrase extends from mm. 15 to 20, without a break in running notes.

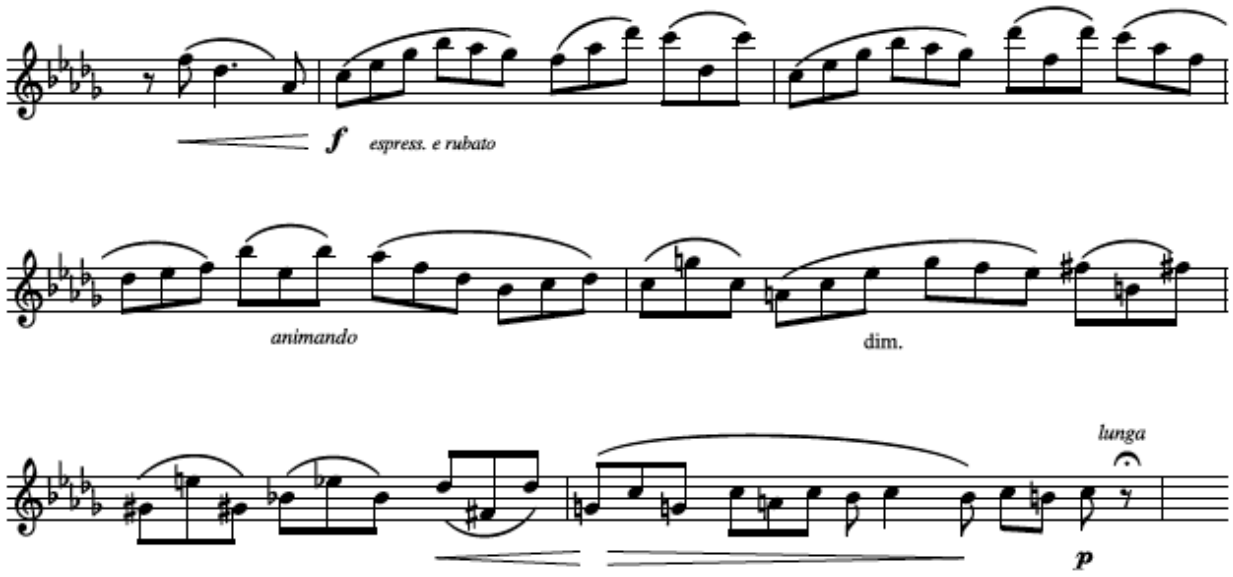

Figure 4: Benjamin Britten, "Niobe," Six Metamorphoses after Ovid (1951), Op. 49 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952), mm. 14-20.

The scene is that of the irrational Niobe's ceaseless begging and praying to the gods for the life of her child, jumping around through pitch leaps that are large for the oboe (many are a fifth or a sixth, but the largest occurs in m. 15 from a c^2 to a d^1). The leaps can be difficult to play smoothly, especially when it comes to the interval shown on beat three of m. 16. The d^2 is beginning to get into the high register on the oboe. Having to slur down and back up again from the f^1 means that you have to cross from middle register to high, requiring a different embouchure, set of fingerings, and air stream. While not quite as extreme as going over the break in instruments like the clarinet, it still proves to be difficult to master in a slow and lyrical movement such as this.

In m. 17, the music is marked *animando*, perhaps as the imagined Niobe realizes that her technique is not working and becomes more frantic. The performance of this section also requires use of the correct fingerings for notes, but has less room for thought than in mm. 6-9. The excerpt in Figure 4 is more difficult in its dynamic and expressive demands as well. M. 15 asks the oboist to be expressive and use rubato, while still maintaining a smooth and connected melodic line. As the line comes to a close, the oboe decrescendos into a long fermata over an eighth rest. The sound evokes the mythical end of the story where Niobe's tongue starts to turn to stone, as her transformation begins and she is unable to weep for much longer.

Late in the B section, (mm. 19-20), the oboe ceases to imitate direct human sounds and instead becomes more mechanical, relying on its inherent evocation of the voice to do the work of generating Niobe's begging. This creates a certain defiance discernible in the B section, as performer Allison Robuck has noted, because of the sudden lack of implication of crying and sobbing.[73] Mythical Niobe, still prideful in her sorrow, claims that even if her children are dead, she is still triumphant over Latona, even at Latona's happiest moments. The pride that she feels as a character in the myth is most visible in the way the music constantly strives up, melodically and in terms of pitch. She has not given up and still believes that her situation is redeemable. This is part of Niobe's flawed character, a hubris even in her mourning, of her family.

As Niobe transforms in the myth, she becomes a rocky mountain, sinking back into the stage of depression. She is unable to stop weeping, even as she is rendered unable to speak or move. The stages of anger and acceptance as outlined by Kübler-Ross are unable to transpire in Niobe's process of mourning, partially because her permanent state preserves her in her most

[73]Allison Robuck, "Programmatic Elements in Selected Post-1950 Works for Solo Oboe" (DMA diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2004), 18.

mournful and painful moment. This is reflected in Britten's movement with the return of the melodic material from the A section. It is perhaps also because of her loss of status, loved ones, and entire social meaning. Mythical Niobe is unable to accept what has happened to her and her children, because, to accept this means that she is no longer the person she identified so proudly as: queen, mother, and equal to the gods. In the music, the sobbing line from the beginning returns in m. 21 and closes out the movement's simple ABA' form. It gradually grows softer and slower, ending on a pitch--d-flat^{3}--that is high for the oboe (not an easy feat for any musician familiar with the difficulties of oboe reeds, high notes, and diminuendos, much less combined onto one of the most important notes). M. 23 is marked by Britten as "*senza express[ivo]*," indicating that the earlier melodic line, which was so emotive as a replication of crying, is becoming stony with its lack of dynamic contrast and overt vibrato (Figure 5). The sigh motif, which earlier evoked the human voice and operatic lament, develops here into something different, perhaps even less than human.[74] It is only with the loss of Niobe's humanity that the oboe line halts its replication of the human voice, and with Niobe, morphs back into a cold object. This is also the only place in the movement where the pitch of the melodic line is able to end conclusively above the note in which it began. After the downward falling sigh motif in m. 23, the rhythmic figure stretches upwards. Its failure to literally end on a higher note is mitigated by a passage of arpeggiation in m. 25, ending on the aforementioned d-flat^{3}, a minor sixth above the f^{2} that reappears so often as the beginning of the sighs (also seen in Figure 5). The mythical Niobe is unable to experience all of the stages of grief outlined by Kübler-Ross. Even if this character, as an individualized grieving person, was not going to experience the stages of anger and acceptance, she is unable to see the process through

[74] Ellen Rosand discusses the technical aspects of operatic lament in her book chapter "Il Lamento." Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 361-386.

to the very end because of her transformation. The process of mourning and lamentation has been interrupted, never to resume again.

