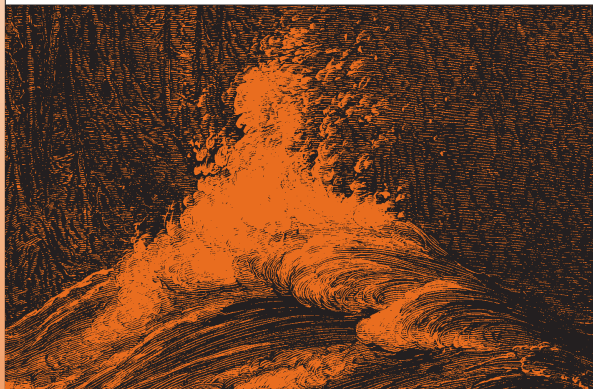


The Sea on Fire:



Jean Barraqué

by Paul Griffiths

THE SEA ON FIRE



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THE SEA ON FIRE:
JEAN BARRAQUÉ

Paul Griffiths



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for Rose-Marie Janzen



Jean Barraqué

(Courtesy of the Association Jean Barraqué)

*Si je suis le musicien que certains pensent et que je pense,
c'est dans cinquante ans qu'on le dira.*

*If I am the musician that some think and that I think,
it's in fifty years that people will be saying so.*

~ 1969 ~

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Preface

History, many thought and hoped after World War II, could start afresh. Jean Barraqué knew it could not. With his deep sense that so much malignity could not be simply disavowed, and with his equally thorough awareness that the greatest masters (Bach, Beethoven and Debussy in the past) could comprehensively remake not only music but humanity's inner life, he knew what he had to do: discover, in and through the void, grandiloquence.

It was a creative task he could not accomplish without the self-destructiveness that alienated all but a handful of close friends, and that led him to his death at the age of forty-five. Six scores, only, remained, together with a fragment of electronic music. But those scores do, indeed, remain. As time proceeds they gather more and more weight into themselves. Or they go on, slowly and steadily, revealing what they are.

That they do so is due in large measure to the patience, care and resolve of Rose-Marie Janzen, who was one of those few who stood by the composer, who safeguarded his musical materials after his death, and who formed the Association Jean Barraqué to protect those materials and his music's interests. To her is owed far more than the dedication of this book. She provided access to the Association's archives, use of interviews she had recorded in shorthand with many people who knew the composer, contacts with others, permission to consult reserved documents at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France—even accommodation, in a garret at the top of her apartment building, overlooking the rooftops of the Latin Quarter. She also provided unwavering strength and encouragement, free and full answers to questions, but never interpretation. What value this book possesses comes from her; its failings are its and its author's own.

Help came, too, from others. Jeanne Bisilliat and André Hodeir welcomed me to their homes, showed me private notes and inscriptions by the composer, and later clarified points in correspondence. Messages from Roger Woodward were invaluable, as was an interview with Pierre Boulez. Antonio Folquer not only entertained me to tea at his home, previously the composer's apartment, but allowed me to explore the intact library and made sure I did not leave—on an unusually cool June day when I had arrived in open sandals—without two pairs of his own socks. There was

another memorable tea at the home of Marie Baillorge (née Le Bras), where I was able to shake the hand of the composer's beloved Breton companion Riri Blivet. Her daughter Annie—again in June, as the long bright evening slowly darkened—amiably drove my wife Anne and me from one to another of the composer's favourite sites along the coast, and I was glad to speak also to another Trélévern resident who knew him well, Josée Le Gros. Laurent Feneyrou, Heribert Henrich and Bruce Phillips were generous with assistances they alone could provide. From the further past, Michael Gerzon first opened to me Barraqué's importance, Bill Hopkins was a guide in what he was as much as what he said, and the *Musical Times* (then edited by Stanley Sadie) made it possible for me to attend performances, and observe the composer, in London and Royan.

I am grateful also to the following for permission to quote copyright material: the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Jeanne Bisilliat, Pierre Boulez, Michel Fano (on his own account and as president of the Association Jean Barraqué), André Hodeir, Clare Hopkins (for letters and articles by her husband Bill Hopkins), Laurent Feneyrou, André Riotte, Françoise Thinat, and Roger Woodward.

