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¹michael.oravitz@unco.edu**Form and Structural Narrative in Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*****ABSTRACT**

The fact that Debussy's early orchestral masterpiece *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* has yielded numerous interpretations is not surprising. Given that it was inspired by Stéphane Mallarmé's eponymous poem re-invoking the ancient mythological figure Pan as a first-person protagonist who vaguely reminisces upon whether or not an erotic experience was dreamed or real, it has prompted analyses seeking to discover various levels of correspondences between the poem and the musical work. Additionally, the work's ambiguous yet implicit mono-tonality, its use of subtle thematic transformations, and its avoidance of standard formal genres have resulted in a number of variant formal readings. Debussy himself suggested a non-literal congruence between the poetry and the music (Vallas 1932, 145), as does this study, combining particular pitch-structural facets of the work with more general musical topics that are suggested in the work's gestures, topics that loosely complement the Attic and erotic themes of the poem (Bellman 2014). Unique resolutions of the C-sharp–G tritone, a dissonant interval experienced at key junctures in the work (Austin 1970, 81–2), may suggest a loose narrative that is formed by a series of contrasting extramusical topics that complement the work's larger sections. Previous studies generally agree on the locations of the larger sections, but often avoid reading any broader structural narrative into the work, perhaps because of Debussy's own implicitly voiced distaste for literal, tone-poem-esque depictions in his 1903 critique of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (Debussy 1977, 117–18). Nonetheless, Debussy's less specific structural narrative transcends the play-by-play attributes of the traditional tone poem, while impressing an unmistakable sense of coherence on the listener.

1. INTRODUCTION

Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, in addition to being one of his most publicly acclaimed works, has prompted a wealth of critical and analytical commentary. An oft-quoted passage in Pierre Boulez's essay on Debussy in *Relevés d'apprenti* (Notes of an Apprenticeship) underscores its iconic historical significance:

The score possesses a youthful potential that defies exhaustion or age; and just as modern poetry surely takes root in certain poems of Baudelaire, one is justified in saying that modern music awakens with *l'Après-midi d'un Faune*. (Boulez 1966, 336.)¹

Leonard Bernstein's perspective on *Faune* forms a two-sides-of-the-same-coin complement to that of Boulez's. Bernstein construes the work as 'one of the last-ditch stands of tonal and syntactic containment, as was the Mallarmé poem on which it is based' (1976, 239).

¹ 'Cette partition possède un potentiel de jeunesse qui défie l'épuisement ou la caducité; et de même que la poésie moderne prend sûrement racine dans certains poèmes de Baudelaire, on est fondé à dire que la musique moderne s'éveille à *l'Après-midi d'un Faune*' (author's translation).

Analytically, scholars have applied a wide range of methodologically informed explications of the work's form. Some argue for rather direct literary correspondences between Debussy's music and Mallarmé's poem, as witnessed in essays of David Code (2001) and Siglind Bruhn (2000, 514–23). Others, such as William Austin (1970) and Matthew Brown (1993), illustrate motivic unity while tracing numerous gradual transformations in the opening theme. Brown and Felix Salzer (1952, 209–10) have used Schenkerian methods to illustrate prolongational structures and loose correlations to conventional tonality. Howat (1983, 149–53) engages issues of proportional aesthetics. Jean Barraqué (1962, 85–90) finds holdovers of sonata form in the work. As Brown has noted, numerous authors have explored *Faune* from various perspectives, yet '(t)hese analyses generally agree about the locations of the work's formal divisions' (1993, 131–2).² Likewise, my view of the locations of formal junctures in *Faune* does not differ highly from a number of other readings. Rather, the manner in which a narrative/topical reading conjoins with a structurally evolving treatment of a specific pitch-class interval to inform the formal functions delineated by these junctures contrasts other analyses.