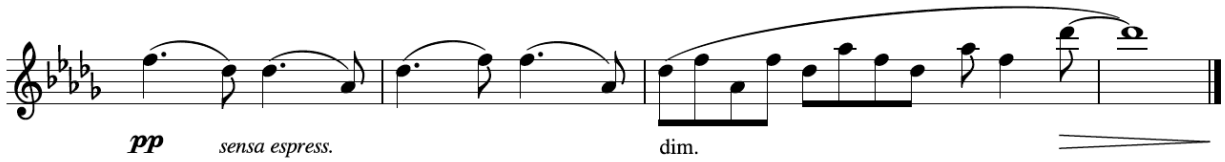

Figure 5: Benjamin Britten, "Niobe," Six Metamorphoses after Ovid (1951), Op. 49 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1952), mm. 23-26.

In terms of social mourning, this movement also presents a musical depiction of Butler's philosophy that the act of mourning is transformative for subjects and communities. Niobe's physical transformation causes her to become something more than human, an eternal monument. However, she transforms into an object whose only purpose is to mourn the losses of human life. She cannot forget, move on, or even die. Another thing to consider with this movement is the social act of mourning and its perception within a society. Niobe is one of two titular characters that are being punished (the other being Phaeton), and she is the only of the six that is depicted as mourning. Even the other characters with tragic stories are not shown as mourning their fate or as having others mourn them. Their actions that are inspired by grief are outside the music set by Britten, if they mythically are able to take place at all. Niobe's grief is at the loss of innocents, a loss that (in the Ovidian telling of the myth) is construed as entirely her own fault. It may also be at the loss of *innocence*, as Niobe in the myth losses her naiveté. She is wrenched out of her comfortable existence and egotistical belief that she is equal or better than her gods, into a miserable situation where all that she has loved is taken from her. This sudden gain of wisdom through terrible loss may be the first indication of the transformation to come.

By mourning her many losses, she is not only attempting to physically rectify the situation by begging the gods to save her child, she may also be socially rectifying the situation as well. The

original myth describes her hubris, an unforgivable offense to the Greek gods. Niobe publically denounces these gods and encourages worship of herself and her royal family, defying the norms defined in these myths. After the death of her children and husband, Niobe's mourning brings her back into social convention, by expressing a pain that is purely human. Greek gods, though often depicted with human emotions, cannot suffer from hubris because of their station as deities. Niobe's shame at being humbled and her tragic loss of loved ones are experiences dependent on her humanity, and it is through this social convention that she is both punished and forced to accept that she is not like the gods, nor can she ever be among them.

It is also not clear if her transformation into a mountain is a reward for excellent mourning, further punishment, or an ambivalent motion by the gods to rid themselves of having to hear her ceaseless pleas. Through her transformation, she is denied death and rest, as well as an afterlife reunion with those family members that she has just lost. Perpetual lamentation may signal endless mourning, but, like in Butler, it also signals eternal personhood. Niobe is allowed by the gods to lament until the end of time through the flowing of streams down her mountain, but she is denied a voice to cry out and connect with others. Socially, she is isolated. Bodily, she is frozen. Mentally, she is still a person, still human on the inside, consigned to eternal lamentation and grief by the nature of what she is transformed into.

The social aspect of this piece is sonically represented at the end of the work, as the oboe holds its highest note, which slowly diminuendos into nothing. The sudden lack of movement in juxtaposition to the rapidly changing pitch immediately before is similar to the silence of the rests, though sonically audible. It causes the listener to stop and ponder the meaning of something that is so different than what has come before, despite being an ending that is so common it might be described as cliché. Socially, the meaning of Niobe's lament is ambiguous and poses many more

questions than it attempts to answer, reflecting on the social implications of excessive mourning and the question of what to do next after such an episode has been personally experienced.

The physical act of performance of this movement also has the ability to color perceptions of the way this work uses the oboe and its potential vocality as a way to express lament. Britten uses the instrument idiomatically in terms of range, articulation, and vibrato to express the depth of grief in this work.[75] This allows the anguish of the mother to be audible. It also sonically represents the transformation into the mountain, ending with the mountain's silence. As noted by Sheri Mattson, who wrote her DMA dissertation on this work, it is also "one of the most challenging [moments] of the piece because it requires the performer to have a large amount of control."[76] The long-held notes and technical passages, without room to breathe, require the oboist to hold an entire lungful of air inside of them. While this back pressure helps create the characteristic sound of the oboe, the small amount of air exiting the body of the performer through the millimeters wide reed can cause intense discomfort. The performer of this piece needs to be intimately familiar with this discomfort in order to focus on musicality, powering through the parts where air must be kept within their lungs for long periods of time. Performing slow slurred passages on this instrument is similar to holding your breath. This movement, along with many other slow pieces and movements, requires that the oboist keep exquisitely calm and maintain strict concentration for long periods of time while little air is flowing out of their lungs and no air is flowing in (though there would not be room to inhale more air. Oboists must exhale stale air

[75] As noted in Sheri Mattson's DMA dissertation, Britten uses "the inherent characteristics of the instrument, such as loud low notes, the ability to change tone color through changes in volume or range, sharp articulation capabilities, mournful tone, use of vibrato, wide dynamic range, and a comparatively narrow tessitura" creating "music that reflects the pastoral nature of Ovid's poetry, as well as its more emotional aspects. Sheri Mattson, "An Analysis of Benjamin Britten's Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Opus 49, For Solo Oboe" (DMA diss., Florida State University, 2000), 19.
[76] Ibid., 44.

from their lungs after finishing a phrase before there is any room to inhale again). The breath control required for this movement demands that the performer keep a strong diaphragm and constant back pressure. Any wavering of the abdominal muscles inhibits the production of vibrato and consistency of tone and pitch. With long passages and unaccompanied held notes, there is no room for rest or hesitancy. Each articulation and subsequent note requires confidence and trained skill. While "Niobe" does not present abnormal difficulty in this respect (as there are many slow and lyrical works in the solo repertoire of the oboe), it is a different struggle than the incredible technical ability required for the other movements of this work, as well as a different type of transformation driven by grief.

