La Victoire du péril rose: Contextualizing Sociological Narratives and Wagnerian Aesthetics in Lili Boulanger’s Faust et Hélène

Master’s Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Department of Music
Eric Chafe, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts
in
Musicology

by
Julie VanGyzen

May, 2014
Abstract

La Victoire du Péril Rose: Contextualizing Sociological Narratives and Wagnerian Aesthetics in Lili Boulanger’s *Faust et Hélène*

A thesis presented to the Department of Music

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Julie VanGyzen

On July 5th, 1913, the instructors of the Académie des Beau-Arts of France, the institutes responsible for the production of French artists, announced an unexpected and unprecedented victor of the distinguished Prix de Rome competition in composition. Nineteen-year-old Lili Boulanger was the new sound of French music. Never before had a woman composer won first place in the century old Prix de Rome due to the conservative political views shared by the Académie and the misogyny of the competition’s jury. This momentous event has been given much attention in the research of Boulanger’s Prix de Rome success through sociological perspective on France in 1913; a bourgeoning feminist atmosphere in the increasingly liberal government of France influenced the jury’s decision to award Boulanger the *Premier Grand Prix*.

Contemporary English musicological scholarship has favored this socio-historical narrative over analysis the aesthetic character of her winning cantata, *Faust et Hélène*, thereby neglecting another significant facet to Boulanger’s win; her overt incorporation of motifs from Richard Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. This thesis will contextualize Boulanger’s *Faust et Hélène*
cantata within the existing sociological narrative as well as in terms of the impact of Wagner in the French musical aesthetic throughout the nineteenth century. These Wagnerian aesthetics will then be incorporated into an analysis of the opening prelude of Boulanger’s cantata to display how she modeled her composition to the musical environment of twentieth century France.
# Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Introduction 1

I. History of Exclusion: Prix de Rome and its Women Competitors Pre-1913 4

II. A Woman Emerges as Winner: Boulanger’s Quest for the Prize 13

III. Wagnerian Reception and Aesthetics in 19th Century France 20

IV. Boulanger’s Harmonic Language and Wagnerian Motivic Methods 30

Conclusion 50

Bibliography 52
List of Examples

Example 1a. Boulanger, *Faust et Hélène* mm. 1-2
Example 1b. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* Act I Prelude mm. 1-3
Example 1c. Boulanger, *Faust* m. 11-12
Example 2a. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 8-10
Example 2b. Wagner, *Tristan* Act 2 Prelude
Example 3a. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 17-18
Example 3b. Wagner, *Tristan* Act 2 Prelude m. 1
Example 4a. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 21-22
Example 4b. Wagner, *Tristan* Act II, Scene 2
Example 5. Wagner, *Tristan* Act II, Scene 2
Example 6a. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 67-73
Example 6b. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 120-125
Example 7. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 80-85
Example 8. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 11-12
Example 9. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 13-16
Example 10. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 19-22
Example 11. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 25-26
Example 12. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 28-30
Introduction

On July 5th, 1913, the instructors of the Académie des Beau-Arts of France, the institute responsible for the production of French artists, announced an unexpected and unprecedented victor of the distinguished Prix de Rome competition in composition. Nineteen-year-old Lili Boulanger was deemed as the new sound of French music. Never before had a woman composer won first place in the Prix de Rome due to the conservative political views shared by the Académie and the misogyny of the competition’s jury. Although these views were not overt during the year that Boulanger competed, the pattern that women composers were excluded from the center of the winner’s circle was characteristic in the history of the competition. Additionally, the years of experience in the competition that her fellow competitors had, taken in conjunction with Boulanger’s own frail health, were factors stacked against Boulanger’s favor. Yet Boulanger not only persevered but also overcame—Boulanger won on her first try, making her an instant celebrity overnight.¹

This momentous event has been given much attention in Boulanger’s biography, as it was perhaps one of the most significant moments in her unfortunately short life of twenty-four years. Boulanger’s success in the competition served as an important advancement for women composers in the history of French music. While many other women composers and musicians had come before Boulanger in France and other countries, there was no prior situation in music history where a woman composer was pitted directly against favorable male composers and emerged as the victor. Boulanger’s win granted legitimacy to other French women composers in the public sphere and made it possible for future victories in the Prix de Rome by women composers.

Discussions of Boulanger’s success in the Prix de Rome are often oriented toward sociological perspectives in contemporary research. Musicologist Annegret Fauser, the authoritative voice on Nadia and Lili Boulanger scholarship, has conducted research through this lens. By using primary accounts like Boulanger’s diary entries and letters as well as secondary documents such as music critiques, Fauser constructs a potential narrative of Boulanger during the Prix de Rome. In Fauser’s view, Boulanger was an incredibly determined individual who would stop at nothing to obtain what she wanted. In one letter delivered to Fernand Bourgeat in 1912, Boulanger asked of Bourgeat to “intervene with members of the jury” so that she might win the end of year Prix Lepaul in the *Paris Conservatoire*. Although Fauser does not provide Bourgeat’s answer or determine if he did actually play a hand in her win of this award, it none the less presents a determined—if not slightly desperate—young woman eager to become a professional. Fauser also constructs Boulanger’s personality in the competition, which she claims was carefully cultivated for the press. Describing the persona of a child genius, music critics constantly commented on Boulanger’s frail and innocent characteristics and thereby made her more appealing as a contestant. Her physical frailty due to her constant bouts of illness was also aggrandized in the press through photographs. Even at age nineteen, Boulanger was not physically developed like most women of her age and maintained an ever youthful, almost androgynous, appearance, making her even more endearing to the public. And so, even as Boulanger had surpassed her adolescence, her public demeanor and her physical appearance all contributed to perception of a child prodigy.

---

While these perspectives certainly provide insight to the narrative that was the 1913 Prix de Rome, they also leave out one particularly important factor in Boulanger’s victory: the cantata which she had composed, *Faust et Hélène*. Fauser does credit Boulanger’s triumph to her composition by claiming it “is an outstanding contribution to the genre,” but she does not explore the actual composition any further.⁴ The *Faust et Hélène* cantata also has not been thoroughly analyzed in other contemporary English musicological research, including both biographies centering on Boulanger, which only grant the composition a general overview.⁵ The goal of this study is to contextualize Boulanger’s *Faust et Hélène* cantata within the sociological and aesthetic history of turn of the century France through a detailed analysis of its opening prelude.⁶

The first section of this study will provide a basic overview of the history of the Prix de Rome and the politics that influenced it from its inception in the nineteenth century to the early twentieth when women composers were finally allowed to compete in the competition. It will also discuss the ideological difficulties of the first few women composers in the competition, with special attention given to Nadia Boulanger, Lili Boulanger’s older sister, who competed in the Prix de Rome four times without victory. The second section will then turn to Boulanger’s early life, influences, and her experience in the Prix de Rome during 1913. This will also include an overview of the music and storyline of her cantata and the responses to her unprecedented accomplishment.

The third segment of this study takes a slight detour to consider musical aesthetics in *fin de siècle* France and the major role that the reception of Richard Wagner’s operas had in its

---

⁴ Ibid., 126.
cultivation. This phenomenon had a particularly thorny history, as at times Wagner’s music was despised and scorned while at other moments it served as an inspiration for much French music. Boulanger herself loved Wagner as is evident through her music, which incorporates Wagnerian allusions quite often; the Prix de Rome winning cantata was no exception. Boulanger pays homage to the German composer in the prelude of the cantata by incorporating musical leitmotifs from *Tristan und Isolde*. This section explores why the Wagnerian style was an acceptable aesthetic in French music by 1913.

The final portion of the present study will analyze the first thirty measures of the *Faust et Hélène* cantata in detail with close attention to her Wagnerian appropriations. While it is not a revelation that Boulanger used these borrowings from Wagner, this facet is generally commented on in passing in musicological descriptions of the cantata. The analysis will show how the Wagnerian motifs from *Tristan* form the entire framework of the cantata, as the motifs also provide insight into Boulanger’s compositional process and musical language. Lastly, the analysis will speculate on Boulanger’s use of these Wagnerian motifs within the context of the competition, and how her association with Wagnerian aesthetics discussed in the third section of this study may have been another contribution to her success in the Prix de Rome.

I. History of Exclusion: Prix de Rome and its Women Competitors Pre-1913

In France’s long lasting quest to proliferate nationalism, the Prix de Rome was founded on the principles of enriching French culture. While the Prix de Rome was already instated in the areas of painting, sculpting, and architecture in the Académie des Beau-Arts, the area of music

---

7 As in Rosenstiel’s analysis of the cantata, who delineates the importance of the Wagnerian motifs to a mere mention. Please refer to *The Life and Works of Lili Boulanger*, cited above, pages 164-169.
was not added until Napoléon Bonaparte reorganized the *Institut National* and its affiliated academies in 1803, most likely in an attempt to actively compete with German composers and finally acquire the definitive French sound.⁸ Although the competition did succeed in launching a few famous careers that had withstood the passage of time, many more composers who had won unfortunately have fallen into obscurity. The overall success of the Prix de Rome was instead marred by several scandals that had arose from it, many which surrounded the women composers who were only reluctantly allowed to compete in the competition.