Nearer the present, the text has been read by my wife, by Nicolas Hodges and by Patrick Ozzard-Low, all of whom strengthened and enriched it enormously. It belongs, also, to them.

Paul Griffiths
April 2003

Notes on sources, together with the original texts of unpublished documents quoted in translation, are to be found at p. 185.

Chapter 1

Family and Formation

It begins like this, Jean. You were born around midday on 17 January 1928 at a clinic in Puteaux, which was then a small town just outside Paris on the western side, though the city has since engulfed it. Your mother had gone there to be with her parents, Louis and Cécile Millet.

Louis Millet, your grandfather, you loved. He was a baker, but his family's roots were among the vine growers of the Loire, the agricultural aristocracy. Consciousness of social position, though, he left to his wife, and in particular concern that their two daughters—Gabrielle (Bela) and Germaine, four and a half years younger—find husbands who would offer a way of life similar to the Millets' own: a standard of petit-bourgeois comfort and propriety supported by hard work. Madame Millet found what she was looking for, she thought, in the Barraqués.

The connection began almost a decade before you were born, in August 1919, when your aunt Bela was married to Martin Barraqué. That was when your parents, too, came together, for there they are in the wedding photograph, among the crowd of people striving in their formal clothes to live up to the occasion. They were the newly-weds' younger siblings, Germaine Millet and Grat Barraqué, serving as supporters at the ceremony.

There too in the photograph is your grandmother, with half her problem solved and, according to family tradition, the solution to the other half already revealing itself to her. If one Barraqué wedding, why not two?

Why not? Germaine and Grat fell in with the plan, to be married four years later at the mairie in the place your mother would return to for your birth, Puteaux. The ceremony took place on your father's twenty-fifth birthday, 9 July 1923. Your mother was twenty.

The young Barraqué men, Martin and now Grat, were a rung or two below the Millets. They came from the Basque country, where their parents, Simon and Marie-Anne, still lived. But as far as your Millet grandmother was concerned, they had the necessary qualification: a trade. They were butchers.

Grat Barraqué was slow and taciturn, a man of grudging docility who had followed his brother Martin to Paris and into the butchery business. His

new wife, full of spirit, was forever criticizing him. She strove to northernize and dignify his name by calling him 'Gratien'. She was also the more sensual. On the back of another photograph she kept—showing a butcher's shop in Arras, the Boucherie Turenne, where she and your father were living in 1927—she noted that this was where you had been conceived, on Easter Day.

By the time you were born, your father was working as a butcher's assistant in Pontoise, to the north west of Paris, while he and your mother were living nearby in Montmorency with another Barraqué brother—Joseph, between Martin and Grat in age—who had done rather better for himself. He had spent four years in Oakland, California, prospered there, and returned to run a laundry employing more than a dozen people. That was where you spent your first years, in an extended family that was almost as numerous as the workforce of launderers. Uncle Joseph and Aunt Marie-Louise had a son, René, who was two and a half when you arrived; their daughter Liliane, or 'Lily', followed two years later. Also lodging with them was your cousin Roland, four when you were born, the son of Martin and Bela, who were working in Paris.

At six months, you were baptized, in the collegiate church of Montmorency, as Jean Henri Alphonse, taking two of those names in the traditional way from your godparents: an Abbé Jean Larrasquet and Henriette Bertelle, a cousin of your mother's. Both were in touch with you when you started having problems in your late teens.

The time in Montmorency lasted until you were three. Then your father found work at a butcher's in Paris, at 1 rue Jacquard in the eleventh arrondissement, and the three of you moved in with Uncle Martin, Aunt Bela and your cousin Roland (by now living with his parents), at their butchery in the rue du Rocher—for around a year, until your father took over the rue Jacquard establishment. There you then lived, from the age of four until you were into your early twenties: above a butcher's shop.

The rue Jacquard is one of the tiniest streets of Paris, part of a little maze to the east of the Boulevard Richard Lenoir, in what was then a working-class district of apartment blocks and shops. You played in these streets, sauntered down to the parish church of Saint-Ambroise, a big neo-Romanesque structure of the eighteen-sixties, returned to the butchery that was your home.