In conclusion, Britten's musical writing of this lament uses the oboe to bring a quasi-vocal sound to idioms and topics (such as the sigh motif) found in earlier laments, and makes for an interesting analysis through the interpretive lens of the Kübler-Ross model of stages of grief, not only as a performance guide, but as a listening guide as well. He calls upon the oboe's ability to imitate human sounds, such as sighs, cries, and questions, to humanize Niobe before she becomes something other than human. This movement is juxtaposed in the following section with Poulenc's sonata, which is very different in terms of use of human vocality, lamenting topics, and general organization.

3.0 FRANCIS POULENC'S SONATA

The second case study for this thesis is Francis Poulenc's *Sonate pour hautbois et piano*. This work was composed in the summer of 1962, shortly before the composer's death in January of 1963.[77] It is dedicated to the memory of Sergei Prokofiev, the Soviet composer who had died in March of 1953, nine years before the composition of the sonata.[78] Prokofiev and Poulenc had been friends in the 1920s but appear to have become estranged in the early 1930s when Prokofiev returned to the Soviet Union after an extended stay in Western Europe.[79] Poulenc's dedication nearly a decade later signals that he still cared for and mourned his lost friend, as Poulenc is known to have "dedicated his compositions to his friends, to people who had meant a great deal to him at the various stages of his career" rather than attempting to flatter or win favor from potential commissioners or performers.[80] Also, this piece was not written for a particular performance venue or occasion, but simply because Poulenc felt so moved to compose it. The dedication of "*a la mémoire de Serge Prokofieff*" at the top of the first page sets the mood for the mournful and sensitive music that follows. As scholar Carl Schmidt notes, the sonata itself is a "work of suggestions rather than statements, which we overhear as much as hear. The confidences of an oboe are given to us as if at the end of a long day, when someone sits opposite you and speaks frankly of what is in his heart."[81]

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[77] Schmidt, 458, 462.
[78] Carol Padgham Albrecht, "Poulenc and Prokofiev: An Essay in Artistic Tribute," in *Dika Caecilia: Essays for Dika Newlin, November 22, 1988*, ed. Theodore Albrecht (Kansas City, Missouri: Department of Music, Park College, 1988), 13.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 2.
[81] Schmidt, 216.

The sense of sadness and grief portrayed in the music is very different from Henri Hell's portrait of Poulenc from his 1959 biography, where the composer is characterized as "jovial," living life as a passionate artist.[82] It does fit, however, with the other sonatas coming out in this late period in Poulenc's career, including one for flute and piano and one for clarinet and piano. Stylistically, these late works are characterized by self-quotation, frequent and rapid modulation, "limited amount of thematic/tonal development . . . often immediately following the initial presentation of thematic material," and "section delineations [that are] generally confined to subtle changes in theme, meter and tonal center."[83] Sometime in the mid 1950s Poulenc, despite not being ill, became convinced that his death was near and wanted to compose a full cycle of woodwind sonatas.[84] He managed to finish all except for a bassoon and piano sonata, which it appears he was never able to begin. His premonition of death came true in 1963, when he died suddenly of a heart attack in his Paris apartment.[85]

This piece cannot be interpreted as narrative in the same manner as Britten's "Niobe." It is important to distinguish this from a narrative style, that seems to evoke external events, whether general or specific. It does not represent an account of events that take place, but rather an emotional trajectory. In this manner, Poulenc's sonata is more impressionistic, depicting an internal journey through grief that could potentially take place over many years and in many different locations. The piece's affective power lies in its ability to portray these emotions without external context.

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[82] Henri Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, tran. Edward Losckspeiser (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1959), 89.
[83] Pamela Lee Poulin, "Three Stylistic Traits in Poulenc's Chamber Works for Wind Instruments" (Ph.D. diss., Eastman School of Music, 1983), 44, 124, 126.
[84] Keith W. Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 55.
[85] Schmidt, 462.

There are many interesting aspects of Poulenc's oboe sonata, including a reversal of the fast-slow-fast ordering of the movements typically found in solo oboe repertoire. Here, the movements are arranged slow-fast-slow, with the movements titled "Élégie," "Scherzo," and "Déploration," respectively. Additionally, there is an "absence of development of themes, [rejecting] the classical models."[86] "Élégie" appears to be a more public memorial for Prokofiev. The elegy is a literary genre that can be traced back to as early as the ancient Greeks, with performers who were both poets and musicians, such as Callinus, Archilochus, and Mimnermus.[87] Elegies have been written throughout history, with notable examples from Renaissance works like *Noel, adieu* (1527) by Thomas Weelkes on the death of his friend Sir Henry Noel, to recent publications such as *An American Elegy* (1999) by Frank Ticheli which was composed in memory of those lost at the Columbine High School shooting.[88] They were, and still are today, generally written by composers as an act of mourning for someone lost, and then published for a wider use. For example, Weelkes's elegies were published as part of larger volumes of madrigals.[89] Ticheli's work continues to be a popular wind band piece.

The title of the first movement also harkens to Poulenc's *Élégie*, written for French horn and piano in 1957. This earlier piece is similarly dedicated to a lost friend of the composer's: Denis Brain, British horn player, who died in a car accident that same year.[90] It is also reminiscent of Poulenc's *Élégie pour deux pianos*, composed in 1959 in memory of Marie-Blance de Polignac,

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[86] Schmidt, 218.
[87] E. L. Bowie, "Early Greek Elegy, Symposium and Public Festival," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986): 13-14.
[88] Alec Robertson, *Requiem: Music of Mourning and Consolation* (New York: Fredierick A Praeger, Publishers, 1967): 215-217.
[89] Ibid., 215.
[90] Schmidt, 419.

another close friend.[91] The fact that Poulenc titled the first movement of the oboe sonata with the same name as two other pieces places it in a creative lineage with them. These all represent very public memorials, music that has been dedicated and published for others to play.

