***Iris of the Eye***

***(A Collabourative***

***Novella-in-Progress)***

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/poulenc_chateau.mp3)

*Cyril and Vyvyan (in italics).*

1. *An Evening at the Baron’s*

In Manchester’s Victoria Mills

The children slave, they learn no Latin.

*But Iris, ah! she laughs in satin,*

*The curtains shudder to her trills.*

*Fine Japanese and Flemish prints*

*Hang on the Morris-papered wall.*

*A chair speaks to her soul with all*

*The flowery eloquence of chintz.*

*(As for Japan: it is a myth. See* *‘The Decay of Lying’*.—[Mr V]

*There’s no such place. There are no such people.)*

A smokestack is the Devil’s steeple.

*The older man she’s flirting with*

*Notes her eyes noting someone younger*

*Whose wife notes this, and in a flounce*

*Exits the room*, and in the towns

Of England, children sleep in hunger.

*But in his country house, the Baron*

*Is giving a soirée.* The poor

Factory children cross the moor,

Builders of wealth they have no share in.

*Here is Clitandre, here Cecelia,*

*Here grave Diana. That pale, thin,*

*Aethereal vision is Gwendolyn.*

*And here comes sprightly young Coppelia,*

*The Princess of the Grand Ballet!*

*(A sorcerer’s handiwork, or daughter);*

*Ondine, who lures men to the water;*

*And Columbine, as fresh as May,*

*Who cuts Pierrot, for she would fain*

*Kiss Harlequin, the masked valet.*

*The Duchess brings her daughters: they*

*Are puritanical and plain.*

*And many more that I could name*

*Grace with their company his house.*

*Slim, handsome dandies make their bows*

*With an arch smile, keen for the game.*

*Each youth, a worldly Parsifal,*

*Intends to yield to every charm*

*These Flower-Maidens wield: bare arm,*

*Flushed cheek, or silent Siren call*

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/ravel_valses_nobles2.mp3)

*Of parted lips that mouth a gasp.*

*If Ondine makes a pure fool of him,*

*Clitandre’s eyes hint* she *could love him.*

*But one flower is beyond his grasp:*

*Iris the Queen, whose charms bewilder an*

*Avid eye. And the feast, the glow*

*Of candelabras…! No, there are no*

*Such children, there are no such children!*

*Look on those braids of golden hair!*

*The beaux are whispering, ‘What a stunner!’*

*Who does not have designs upon her?*

The power loom in the corner there

Is rather big to fit the space.

*She’s no Penelope, though she*

*Plays the piano skillfully.*

Ah, power looms in every place!

*Into the night the guests carouse*

*In decorous patterns ‘neath a blaze*

*Of chandeliers, as the band plays*

*The* Treues Liebes Herz *of Strauss.*

(The police have just seized the man

Who killed three pheasants in the woods

And almost made off with the goods

But they ran faster than he ran.)

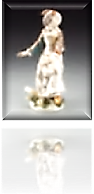
2. *The Anatomy of a Sphinx*

*Of all eyes cynosure, this Iris;*

*Her face turns every head her way—*

*To the chagrin of Amadée,*

*The tragic tribade. (To admire is*

*Exquisite, but, ah, to possess*

*Exceeds the powers of this grey-*

*Eyed Artemisian* femme damnée*,*

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/strauss_champagne.mp33)

*So she selects a watercress*

*Sandwich with a disconsolate* moue*.)*

*Iris moves past her in a shimmer*

*That changes as the lights grow dimmer*

*To a mirage of gold and blue.*

But now the brittle windows tremble

In neurasthenic rhythm to

The coal train that comes rumbling through

The garden, where the flowers resemble

Their shades in Hades, they are so

 Black with the dust the iron beast scatters.

*Iris is heedless of such matters.*

*Desire is her domain. The glow*

*Upon her silks blinds every eye*

*To the grim business without,*

Though guests must strain to hear, and shout

To *be* heard over the shrill cry

Of the steel whistle as the steam-

Powered hulking demon shambles by.

*But shimmering in her vibrancy*

*Is Iris, lambent and a-gleam,*

*A glow-worm in the hearts of men,*

*Bait to capture a lingering stare.*

In the fireplace the embers glare

At her sullenly now and then.

*Has Iris any depths to sound?*

*A Sphinx without a secret, she!*

*A superficiality*

*So pure it is, indeed, profound:*

*A lateral profundity*

*Of surface into surface woven,*

*Like the rich fabric her limbs move in,*

*Whose sheen a craftsman knows to be*

*The effect of empty spaces, ‘floats’*

*Where the threads do not interlace.*

*But ah, the glamour of that face*

*In whose eyes Aphrodite gloats*

*Is as a Symbol on which dotes*

*The weightiest mind in helpless wonder!*

The urchin-children huddle under

The bridge. It’s cold. They have no coats.