From 1803 to 1968 the composition segment of the Prix de Rome was held annually. In most years only one grand prize (*Primier Grand Prix de Rome*) was awarded along with a second place award (*Second Grand Prix*). In some cases, a merit prize (*Deuxième Second Grand Prix*) was awarded when many of the final entries were particularly stellar.⁹ Occasionally, two first place awards would be merited while other years no awards were given.¹⁰ Though the award system may not have always operated consistently from year to year, the competition did constantly attract many eager contestants who were hopeful of winning the compensation of the competition. This grand prize certainly lived up to its title, as it included a moderate income for several years, consistent performances and publications of the winner’s compositions, travel opportunities, and military draft deferments. The primary award was a two-year artistic residency with the winners from the other fields at the Villa Medici in Rome, Italy, from which the competition took its name. The years following the Villa Medici would be spent in either Germany or other locations in France. The Prix de Rome supplied the ideal, creative environment where the winners could work and learn from each other. This luxurious award was

---

⁹ Fauser, “‘La Guerre,’” 111.
¹⁰ Gilbert, “Prix de Rome.”
generously supported by the government, which relied on the Prix de Rome to propagate ideologies of French nationalism.¹¹

Due to the overwhelming number of composers who sought the coveted award, the competition was open to French composers who were currently enrolled in or had graduated from the Académie des Beau-Arts affiliated institutions on the recommendations of their instructors. The competition was comprised of two rounds, named the Concours d’Essai and the Concours Définitif respectively. The objective of the Concours d’Essai was to test the competitors’ “knowledge of music as an art and science,” a very French rational approach to music.¹² This means that a measurable skillset was necessary to test music as a science, which the Académie determined to be abilities in counterpoint, fugue writing, and harmony. Judged by the music instructors of the Académie, contestants were required to construct an orchestrated chorus and fugue in four voices and clefs.¹³ The text used in this round was a poetic fragment chosen by the jury so that the contestants could prove how well they could create a complete work out of only a modest amount of material.¹⁴

The final group of five competitors then displayed “their understanding of music as an art” in the Concours Définitif. While in isolation for the span of one month at the Palace at Compiègne, the competitors were asked to compose a cantata or a scène lyrique for one or more voices based on a concentrated libretto selected by the jury of the competition.¹⁵ The composers needed to provide two complete scores of their compositions in the forms of a piano reduction and a fully orchestrated score. Contestants were also responsible for choosing of the vocalists

---

¹¹ Ibid.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Gilbert, “Prix de Rome.”
¹⁴ Rosenstiel, Life, 55.
¹⁵ Gilbert, “Prix de Rome.”
who would perform their works, directing the rehearsals, and conducting the final performance.\textsuperscript{16}
The final cantatas were performed and judged twice; the first time the music school of the Académie would rank the cantatas, and then all instructors from the various fields of the school would vote in the second performance, the determining decision for the winner of the Prix de Rome.\textsuperscript{17}

Most prominent French composers of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century competed in and won the Prix de Rome, but at times composers had to compete more than once before winning the Premier Grand Prix. The awarding process extended beyond talent, and normally a competitor would fair either the same or better in rank through consecutive competitions. For instance, if a competitor won the Second Grand Prix, then the next year they were expected to either win that same award or the Premier Grand Prix. This is one possible reason why it took Hector Berlioz four attempts in the competition before finally winning the Prix de Rome in 1830.\textsuperscript{18} However, this does not explain why Maurice Ravel in his fifth try at the Prix de Rome in 1905 failed to advance to the second round after having won a Deuxième Second Grand Prix in his previous attempt of 1901.\textsuperscript{19} As Ravel is a composer who was eventually considered in the canon of twentieth century French music, his failure to succeed is partial proof of how unreliable the competition actually was in the fostering of French music. The competition proved even more difficult for French women composers who were not even allowed to compete in the competition until 1903.\textsuperscript{20} Not only did these women composers have a century’s worth of male musical tradition they needed to surpass, but there were also misogynistic societal ideologies that had barred women from the professional

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Fauser, “La Guerre,” 94.
\item Rosenstiel, \textit{Life}, 54, 72, 78, 80.
\item Fauser, “La Guerre,” 111.
\item Ibid., 86.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
world, which had stemmed from the same point in history as the inception of the composition segment in the Prix de Rome itself.

Despite that the Prix de Rome in composition lasting for more than one hundred-fifty years, it was not until a century had passed before the eligibility of women in the competition was even entertained. This was a rather difficult task for the more conservative Académie to adapt to. The gender ideologies that the Académie valued were closely tied with the initial changes enforced by Napoléon. The year following the induction of the composition segment of the Prix de Rome, an alteration to the social structure in France was enforced in 1804 with the Code Napoléon. This statute stripped away civil rights from all French women including those of the upper class bourgeoisie, who at least had enjoyed some freedoms. In place of these civil rights, women were expected aspire to an ideological “Republican motherhood,” in which women’s sole purpose was to raise French soldiers, workers, and citizens for the state. This ideology of Republican motherhood lasted throughout the 19th century well after the end of the Napoleonic rule. By the 1890s, the women of France finally endeavored to regain some of these basic rights that they had lost due to the Code Napoléon. Alongside the feminists in the population who demanded these rights another type of woman developed in France’s social structure. Adequately called the femme nouvelle, or “new woman,” this individual was described as an “educated, independent, dandyish woman who dared to disrupt the bourgeois ideal of domestic femininity.” She challenged the gender ideologies such as the Republican motherhood by entering the public sphere, working side by side with men. The femme nouvelle

21 Ibid., 88.
23 Ibid., 1451.
intimidated the men of France, who assumed that not only would these women steal work away from hard-working and deserving men but would also destroy traditional values of the home.

Unexpectedly, the femme nouvelle also provided a fortuitous opportunity for the liberal leaning government by the end of the 19th century. There was an increasing fear of depopulation in France by the end of the century, a fear bolstered most likely by the rejection of traditional motherhood by the new women.\textsuperscript{24} Additionally, the new government desired to change their national image, as they were still recovering from the fall out of Napoleonic rule. So instead of fighting against the femme nouvelle, the French government sought to reclaim French women’s bodies by upholding an idealized version of the femme nouvelle. Images of young, beautiful women in industrial workplace settings flooded the French press and advertisements as a type of nationalistic propaganda.\textsuperscript{25} By doing this, the government hoped that the femme nouvelle would become more sexually appealing to the male population of France and thus simultaneously relegating French women to their former diminutive social status. The femme nouvelle was thereby appropriated by the French government; she was meant to be the young, virtuous, hardworking, and above all beautiful image of the state for all of Europe to envy.\textsuperscript{26}

Since the once problematic femme nouvelle was actually benefitting the state of France, the concept of women competing in the Prix de Rome was inevitable. This significant change in the competition occurred with the election of Joseph Chaumié as the minister of Public Instruction in the temporarily more liberal government.\textsuperscript{27} In 1903, Chaumié ordered the Académie to permit women to compete in the Prix de Rome. Although this came as a shock to

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 1441.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 1462.
\textsuperscript{26} This history has been truncated to directly respond to the matter of women in the Prix de Rome competition, but the history of the appropriation of the femme nouvelle is an interesting facet of French history. For a more detailed history of the femme nouvelle as the “People’s Muse” of France, please read Pomfret, David M., “‘A Muse for the Masses’: Gender, Age, and Nation in France, Fin de Siecle, cited above.
\textsuperscript{27} Fauser, “La Guerre,” 86.
the administration of the school, women had attempted to enter this all-male competition much earlier than the 1903 decree. Preceding this official order, one student, composer Maria Isambert, implored the Académie to allow her entry into the Prix de Rome in 1874. Isambert argued that the official rules of the competition did not explicitly exclude women from entering and also emphasized that she was a diligent student in the advanced studies of harmony and composition, placing her on par with the other male students. Unfortunately, Isambert’s plight was dismissed and later either ignored or forgotten.28 Chaumié, it seems, was unaware of the Isambert issue—in 1903 when three women, including composer Juliette Toutain, appealed to him for entry into the Prix de Rome, he immediately answered their requests. Chaumié attempted to take the middle ground and chose not to blame the Académie in denying women entry; he instead explained to these women that the only reason why they had not been allowed to compete in the previous one hundred years was because no woman until that point had asked to do so.29 Even if he was unaware of Isambert’s request, undoubtedly other woman students at the Académie had voiced their desires to compete in the Prix de Rome as well, diminishing this statement to a rather weak excuse. Regardless, the Académie was now forced to fully recognize the women students in their ranks and permit them entry to the Prix de Rome on to the whim of their patron, the government.

Over the next few years, female students involved with the Académie competed in the Prix de Rome with varying degrees of success. The initial years with this new dynamic determined what type of women would be prosperous in the competition. The previously mentioned Juliette Toutain was one of the first female competitors in the Prix de Rome. As a member of the bourgeoisie class in Paris, Toutain was tied to the older values of Republican motherhood, making her enrollment in the conservatory and her desire to compete in the Prix de

---

28 Ibid., 90, 91.
29 Ibid., 91.
Rome contradict her social status. However, due to some logistical issues with the Académie as well as sociological expectations for bourgeois women, Toutain failed to show up the first day of the competition in 1903 and was therefore disqualified.\(^{30}\) Several other women who also competed in 1903 and the subsequent years included Hélène Fleury, Marthe Grumbach, and Marguerite Audan.\(^{31}\) Of these three, Fleury, who competed in the years 1903 through 1905, was the most successful; she was the first woman to win the Deuxième Second Grand Prix in composition in 1904.\(^{32}\) Fleury represented the femme nouvelle as a working-woman in her late twenties; she was established as a music tutor for middle and upper class students as well as a published composer.\(^{33}\) While she seemed apt to win the Premier Grand Prix in 1905, both she and Ravel were scandalously not permitted into the final round of the competition.\(^{34}\)

The last woman competitor of the Prix de Rome before 1913 will be described with more detail, since she had more of a direct effect on Boulanger’s run in the competition. If any female composer was more expected to win the Prix de Rome, it was Nadia Boulanger, Lili Boulanger’s older sister.\(^{35}\) Nadia and Lili hailed from a long line of Parisian musicians, and the most important of these was their father, Ernest Boulanger, who won the Prix de Rome in 1836.\(^{36}\)

Nadia proved herself as an exemplary student at the Paris Conservatoire, an institute associated with the Académie. She had entered the Conservatoire at the young age of ten and had won

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 97.
\(^{31}\) Unfortunately, none of these female competitors (Toutain, Fleury, Grumbach, and Audan) have had any substantial research conducted on them outside of Fauser’s “La Guerre en dentelles” article, and they all lack Grove entries.
\(^{32}\) Fauser, “La Guerre,” 110.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 104, 105.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 111; In this year the only composers who advanced to the final round were students of Charles Lenepveu, an obvious display of favoritism. For a more detailed history of these women’s experiences in the Prix de Rome, please refer to Fauser, Annegret, “‘La Guerre en dentelles’: Women and the ‘Prix de Rome’ in French Cultural Politics,” cited above.
\(^{35}\) Usually Lili’s name is associated alongside that of Nadia’s, most likely because Nadia was older and more successful in music history. As this essay is not about Nadia but is focused on Lili, Nadia will be referred to by her first name and Lili will be referred to by her last.
\(^{36}\) Rosenstiel, Life, 19, 24.
numerous end-of-the-year prizes for her compositions throughout her education.\textsuperscript{37} As soon as she left the conservatory in 1904, Nadia ran a successful music studio, a career that ultimately would identify Nadia as the most highly acclaimed music educator in the twentieth century.