This first movement of the oboe sonata is highly dramatic, but, in terms of Kübler-Ross, it appears to put on a facade of acceptance, interwoven with peaks of a more genuine anger. It begins in a "surprisingly peaceful" manner, with a "simple restrained melody."[92] After an initial melody that is like a mournful cry, it does its best to remain somewhat detached. In its ABA' form, however, the middle section is a performance of anger, with suddenly louder dynamics, notes in the extremes of the range, and the marking *sans presser.*[93] This section breaks the public-facing mask, showing the composer's inner feelings before they retreat back underneath the reserved melody, and restraint regains control. In this way, the acceptance that is shown in the first movement is not wholly genuine. It is an honest attempt at working towards an acceptance of the loss of Prokofiev, though there is still a significant amount of anger underneath the surface, which frustrates the emotional process, unable to fully smooth away the intense emotion still present. It is only this movement, however, that is able to maintain any semblance of that facade.

"Scherzo," the second movement, represents anger as a stage of grief, and it is a *tour de force* of technique with a wild tempo of dotted eighth note equals 160 and rapid technical passages comprised entirely of eighth note triplets. Its short phrases are fragmented and disjointed, barely able to sound in the rampage. Unlike the previous movement, its focal point is entirely this feeling of anger. The bottled-up rage from the first movement resurfaces with a vengeance, and only dissipates once it has run its course and tires out both the griever and the performer. It is the third

[91] Schmidt, 435.
[92] Albrecht, 7.
[93] Ibid.

and last movement that really laments. It is titled "Déploration," a French term that connotes has weeping and lamenting through poetic and musical form.[94] As such, in this study the selected focal point for discussion of the sonata is the third movement.

The genre of the *déploration* was a medieval French poetic and musical form lamenting a prominent death; specifically, in the late medieval and early Renaissance, it referred to a composition written for the death of a composer. However, as scholar Sean Hallowell notes, these works were usually collaborative between the composer, poet, and a living person had commissioned the work, whether it was a patron or publisher.[95] It is different from an elegy in that the *déploration* is a work more associated with a religious experience, as this genre historically appears to be associated with funerary rites and services. Another important aspect of the genre is polytextuality, with Medieval and Renaissance composers interpolating parts of the Requiem Mass or other religious text with other poems.[96] Poulenc, however, wrote his work without collaborators, for instruments rather than a texted voice, and for no specific living commissioner, much like the way he wrote many of his pieces in his life, specifically near the end. He did, though, use the tradition of polytextuality through self-reference to many of his other pieces, as examined below.

Poulenc is specifically harkening back upon this older genre tradition by titling the movement as such, especially since the genre was, and still is today, rare in performance and new composition.[97] It is also interesting that Poulenc employs lament, typically associated with emotional women. This genre, however, appears to be associated with male composers mourning

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[94] Davitt Moroney, "Déploration." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed December 5, 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/07582.
[95] Sean Hallowell, "The Déploration as Musical Idea" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2013), 5.
[96] Robert Aiken Geary, "An Introduction to the Renaissance Déploration" (MA thesis, California State University, Fullerton,1981), 37.
[97] Ibid.

the loss of male friends, written by and also for composers such as Johannes Ockeghem, and Josquin des Prez[98] Thus, Poulenc is also drawing upon a historically male-centered manner of public lamentation.

Like earlier *déplorations*, there is also a religious connection in this work, and specifically its last movement, to Poulenc's earlier *Sept répons des ténèbres* (1961-1962), a sacred work in seven movements that sets responsories from the Roman Catholic liturgy for moments of the Holy Week, including Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday.[99] Commissioned by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, it is scored for solo soprano, boy and men's choir, and orchestra.[100] As Keith Daniel notes, "when the chorus tenors enter [in m.12], we are in the same world as the opening of the last movement of the Sonata for oboe, completed in the summer of 1962, and marked *Déploration*, again suggestion the connection with the Passion and Poulenc's own impending death."**.**[101]

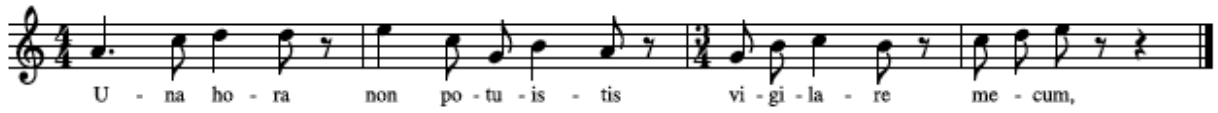

Figure 6: Poulenc, *Sept répons des ténèbres* (1962), FP 181 (Paris: Editions Salabert), mm.12-15. Tenor melody reminiscent of Movement III opening of the oboe sonata.

The placement of rests in this line is also similar to the use of rests in the sonata. This tenor line is fragmented not only in respect to the rests where the rests are placed musically, but also in the way that they break up the text. They do not occur at places where one would typically pause. Similarly, there are moments in the sonata where the oboe has a rest at the end of a measure and the piano

[98] Geary, 37.
[99] George R. Keck, *Francis Poulenc: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 34.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Keith W. Daniel, "Poulenc's Choral Works with Orchestra," in *Francis Poulenc: Music, Art and Literature*, eds. Sidney Buckland and Myriam Chimènes (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 73.

has a held note that has decayed, creating a moment of silence. There are also places where the oboe and piano both do have a rest at the end of a measure, similar to the line in Figure 6, and illustrated in Figure 7. This technique is notably used in all three movements of this sonata, generally creating a sense of fragmentation between each melodic line when it occurs. Figure 7 comes from the first movement of the sonata, showing the way Poulenc is using this technique to reference *Sept répons des ténèbres* throughout his oboe sonata.