Specifically, Debussy's treatment of the tritone between C-sharp (or its enharmonic equivalent, D-flat) and G-natural may suggest and/or complement extramusical meanings in given moments. An awareness of this specific tritone's strategic inclusions, omissions, and composition-specific resolutions can inform a formal reading of *Faune*. Both Austin (1970, 81–2) and Leonard Bernstein (1976, 239–59) have commented in some detail about Debussy's use of the tritone in this work, with Austin particularly noting the presence of the above-mentioned pitch classes (pc1 and pc7, C-sharp/D-flat and G-natural respectively) at crucial formal junctures.³ The characteristic interval is initially heard numerous times in the high and low 'boundary' notes of the opening pan-flute melody, what I will refer to as the 'boundary interval'. The 1/7 tritone is then featured in bass-soprano juxtaposition at the initiation of the whole-tone section beginning at b. 31 (R3), is poignantly presented in the opening bass line of the celebrated climactic section, a writ-large period structure featuring a lyrical D-flat major melody (bb. 55–6), and is finally restated in a recollection of the pan-flute melody again at b. 94 (R10). Austin also parenthetically comments on the statement of the opening pan-flute melody at b. 100 'with the low note adjusted' (1970,

² For an extended list of published analytical essays on *Faune*, see Brown, 131–2, n. 22.

³ At certain points in the work (among multiple statements spanning mm. 1–31 and m. 94), the tritone is spelled with C-sharp and G, and at other points (mm. 55–8 and 63–6) its upper note is spelled D-flat. Thus, at points in the essay, simple integer notation will be used, 1 for C-sharp or D-flat and 7 for G-natural, to avoid listing all of the enharmonic equivalents at every mention.

82). That is to say, its lower boundary-note G-natural is raised to G-sharp, forming a perfect-fourth boundary that replaces the tritone.⁴

This parenthetical observation by Austin, in my view, provides a small but crucial window into a larger, musical-form process in *Faune*. Debussy does not merely feature this specific pc1–pc7 tritone at crucial junctures throughout *Faune* as a means of compositional unity in and of itself. Rather he transforms it, or, to use Austin’s term, ‘adjusts’ it, throughout the work at a number of key moments, not only at the point Austin cites (b. 100). These half-step transformations suggest meaningful shifts in affect that support extramusical narratives that are, in turn, further supported by the music’s gestural cues and the topics they engender. Specifically, Debussy incorporates half-step adjustments to the tritone boundary interval, ones that either expand it out to a perfect fifth, from a pc1–pc7 to a pc1–pc6 juxtaposition,⁵ or contract it to the perfect fourth, as described by Austin. Tracing these half-step transformations in more detail, while engaging the work’s larger formal design and implicit musical topics in the process, aids in the suggestion of a loose formal narrative.

2. ANALYSIS: TOPICS AND TRITONE TRANSFORMATIONS⁶

2.1 Pan’s Pyknon: The Chromatic Lure (bb. 1–30)

The most pronounced sounding of the pc1–pc7 tritone is heard in the opening pan-flute gesture’s boundary interval, an intervallic span that is traversed exclusively by the flute no less than 18 times in descent and ascent among this opening formal section (bb. 1–30), one essentially devoted to contrasting presentations of the pan-flute theme. In only one instance, heard in b. 23 in the context of a singular dominant-harmony response to an E-major tonic statement in b. 22,⁷ is anything but the C-sharp to G boundary featured in the flute melody. In bb. 26–7, this motive is traversed in excellent compressions — what Alfred Brendel (1976, 154–61) might refer to as ‘foreshortening’ — no less than eight times, further impressing the specific pc1–pc7 tritone boundary interval onto the listener just prior to this section’s final cadence in B major (b. 30).

⁴ As will be discussed, that particular ‘adjustment’ (the G-natural becoming G-sharp) actually occurs earlier, in b. 94, immediately following the single re-appearance of the original tritone-boundary version of the pan-flute theme.

⁵ That is to say, he expands the tritone formed by the notes C-sharp (or D-flat) and G by lowering the G to either F-sharp or G-flat.

⁶ The author assumes the reader will avail her/himself with a full score with measures numbered. The original holograph manuscript as well as corrected proofs and the 1895 Fromont printed publication are all available on the IMSLP website <imslp.org> (accessed 21/07/2023). Given the exigencies of efficiency requested by the editors of these expanded EuroMAC 9 conference proceedings, musical examples merely for the purpose of recalling a given passage rather than illustrating a particular theoretical abstraction are not given. Given the lack of musical examples, a concerted effort to locate specific moments through measure numbers has been made throughout the essay.

⁷ The ‘dominant response’ does not resolve to E, but is heard as such in the moment. Of course, E major as ultimate tonic, suggested from the very onset by the E major arpeggiations and agogic emphases on E in bb. 3 and 13, is unambiguously confirmed in the *Prélude*’s final measures.