Although Nadia and Lili were part of the bourgeoisie, as their mother, Raïssa Mychetsky, was a Russian princess, their status was mostly by association. Therefore, when their father died in 1900, Nadia became the sole provider for the family, since it was unsightly for a bourgeois mother to work to support her family.\textsuperscript{38} With hopes of furthering her career to better support her family, Nadia competed in the Prix de Rome four times. In 1906 she was eliminated in the first round, but she did advance to the Concours Définitif in 1907. Finally by 1908 Nadia had placed in the final voting and won the Deuxième Second Grand Prix, the first time this award was given to a female competitor since Fleury.\textsuperscript{39} Unfortunately, Nadia did not leave this competition free of scandal either. Though the fugue for the first round of the competition was supposed to be a choral arrangement, Nadia composed hers as a string quartet. This action greatly irritated the judges, especially the outspoken composer and judge Camille Saint-Saëns, who wanted to disqualify Nadia due to her breach of the rules.\textsuperscript{40} Nadia’s fugue was still performed, but her straying from the requirements of the competition most likely demoted her final placement to the Deuxième Second Grand Prix. Perhaps it was her “affaire fugue” that despoiled the image of Nadia Boulanger in the eyes of the judges, or perhaps it was her position as a highly successful

\textsuperscript{38} Potter, Caroline, \textit{Nadia and Lili Boulanger} (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing 2006), 3.  
\textsuperscript{39} Fauser, “La Guerre,” 119.  
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 114, 115.
femme nouvelle that intimidated the male composers of the Académie, but the following year Nadia only won the *Deuxième Second Grand Prix* as well.\(^{41}\)

II. A Woman Emerges as Winner: Boulanger’s Quest for the Prize

After Nadia’s second *Deuxième Second Grand Prix* in 1909, another woman composer did not compete again until 1912.\(^{42}\) During this intermittent period, Lili Boulanger at age seventeen had finally enrolled in classes at the Conservatoire by 1911 to prepare for her attempt at the elusive award. By this point in her life, though, winning the Prix de Rome was not merely an aspiration; bringing back the award to her family and redeeming the name of her sister was her *raison d’être*, as it were.\(^{43}\) While this may seem like a rather dramatic statement, it is most likely that Boulanger knew she did not have the luxury of time to compete over and over again like many other contestants; all her life Boulanger was quite ill and actually passed away young, only living to age twenty-four.\(^{44}\)

Born Marie-Juliette Olga Boulanger on August 21\(^{\text{st}}\), 1893, Boulanger had always displayed an aptitude for music, just like her sister Nadia.\(^{45}\) By age two she could sing songs by ear, and by age five Boulanger was already auditing harmony classes at the Conservatoire National with instructor Auguste Chapuis. In 1899 she took organ classes with Louis Vierne, in 1900 accompaniment classes with her future composition teacher, Paul Vidal, and other instrumental lessons on violin, cello, and harp over the next few years. Boulanger’s true talent

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 122.
\(^{42}\) Fauser, “La Guerre,” 122.
\(^{43}\) Rosenstiel, *Life*, 46.
was on piano, which she could expertly play by age six. She enjoyed sight-reading works of Bach, the French clavecinists, Mozart, Chopin, Schumann, Wagner, Faure, Debussy, and Mussorgsky, all of which greatly affected her compositional practices later in her life.46

Despite her enthusiasm, Boulanger’s lessons were unfortunately rather sporadic during this period due to her illnesses. When Boulanger was only two years old she contracted bronchial pneumonia, and although she miraculously survived this infection her immune system was greatly compromised. As a result Boulanger would become easily ill throughout the rest of her short life. Boulanger attempted to enjoy her life the best she could despite her sickness during her youth with her friends and by travelling. At age sixteen, Boulanger’s mother began to worry about her youngest daughter’s lack of direction; she had taken all of these lessons haphazardly and had no consistent education. Of course, when her mother Raïssa inquired of her daughter about a potential career, Boulanger decided immediately she would pursue composition, just like her father and sister.47

In 1910 Boulanger actively began taking consistent courses at the Conservatoire. She also studied alongside her sister, Nadia, not only for guidance but also to learn from her sister’s past mistakes.48 Unlike Nadia, Boulanger did not compete for any of the conservatory’s end of year awards, either be because of her illnesses, which still caused her to miss classes during her enrollment, or because of her approach in preparation for the competition. While Fleury and Nadia were both of the femme nouvelle association, Boulanger could not display the same image due to her illnesses and overall non-threatening, frail demeanor. Whether she was attempting to present a public persona or not, Boulanger was described as a femme fragile (“fragile woman”)

46 Ibid., 33, 35, 37.
47 Ibid., 33, 46.
in the press, a woman who was charmingly weak and gained the sympathies of the “stronger male sex.” At the same time, Boulanger was not of the same bourgeois stature that Toutain was; in other words, Boulanger was at the midpoint between the high maintenance bourgeois woman and the strong femme nouvelle. This persona could be a potential reason that Boulanger was a more appealing candidate than the women that came before her.

In 1912, Boulanger was recommended and accepted to compete in the Prix de Rome. Unfortunately, during the first round of the competition Boulanger became seriously ill, and although she submitted both her fugue and chorus, she withdrew from the competition nonetheless. Interestingly, her withdrawal was not made evident to the public, which instead reported that Boulanger was eliminated in the first round. Evidently, the entire competition that year was not promising as a whole. Only four contestants were permitted into the Concours Définitif, and the cantatas were so poor that no award was given in the year 1912. Boulanger fared much better in 1913 when she returned to the competition. That year she did not become ill during the first round and was permitted to advance to the second. Alongside her in the Concours Définitif were Marc Delmas, Claude Delvincourt, Marcel Dupré, and Édouard Mignon. All of these men had many years experience in the Prix de Rome; Delmas his seventh, Delvincourt was on his fifth try, Dupré on his fourth attempt, and Mignon on his sixth, which meant that any one of these men as in a much better position to win the Prix de Rome over Boulanger, who barely competed once. It certainly would be an intense and emotional month for Boulanger during the composition of the cantata for the finals.

---

49 Ibid., 124.
51 Ibid., 61.
52 Ibid., 70.
The work of prose chosen for the 1913 competition was an adaptation of the Hélène arc from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s drama Faust II. Modified by Eugène Adenis, the libretto tells the story of a tormented, sleeping Faust in a pastoral meadow inhabited by spirits and fairies. Méphistophélès, the devil who acts as Faust’s sidekick in the story, watches as Faust’s tormented sleep turns into blissful dreams. The doctor wakes up and explains that he was dreaming of the eternally beautiful Hélène of Troy, the daughter of Zeus who had thousands of men dying at her feet for her love. Faust decides that he wants to have Hélène for his own and orders Méphistophélès to resurrect her from the dead. Méphistophélès is uneasy about this and attempts to dissuade Faust from his desires; however, Faust demands it and so the devil draws magic circles on the ground to begin the ritual. Hélène appears before Faust, not fully understanding why she is awake. While she first also tries to dissuade Faust from falling in love with her, as it has only resulted in bloodshed in the past, she nonetheless is flattered by Faust’s insistence and falls for him as well. Because Hélène was resurrected from the Classical Underworld by a devil from the Christian Hell, a magical rift opens and the ghosts from Hélène’s past come back to drag her away in a dramatic ending.