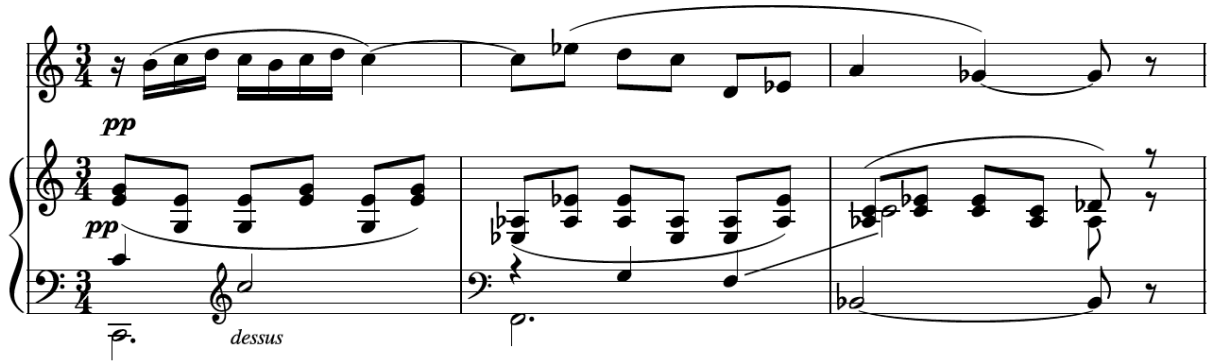

Figure 7: Francis Poulenc, Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1962), FP 185 (London: Chester, 1990), Movement I, mm. 19-21.

Poulenc draws from *Sept répons des ténèbres* to produce the liturgical feel mentioned above. He does this by quoting melodies and harmonies from a musical work that is representative of his Catholic beliefs in the sonata that was his last musical statement. Scholar Keith Daniel later describes the final movement of the sonata as "Poulenc's own death music" because of its presence and harmonic connection with Christ's words in *Sept répons des ténèbres*, as well as its original appearance in *Dialogues des Carmélites.*[102] Poulenc used this music in connection with Christ's death in *Sept répons des ténèbres* in mm. 32-33 in the fourth movement, titled "Caligaverunt oculi mei" or "My Eyes are Blinded with Tears." He used this extramusical association between the two

[102] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style,* 240.

to create meaning in the sonata by continually reinforcing the idea of death and dying. Between Poulenc's memorial of Prokofiev, the title of the third movement, and this borrowing, there is a strong suggestion of meaning. It is a "death marked by sweetness and transfiguration, not by rage or questioning."[103] Whether Poulenc's own, Prokofiev, or even that of Christ, death surrounds this music. Clearly, this work is connected to multiple earlier pieces of Poulenc's. It creates multi-layered extramusical associations between this piece and several others, all centered around the ideas of loss and grieving, creating a sense of polytextuality that was a convention of early *déplorations*, even without actual text itself. The composer is drawing upon his own life in music, a historic genre, and the evocation of the memory of fellow composer to create this lament, with the culmination coming in the third and final movement.

This third movement is in an ABA' form. The first A section (mm. 1-47) is roughly twice as long as the B section (mm. 48-71), which leads into the final and shortest A' section (mm. 71-91) as the oboe and piano fade away at the end before they are able to fill out the last section. The tempo is marked of a quarter note equals 56, with an expressive marking of *très calme* (very calm), creating a slow and deliberate sound to each note that is heard. Poulenc's compositional style throughout his lifetime is known for his use of seventh structures and this work in no exception, with many seventh and ninth chords throughout the movement, with a full and lush, though slightly dissonant character to the work.[104]

Additionally, this movement was the last section of the work to be composed, and as such, stands in hindsight as Poulenc's last musical statement before his death. While he made plans for a premiere for later in 1963, Poulenc died before it could happen and as such, it was not performed

[103] Daniel, "Poulenc's Choral Works in Orchestra," 80.
[104] Ibid., 75.

or published in his lifetime. Poulenc meant his "Déploration" to be "a sort of liturgical chant," directly in the lineage of the medieval genre.[105] With no text, however, the instruments must speak and communicate in lieu of the voice.

Analyzing this aspect in the work through a psychological lens is significantly different that Britten's movement. Poulenc's sonata is a personal statement, which is in clear contrast with Britten's narrative of a mythical character. In "Niobe," the analysis focuses on a character, and the emotions that she could be interpreted as having in respect to her story and the music written. Beyond large generalizations of emotion (e.g. the work is clearly lamenting, not joyous), many interpretations could differ in their nuances and all be equally valid. With Poulenc's sonata and his personal mourning, however, interpretation must be approached more carefully. As Maynard Solomon writes in his biography of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, one needs to keep the "galaxy of possibilities" of interpretation in mind, while still grounding the argument in music and biographical information.[106] This can lead to valid insights into the music and its composer, framed with the notion that there may be competing ideas that are equal in strength.

One must also be careful in terms of how Poulenc's death is read back into this piece. There appears, however, to be biographical information to support a certain degree of this interpretation. Poulenc wrote this music during a time where he was obsessing over his own death. As noted above, this piece, and specifically the third movement, is strongly linked to dying and mourning, through titular associations and self-referential sections. Thus, it seems to be a coming to terms with the emotions associated with impending death. It is important to acknowledge, though, that this movement is not a complete documentation of Poulenc's feelings on death, nor a narrative

[105] Albrecht, 13.
[106] Maynard Solomon, *Mozart* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers 1995), 195.

journey that ends with the composer's death. Rather, is serves as an impressionistic snapshot of moments of emotional intensity near the end of Poulenc's life.

With this in mind, the third movement is suggestive of the psychological stage of acceptance, which, for Kübler-Ross, is about accepting reality and coming to terms with what has happened, rather than a dissolution of pain associated with the loss of a loved one. The piece begins very slowly and calmly, unhurried and unworried. The idea of acceptance is expressed in each iteration of the main melody, which changes little with each appearance. The piano begins the piece alone by laying out the first statement of the melodic theme, after which the oboe enters. The first appearance, from mm. 1 through 5, is where the melody begins on a-flat and a-flat[1] with an e-flat[1] between the two in the piano, and it ends on multiple octaves of E flat. The final open octave chord is lower than the initial pitches, sinking down in each line to the octave below.