You said nothing in later years about what you would have seen there, smelt there, heard cleaved and axed there. Meat: you could not handle it—as your friend André Hodeir recalled: 'Like many musicians he was a good cook. He achieved remarkable things, and would boast that his Béarnaise sauce was unsurpassable. Nevertheless, since he could not stand the sight of blood (one of his many phobias), or even that of a piece of meat, he needed an assistant every time he would vest himself for the kitchen.'

With the move to rue Jacquard your family had condensed, but not separated: your grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins were constantly around, for the outings and visits that would express and reinforce familial connections. With Roland you would be taken on holiday to stay with your mother's aunt Fernande Millet, who had a daughter of around twenty to cosset you. They lived in Montfort l'Amaury, which is how it came about that when you were four or five you were patted on the head by the most distinguished inhabitant of that town, Maurice Ravel.

Also, there was an addition to the family: not another child—you remained your parents' only offspring—but a combined nanny, maid and shop assistant who came with the rue Jacquard business, Francine Le Faucheur. She was from Brittany, and in the summers she would take you with her to stay with her family in Trélévern, on the rocky north coast. There she had a daughter, Eugénie, known as 'Riri', almost twelve years older than you, a little mother you loved, who loved you, and with whom you would stay many times in later life. You went there for the first time when you were five or six, according to your own account: did it help shape your enthusiasm for the place that this was about as far as it was possible to be in France from ancestral Barraqué territory in the Basque region? Your words:

Another influence I underwent: Brittany. Unfortunately I'm not a Breton by birth, only by adoption. My whole life, my whole artistic life, is in Brittany. I was fascinated by the sea, by the rocks, by the tides, by a rhythm of life. Undoubtedly it was there that I became a composer, got the desire to remake something, like the tide, which remakes things. I wanted to remake the Unfinished Symphony [of Schubert, to be sure]. It was there that I dreamed, though for later, of the *Mort de Virgile*. So: *everything* happened there.

Right to the end. At Trélévern you were buried.

Trélévern has changed since your time. For one thing, like every other place in the province, it has gained a Breton form on its nameboards: Trelévern. That might please you, for you loved everything Breton (while having more confused feelings about everything Basque). Also, the village has grown. You would surely recognize the straggling centre, half a kilometre inland, with its few shops, bar and plain, early twentieth-century church. But you might be surprised, as you took one of your regular strolls gently downhill towards the coast, by the new houses that dot the lanes.

Once you had reached the sea, though, you would be at home.

If you had come north from the church, and then eastwards over the gurgling stream, you would be at Keriec (Kerieg in Breton), a low grassy

knoll joined to the mainland by a narrow neck and otherwise surrounded by rocks and the sea. The water here is shallow and flat. Out in the bay, at high tide, rocks and islets just break the surface, becalmed behind a larger island, the Île Tomé. When the sea withdraws, they stand revealed as peaks on great banks of rock, some now extending out from the land. Everywhere—right up to the village—is the rank tang in the air of seaweed that the waves have dredged up to rot above the tide line.

Westwards from Keriec the beach extends for half a kilometre. This is one of the spots where you could swim—swim in your own way, almost in a standing position, your chin up, for fear of losing your glasses. As a child you could dig, in the almost white sand, and decorate your castles with the common limpet shells.

Further west, around a cove that sheltered fishing boats at the time you knew it and now has a couple of dozen modest pleasure craft at ease in the water, is the place that was yours. It is a hill on the edge of the sea, with a northern spur—beyond the ruins of an old customs post—of bare rock. Shelves and separated lumps of stone provide positions where you could sit, surrounded only by grey granite with black swirls of schist through it, fecund clumps of thrift in the late spring or early summer, and always the sea. On maps and signs the promontory appears as Port l'Épine. To local people it is known as Toul ar Roussin. Keriec was a place to go in company, but here you came by yourself, and you gave it a name of your own: Eden des Solitaires, Eden of Those Alone.