As the melody pans through its tritone range, its compacted intervals, placed at the bottom in descents and the top in ascents, loosely mimic the pyknon structure found in Ancient Greek tetrachords. Bellman (2014) offers the possible influence of composer, friend, and Ancient Greek music enthusiast Maurice Emmanuel upon Debussy. Although Emmanuel’s 1895 dissertation on Ancient Greek music came after the composition of *Faune*, it seems likely that he shared his interests on that subject with Debussy prior, and that this may have lent Debussy the confidence to apply his own brand of Attic gestures in his Ancient-Greek-themed repertoire. In this context, the pan flute melody can be heard as a depiction of Pan attempting to seduce nymphs with this chromatic lure played on his reed flute. Bellman finds, among certain Attic-themed works by Debussy, the topical shift between chromatic and diatonic passages as means of depicting either Dionysian or Apollonian aesthetics respectively. He notes the appropriateness of this loose evocation of the Attic chromatic tetrachord, given the Dionysian (as opposed to Apollonian) nature of Pan’s lustful pursuits. Of course, the pan-flute melody is Debussy’s own referential rather than literal representation of the pyknon tuning, with a total of seven instead of four pitches — we note that Pan’s reed flute is often depicted as having seven pipes —, ones that feature intervallic compressions at both rather than just the lower end of the intervallic span, and ones that span a tritone rather than a perfect fourth.

As is the case with ensuing larger formal areas in *Faune*, this opening larger section concludes with a clear V–I cadence, (b. 30), a harmonic formula that Debussy, like his common-practice predecessors, reserves for significant formal closure. In this instance, the cadence is on B major. Yet, leading up to this common-practice cadential gesture, we have been inundated with harmonically progressive and variegated presentations of the characteristic pc1–pc7 tritone in the context of the work’s primary pan-flute melody. Thus, Debussy sets the table for his topical transformations of that pitch-class-specific interval by unequivocally establishing its significance.

2.2 Nymphs’ Flight: A Whole-Tone Transition (bb. 31–6)

Debussy maintains the structural importance of that interval in the brief, formally transitory section heard in bb. 31–36 (R3). Given the section’s brevity, its whole-tone instability, its sequential nature, and given the change in character between the longer, cadentially-defined formal sections that flank it, the six-bar span impresses upon the listener a transitional formal function, one imbued with extramusical traits. It begins with a clear bass-soprano emphasis (in contrabass/cello and clarinet respectively) on C-sharp and G, drawing from the whole-tone scale in order to underscore that instability and suggested unrest of this passage. This sense of unrest is further projected in the metric compressions of its transformed pan-flute gestures within each of its three-bar pair of statements. Each statement begins with a 12/8 bar housing a more urgent, entirely chromatic traversing of notes, now depicted in the clarinet, thus timbrally suggesting Pan’s persona — in the act of scanning the landscape — rather than the performative flutist Pan in the act of attempting to lure the nymphs. In each sequential statement, the 12/8 gesture is followed by two compressed

upward whole-tone sweeps in 3/4 time. The chalumeau register and *forte* dynamic of the clarinet's agogically emphasized opening G, compiled with the now unmuted scampering staccato figures in the cello, framed in two successive sequential statements a minor third apart, may suggest a chase and the fleeing of nymphs from Pan's advances. Such an interpretation is colored by the suggestion of a pastorale heard in the ensuing section.

2.3 Nymphs in their Domain: Perhaps a Riverside Pastorale? (bb. 37–51)

The featured opening melody at the onset of the next formal section (b. 37; R4), presents yet another transformation of the opening pan-flute theme. The range is virtually identical to the opening pan flute theme, but now with its boundary interval expanded by half step at the lower end of the melody's opening (in b. 37), which is now F-sharp instead of G. This half-step alteration will take on further importance in the climax of the work, but here, this resolution of sorts symbolizes the end of both Pan's attempt to lure (bb. 1–30) and to pursue (31–36) the nymphs. Its initial diatonicism and gentle, wave-like melodic contours, often in the form of sequentially stepwise pairs of descending thirds heard throughout bb. 38–45, seem to suggest the domicile of nymphs, a riverside. Given the sense of chase and flight in the previous section, it seems probable that Debussy, in this section, is depicting the nymphs having escaped Pan's advances, in this less agitated and more bucolic state. The pastoral association is further suggested by the change in timbre to the oboe, predecessor to the shawm, a markedly outdoor instrument. The section builds in lyric intensity, yet never entirely loses its pastoral, riverside depictions, formally cadencing in A-flat major (V–I) at b. 51 (R6). A brief transition, whose function is to gently transform that A-flat tonic arrival into a dominant function of D-flat, follows in bb. 51–54.