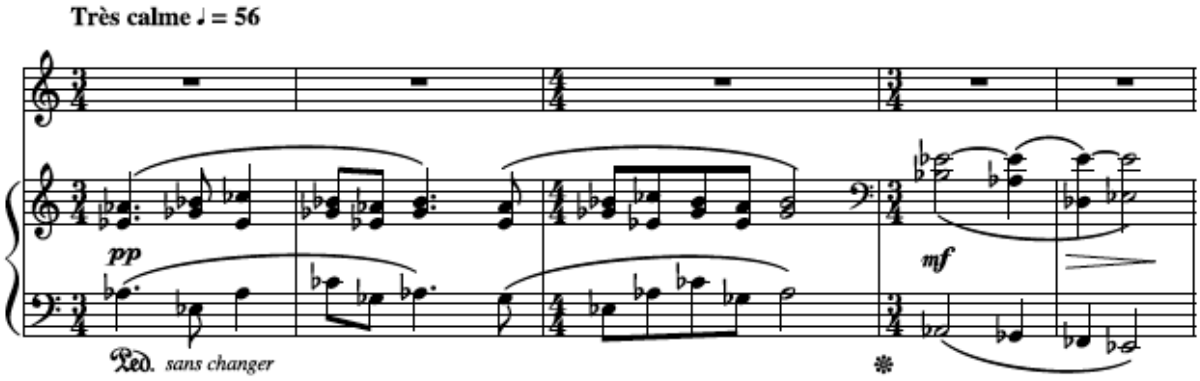

Figure 8: Francis Poulenc, Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1962), FP 185 (London: Chester, 1990), Movement III, mm. 1-5.

These exact pitches also commence and culminate the melody in the next two phrases in the oboe. The "slight melodic variations in the many repetitions emulate those that would naturally occur with changing texts sung to the same chant melody in liturgical music. The extremes of the oboe's register imply higher and lower voices," specifically soprano voices in the first fourteen measures

(with a range of a-flat^2 to e-flat^6, though the upper range would be out of reach for most sopranos) and alto and high tenor voices in mm. 15-22 (with a range of b-flat to e-flat^1).[107] Poulenc's use of the melodic theme is noteworthy, especially in regard to his resistance to development, because this pattern continues through the exposition in the various key areas. While within Poulenc's preferred style, this movement has the potential to portray acceptance because extreme lack of development in specifically the melodic material. It is presented in the piano and then only gently altered, where motives in other movements do see more development.

Additionally, the movement is more modal than tonal.[108] In the final A' section, the melody is starting on f^2 and f-flat^2 rather than the original a-flat. This is the last time this melody appears, however, as the final section of the movement varies the melodic line beginning at m. 54. From that point, the phrases end a half step away from where they began, beginning with an f-flat^2 and ending on an e-flat^2 for the first two iterations and then from a d^2 to an e-flat^2 in the final two. The range tightens in this final section, restricting the oboe to notes between c^2 and f-flat^2, a diminished fourth. This range is solidly in the oboe's middle range, where the performer has more control over pitch and dynamics. The extreme *pianissimo* required in the last few measures is achievable in this range, allowing the sound of the instrument to gently decay. Overall, this movement begins "from nothing, slowly build[s] to a shattering climax in the oboe over relentless repeated eighth-notes in the piano" before fading away with " a long note decaying into nothing.[109]

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[107] Margaret Jean Grant, "A Feminist Analysis of Francis Poulenc's Sonata for Oboe and Piano," DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, (2006), 96-97.
[108] Kiran Bhardwaj, "Poulenc and the Question of Analytical Interpretations," Senior Thesis, Haverford College (2010): 16.
[109] Albrecht, 14.

The piano was Poulenc's principal instrument, one that he had learned from his mother as a child.[110] It would have been the part he played if he had been able to attend and perform at the premiere. Because this work is a collaboration between two instruments, the relationship between the piano and the oboe is particularly important. Beginning in m. 6 and on many more subsequent chords, the piano begins just slightly ahead of the oboe through notated grace notes in its part, as seen in Figure 9. In performance, this technique is particularly noticeable, and sounds almost as if the two instruments are not together, when in reality it takes enormous skill and communication to successfully perform this passage as it is written in the score. In this way, the piano is often ahead or slightly off beat from the oboe.

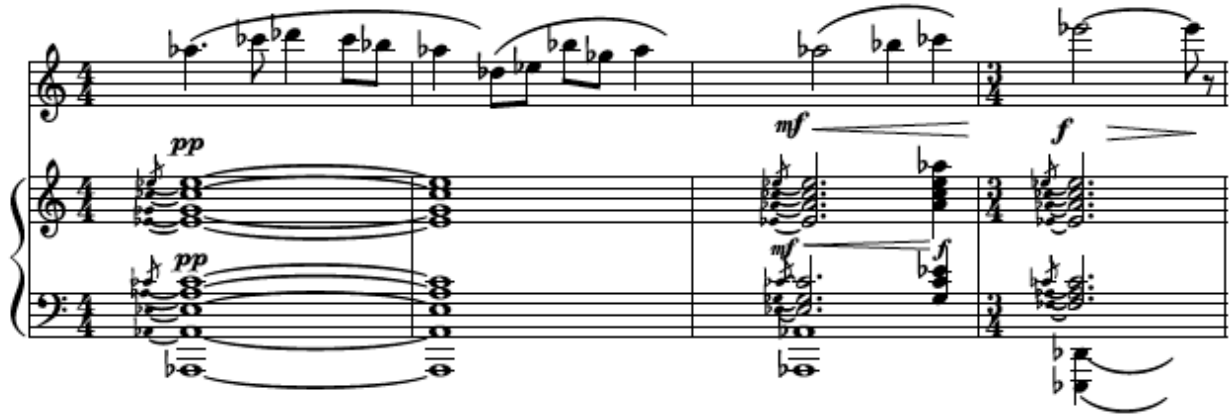

Figure 9: Francis Poulenc, Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1962), FP 185 (London: Chester, 1990), Movement III, mm. 6-9.

Figure 9 also shows the use of rests and decay to fragment the melodic line, as discussed earlier in connection to *Sept répons des ténèbres.* In measure 9, the oboe's note ends on the first half of beat three, leaving an eighth rest of silence. The sound of the piano's held note has decayed at this point, even with use of the pedal. The melody is slurred and smooth when it is taking place, but is broken

[110] Ibid., 8.

and isolated from both the melodic line before and after it. This fragmentation references not only *Sept répons des ténèbres*, but also the other movements of the sonata itself.

The piano's accompaniment is also interesting in terms of its melodic and harmonic part. When the oboe is playing in the first A and B section, the piano is only accompaniment. As soon as the oboe begins to rest, however, the piano takes up melodic material, as in m. 35 (Figure 10).