From Trélévern you would make expeditions by bicycle or car. Westwards lies the resort town of Perros Guirec and, along the corniche, a favourite restaurant (Le Manoir au Sphinx) at which you would liberally entertain friends when you had money, perhaps going on to Ploumanac'h, and its coastal paths snaking among gigantic rounded boulders of pink granite. To the east is the big beach at Trestel and beyond that Port Blanc, where you liked to visit the ancient chapel, with its naive, characterful wooden figures of sixteenth-century workmanship decorating an altar to the local Saint Yves. Further along, on a corner jutting into the ocean, comes the spectacular rocky landscape of Plougrescant. Here the tides have scooped pools that look (imagining away the water) like lunar craters as seen from the high point, where a deep chasm falls to the heavy waves. Even on a calm day here, the sea slams at the rock and spume flies.

Back in Paris, in June 1939, you made your first communion at Saint-Ambroise. There is a formal photograph of you with the customary white bow on your sleeve, looking serious and proper.

Other childhood snaps—sorted by your mother into envelopes she pointedly marked as mementos of 'happy' times—show you playing on the beach at Trélévern in your maillot, grinning out from a group of schoolboys,

enjoying an afternoon in the Bois de Boulogne or strolling in the Jardin d'Acclimatation. She will sometimes be there too, occasionally with her sister and one or two of your cousins, rarely your father, who was probably the photographer of the family. Hers, though, was the hand that pencilled an annotation on the back of each still monochrome moment, clipped from her Jeannot's nurturing. For you, so often smiling or a bit bored, the attention had not yet come to feel like control.

In another instant caught by the camera, perhaps from when you were nine or ten, you are dressed in national costume as a junior member of a Basque children's club, Euskalduna, compliant with your paternal ancestry, but not concealing your reluctance. On the backs of pink membership cards from this society you were much later to pencil, incongruously, sketches for your first acknowledged work, the Sonata for piano.

You were on holiday with Francine in Brittany when war broke out, in September 1939. Like so many in France, and more beyond, your family was disrupted. You and Francine stayed on in Trélévern, and you completed your primary education in the neighbouring town of Lannion, ending top of the class. Meanwhile, your father was in the army from the start of the war until the fall of France, in June 1940. Then, as part of the great exodus, he and your mother gathered you up from Trélévern to go south, perhaps with his brother Martin and family, to the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, old Barraqué country. That summer your father and uncle found work as butchers in the small town of Ogeu-les-Bains, where refugees were regrouping. Then in September you all returned to Paris.

Though the city was occupied, your father was able to return to his butcher's business, and for you the biggest change was probably starting the next month at a new school: the one attached to Notre Dame, close by the cathedral, in the rue Massillon. You were twelve and a half.

I wanted to be a priest—no doubt because my family was very devout, and perhaps from a mystical bent. I'd been brought up in a religious atmosphere: I had faith, for sure, I was impregnated with it. I came out of it quickly enough, and happily.

How quickly—never mind how happily—is not so clear. Your story was a common one: a boy, the only child of a devout and devoted mother, happily yields to her destiny for him—until he discovers something else, which in your case was music. But did you make the break so cleanly? Perhaps the sacred pieces you went on writing, even past the age of twenty, were merely exercises. But perhaps not. You were still talking in your late teens of wanting to be a priest. You spent a couple of weeks at the abbey of Solesmes when you were nineteen. By all accounts you were much moved when, two years later, your seven-years-older friend René Martin was priested at Notre

Dame and you served at his first mass. You continued going to mass occasionally at Saint-Pierre-de-Montmartre with another friend, Fernand Izard, until after 1950.

Your vocation had certainly changed by then, but the draw of the church went on, as strong as your need. Your mother never disposed of the vestments and communion vessels she had acquired in readiness. She had recognized the sacerdotal in you, if misinterpreted it—as, at first, you did. When you eventually overcame any feeling that your need could be satisfied by the church, you still did not lose your sense of being elect, even if you felt the election—to music—to be also a damnation.

The choir school would have encouraged you on the road to service. Unlike most of the boys, you did not board there: this was wartime, and why should the school be feeding the son of a butcher? Still, for three years you were part of the life of the cathedral, which heard your voice in the boys' choir, the *maîtrise*, on Sundays and festivals. Echoes of the great medieval masters of Notre Dame, Léonin and Pérotin, had long died away. Wearing the long white robe of the chorister, you were singing plainsong interspersed with music in the French nineteenth-century tradition, sweet and fragrant.