To be clear, it is not my intent to argue for an overly specific narrative. Rather, one experiences, without question, a drastic shift in topic and character between the six-measure transitional span of music and this broader section. Debussy's own comments Vallas are certainly suggestive in this regard.

The music of the *Prélude* is a very free illustration of the beautiful poem of Mallarmé. By no means does it claim to be a synthesis of the latter. Rather, there are successive scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of this afternoon. Then, tired of pursuing the fearful flight of the nymphs and naiads, he succumbs to intoxicating sleep, in which he can finally realize his dreams of possession in universal Nature.⁸ (Vallas 1932, 145.)

⁸ '[L]a musique de ce Prélude est une illustration très libre du beau poème de Stéphane Mallarmé. Elle ne prétend nullement à une synthèse de celui-ci. Ce sont plutôt les décors successifs à travers lesquels se meuvent les désirs et les rêves du Faune dans la chaleur de cet après-midi. Puis, las de poursuivre la fuite peureuse des nymphes et des naïades, il se laisse aller au sommeil enivrant, rempli de songes enfin réalisés, de possession totale dans l'universelle nature'. Léon Vallas (1932, 145) notes that, Debussy, in all likelihood, wrote this description himself. This translation, by William Austin, is taken from the Norton Critical Score *Debussy: 'Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun'*, ed. William Austin (1970, 14). Austin cites Léon Vallas's later edition of *Debussy et son temps* (1958, 218) as his source. Austin surmises that this 'note' was written 'perhaps for the Colonne concert-

The shift from 'la fuite peureuse' ('fearful flight') of nymphs heard in bb. 31–36 to a more general, loosely defined series of visions or reminiscences that come with Pan's 'sommeil enivrant' ('intoxicating sleep') in the music that follows, can be sensed on a number of levels. The haunting chalumeau register of the clarinet is replaced with the pastoral oboe. The whole-tone collection gives way to a more tonally stable idea, momentarily entirely diatonic and even suggestive of V–I motion in the work's over-arching tonic, E major, over bar 39. The agitated metric compressions in bb. 31–36 are replaced with a relatively stable triple-meter, albeit with a single 4/4 measure inserted in b. 44. And, as mentioned, the C-sharp/G-natural tritone that launches the brief 'flight' section is replaced with the expanded boundary interval of the perfect fifth between C-sharp and F-sharp in the initial downward melodic sweep of the oboe that initiates this pastorale at b. 37.

This depiction of nymphs in their riverside domicile, then, can suggest a kind of voyeuristic dream of Pan's, one where he perhaps imagines himself clandestinely observing the nymphs while they indulge in their relaxed, brookside frolicking.

Scholars such as Matthew Brown or Jean Barraqué, who have taken a more abstract-music approach to what I depict as the 'nymph-depicting pastorale' section, have arrived at formal labels that, in some sense can resonate with structural-pitch unfoldings or motivic interplay, but certainly twist conventional notions of such labels to the point of questioning their application. Barraqué (1962) lumps together what I've deemed the 'flight of the nymphs' with the 'riverside pastorale', assigning a broader label of 'Development' to that entire span (bb. 31–54). As he uses the term rather freely, in two sections of his formal reading of *Faune*, he seems to base its use on the presence of tonal migration (the other being bb. 79–93, R8–R10). Brown (1993, 134) notes 'Barraqué has rightly observed that this segment [bb. 31–54] functions as some sort of development', based on its freer motivic connections to the preceding opening section (bb. 1–30) and a structurally linear chromatic descent from B-natural to A-flat in its bass from an analysis of Charles Burkhart's (1978, 155–8) that Brown prizes. Burkhart's reading is interesting, but does omit, entirely, sustained bass dwellings on root-position E and D harmonies (bb. 39–41 and 42–5 respectively), roughly one third of the broader eighteen-measure section in question, as they do not fit his linear-descent paradigm.⁹ Brown, in his formal outline (1993, 132), ultimately relegates the 'flight' of bb. 31–36 to an 'episode', followed by a 'transition' for the larger section in question, bb. 37–54. The term 'transition' implies a less thematic link between more significant sections, and in this context, Brown seems to imply a transition to the celebrated, lyrical writ-large periodic melody in D-flat major that comprises the larger section of music spanning bb. 55–74.