This story has all the elements for a dramatic cantata with themes of love, tragedy, desire, and torment, as well as a narrative appropriate for three composed voices. Boulanger

53 Ibid., 90.
54 Adenis’ version of the Hélène arc is drastically different than what was presented in the 1913 Prix de Rome. In the Goethe’s original Faust, Faust had to bring back Hélène for an emperor he was helping at the time on his quest. The moment he saw Hélène he instantly was deeply attracted to her beauty. The more important feature of his task to resurrect Hélène, though, was his quest to confront the Mütters in the Underworld, presumably the source of everything that was in existence. While this may have been the definitive answer to Faust’s existential journey, Goethe’s character was distracted by the devastatingly beautiful Hélène as he pursued a romantic relationship with her. The two marry and have a son named Euphorion; Euphorion dies young as he threw himself off of a cliff. Wishing to be with her son, Hélène retreats to the underworld and leaves Faust behind. In a way, the Hélène in Goethe’s epic actually has a stronger and more respectable persona than the one displayed in the libretto for the Prix de Rome by rejecting her husband in favor of her son. For more on gender and existentialism in Goethe’s Faust please see Jantz, Harold, “The Place of the ‘Eternal-Womanly,’ in Goethe’s Faust Drama,” PMLA 68, No. 4 (Sept., 1953): 791-805; Niazi, Mohammed Nadeem, “Faust’s Violence against the Mothers,” The German Quarterly 72, No. 3 (Summer 1999): 221-231; and Kaufman, Walter, From Shakespeare to Existentialism (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1959).
expertly featured all these narrative qualities through her own advanced compositional prowess, which will be discussed in more detail later on in this study. As a general overview, though, she incorporated three voices in the cantata; baritone for Méphistophélès, tenor for Faust, and mezzo-soprano for Hélène. Méphistophélès’s vocal sections are characterized by recitative, almost chant-like lines, which perhaps ties his role as the devil to tropes of Christian liturgical music. As the lead tenor, Faust has more heroic and melodious vocal lines and is often accompanied by the French horn, which also often characterizes this trope. For instance, the melody of Faust’s first aria is initially presented in the French horn in the pastoral section following the restless prelude of the cantata. Lastly, Hélène first displays a solemn and somewhat hesitant cadence to her voice, but once Faust begins to woo the Classical beauty, she begins to imitate Faust’s own romantic style in the duet of the opera. Boulanger then skillfully combines these three different types of emotive voices in the final and stormy fugue of the cantata, culminating the entire dramatic climax with Hélène’s mournful “Adieu” to her ephemeral love.

During the final round, though, Boulanger once again became ill, her condition most likely exacerbated due to the stress the composition imposed. While she completed both the piano and orchestral score by herself, she was still responsible to also produce the separate parts for the musicians as well as run rehearsals. Out of kindness, her fellow competitor and friend, Dupré, assisted Boulanger in transcribing these copies.\(^{55}\) Perhaps Dupré himself did not feel intimidated by his competitor due to her frail state so late in the competition. Additionally, in the Concours d’Essai round of the competition Dupré was ranked in first place and was followed by Boulanger, putting him at an advantage over the other contestants. In the final round, though, Dupré did not rank at all; Boulanger’s cantata obtained the majority vote from those in the jury, a

\(^{55}\) Rosenstiel, *Life*, 72.
total of 31 out of 36 possible votes.\textsuperscript{56} As the previous round did not hold any bearing on the results of the final judging (with the exception of Nadia’s “affaire fugue”), Boulanger’s first place ranking made her the victor of the entire competition. Finally and quite unexpectedly, a woman composer won the Premier Grand Prix and gained access to the Villa Medici, and impressively on her first try (if the 1912 attempt is omitted due to her early dismissal on behalf of her health).\textsuperscript{57} The French music critics were completely awed by these facts and unanimously believed that Boulanger was worthy of the prize.

Boulanger’s youth stunned the critics most as they constantly commented on the fact that she was only nineteen. \textit{Le Monde Musical} reported, “We must congratulate Mlle Lili Boulanger for having, at her age, such an ability, such a sense of the stage, a touching musicality… Her cantata was the revelation of the day.”\textsuperscript{58} Later, Paul Martineau reviewed the orchestral premier for the same music journal and noted, “Age (alas! ... must one speak of age?...) and work will bring to fruition the qualities of an already undeniable talent; of a talent that in no way excludes grace.”\textsuperscript{59} Claude Debussy, who would hear her winning cantata later that year, also could not believe how young Boulanger was and the advanced talent that resided inside her.\textsuperscript{60} Even if Boulanger was attempting to cultivate the image of child genius as discussed before, such worries were not at all necessary for the first woman composer; her age, circumstances, and music all spoke fluently for her.\textsuperscript{61}

Despite the nonthreatening, femme fragile image Boulanger may have represented, her music and her ultimate success in the Prix de Rome associated her with the femme nouvelle

\textsuperscript{56} Potter, \textit{Nadia}, 13.
\textsuperscript{57} Rosenstiel, \textit{Life}, 80.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{61} Fauser, “La Guerre,” 124.
nonetheless. Critic Émile Vuillermoz anticipated Boulanger’s win from only hearing the performances of the cantatas in the competition’s finals, as he wrote of a month later in Musica:

“Several months ago, in this column, I warned musicians of the imminence of the ‘pink peril’: events have not hesitated to prove me right. Mlle Lili Boulanger has just triumphed in the last Prix de Rome competition over all its male contestants, and has carried off, on her first try the First Grand Prize with an authority, a speed, and an ease apt to seriously disturb the candidates who, for long years, cried tears and sweated blood while laboriously approaching this goal. Do not be fooled: this deed stands on its own merits. Not only did… the judges not intervene to facilitate her victory, but it could be said that they were stricter with this young girl of nineteen than with her competitors.

“…The frail grace of Mlle Lili Boulanger only moved the spectators who were touched at the group formed by the contestant and her sister united at the piano in an attentive and affectionate collaboration. The heat of battle made her young male rivals, devoured by ambition, insensitive to this poetry…”

Clearly, Vuillermoz recognized Boulanger’s representation as a femme fragile. However, he viewed this trait as more of a positive characteristic that only adds to the strength of the femme nouvelle as oppose to a representation of a helpless woman. The Prix de Rome was not awarded to Boulanger out of pity; more spectators were impressed by Boulanger’s youth and musical capabilities, which were the primary reasons for her victory. After all, the implications of her win were tremendous; not only would her composition career flourish by the immense amount of

62 Rosenstiel, Life, 76-77.
63 Vuillermoz also noted in this review that, “The misogyny of the jury was known.” By that he was most likely revering to Lenepveu, a teacher in the Académie that blocked both Fleury and Ravel from placing in 1905. Lenepveu passed away in 1910, which may have removed the misogynistic element from the jury of the Prix de Rome. Please refer to Fauser’s article “La Guerre en dentelles” for more information.
attention Boulanger and her music were about to receive through publicity and publishing, but also Boulanger opened the door for future women composers to win the illustrious Prix de Rome. Most importantly for Boulanger, though, she brought the prize back to her family and redeemed Nadia through her win. As a sign of gratitude and love, Boulanger dedicated to the cantata to her sister, as this was a win for them both.

**III. Wagnerian Reception and Aesthetics in 19th Century France**

As just discussed, the most prominent reason for Boulanger’s victory was the exceptional skill in composition that she had displayed at such a young age. Boulanger’s incredibly dense and technical harmonic language shared characteristics with much more experienced and prominent composers of her day. However, there is one aspect of her compositional abilities that is far more prominent than the rest in the cantata, *Faust et Hélène*: her use of Wagnerian leitmotifs. These leitmotifs are first presented in the prelude of the cantata and essentially form the framework upon which the composition is built. At the commencement of the composition, a familiar descending motif emanates from deep in the lower strings. This motif is reminiscent of the famous opening phrase of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* opera, perhaps the most often analyzed passage of music in all of Western music history. By opening her work alluding to the prominent music of the *Tristan* prelude, Boulanger was sure to invoke certain connotations in the minds of her judges and audiences, primarily through the associations of longing and desire as represented in Wagner’s opera. While such an overt use of borrowing may seem incongruous in a competition such as the Prix de Rome, the inclusion of the Wagnernian motifs at the start of

---

Boulanger’s cantata enhance the quality of the composition, rather than detract from it. These motifs facilitate Boulanger’s compositional process and reflect the Wagnerian musical aesthetic that was in vogue during fin de siècle France.

By the time Lili Boulanger began attending composition classes alongside her sister Nadia in 1901, the operatic oeuvre of Richard Wagner was already deeply entrenched in the French musical milieu. That being said, Wagner’s reception in France was initially in a tumultuous state when his music was first performed in the opera houses in the early 1800s. As a result his overall influence on French aesthetics had a fickle relationship with the musical intellectuals, and throughout the later half of the nineteenth century Wagner’s demanding presence created a rift in the musical community. There were the wagnérisme, the people who embraced Wagner’s artistic vision, and then the anti-Wagnerians, those who saw Wagner as a threat to French culture. While much of this dispute manifested in critiques of the performances of his operas, most of the conflict occurred on the stage as French composers felt compelled to respond to Wagner through their own compositions.

Wagner’s entry into the intellectual community of France was not through the musiciens but rather the littérateurs. Wagner’s three visits to Paris were overall quite devastating for the German composer, though his initial stay was rather a muted affair. Escaping from his creditors in Riga, Wagner aimed to make personal connections in the Paris Opéra by staging his French-style opera, Rienzi. However, the Opéra refused to perform Rienzi, which left Wagner and his wife, Minna, in a state of destitution. During this period he survived mainly through journalism while he worked on Der fliegende Holländer, which unfortunately passed barely noticed by the public. Shortly after he left Paris in April of 1842, Wagner’s own musical taste towards Rienzi

65 Rosenstiel, Life, 37.
diminished as he felt it held too many similarities to Giacomo Meyerbeer, a composer he had definitely grown to dislike.\(^{67}\)

Wagner returned to Paris as an exile after escaping capture during the political uprisings in Dresden of 1849. Though he intended to keep a low profile, interest in Wagner’s operas steadily increased through various performances in the 1840s. Wagner set out to formulate his philosophy on opera during his stay in Paris.\(^{68}\) His *Oper und Drama* was originally intended as an essay delineating the relationship between music and dramatic language and how the two should conceive a complete work of art in one complete amalgamation. In his theory, which had grown into a much larger literary opus by its completion, dramatic language does not play a subsidiary role to that of the music and actually is what motivates the dramatic character of the music that accompanies it. This perspective simultaneously gained the ire of his contemporary composers as well attracted the fascination of *littératurs* who felt the theory was sympathetic to their field. But before Wagner was even aware of his growing number of proponents with the *littératurs*, he departed Paris again in the summer of 1850.\(^{69}\)