Music was not all, of course. The Notre Dame school provided an all-round education, in French, Maths, Latin, History and Geography, German, Religious Studies and, in the more senior classes, Greek. There was an Abbé René Gilles, who, besides teaching French, was your confessor and spiritual adviser. From the report of one of your schoolmates, Paul Revert, he sounds like a worthy descendant of the Spanish Inquisition, a man who would tease into the furthest corners of his charges' consciences in search of any deviation from absolute purity. You remembered him with special loathing. Hodeir recalls that by late 1951, when the two of you got acquainted, you were militantly anti-clerical: you knew what 'they' were like.

Again your story begins to fall into a pattern, one of Catholic discipline and intimidation—alleviated, surely, by the music you were singing and hearing, and perhaps also by the presence and enfolding of the great cathedral. But the crucial event was your discovery of the symphony you later wanted to remake:

I'm a composer because of the emotional shock I received from Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. I'd not thought of being a musician at all—I was in a religious school—and then one Saturday evening (I'll always remember: I was—what?—twelve) a teacher took us into his room, put on a record, and it was the Unfinished Symphony.

I'd had some very superficial contact with music before: I was from a bourgeois family, I'd played the piano, the violin. At

the Notre Dame school, where I began my studies, we had almost three-quarters of an hour singing every day. But I didn't know music! And there, all of a sudden, that Saturday, with a few of my schoolfriends, I was introduced to the Unfinished Symphony!

If you were indeed twelve, this gramophone evening took place during your first months in the maîtrise, some time between October 1940 and 17 January 1941, your thirteenth birthday. And the early date is borne out by the juvenile handwriting on the many scraps of composition you retained—scraps that must have come after hearing the Unfinished and been, at the time, clutchings at a new life. But unless you lost or discarded a lot of your efforts (which would have been quite against your hoarding nature), it was not until the autumn of 1945 that composition became more than an occasional pursuit. Perhaps you knew you needed time to listen, and learn.

Back to your own story:

I didn't know what it was. Abruptly, right from that moment, I became like a madman, I was obsessed. And (it was very vain, of course) immediately I wanted to make something similar. I didn't know what two sharps were, but that didn't mean anything, and I remember that I absolutely had to have the Unfinished Symphony—the 78 r.p.m. records of that time. I had a record player at home, one you wound by a handle, and I recall a little record shop at the Gare Saint-Lazare where I went to ask for the Unfinished Symphony, stammering—and he didn't have it! Then I asked for anything of Schubert, who remains the composer I've always loved in the most tender and very special way, a little “outside”. The shopkeeper suggested the Arpeggione Sonata: it was the first record I had. I put it on; I didn't know what it was.

(In a 1969 radio interview you explained this outsider character of Schubert a little: ‘There's no divorce between rhetoric and expression. It's the same thing. A great technician is a great composer, except for a very special phenomenon, a musician who remains the purest, who is Schubert.’ And Schubert's abiding closeness to you comes across distinctly in this passage from an unpublished article: ‘But any “Homage to Beethoven” becomes pointless if it does not include the junior, Franz, mysterious, delicate, discreet in his love before his Master’. Since all your work was just such a homage, it embraced them both.)

Then I got other records: Beethoven's Pastoral at first. Soon afterwards a sort of mania began: to get acquainted with this unfamiliar world, music, to *touch it, know it*—like those children who open a toy to find out how it's made inside. Immediately the technician in me was awakened: I wanted to know what went on behind the music, and I started buying sheet music, even full

scores. I made copies, and went so far as to copy out the Unfinished. I began writing things: machines, of a kind, for choir and organ, because I *wanted* to “make something similar”. Why? How may we know? And why should we know? Why a flower? Why a man and a woman? Why music? I wanted to “make something similar”, that’s all: I don’t understand it at all. I’ve always said, and I say it still, at my age, I’ve never *understood* music. I still don’t *understand* anything about it.

You present your readers with a full-blown conversion drama, and with a Romantic—but a Romantic of a modern sort. You do not want to know where your art comes from, and yet you wanted to know where the Unfinished came from. And you kept that copy you made—probably, to judge from the handwriting, two or three years after the evening when you first heard it, and so around the time of your first finished compositions.