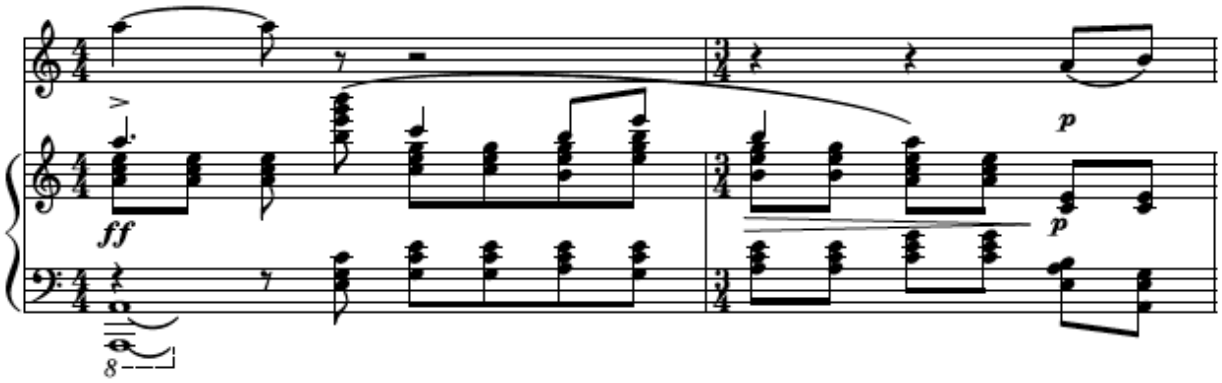

Figure 10: Francis Poulenc, Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1962), FP 185 (London: Chester, 1990), Movement III, mm. 35-36.

This changes in the A' section, where the oboe begins its final variation of the melodic theme in m. 60. The oboe has a sustained note for two measures, and the piano plays a melodic line underneath it, after which the two switch roles. The performance process is particularly interesting, as two instruments and performers begin a dialogue for the first time in the movement, exchanging melody back and forth. The parts of both are finally on the same page, with rhythms lining up evenly and a sense of connection and partnership between the two performers. This is perhaps the only conclusion presented in the entire movement, with no clear tonic for the final chord to reference, and a slow dissipation of the sound of both instruments.

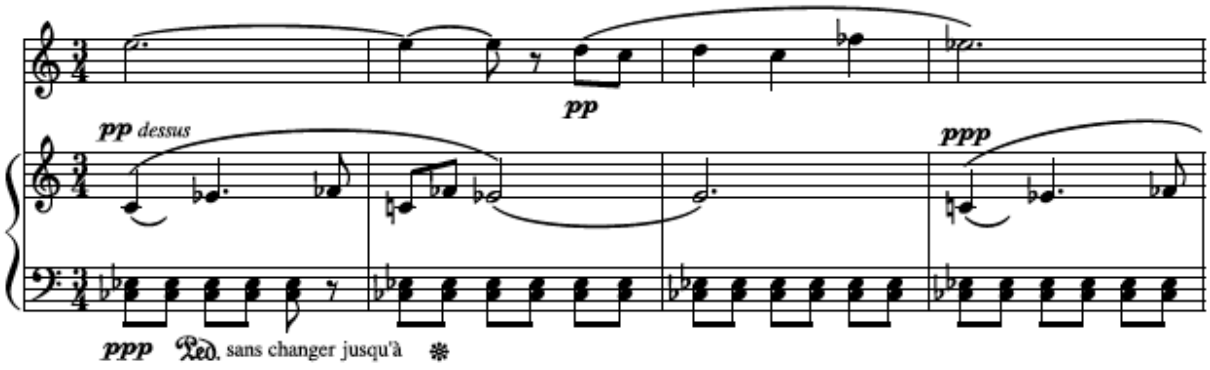

Figure 11: Francis Poulenc, Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1962), FP 185 (London: Chester, 1990), Movement III, mm. 60-63.

This level of acceptance is not celebratory, but rather a placid and tacit acknowledgement of the inevitable. It documents an emotional journey of processing the last remnants of lingering emotions (the anger in the B section) before the final coming to terms with the future. If the last A' section were a statement, it would be akin to "Okay, I'm ready now."

What makes this entire piece particularly interesting in terms of the Kübler-Ross interpretative lens is that only two of the major stages are present: anger and acceptance. This can be interpreted a couple of different ways. When looking at Kübler-Ross's revised model, it could simply imply that these emotions were not present during this grieving process. Perhaps denial, bargaining, and depression were not feelings that Poulenc had when working through the death of his former friend. This interpretation does not hold a lot of explanatory power, nor does it seem mostly likely. Rather, it seems that piece begins its depiction of grief in the middle of the process. This version is supported by the oboe sonata's engagement with other works by Poulenc, and by the sheer fact that Poulenc composed this work nearly ten years after Prokofiev had already passed. Logistically, it makes sense that Poulenc would have experienced some emotions tied to the death of his friend before composing this piece. Thus, more than half of the stages described by the

Kübler-Ross Model are missing in the oboe sonata, and it seems to suggest that it begins *in medias res*.

This sonata also warrants interpretation through the social lens of Butler's writing, though in a much different manner than Britten's "Niobe." Poulenc's symbolic mourning of Prokofiev effectively takes place in a public arena, through the widespread publication and concert performance of this sonata. Each time it is programed on a recital, the grief that Poulenc wrote into this piece is presented wholesale to a new audience, in a perhaps endless cycle. Oddly, this work is also private, in that Poulenc never lived to see it performed to the public, and composed it on a vacation away from his home in Paris.[111] In this way, the sonata functions both as a public and private act of mourning the death and memory of Prokofiev.

Akin to Judith Butler's *Precarious Life*, the grieving in this work presents a transformation. The piece begins with Poulenc, though having lost contact with Prokofiev, lamenting the death of his old friend from the past. It ends, however, on an acceptance of his own death, prophesied by himself alone. This is not a typical transformation, as grieving is theorized to change a living person through the absence (some type loss or death) of someone important. Poulenc, rather, changes by readying for death, and perhaps even experiencing a symbolic first death through the fading away of the oboe and piano at the end of the sonata. Poulenc's voice is silenced, and he ceases to grieve, perhaps ending his personhood. This precedes his true physical death by less than a year.