It was in that same year that *littératour* Gérard de Nerval enthusiastically presented Wagner in a series of four articles that described the ceremonies in Weimar for the inauguration of Goethe and Johann Gottfried von Herder’s memorial statues. During these celebrations, Nerval attended the premier of the opera, *Lohengrin*, that was conducted by court composer and friend of Wagner, Franz Liszt. Nerval praised Wagner for turning from traditional operatic forms and instead creating the *drame lyrique*, which was a close enough of an interpretation to Wagner’s

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 62.  
\(^{68}\) Ibid.  
\(^{69}\) Ibid.
total vision in *Oper und Drama*.\(^{70}\) Similarly, littérateur Théophile Gautier also wrote glowing reviews of Wagner’s 1857 performance of *Tannhäuser* in Wiesbaden. Like Nerval, Gautier recognized the emphasis on poetic language as opposed to the traditional norm. Unfortunately, Gautier’s lack of musical knowledge also resulted in some drastic misinterpretations of Wagner’s opera. For instance, he claimed that that Wagner did not understand basic concepts of rhythm and melody and that he did not modulate at all through the opera, which, as is well known, Wagner does quite often over the course of a composition.\(^{71}\) While this could not help the wagnériste argument, Gautier and other littérateurs obviously found much more value in Wagner’s sensitivity to text, as it proved that the German composer worked to elevate text and poetry to the same level of prominence to musical composition. Gautier’s daughter, Judith, would continue to spread the Wagnerian gospel. In 1876 Judith would begin an influential epistolary relationship with Wagner during his composition of *Parsifal*. Later in 1893, Gautier would open a theatre in Paris where she would produce a French translation of *Parsifal* so Wagner’s music could reach a wider audience.\(^{72}\)

It was Wagner’s third visit to Paris that had aroused disparaging responses from the seemingly louder music critics in France. On Sunday afternoons from January 25\(^{th}\) through February 8\(^{th}\) in 1860, Wagner conducted three concerts of his music, including an excerpt from *Tristan*. The concerts did succeed in gaining yet another littérateur to the French Wagnerian ranks, the author Charles Baudelaire, who would be responsible for many pro-Wagnerian articles such as *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris* over the next decade. However, the critics, like François-Joseph Fétis and Pietro Scudo, stubbornly remained against Wagner’s musical

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 66.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 67-68.
aesthetic. Even before these performances in 1860, Fétis published a series of slanderous articles against Wagner’s music, claiming that Wagner did not have proper musical training and that his music was overall nonsensical. In addition to this, *Oper und Drama* had accomplished little to clarify Wagner’s approach to music for the French; instead, these critics used Wagner’s own words from his “most offensive passages” to convince their readers of Wagner’s derision.73

A French imperial decree ordered that *Tannhäuser* be performed at the Paris Opéra in 1861. Unfortunately, because of these aforementioned music critics and others like them, the audiences of these three performances were stacked against Wagner; the audiences were already conditioned to dislike the opera by the critics, though they did not understand Wagner’s vision.74 Critic Alexis Azevedo echoed Fétis and Scudo’s opinions that Wagner did not understand how to compose music. He reviewed in *L’Opinion nationale*, “The name that M. Wagner himself gives to his music, ‘The Melody of the Forest,’ will stick because in this music it is lost in the woods… This sing-song is accompanied by extremely complicated symphonic devilry, quite painful to hear, and all too capable of clouding an idea, if there were one.”75

This criticism was juxtaposed to highly acclaiming reviews of another German composer, Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck, who was very successful in France and ultimately adopted as one of their own. A revival of Gluck’s opera, *Alceste*, had showed merely seven months after Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* and was warmly received. This revival of Gluck seemed to be a message to Wagner indeed, to prove that a fellow German had assimilated into French culture just fine without overturning all the traditional forms of opera. Critics accused Wagner, on the other hand,

---

73 Lees, Mallarmé, 20, 60, 63-64.
75 Ibid., 236.
of attempting to force French culture to assimilate to his tastes.\textsuperscript{76} Oscar Comettant narrows down the Wagner problem in \textit{L’Art} rather succinctly:

“Of course, if Mr. Wagner had not shown his disdain for the works of the great masters both past and present in his numerous writings published in Germany and France, and if he had not asserted with such incredible pride his system of opera composition as the \textit{nec plus ultra} of the beautiful, and if he had not presented his operas as the only ones worthy to be listened to by the serious-minded, the Parisian public… would have been content to remain silent.”\textsuperscript{77}

Wagner was, to quote the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns’ scathing words, “foisting” himself upon the French public.\textsuperscript{78} In these critics’ perspectives, Wagner infiltrated French culture all on his own, forcing other, more talented French composers, such as such as Auber, Gounod, and Berlioz, out of the public eye. “Wagnerism,” Saint-Saëns wrote rather fanatically, “in the guise of art, was a machine marvelously fashioned to nibble at French patriotism.”\textsuperscript{79} In other words, Wagner was a threat to French national identity. How contradictory, though, that a composer who was supposedly so poor at his craft and was so arrogant towards the public according to the voices of musical authority in France would not only be continuously accused of these offenses but also deemed a threat to France itself?

Ultimately, it seemed that the musical intellectuals did not understand the sensation that Wagner’s music had created in France. Even though the performance \textit{Tannhäuser} in 1861 was an overall failure, Wagner’s music was already prominent in bourgeois musical salons.

Musicians publicized Wagner’s music on their own, like pianist Augusta Holmès, who was said

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 237.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
to not only incorporate Wagnerian sentimentalities in her musical language but also was described as physically appearing like Wagner’s Walkyrie, Brüninghilde. Over the next couple decades, Holmès’ companion, Catulle Mendès, zealously wrote positive Wagnerian articles in *Revue wagnérienne*, defending the presence of Wagner in French culture.

More importantly, prominent French composers often made pilgrimages to Bayreuth to hear Wagner’s music. Over the course of the 1870s and 80s, composers who had exposed themselves to this music began to incorporate it into their own styles and produced works that were similar to Wagner’s. One such composer was Vincent D’Indy, who closely studied Wagnerian techniques and displayed them in his first opera *Fervaal*. *Fervaal* seemed to be not just be a mere emulation, but a blending of Wagnerian technique and French “restraint and rationality.” Jules Massenet was yet another composer who, after his pilgrimage to Bayreuth to view a performance of *Parsifal* in August of 1886, also became a keen Wagnerian. Shortly after he was exposed to Wagner, Massenet composed a *Tristan*-esque opera named *Esclarmonde*, which premiered in 1889. Although it may be easy to link any opera based on a tragic love story to that of *Tristan und Isolde*, Massenet incorporated direct quotations from the opera. For instance, when the main character, Esclarmonde, pines for her lover in Act I, her sister, Parséis, hints that she may use her powers to unite them. Imbedded within the music of this answer lies the Tristan chord, conjuring parallels to Isolde’s plight and Brangaene’s solution of the love

---

81 Ibid., 64.
83 Ibid., 239, 263.
85 Ibid., 227.
potion, the catalyst for the entire story of Tristan.\textsuperscript{86} In addition, the Act II love duet between Esclarmonde and Roland, which itself is thirty minutes long, is centered on the key of Ab, mimicking the tonality of the love duet of ‘O sink hernieder’ in Act II of Tristan.\textsuperscript{87}

Although Massenet was treated harshly by music critics for producing a work that held such an obvious analogy to that of Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde,\textsuperscript{88} his would not be the last to replicate Wagernian characteristics in French operas. Ernest Chausson’s Roi Arthus, Emmanuel Chabrier’s Gwendoline, Paul Dukas’ Ariane and Barbe Bleue, and Gabriel Faure’s Penelope all also incorporated Wagnerian techniques within their compositional language.\textsuperscript{89} Charbrier, upon hearing Tristan in Munich in 1879, feared that there may be nothing more composers would be able to accomplish after Wagner.\textsuperscript{90} The crux of the matter was that while the French music critics disparaged Wagner greatly for encroaching on French musical identity, French composers turned to Wagner for direction and inspiration.

The composer that had the most fickle relationship Wagner was undoubtedly Claude Debussy. Unlike many composers, Debussy became a wagnériste sometime before he made his pilgrimage to Bayreuth in 1888 and 1889, where he heard Tristan, Parsifal, and Die Meistersinger.\textsuperscript{91} Not only did he fervently defend Wagner to those who may have not seen the German composer’s appeal, but he also often performed Wagner’s music, much like Augusta Holmès.\textsuperscript{92} It was not until the mid 1890s did Debussy become disenchanted with the Wagnerian theory. After seeing his predecessors Chabrier, Chausson, and d’Indy all incorporate the

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 228.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 229.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 238.
\textsuperscript{90} Holloway, Robin, Debussy and Wagner (London: Eulenburg Books, 1979), 12.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 18, 19.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 19.
Wagnerian methods but ultimately fail at producing the defining French operatic style, Debussy questioned the effectiveness of the Wagner approach. Though Debussy did not doubt Wagner’s genius, he did question how French composers could move past Wagner while not continuing to merely emulate him. Debussy became rather cynical at the whole Wagner prospect despite his early fanaticism. He instead turned to the arguments of the music critics, claiming that Wagner denounced all other forms of music:

“Wagner’s work suggests a striking picture: Bach as the Holy Grail, Wagner as Klingsor wishing to crush the Grail and usurp its place… Bach shines supreme over music, and in his unknown, of the great lesson he has bequeathed us of disinterested love of music.”