*(Not now! I’m working on my next*

*Novella*, Iris of the Eye,

*An iridescent fantasy.*

*Realist details would mar the text.)*



3. *An Unfortunate Incident*

The older man, the Baron, is

Being questioned by two constables,

Causing cessation in the pulse

Of waltzing: something is amiss.

‘The poacher’s daughter, sir, has filed,

Sir, a complaint that you have, er,

Behaved indecently with her,

Used force, and she is now with child’.

That iron loom has spun the lord

A sticky web of legal troubles.

Dom Perignon expels his bubbles

As *peu à peu*, without a word,

The guests leave, singly or in pairs—

*Except for two: for Amadée*

*Is wrapt in passionate Sapphic play*

*Sequestered in a room upstairs:*

*At last, her lovelorn heart’s desire is*

*Hers by a most perverse plot twist*

*I weave into the tale: a tryst*

*With aureate-haired and lustrous Iris!*

How frail a thing is a good name!

The lady of the house walks in

Upon the couple whilst the sin

Is burning—burning now with shame!

Writ in the book of infamy,

Wide-eyed and scarlet-cheeked, with hands

Clapped to their mouths, they hold their stance

Like figures in a tapestry.

4. *The Sequel:*

*Another Victim of the Labouchère Amendment*

The Baron pays for wicked bliss

When others come forth with their tale.

Behold him in his cell in gaol,

With not a girl around to kiss.

*And Iris? On her feet she lands,*

*Her small white feet, in Paris, an*

*Accomplished actress-courtesan*

*Who has them eating from her hands*

*Upon the boards, whereon she dies*

*In many rôles, and lives again,*

*Idol of women and of men*

*Who dream in French of those blue eyes.*

5. *The Moral*

Of course, the moral of the fable’s—

*Do what you will, not what you ought?*

A child is to be loved, not bought.

*Morality is a game of labels.*

***Iris in Paris***

[♫](http://inmemoriamc33.com/ravel_la_valse.mp33)

*Scene: cabaret somewhere in Montmartre. Iris and her lover perform on a revolving platform that wheels them*

*past successive instruments of execution and the interior of a galley-slave ship. ‘Iris’ is pronounced ‘ear-ease’.*

*She is the Sphinx, with a touch of Manon. But most of all her performance alludes to ‘la Comtesse’ Jeanne de*

*Saint-Rémy de Valois of the notorious Affair of the Necklace. (Jeanne de Valois was sentenced to prison but*

*escaped disguised a boy. In her absence, her husband was sent to the galleys for life. I play the husband.)*

Justice, like love, alas, is blind.

I had such fun with you in Berne,

But now, my dear, *à la lanterne! A street-lamp with noose attached.*

Although my heart revolts, my mind

Believes in Violent Revolution.

****** Ah, what sweet moments to recall!

Darling, when up against the wall, *The Communards’ Wall,*

Be sure of my undying devotion. *Pére Lachaise, May 28, 1871.*

******Sharp faction, and the worn-out tread

Of Fortune’s Wheel leave one in need.

‘Twas you or I. (How sad, to feed *A guillotine.*

The basket such a handsome head!)

******

Sometimes Fate leads us into alleys

Shadowy: we must take our chances

Between the murderers and romancers.

For you, I fear, it is the galleys. *Slave galley ship,*

****** *benches, oars, chains, etc.*

Dear, never for a moment doubt

The pain it costs to watch you mount *A gallows.*

The scaffold! But a girl’s debts *count*,

And so I had to sell you out.

Ah, do not think I shall forget!

I loved you madly, darling—past words!

All I can give you is your last words,

A blindfold, and a cigarette.

What’s that? The word that rhymes with ‘rich’?

Oh how you wound me, dear! That curse,

You cruel man, hurts me far worse

Than it will hurt to watch you twitch.

***Musical Program***

**Page 1**

Poulenc, *L’Invitation au château*. Mouvement de valse. Oleg Gunko clarinet, Olena Kharambura violin and Olga Lysa piano.

**Page 2**

Ravel, *Valses nobles et sentimentales.* VII: Moins vif. Krystian Zimerman, piano.

**Page 3**

Johann Strauss, Jr., *Die Fledermaus*. Act II Ensemble (“Champagne Song”). Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Adam Fischer, conductor.

**Page 5**

Ravel, *La Valse*. City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Simon Rattle, conductor.