program [Édouard Colonne led performances of *Faune* on 13 and 20 October, 1885]'.
⁹ Brown (1933, 135), sensing this shortcoming, reintroduces those bass notes into his graph, but reduces them to subsidiary motions stemming from other more structural bass notes. The initial B of b. 37 resolves by fifth to E, but the E remains un-stemmed or significant. The ensuing D is construed as an anticipatory arpeggiating-third motion to an ensuing structural B-flat.

Howat (1983, 151) in the context of illustrating proportionality among sections, also duplicates Barraqué's conflation of the two contrasting 'flight' and 'pastoral' sections (bb. 31–36 and 37–54 respectively) into a broader section, which he deems *A'* among an *A A' B A'' A_r* arch-form construal, noting that '[t]he italicization of the two transitional *A* sections refers to their freer relationship to the opening section, by comparison with the final recapitulative *A_r* section [bb. 94–110 (end), starting at R10; the subscript *r* symbolizing 'recapitulative']'.¹⁰

To be sure, there are abstract elements in the music that, to some extent, can provide support for such abstract formal construals. Yet, the strong, self-contained arc of bb. 37–51, with its emphatic shift in character and tempo (*En animant*) at b. 37, its clear initiating thematic presentations that nonetheless continue an ongoing series of transformations of the opening theme, its contrastingly straightforward metric palette, its gentle build to a climax, and what Wallace Berry (1987, 7) might refer to as a conclusive 'recessive dynamic', with a full-blown authentic cadence, seem to resist the label 'transition', as well as Barraqué's 'development' label. Granted, the material is motivically transformed to what precedes and follows, and begins and ends in different keys. Nonetheless, the section has a self-contained beginning-middle-end dynamic all its own, even if that arc is framed by different tonics. When filtered through a lens of musical topics reflective of the poem's aesthetics — and Debussy's own description of them — rather than strictly through one of conventional formal structures, particularly one devoted to sonata-form rhetoric, the topic-driven formal partitions of bb. 30–36 and 37–51 provide, in the author's opinion, a more fitting description of the formal roles occurring in that broader span of music.

2.4 A 'Dream-Sequence Shift' Motive?: A Brief Comment on Appearances of the 'Syncopated Motif' at bb. 46–54, bb. 74–78, and b. 95.

The span of music in bb. 51–4 (R6) that bridges this pastorale and the ensuing larger D-flat major section of bb. 55–78 — often referred to as the 'B' section of the work, as in both Brown's and Howat's aforementioned readings — features a motive in the solo clarinet that Austin (1970, 75) deems the 'syncopated motif'. As the 'pastorale' section winds down, the motive is heard, *en dehors*, in b. 46, leading into the b. 51 statement.¹¹ It also briefly appears in octaves in two solo violins at b. 95; I will address the potential significance of that later in this essay. Both Austin and Brown (1993, 137) note its appearance as early as b. 39 (solo oboe), and Brown notes its derivation from the syncopated horn figures first heard in bb. 5 and 13 — in the episodic interjections between the initial three pan-flute melody statements. Brown notes that this motive and another, what Austin calls the 'flowing motif' (Austin 1970), 'play a vital

role in the subsequent unfolding of the piece', and aptly states, 'in Debussy's music, motives that initially seem innocuous may end up playing a vital role later' (Brown 2001).

Both Austin and Brown note that the 'syncopated motif' peppers the score at crucial formal moments from b. 38 on. It is, however, first heard in a most outwardly featured manner, that is, as the primary melody at hand, here in this bridging passage. Significantly, it will also be heard at the end of the 'B' section (bb. 74–78) as a bridging figure to the first series of recollections of the pan-flute theme starting at b. 79 (R8). Given that this motive appears in these bridge-like functions between larger sections possessing contrasting affects, and only after Pan is 'tired of pursuing the fearful flight of the nymphs', one might attribute to it a quasi-narrative agency, devoted to signalling a shift from one to the other of the 'successive scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of this afternoon', as Debussy put it (see fn. 8).