Of course, Debussy’s actions spoke louder than his words. While he denounced the so-called “sorcerer,” Debussy, like many French composers before him, sought after Wagner as an instructor in his own compositions. Pelléas et Melisande was Debussy’s own Tristan-esque tragedy that had premiered in 1899. It is not within the scope of this study to fully compare Tristan and Pelléas musically, but the subject matter of betrayal through adultery in the hopes of true love and transcendence as well as the dramatic narrative timeline of the opera determine very close parallels between the two operas. Additionally, the librettist of this Maurice Maeterlinck play was the aforementioned littérateur wagnériste, Catulle Mendès, who undoubtedly made the similarities in the libretto even more obvious. Besides this opera,

---

93 Ibid., 19.
94 Ibid., 16.
95 For a poetic-musical comparison between Tristan and Pelléas, please refer to Robin Holloway’s text Debussy and Wagner, who covers this material over the course of three chapters, as well as Carolyn Abbate’s article “‘Tristan’ in the Composition of ‘Pelléas,’” published in 19th-Century Music, which looks for Wagnerian techniques in the analysis of Debussy’s preliminary manuscripts.
96 Abbate, Carolyn, “‘Tristan’ in the Composition of ‘Pelléas,’” 19th-Century Music 5, No. 2 (Autumn, 1981): 118; One of Mendès’s well known articles, “Le ‘jeune Prix de Rome’ et le vieux wagneriste,” in Revue wagnérienne in 8
Debussy would also later quote Wagner’s *Tristan* in his composition *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* of 1894 and in *Golliwog’s Cakewalk* of 1908. The latter, it is suspected, actually satirizes *Tristan* by haphazardly mimicking the opening measures of Wagner’s opera as a ragtime melody. However, it is presented in the same spirit as the loyal *wagnériste* Chabrier did in his *Tristan-Quadrilles*, in which he sets famous melodies from *Tristan* as dance pieces. Whether the composer intended any ill will towards Wagner even this late in his life is debatable. What can be asserted is that in December of 1913 Debussy had heard a performance featuring Lili Boulanger’s Prix de Rome winning cantata *Faust et Hélène*. It is highly unlikely that the venerable French composer did not notice the obvious Wagnerian adaptations in Boulanger’s work. Although Debussy supposedly disliked both the Prix de Rome and Wagner, he was overall impressed with the young woman composer:

“Mlle. Lili Boulanger, who has just came back with the Grand Prix de Rome for her *Faust et Hélène* (a lyric cantata based on the second Faust, words by E. Adenis) is only nineteen! Her experience of the different ways of writing music seems much older! There are little threads here and there with which one ties up the phrases in this kind of piece, but Mlle Boulanger uses still more subtle tricks. The arrival of Hélène, accompanied by a high throbbing of divided strings, waves gracefully before the eyes. But scarcely has she arrived then Hélène (sung by Mme Croiza) takes on the voice that belongs to one of Zeuz’s daughters,

---

97 Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner*, 142.
oppressed by so many conflicting destinies. Meanwhile Faust was whispered in David Devries’ beautiful voice…”

Despite the thorny reception history of Wagner in France during the nineteenth century, the sensation caused by his music among the audience members of the opera houses transformed the term “Wagnerian” from an insult to that of an aspiration. The drama surrounding Wagner the man as well as his music perpetuated most of the conversation and accomplished what the music critics of France feared the most—Wagner had heavily influenced the French national sound. By time Boulanger competed in the government-sponsored competition of the Prix de Rome quoting Wagner was not taboo but encouraged. Still, the very fact that Boulanger incorporated Wagner’s music in her *Faust et Hélène* cantata surely impressed the judges and was a key attribute towards her success in the Prix de Rome.

IV. Boulanger’s Harmonic Language and Motivic Methods

The first thirty measures of Boulanger’s *Faust et Hélène* cantata functions as a prelude that serves a dual purpose. The first of these moves the prelude from an atonal beginning to an area of concrete tonality, which will be B major by m. 30. The second function of the opening is to introduce the motifs that will be incorporated throughout the rest of the cantata, as referred to before. These motifs delineate narrative aspects of the storyline, namely that of Faust’s desire and torment and how these two impulses perpetuate his actions in the dramatic unfolding. The prelude is also separated into three sections with two important events, both which are indicated

---

by the introduction of a new motif. For matters of clarity, these motifs will first be described and named in this analysis before discussing how they operate in the prelude to the cantata. The first

Example 1a. Boulanger, *Faust et Hélène* mm. 1-2

Example 1b. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* Act I Prelude mm. 1-3

Example 1c. Boulanger, *Faust* m. 11-12

motif, which was mentioned before as reminiscent of the famous opening motif of *Tristan*, initiates the entire cantata in mm. 1-2, and will be referred to as the “desire” motif in this paper
(Example 1a). This motif is characterized by a three semitone descent that skips down a major third and then leaps up a minor seventh. This pitch then transposes down another semitone, and generally this last tone becomes the starting pitch of the next succession of the desire motif. The next motif coincides with that of the desire motif and is located in mm. 11-12, the first major point of arrival in the prelude. This four semitone motif moves in contrary motion to that of the desire motif in an ascent. Though this motif, characterized by slow quarter notes moving to a note of longer duration, may stand alone as a symbol in the musical language, Boulanger also uses this motif to move chromatically through the prelude. This motif will be called the “longing” motif in reference, and it is essentially an answer to that of the opening desire motif (Example 1c). A variation of the opening desire motif is present in mm. 8-10, which only contains the contour of the initial descent of the desire motif (Example 2a). At the second point of arrival in mm. 17-18 Boulanger introduces the third motif. Heralded by the trumpets, this motif is comprised of a perfect fifth downward motion followed by an ascent of three pitches (Example 3a). This motif narratively relates to the “torment” that Faust experiences and will be noted as such in this analysis. The final motif that Boulanger incorporates is a conflation of the longing and the torment motifs in mm. 21-22. While it follows the general contour of the torment motif, the ascent is modified to incorporate the four semitone ascent of the longing motif (Example 4a).

All of the motifs that Boulanger presents in the prelude of the cantata are related to the Wagnerian motifs of *Tristan und Isolde*. While Boulanger may have altered the intervallic material of the motifs and changed the harmonic content of the original Wagnerian motifs, the general contour of the motifs as well as their attached symbolic meanings remain and are appropriated for her own composition. A prime example occurs in the opening motif of the
cantata, which holds direct connections with the “desire” music from Wagner’s *Tristan*. By using music that is similar to the desire music of *Tristan*, Boulanger presumably intends to inform the audience that the upcoming material of the cantata is centered on the same subject.\(^9\) Considering the time constraint for the composition process of the cantata and the length limitations for the competition, Boulanger’s procedure is actually quite practical. If she had composed entirely original leitmotifs, not only would it take much more music to fulfill their melodic potential, but it would also require more story than Adenis’s libretto provides in order to attach any significant symbolic meaning to new motifs.

Example 2a. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 8-10

\[\text{Example 2b. Wagner, *Tristan* Act 2 Prelude}\]

\(^9\) Potter in the text Nadia and Lili Boulanger claims that while the cantata is attributed to Wagner, the opening motif refers to Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*. However the only thing the two motifs have in common are the initial descending seminotes, which *Prélude* contains far more of; otherwise the contour and the symbolic meanings are not at all similar the in the way that Boulanger’s opening motif is to that of Wagner’s *Tristan*. Please see Potter Nadia and Lili Boulanger, 62.
That being said, Boulanger alters the most renowned motif from *Tristan* so that she does not provide just a mere emulation. First, she truncates the desire music from the prelude of *Tristan* (Example 1b) from three measures to only two measures. Boulanger varies the motif by presenting it in diminution, moving in eighth notes instead of quarters. The opening anacrusis of the *Tristan* desire music is removed entirely; the leap that is characteristic of the Wagner’s motif is instead transferred to the end of the initial descent. Additionally, the F-E-D# shift of the Wagnerian motif is transposed at a third in Boulanger’s cantata. Another modification occurs in the abridged second half from Wagner’s original desire music. As seen in Example 1b, a rising chromatic line between G# and B concludes the opening *Tristan* motif as an answer to the opening motion. A rising chromatic line reminiscent of the ascending chromatic line in *Tristan* does follow Boulanger’s opening desire motif (as seen in Example 1a). However, this chromatic motion resides in an inner voice and is ultimately shrouded by the more prominent outer voices,
which only move a semitone. Thus, the rising response to the initial downward descent of the motif is covered melodically and amplified by parallel triadic motion. Boulanger separates the “real” answer to her desire motif entirely, making it the aforementioned “longing” motif in m. 11. The last prominent feature of Boulanger’s opening motif is the lack of silence between consecutive repetitions of the desire motif, providing a more restless character to the musical material and the ensuing story.

Of course the most striking difference between the two motifs is the absence of the illustrious Tristan chord. The Tristan chord serves as the source of much discussion in the analysis of *Tristan und Isolde*, primarily over the significance of the chord’s function and how does it or does not apply to the tonal center of the opera. Its removal, though, does not provide any insight to a tonal center in Boulanger’s composition. In its place resides only an empty D
octave, which moves down a semitone by the end of m. 2, the starting pitch for the next rendition of the desire motif. While Boulanger’s version does not have the Tristan chord, it is harmonically similar to Wagner’s by ending on a dominant seventh chord that does not actually resolve. The string of unrelated dominant seventh chords on C# in m. 2, F in m. 4, and so on generate tonal ambiguity and serve to create a restless environment from which the work progresses.