But why, if you wanted to ‘make something similar’, these choral ‘machines’? Why not a symphony—something you did not start until 1945? Were you not, in your early teens, moved less by Schubert and Beethoven than by the music of the church you were serving, as your first compositional efforts suggest? Did the conversion happen only in retrospect, as you, by now a composer of high achievement, looked for an impulse to have led you to that achievement, from a source adequate to it? These childhood moments, they fix us—and we fix them. Was it a little less awesome and a little less self-conscious at the time?

Your memory of your ‘machines’ is borne out by what you kept. From when you were thirteen or so, there are beginnings (no more) of sacred pieces and piano movements, often drafted on sheets torn from school exercise books, since in occupied Paris paper was short. Your ambitions were already high. Among smaller attempts are several grand projects: a *Messe solennelle* in C major for choir and brass, Requiem settings in C minor and D minor, always stumbling after a few bars. The earliest completed composition you held on to—in a copy you made two or three years later—is a *Tu es Petrus* boldly laid out in C major for choir, brass and organ, over the date of 28 May 1943, which was near the end of your time at the cathedral school. You were fifteen. In the summer holiday you wrote a Nocturne in C# minor for piano, and dedicated it to your cousin René.

Trying to ‘make something similar’ would come afterwards. And you were to gain another dazzling ideal:

A little later there was the big shock of the *Missa solennis*, when I was fifteen. If I’d been asked what it was to be a composer, when I was fifteen it was to write the *Missa solennis*. I didn’t at all think I was going to write *La Mort de Virgile*; even so, I say and I believe that a composer is someone who desires, as a male

desires. One loves music, that's all. Indeed, to love it is to create it, as beautiful as possible, if one can.

Undaunted, here as before, you set your life's work in the immediate context of the most venerated masterpieces.

It was also when you were fifteen, at the start of the 1943–4 academic year, that you entered the Lycée Condorcet, one of the great schools of Paris: the suggestion seems to have come from one of your parish priests, Abbé Ceppe, who perhaps felt you were not ready to take the more orthodox path towards priesthood by way of the seminary at Charenton. The Condorcet was also convenient, for though it was far from home, it was near the rue du Rocher, where Uncle Martin and Aunt Bela still lived.

In another sense, though, you were now a long way from any butcher's shop. Your parents had no means to understand, channel or encourage your zest for music, which was taking you away from them. Perhaps, for you, that was part of the point. So you found yourself an alternative family. Your colleagues at the lycée were the sons of professional homes, and one of these boys, Jean-François Beerblock, brought you for the first time into an artistic milieu. His father, Maurice, was a poet and translator from English (of C.S. Forester's Hornblower novels, O. Henry's stories and much else), his mother, Simone, a piano teacher. They lived in Montmartre, rue Ravignan—not quite what it had been for Toulouse-Lautrec, but still abuzz.

Simone, who lived into her nineties, put down her memories of you on paper, and though her testimony may not always be reliable—the events were long in the past; she went on seeing you regularly for several years, and so may have confused periods; she idolized you; and she might understandably have been inclined to accept anything negative you disclosed about your original family—much of the detail rings true. When you were sixteen or seventeen, she says, you were a boy who spoke 'in an elegant, precise manner, as taught by the priests, had fine manners and was exquisitely polite'. Presumably also at this early period in your acquaintance with her, you showed a great fondness for animals, and objected to fur coats and hats with feathers; you had a black cat, Bichon. And you were very attached to your family of aunts, uncles and cousins; you spoke often of your cousins Germain and Lily.

Germain, the son of a sister of your father's, was two and a half years older than you, and had come to help in the shop during the war, when he was eighteen or nineteen. A photograph that stayed among your family's possessions shows him as a strapping youth in boxing strip—one whose entry into the rue Jacquard household could well have been electric for a woman of forty with a listless husband, and for a younger teenager discovering an attraction to his own sex. After national service—he wrote to you

from Indochina—he became something of a wide boy in Paris. He found you the lyre-legged Charles X desk at which you composed.

Towards the end of the war—on 26 January 1945, a week after your seventeenth birthday—your adored Millet grandfather died. You wore a mourning band on your arm at school. You remembered being required to kiss his cold forehead.