The shift, in the case of the four-bar span of bb. 51–4, is also literally manifest in the simplest yet very effective harmonic terms, an instant flip from a 'recessive' to a 'progressive' dynamic (see Berry 1987, 7). The initial two measures, 51–2, comprise a recessive tonic arrival; we note the G-naturals as part of an arriving A-flat major tonic with its added major seventh. Contrastingly, the following two bars, taking on a G-flat above the A-flat major harmony, create a progressive dynamic as they form a preparatory dominant to the ensuing tonic initiation of the 'B' section.¹² As this shift occurs, we, as if in a dream sequence, are transplanted from the playful, bucolic quality of the pastorale to a more plaintive, lyrically pining quality to be featured in the ensuing, climactic 'B' section. Debussy opens the recessive stage with a single, clarinet in chalumeau register, now with a calming *piano* dynamic, in contrast to the *forte* chalumeau entrance depicting the nymphs' flight, but as the passage transforms into its progressive-dynamic extended upbeat (see Cone 1968, 18), the clarinet's melody pines into the clarion register, and is gradually and artfully reinforced by subtle, temporally offset doublings in the horn and flute in b. 53, to which is added an in-time, aligned doubling in the oboe and flute in b. 54. David Code, within the context of his argument for more directly corresponding text-music relationships, effectively captures the essence of this moment's shift in affect:

With this upward wandering solo [the clarinet in bb. 51–54, ...] Debussy paints in sound the 'rising motion' that characterizes the *disappearance* at the end of the whole 'literary fugue' [Code's analysis assigns music up to this point, b. 51, as corresponding to what Code deems a 'literary fugue' in Mallarmé's poem] and delivers us to the piece's central efflorescence. (Code 2001, 527.)

2.5 The Re-Emergence of the pc7–pc1 Tritone and its Resolution at the Work's Cathartic Climax (bb. 55–74)

The next larger section, spanning bb. 55–74, comprises the climax of the work as well as a significantly cathartic

¹⁰In Howat's reading, *A* = bb. 1–30, *B* = bb. 55–78, and *A''* = bb. 79–93. Note the nuancing of the term, 'recapitulative' as opposed to 'recapitulation', which I interpret as Howat's desire for a less literal interpretation of the sonata-rhetoric based term.

¹¹Immediately after b. 46, in bb. 47–48, is another subtle form of a pc1–pc7 juxtaposition. The ascending quarter-note gesture features a G-natural in the bass on the downbeats of each measure and a D-flat as the apex of the melodic statements on the third beats of each measure.

¹²Interestingly, those two tones, G-natural and F-sharp/G-flat, are the differing lowest-note tones in the boundary intervals between the original pan-flute theme and the opening pastorale melody (b. 37). As will soon be discussed, that same half-step lowering from pc7 to pc6, in juxtaposition with pc1, will occur in the contrabasses at the onset of the work's climax (bb. 67–70).

‘resolution’ of the tritone between C-sharp/D-flat and G at b. 67. That point of resolution, b. 67, both sparks a crescendo into the work’s climax (ca. bb. 69–70),¹³ and also launches the work’s longest stretch of pure diatonicism in D-flat major, along with the clearest extensive span of relative triple-meter stability. The diatonicism and metric stability both aid in the propulsion of that climax. This resolution and climax is structurally situated in a writ-large period structure, one whose weak-cadence antecedent to authentic-cadence consequent thematic-statement conventions are drawn upon by Debussy to frame a musical reflection on the question at the heart of Mallarmé’s poem: was the sexual experience dreamed or real? During the more expansive consequent phrase group, Debussy moves the melody’s timbre from winds — featured in the antecedent phrase group — to an orchestral unison among all the strings save the contrabasses, an instrumentation choice that affords the melody a horsepower, so to speak, that Debussy exploits beautifully as he swells in to the work’s climax at b. 70.