The two main differences of the opening desire motifs described here call into question the exact symbolic meaning of Boulanger’s motif. The Tristan chord’s purpose in Tristan und Isolde is to act as the entity that initiates the seemingly endless search for a resolution, one that is not fully provided until the very end of Wagner’s opera. This meaning is amplified by the longing, rising chromatic line that follows it. If these two aspects are missing, then how can the opening motif of Faust et Hélène designate the meaning of desire just as adequately? It is important to remember that while Boulanger draws upon Wagnerian motifs in Faust et Hélène, she does not necessarily incorporate his harmonic language. To reiterate, Boulanger had a time constraint of a month to compose a work that required certain musical elements. In order to present these abstract motivic ideas sufficiently, Boulanger relies on her own harmonic language, which moves rather quickly in a small span of measures. In this case, Boulanger uses the basic contour of the desire music from Tristan in order to identify that motif as the “desire” motif in this cantata. Overall, the same symbolic narratives are implied in both compositions.

The other motifs borrowed from Tristan und Isolde appear in their original form in Faust et Hélène with only minor modifications. The variation of Boulanger’s desire motif as seen in Example 2a has a similar contour to that of the “torch” motif from the prelude to Act II of Tristan (Example 2b). Wagner’s torch motif simultaneously indicates a physical action committed by one of the characters and an existential ideal significant to the greater philosophy
of the opera. In the literal sense, Isolde, upon Tristan’s appearance at the secluded garden where they meet, orders her handmaid, Brangaene, to extinguish the torch she is holding so that the couple may consummate their love in private. In the existential perspective, the extinguishing of the torch also represents Isolde’s rejection of the lies of the material world, known as the World of Day in the Wagnerian and Schopenhauerian philosophical framework, in favor of the magical World of Night that leads to the path of transcendence. Boulanger’s use of the “torch” motif does not seem to hold the same connotations that Wagner’s does in the greater scheme of the cantata. This rendition of Wagner’s motif seems to only be a variant of her own opening desire motif, since it is too early in the cantata to attach any significance to its presence. Boulanger’s variation of the desire motif moves on towards the first point of arrival of the four-semitone ascent of the actual desire motif in m. 11. This semi-climax at m. 11 initiates an emphasis on semitone melodic ascent that permeates the remainder of the introductory thirty measures of the cantata, saturating them with Tristan-esque associations of unfulfilled desire.

The torment motif is nearly identical in both intervallic content and harmonic character to Wagner’s “day” motive from the prelude of Act II of Tristan (Example 3b). Both are essentially comprised of a perfect fifth motion downwards followed by an ascent up of three notes. Boulanger embellishes her version of the motif further by starting it one note above Wagner’s original day motif and repeating the top note of the perfect fifth interval. The major difference between the two motifs lies in what they represent, though. Wagner’s day motif signifies Tristan’s ties to the World of Day that is ultimately negated by the torch motif, as explained above. Although Boulanger’s use of this motif does not directly indicate Faust’s materiality or display anything of an existential crisis on his part, it still refers to an existential issue that Faust faces in Goethe’s drama. The whole premise of Faust’s epic journey begins with his deal with
the devil, Méphistophélès, in order to leave his mundane life behind and discover the knowledge of the truth of the world. It is Méphistophélès’s goal, in keeping with his bet against God in the opening scene of the epic, to ensure that Faust does not succeed in his quest. That being said, this knowledge of Faust’s transcendental journey and his relationship with Hélène as a potential path towards this transcendence would only be known to those privy to Goethe’s original story in terms of this cantata, which certainly the jury of the competition would have been.

Boulanger’s conflation of the longing and torment motifs is yet another borrowing from Tristan, her last motivic tie to Wagner. His combined day/desire motif occurs in Act II Scene 2 before Tristan’s “Tagesgespräch” (Example 4b). At the most basic level of interpretation, the “Tagesgespräch” describes Tristan’s ties to the superficial World of Day and how he wishes to escape it. Wagner’s version of this combined motif, though, does not contain the four semitones of the desire music here. Instead, he extends the day motif one semitone further, which creates a connotation to the desire music. A closer rendition still to that of Boulanger’s is located at the climax of the following duet, “O sink herneider,” in the same scene (Example 5). A segment of the day motif appears three times in the four measures preceding Isolde and Tristan’s voices finally accumulate with the words, “selbst dann bin ich die Welt (I myself am the world)!” The day motif is then buried beneath the desire music, which moves chromatically from Ab to Cb in augmentation from its original form. Through motivic material, Wagner nullifies the superficiality of the day motif with the greater significance of the desire music, thereby enforcing the existential message of the music it accompanies and of the entire opera.

Even after comparing the motifs of Faust to those of Wagner, these interpretations of Boulanger’s torment motif and the desire motif might arouse disagreement. In Léonie Rosenstiel’s The Life and Works of Lili Boulanger, one of Boulanger’s two biographies, the
symbolic meanings claimed here are reversed. Rosenstiel states of the motifs in mm. 1-2 and then mm. 17-18, “The first, a somber theme that appears at the very beginning in the basses, seems to be an expression of Faust’s torment, of the state of his soul, as it were. The second appears to reflect the insatiable nature of his longing, a desire that nothing in life can satisfy.” However, Rosenstiel neglects the use of the motifs through the remainder of the composition in Example 5. Wagner, *Tristan* Act II, Scene 2

---

100 Rosenstiel, *Life*, 164-165.
her interpretation. The initial motif from mm.1-2 appears more frequently in the cantata as a signifier of Faust’s desire as opposed to the motif that Rosenstiel labels as such. For instance, the desire motif appears when Faust confesses to Méphistophélès that he has been dreaming of the devastatingly beautiful Hélène in mm. 70-71 (Example 6a). It also manifests in sequential harmonic motion while Faust euphorically calls out Hélène’s name when her apparition materializes in front of him (Example 6b).

In contrast, the musical material that Rosenstiel claims to represent desire only makes one further appearance in the cantata. In this instance, Méphistophélès questions Faust’s moral integrity of desiring another woman so shortly after his last love, Gretchen (referred to as Marguerite in this libretto), had committed suicide. Faust replies with the musical directions douloureux and abattu (painful and despondent), “Tastoi! Ne trouble pas encore ma conscience. Du seul remords que j’en voudrais banner (Quiet! My self-awareness is not blurred. I wish to be rid of my loneliness).” Beneath Faust’s exclamation, two statements of Boulanger’s rendition of the day motif sound quite clearly in mm. 81-83 and then again in mm. 84-85 (Example 7). What the torment motif refers to here, though, is something that had previously dragged Faust off his path for worldly knowledge. When Boulanger places the torment motif in reference to Gretchen, she is indicating a false path in Faust’s quest that ultimately did not deliver him transcendence. This is similar to the symbolic meaning of Wagner’s day motif as representing an undesirable outcome.

Paradoxically, Hélène is also a distraction from transcendence in Goethe’s drama. The sexual desire Faust expresses for Hélène clearly is a base human instinct, which is something he expects will lead him to transcendence in the actual drama. The difference between Gretchen and Hélène as false paths, though, is that Gretchen is merely a distraction while Hélène is an
attempted solution to Faust’s existential problem. The two types of desires Faust feels, the desire for worldly knowledge and the desire for company, are different for each woman. In this particular cantata, Hélène, though it is not overtly delineated, is a possible path to transcendence.  

Example 6a. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 67-73

along the same manner as *Tristan*. And so, for Rosenstiel to claim that the torment motif in this study represents “desire” of the same vein as that of the *Tristan* desire music is a mistake. As can be seen, the entirety of the prelude in Boulanger’s cantata is a sort of pastiche to *Tristan und*
*Isolde* that incorporates references to Tristan that ultimately lead her to articulate a quite different vision.

Example 6b. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 120-125

![Sheet Music](image-url)

Clearly, Boulanger relies quite heavily on these Wagnerian motifs in the construction of the prelude to the cantata. Though she uses these motifs to convey certain symbolic notions, Boulanger employs them to move through harmonic regions throughout the composition and the prelude represents a prime example of her compositional method. While the introduction begins in complete tonal ambiguity, Boulanger reaches the tonal area of B major in the span of only thirty measures. To accomplish this, the leitmotifs serve as an integral structural element to progress from no tonality to tonal center, mainly through intervallic relations and chromatic motion.
The opening of the prelude both indicates the theme of desire that will run through the rest of the work as well as create an ambiguous tonality. The two iterations of the desire motif in mm. 1-4 conclude with dominant functioning chords, C# and F, which have no relation to each other. These chords do provide the starting note for the next repetition of the motif; the C# in the bass of m. 2 acts as the first note of the desire motif in m. 3. The same pattern appears in m. 4, though the desire motif does not appear again in the consequent measure. Instead the bass descends a fifth lower by m. 7 to Bb, and ends the first phrase on an anticipation, A, of the next

Example 7. Boulanger, Faust mm. 80-85
phrase. Already by m. 8 Boulanger introduces the variation of the desire motif to begin the second phrase. At this point this motif ascends through various transpositions (refer to Example 2a). First, the starting pitch, D, transposes by a fourth to G in m. 9. This G moves to Bb in m. 10, and then third repetition moves from Bb as the starting pitch to the Db of m. 11, which is the first point of arrival in the prelude. After this Db moves down to C, a registral shift occurs and the four semitone ascent that is characteristic of Wagner’s desire music in Tristan finally emerges as the longing motif in Boulanger’s cantata (Example 8). Although the answer to the desire music does make the first point of arrival all the more significant, the second half of the original desire music is also very perplexing. For instance, why is the first half of the desire music answered so late? And how does it connect to the beginning of the prelude?