Movement III was the last part of the sonata that Poulenc finished, and truly stands as his last musical statement, a memorial to a friend and a reflection upon himself. Poulenc, as the composer and mourner, transforms through his journey through grief, though in a much less visual

[111] Schmidt, 458.

way than in "Niobe." The transformation occurs through his acceptance of the past, the death of Prokofiev, and the present, his impending death, and the future, his actual death. His symbolic fading away at the end of the works transforms the mourner into the mourned. This movement functions almost as "a *memento mori*, intimating that player and listener alike must someday die."[112]

The oboe sonata is also connected to other late works in Poulenc's output. There are "similar motivic fragments, [and] similar melodic designs" between the other two sonatas written for woodwind instruments at the end of Poulenc's life.[113] These similar motivic and melodic figures appear in each sonata in some way, though they are varied between the three, along with a general mood and affect that are shared between all.[114] The oboe sonata's third movement also appears to draw its melodic motif in the third movement from the Sonata for two pianos.[115] A motive that is similarly rhythmically and melodically is found in this earlier work, "which in its lyricism, its seventh-chord harmony, and its melodic shape serves as the prototype for the last movement of the serene *Sonate for Oboe and Piano*."[116]

The vocality in this movement is significantly different than that in Britten's work. Poulenc does not use musical motives and topics that harken back to operatic lament of the distant past. Rather, he draws musical associations to his own vocal works, such as the *Sept Répons*, along with the titular association with the déploration. He also allows the oboe's lyricism to speak for itself. This instrument is given long lines with mostly relatively small leaps and few larger or difficult leaps, making it lyric and fairly easy to vocalize (in the preferred octave of one's range).

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[112] Schmidt, 218.
[113] Albrecht, 6.
[114] For a more detailed analysis, see Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 128-129.
[115] Daniel, *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style*, 82.
[116] Ibid., 193.

Poulenc is similar to Britten in regards to use of the oboe's range. He places the very first pitch of "Èlègie," the first movement, in the same high register that is used at the end of "Niobe." Later, in "Déploration, he requires the oboe to play both notes higher than in Britten (an e-flat^3) and the lowest note in the oboe's range (b-flat). These pitches, however, are still mostly within reach of a typical soprano range. It is only the very highest notes that may be out of range for high voices, and even those can often be reached by classically trained soprano vocalists, especially a coloratura soprano. On the other hand, the oboe also does not always imitate the sound of the human voice. At times, it almost sounds as it if is evoking the call of birds or other natural sounds such as in m. 27 with the alternation between c^2 and d^2 (Figure 12). Poulenc does not rely as heavily on the composed evocation of the human voice in this work, and allows the oboe to explore different timbral possibilities as it laments.

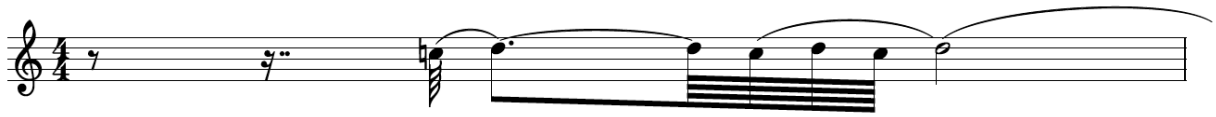

Figure 12: Francis Poulenc, Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1962), FP 185 (London: Chester, 1990), Movement III, m. 23.

Despite being a popular piece for student oboe recitals, this piece is difficult to play with all of the written expression of the score. It, like "Niobe," requires extreme control to hold the sustained notes at a steady pitch for the length of time required. There are also delicate melodic passages that require the oboist to use the very extremes of their range, such as in m. 15 where the oboe enters on its lowest possible note, at a *fortissimo* dynamic no less. The very quiet parts of the work are also hard, as it takes a certain amount of air to make the oboe reed vibrate. It takes an intimate understanding of the individual reed itself (in its ever-changing state influenced by weather and overall climate) as well as the space in which one is performing.

This work is very different from Britten's "Niobe," in regard to autobiographical and programmatic elements as well as place within a larger work or output. Poulenc's sonata is significantly longer than Britten's movement purely because it is a full work centered around loss and mourning, where "Niobe" is one movement out of six in Britten's work. But there is also a sense of length in the narrative surrounding Poulenc's sonata versus Britten's "Niobe." There is also the fact that Poulenc wrote this piece on his own accord, rather than for a specific performer. He chose to write a sonata for the oboe and dedicate it to Prokofiev, rather than dedicating any of his other instrumental sonatas to the deceased composer or choosing another instrument for Prokofiev's musical memorial. Despite these major differences, the parallels between the lamenting nature of each of these works and their use of the oboe as the solo instrument to portray the humanity of the lamenter draw these works together.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Through Judith Butler's explanation of grief and transformation and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's model of the stages of grief, I have argued that these movements effectively lament, in both their construction and their associated performance practice. Britten's movement laments as a character from an ancient Greek myth, providing a narrative quality. "Niobe" also presents a physical transformation where the mourner becomes an object. Through an interpretative analysis, it outlines depression, bargaining, and denial from Kübler-Ross's model of the five stages of grief. It asks questions about personhood and grief while demonstrating the social fulfillment of norms. On the other hand, Poulenc allows himself to lament the past death of a close friend. His sonata is much more impressionistic, showing stages of anger and acceptance. It appears to only present a fraction of the full mourning for Prokofiev, though seems to capture the end of the emotional process. Interpretation of social relationships and emotions much be approached much more carefully, however, as biographical information provides concrete evidence to support or refute the analysis.

Both composers use the oboe as the vehicle for their laments, exploiting its voice-like timbre to mediate cries of the human voice. The instrument's long history of association with the sound of the human voice and with melancholic expression make it a fitting choice for these pieces. The performer then is given the freedom to cultivate as much likeness to the human voice as they physically can, perhaps modeling sections of the work off specific grief-based emotions and recreating the phrasing in the same way as a professional vocalist. Through these two works, we can begin to construct an understanding of composed lament as performed by oboes and oboists,

working to cultivate the sound of a grieving voice through associations with laments throughout history, as well as a window into the affective nature of these pieces on an audience.

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