The ‘basic idea’ (to use Caplin’s term: 1998, 12) in both the antecedent and consequent (bb. 55–8 and 63–6 respectively) features a haunting D-flat-to-G bass motion, initiating this larger formal section with yet another display of that prominently characteristic pc7–pc1 tritone. Within that period, one witnesses a tonal divergence in the antecedent phrase’s contrasting idea (bb. 59–62) that leads the music through a borrowed subdominant at b. 59 (R7), with G-flat minor enharmonically presented as F-sharp minor, en route to a tritone-substitution half-cadence at b. 62 on the lowered second scale degree (spelled as D major). This divergence can be heard as a representation of either Pan’s unrequited longings and sexual frustrations, or as a commentary on his troubled state of ignorance of not knowing whether his sexual encounter was dreamed or real, or both. The drastic swell from *piano* to *forte* in the short space of the three measures (bb. 59–61), fairly uncommon for Debussy, which moves from the off-colored borrowed subdominant, F-sharp minor, to the penultimate chromatic-mediant A minor harmony, leading to that ‘substitute’ half cadence at b. 62, underscores the tension of this moment.

In the contrasting idea of the consequent, this divergence is ‘corrected’ in a way that uniquely resolves the tritone bass motion in b. 67. Here, Debussy sounds the diatonic (rather than ‘borrowed’) predominant, spelling it now with a G-flat as opposed to the F-sharp.¹⁴ This motion expands the tritone into a broader, linear perfect fifth descent foreshadowed in both the recent ‘borrowed’ F-sharp minor divergence (b. 59) and the expansion that was foreshadowed at the onset of the pastorale section at b. 37 (R4). This rather significantly cathartic structural resolution of the C-sharp (or, in this case, D-flat)-to-G tritone in its climactic ‘consequent’ phrase, as mentioned above, is the spark that ignites an extensive outpouring of diatonic lyricism — the longest span of diatonicism in the entire work — that swells to the climax

around bb. 69–70, and then reposes in a gentle authentic cadence (complete with ii–V–I root movement) in bb. 73–74. Also, it is precisely at b. 67 where Debussy unleashes the beautiful cross-rhythm countermelody in the winds, one formed by four-note descending figures in steady borrowed triplet-division eighth notes among the more standard eighth and sixteenth notes in the simple 3/4 time signature. This pitch-based catharsis, seasoned beautifully with complex yet lyrical rhythmic counterpoints, perhaps represents Pan’s reconciliation that he will never be able to know if the sexual experience was dreamed or real, thus leading to a mixture of emotional yearning and an acceptance of that fact — a resignation that allows him to now take pleasure in his memory.

This larger period structure is outlined here:

- Antecedent: 55–62:
 - basic idea: 55–58, featuring the D-flat to G motions in the bass line;
 - contrasting idea, inflecting to the ‘borrowed’ subdominant of F-sharp minor (enharmonically G-flat minor), and leading to a tritone-substitute ‘half-cadence’ (on D): bb. 59–62;
- Consequent: 63–74:
 - basic idea: 63–66;
 - contrasting idea, expanded and comprising diatonic climax to PAC: bb. 67–74.

2.6 The Absence of the pc7–pc1 Tritone in the Wake of the Cathartic Climax (bb. 74–110 [end])

Significantly, virtually *all* of the statements of the pan-flute theme that follow in the wake of the cathartic resolution are now absent of their characteristic tritone-boundary interval. Bars 74–78, by transforming the D-flat major arrival into a D-flat dominant sonority, recall the similar event in bb. 51–54 (R6), where the A-flat arrival was transformed into A-flat dominant in preparation for the lyrical climax in D-flat major.¹⁵ As mentioned above, this transitional span again features the ‘syncopated motif’, which, as I have argued, may be a kind of signal for a shift of scene in Pan’s dream sequence.

Bars 79–93’s two broader melodic pan-flute statements, in E and E-flat, now span a perfect fourth rather than the characteristic tritone. The use of flute for the E major statement, followed by oboe in the E-flat statement, recalls the timbral shift between the protagonist Pan in bb. 1–30 and the nymphs’ pastorale at b. 37.¹⁶ The use of two sequential statements also recalls the similar sequence in the whole-tone transition-like passage heard in bb. 31–36. If we are to interpret the downward splash of staccato articulations in the winds in b. 85 and 90–93 as a scampering from Pan’s advances by the nymphs, perhaps accompanied with a gentle laughter after having escaped Pan’s advances — as is somewhat suggested in Nijinsky’s choreography, for example —, this section represents a recollection of the pursuit and an emphatic rejection of it, given the absence of the tritone in the

¹³In addition to being the only double-*forte*, bb. 70, in Roy Howat’s analysis (1970, 151), also represents the central golden-section moment for the entire work.