The second phrase needs to be further analyzed in order to successfully deconstruct this subject. The variations of the desire motifs that appear in succession in mm. 8-10 do not seem to offer much insight, as they do not unfold in consistent transpositions. The transpositions of the motifs occur first at a perfect fourth (D-G) but then twice at the minor third, G-Bb and Bb-Db (refer to Example 2a). The C that is reached by semitone descent in m. 11 connects the goal note of the successive desire variation motifs to the first note of the upcoming longing motif on the same pitch. However, because of the registral displacement of the longing motif, it is difficult to hear these two features as part of the same melodic line. Beneath the successive variation of desire motifs lay three separate chromatic lines in the inner and bass voices that ascend between m. 8-10. The most significant of these lines is the bass voice, which starts on a low D. For three measures the bass ascends through the octave chromatically until the end of m. 10 where an interruption occurs between B and Db. The missing pitch, C, appears at the start of m. 11 as the root of the dominant seventh chord present there. The Db juxtaposed to this C in the upper voice
acts as an appoggiatura and therefore places even greater emphasis on the dominant function of the C in this measure. The C that the bass reaches is the first note of the third appearance of the desire motif as well as the first pitch of the answering longing motif above it, which is perhaps the most significant aspect of this point of arrival in m. 11. Not only does this shared tone create an important connection between the two motifs here, but it also connects the longing motif to the desire motif’s parallel place in mm. 1-2.

Example 8. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 11-12

Boulanger then replicates this method from mm. 8-10 for the next phrase. Presumably to avoid using harmonic patterns of progression, Boulanger alters the last interval of the desire motif (originally Eb to D in m. 1, an ascending major seventh). The leap between m. 11 to the beginning of the next measure is Gb to Db, a perfect fifth, but in m. 12 to the start of the next iteration of the motif is Bbb (A) to B natural, only a major second. Chromaticism once more leads the harmonic progression of the work, and this time the chromatic line in the upper voice constitutes the melodic line in the form of the longing motif introduced in m. 11. While there is no consistent harmonic progression, this chromatic motion does lead to the construction of several dominant seventh chords beneath it. These dominant seventh chords, in which the root is C in m. 11, B in m. 13, and D in m. 15, add to the significance of the pitch C that was reached in
m. 11 and also form a harmonic link to the initial appearance of the desire motif in mm. 1-4, which had concluded with dominant sevenths.

Through mm. 11-15 the chromatic longing motif, prominent in the upper strings, rises in register with an increase in both dynamics and tempo (Example 9). Unlike the transposition pattern of the desire motif beneath it, the longing motif does follow a consistent pattern through mm. 11-16. The end of each repetition of the motif becomes the starting pitch of the next repetition, resulting in a transposition of a minor third each time. As to be expected, this pattern of transposition emulates a similar transposition pattern of the original Wagnerian motif in Tristan, further connecting the two compositions. In m. 16 the music suddenly slows down as the lower voice forfeits the desire motif in favor of joining the upper voice in rising chromatic motion. The abrupt allargando in conjunction with the rising crescendo and the mounting tension through the chromatic motion indicates the arrival to the most significant event thus far in the prelude. In m. 17 Boulanger reaches the climax of the prelude with the introduction of the torment motif. Besides the rhythmic modification from Wagner’s original motif, Boulanger also starts this motif one note above the starting pitch. This climatic pitch, F, is the highest note of the composition so far; even though E also had not been reached yet, this extension of one note increases the dramatic tension of the climax.

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on the use of chromaticism as the main engine of harmonic progression throughout the prelude. While there has yet to be any sign that Boulanger will move to a place of tonal stability, which is the B major section of m. 30, the climax at m. 17 finally foreshadows the upcoming tonal center. The torment motif included here is the first motif that Boulanger incorporates that contains mostly consonant intervals as opposed to the characteristic chromaticism. This is not to say that the music surrounding it is truly tonal;
the accompaniment is still very harmonically dense and chromatic. For instance, beneath the torment motif is a chromatic motion that descends in the bass from Db to C to B. That the bass reaches B by m. 18 is significant as well, though it is not yet heard as the tonal center (refer to Example 3a).

Example 9. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 13-16

It is the purpose of the ending of the introduction to make F# audible as the dominant of B through both intervallic manipulation of the motifs and overall chromatic motion. Continuing from the climax, the torment motif descends a perfect fourth, and overall this repetition sounds identical except the last three pitches are altered so that they move chromatically from E to F# (Example 10). The accompaniment underneath the torment motif in m. 19 is re-harmonized as dominant functioning chords that are related to each other through semitone descent. The chromatic motion takes precedence over harmonic function, as has been seen throughout the majority of the prelude to this point. The most important feature of the accompaniment is the G# in the bass of m. 20, which moves down by semitone to G before making the essential move to F# in m. 22. The arrival at F# is not the only aspect that makes this phrase significant, however. Even though another torment motif is provided in the melodic line, Boulanger modifies the drop of a perfect fifth down to the interval of a tritone, G to C#, in m. 21. Then the four note longing motif is attached to this C#, thereby resulting in the conflation of the torment and longing motifs (refer to Example 4a). The importance of this combined motif, even if the exact meaning is not
yet signified in the cantata at this point, is to provide prominence to the sound of the F# as a dominant functioning pitch.

Despite the significance of this event, Boulanger does not linger on the F# for long, as the F# becomes the first note of the next iteration of the desire motif. In m. 23, this motif transposes by a diminished fourth and moves away from the F#. Unexpectedly, the combined torment and longing motif remains at the same pitches in its next iteration in m. 23. As seen through this study, an exact repeat of musical material is rare in Boulanger’s compositional process. This particular repetition therefore has two effects. First, it bolsters the importance of the combined torment and longing motif by repeating it at pitch and reinforcing it in the ears of the audience. Second, the F# that was originally in the bass of the first appearance of the conflated motif is implied and solidified as part of the harmony, despite not actively being present in the second repetition.

In the consequent measure, Boulanger moves away from the combined day and desire motif and concentrates on only the desire motif. This rendition in m. 24 is altered, though, so that the last three notes ascend instead of descend. Additionally, a tritone is inserted between the C# and G at the end of the motif, mimicking the tritone that was inserted in the combined torment

Example 10. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 19-22
and longing motif (Example 11). These two notes of the tritone also enforce the F# that reappears in the bass of m. 26 as a dominant of B major. Not only does the G allow for Boulanger to approach the F# by semitone, but the C# creates a satisfying dominant to tonic motion (or in the context of B major, a secondary-dominant to dominant motion). The alternation of the desire motif also highlights a harmonic progression starting in m. 22. The transpositions of the desire motif between mm. 22-25 enharmonically result in the starting pitches F#-A# (Bb)-CX (D), an augmented triad. This augmented triad then completes its cycle in m. 26 by returning to F#. While the dominant of B major is moved away from briefly from m. 22, its return after cycling through the augmented triad creates a definitive arrival and a greater longing to resolve to B. With the F# now as the pedal in the bass, the D in the desire motif of the upper voice acts as an appoggiatura to the C#, the only note missing in the F# dominant chord beneath it. Even though the C# arrives late, it satisfies requirement needed for the expected B major section.

Example 11. Boulanger, Faust mm. 25-26

From here until the end of the prelude, the F# acts as a pedal in the bass and leaves no question as to how the tonality will unfold. The opening desire motif, which has now adopted the tritone in its last interval in m. 26, sequences above the pedal. Boulanger repeats the desire motif with this intervallic content at the same pitch, G, in mm. 28-29, except an octave lower. As the entire prelude decreases in energy and dynamics, Boulanger allows for one last move to the
dominant of B. After the last pedal F# in m. 29, the desire motif in m. 20 continues to descend from its last note B to A in m. 30. Boulanger thereby enforces two simultaneous actions. First, by descending in pitch in mm. 29-30 she makes yet another move to the dominant F# in m.31 at the start of the calmer, pastoral B major section. More importantly, Boulanger reverses the trajectory of the original desire motif from m. 1 (Example 12). Instead of the final note leaping up a minor seventh, it descends to the intended pitch by step. This final variation on the motif, the very motive that perpetuated the entire opening thirty measures, elegantly brings the whole prelude full circle.

Example 12. Boulanger, *Faust* mm. 28-30

**Conclusion**

In order to fully construct a narrative for any major event in history, numerous perspectives must be taken into account. In Boulanger's case, her win in the Prix de Rome of 1913 has myriads of implications. The burgeoning feminist movement in the social structure of France at the beginning of the century was certainly one major aspect of her victory. The groundwork formed by the previous women composers in the ten years proceeding Boulanger's success also had facilitated her success, attributing each one of
these women composers credit to her victory. Boulanger’s own personal history adds to
the depth of this narrative; as a young femme fragile, Boulanger was certainly the underdog
of the competition, making the first woman prizewinner in the competition all the more
impressive for the French press at the time.

However, Boulanger’s own hard work cannot just be assumed within the discussion
of this moment in music history. By taking a closer look into the music, even just the first
thirty measures as is done in this study, a whole new dynamic is revealed in the form of
Wagnerian aesthetics. By incorporating overt elements to Tristan und Isolde, Boulanger
both expedited her own compositional process and appealed to a popular element of
French musical aesthetics that the judges would emphatically appreciate. The long lasting
tradition of Wagnerian aesthetics in French music is certainly an attribute to Boulanger’s
victory that should be considered at the same level of importance as that of the socio-
historical perspective; in this way, Boulanger as a composer is contextualized back into the
narrative of this monumental musical event. While Boulanger did not become the definitive
sound of French culture as the Prix de Rome was meant to predict, she did represent a
voice that was oppressed in French music for centuries—that of women composers. By
succeeding in the Prix de Rome, Boulanger accomplished more than just defending her
family’s name or earning a stay at the Villa Medici, which Boulanger barely spent any time
at when she finally arrived there. She also legitimized the status of the French female
composer within the competition, allowing future female victors, such as Marguerite Canal
in 1920, Jeanne Leleu in 1923, and Elsa Barraine in 1929. Though Boulanger’s professional
career was short lived, she made an incredible impact on the social dynamic of composers,
all because of her exemplary cantata, Faust et Hélène.
Bibliography