By the time victory day came, you must have been visiting the Beerblocks very regularly, for Simone notes that at the armistice there was a period of four or five days when you did not show up. But the early flurry of compositional starts had died down. The only works from your first two years at the Condorcet are an *Ave Maria* for voice and organ (June 1944) and a song setting Baudelaire's *Harmonie du soir* (March 1945). Was this indeed a time for finding your bearings, with the help of the record shop at the Gare Saint-Lazare and the cultivated ambience of the Beerblock household?

Your first larger essay was a symphony in C# minor you pursued for all of fourteen bars, though in full score. Possibly you wrote those bars in the Basque country, where you went for a holiday with Barraqué relations during the first summer of peace. Or else they date from the start of your third year at the Condorcet. In any event, in November 1945 you received a response to them from Pierre Buis, an old choir-school friend who was now at Charenton. 'Your theme is not bad, but it strangely resembles that of a waltz by Brahms.' There followed six pages of advice about orchestration.

Even this Pierre, moving towards becoming a monk, seems to have been musically much more sophisticated than you—which is presumably why you sent him your precious incipit. But that you dared do so shows the scale of your hopes. Asked in your German class three months later to describe your future, you wrote this:

I love music; it is a real passion. I want to dedicate myself to this art. I play the piano and I like that a lot, but I do not want to be a pianist. I would rather be a composer and conductor. I know I have a long way to go, and I am aware of everything that still keeps me from my goal. My schoolwork gets in the way of my music studies, and my music studies get in the way of my schoolwork. Nevertheless, I dedicate myself to music; every day for one or two hours I study the piano and theory (harmony, music history and so on), and I go frequently to concerts and opera. Thus I hope to achieve an initial stage of formation, and dedicate myself wholly to my art.

You were just eighteen.

Your concert and opera attendances were facilitated by people who had the means: your cousin René and the Beerblocks. Simone recalled that *Fidelio*—Beethoven again—made a big impression. (There were performances

at the Opéra in the winter of 1945–6, around the time of your stab at German prose, and during this same period you could have made the acquaintance of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which was regularly revived at the Opéra-Comique.) You were also going to the theatre, and got a crush on the actress Marguerite Moréno: the source is Simone once more, backed up by the presence of Moréno's *Souvenirs de ma vie* in your library—a stranger on the shelves of high literature, music and philosophy. And the idea of becoming a conductor was evidently a real one:

The dilemma concerning my future, after the Unfinished Symphony episode, was between a religious vocation and conducting. I was so fascinated by music that I was really like a moth: I was attracted by it, without knowing what it was. I was at a concert, my first concert: it was Münch conducting in the small hall of the Conservatoire. Then I wanted to be a conductor!

A primary doubt qualified my religious goal. I was not made to be a priest: I am an atheist (o how much, now!) and will be a conductor.

Again you were wanting, in retrospect, to represent your rejection of the church for music as decisive. For your conductor dreams, though, there indeed was a moment of choice—or of fate. You bought a baton and took it (but why?) to one of your regular dates with the Beerblocks at the Saturday morning dress rehearsals for the Sunday afternoon performances of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. 'Very proud', according to Simone, you 'made gestures of conducting.' Presumably this was before the actual performance. Then, waiting for the bus afterwards, you and your friends were talking about how different conductors used the baton, and— Where was it? Left behind. 'He was desperate: "It's an omen. I'll never be a conductor."' "

It is not clear quite when this incident occurred, but composition was becoming more important to you during your third year at the Condorcet, that of 1945–6, the year of your declaration of intent in German, when, besides the quickly abandoned symphony and a more substantial draft for an orchestral 'fantaisie' in D major, you wrote piano pieces as portraits of your classmates. A suite—*Amis? Camarades? Elèves?*—included character studies of several boys, including the young Beerblock; like many of your youthful works, it was never finished. More music came from the summer holiday you and your parents took in Brittany. This was almost certainly your first visit since 1940: back you were going, at eighteen, to the haunts of your childhood. You wrote a song, *Là dans une brume grise* ('There in a grey mist'), dating it '10 August 1946: Trélévern—Eden of the Solitary—7 o'clock in the evening', and a piece for saxophone and piano from the same date and place.