¹⁴One also notes the C-natural anacrusis in the strings’ melody just before b. 67, in contrast to the winds’ C-flat leading into b. 59. That subtle shift to the diatonic C-natural in b. 66 cues the listener to the diatonic catharsis that is about to ensue.

¹⁵Here, the D-flat dominant does not resolve by fifth; rather, it links to the E-major arrival over b. 79 through common tones A-flat/G-sharp and C-flat/B-natural.

¹⁶Marianne Wheelodon (2005, 649) has noted Debussy’s strategic use of ‘timbral recall’ between cyclic events in his String Quartet of the year prior to *Faune*.

pan-flute melody. Architecturally, then, bb. 79–93 possess a narrative-based relationship to the brief ‘nymph’s flight’ passage, as it forms the latter portion of complementary flanking transitional/sequential passages (bb. 31–6 and 79–93) that frame the larger ‘pastorale’ (bb. 37–51) and ‘catharsis’ (bb. 55–74) sections.

Finally, with the return of the opening theme at its original register (at b. 94, R10), Debussy invokes a brief recollection of the tritone boundary from C-sharp to G, but, compellingly, one that is immediately abandoned in the ensuing measure, as the G-natural is replaced in the flute with G-sharp. It is precisely at this moment, b. 95, when Debussy, for a final time, invokes the ‘syncopated motif’ (in two solo violins) as a countermelody to the flute melody’s ‘cancelling of G-natural’ contour. Just as the nymph’s final scampering provided a symmetrical-arch complement to Pan’s aggressive pursuits and their ‘fearful flight’, this closing section provides the complement to Pan’s initial pan-flute chromatic lure featured in the opening section (bb. 1–30). This ‘cancelling out’ of the tritone boundary interval, a *tant pis!* symbol of acceptance and resignation in select moments,¹⁷ is confirmed with a number successive statements spanning C-sharp to G-sharp in the flute (at times doubled with cello), in bb. 99–102.

3. CONCLUSION

William Austin (1970, 71–96), in his oft-cited and thorough analytical commentary on *Faune*, has briefly discussed the significance of the pc7–pc1 relationship at key junctures. When these threads of Austin’s are picked up and complemented with narrative and topical approaches, a formal reading, one suggesting an artful weaving of both extramusical and abstractly structural events, emerges. Individual formal functions of sections, functions that transcend sonata-form rhetoric, are, in the opinion of the author, further clarified; additionally, an arch-form with complementary extramusical references, emerges — (A) Pan lures, (B) nymphs flee, (C₁) nymphs dwell peacefully and (C₂) Pan contemplates the reality or lack of regarding his lustful dream, and arrives at a resignation (B’) nymphs flee and gently mock Pan (or Pan perceptually contemplates this past event), (A’) Pan recalls his luring Pan-flute theme gestures, an resigns himself to their futility as a means of gaining possession of the nymphs.

Such a formal reading, as I hope to have shown, is not based in loose conjecture. Still, I fully concede, it is one of an infinite number of possibilities based on the gestural and structural events in the music. Following the composer’s lead, I wish to avoid any overtly specific, tone-poem-esque narrative. The above descriptors are intentionally vague as opposed to play-by-play, leaving room for broader narrative interpretations. What is unmistakable, nonetheless, is Debussy’s use of the pc7–pc1 tritone in ways that are highly formally significant, followed by a relinquishing, if you will, of the employment of that tritone as an avenue for sexual fulfillment, a fulfillment suggested but never confirmed by both Mallarmé’s poem and Debussy’s music.

Ultimately, this reading attempts to find a common ground between literary-informed and abstract-musical analyses, one that, for example, does not downplay what is a clear pan-flute

reference in the opening measures simply because no such reference is found in the opening lines of Mallarmé’s poem, nor does it seek to meld sonata-oriented rhetorical frameworks in an attempt to define the structure of *Faune* through a lens of earlier traditions that are, for this ‘modern-music-awakening’ masterpiece, arguably no longer applicable.

KEYWORDS

Debussy, *Faune*, Form, Intervallic Transformations, Topics, Narrative.

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¹⁷See line 93 of Mallarmé’s poem.