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Ravel and Roussel: Retrospectivism in *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *La Suite pour piano*

Urged by an increasingly pervading nationalism, many French composers at the beginning of the twentieth century sought to create unique French music by linking to their past musical traditions. This trend of the retrospective approach to musical composition is evident in the works of contemporary French composers such as Vincent d'Indy, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Albert Roussel. Of the latter two composers, however, personal stylistic traits differentiate their Retrospectivism on both the musical level and the aesthetic one.¹ Whereas Ravel uses the conventional as a foundation upon which deceptions and illusions are created, Roussel's usage shows a linear development of the past tradition. Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and Roussel's *La Suite pour piano*, op.14—both written originally for solo piano and using stylized dance forms—can demonstrate this difference in applying Retrospectivism in music.

Training and Background

To begin with, Ravel's and Roussel's musical backgrounds are far from being similar. A child of a Swiss father and a Basque mother, Ravel nevertheless possesses the true French spirit. Spending almost his entire life in Paris, he was able to be acquainted with the latest compositions and was enriched by both Parisian popular and high cultures. Ravel showed his musical talent at a young age. His earliest compositions date from 1887 when he was only twelve years old.² Two

¹ The word "Retrospectivism" is used rather than "Neoclassicism," since the former suggests a broader meaning of borrowing materials from the past tradition, particularly from pre-nineteenth century, whereas the latter associates with Stravinsky and Hindemith specifically, according to Scott Messing in his book *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic*, and Richard Taruskin's review of this book.

² Barbara L. Kelly, "Ravel, Maurice," *Oxford Music Online*, accessed 11 February 2012.

years later, he was admitted to the piano class at the Paris Conservatoire. There, he studied composition with Gabriel Fauré whom he admired greatly and dedicated several compositions. Yet the academic life for Ravel was not without obstacles. In 1900 he was dismissed from the composition class and in the next five years he repeatedly failed to win the Prix de Rome.³ He found unease in the academic realm, as these obstacles are partly due to his unwillingness to conform to the authority. Yet when he in 1902 joined les Apaches, a group of young musicians, poets and artistes who frequently met and shared thoughts on the newest artistic works, Ravel found this non-academic atmosphere encouraging and he enthusiastically participated in their activities. He even had a nickname “Rara” and invented a fictional member “Gomez de Riquet.”⁴ According to Léon-Paul Fargue, “Ravel shared our predilections, our weaknesses, our manias for Chinese art, Mallarmé and Verlaine, Rimbaud and Corbière, Cézanne and Van Gogh, Rameau and Chopin, Whistler and Valéry, the Russians and Debussy.”⁵

Aaron Copland suggests that Roussel was less gifted than Ravel.⁶ Whether or not this is true is questionable, yet Roussel did not show his musical gift as early as Ravel did. Born in Tourcoing, Roussel’s childhood was marked by unhappy incidents. He lost his father and mother in 1870 and 1877, respectively. His grandfather took care him for two years until 1879 when Roussel was handed over to Eugénie and Félix Réquillart, his aunt and uncle. Although he took piano lessons as early as 1880, Roussel focused on a navy career as he attended the Ecole Navale in 1887 and voyaged extensively until 1894. He recalled in an interview that he “felt very early a penchant for nature, later a well-marked taste for music. Yet I did not cultivate that but simply as

³ Ibid.

⁴ Arbie Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 4.

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Aaron Copland, *The New Music 1900-1960* (New York: Norton, 1968), 56.

an amateur”,⁷ Roussel did not begin a serious musical training until he resigned from the navy in 1894, and consequently settled in Paris and studied at La Schola Cantorum in 1898.⁸ There, he studied with Vincent d’Indy who later pointed him as professor of counterpoint at La Schola in 1902. Although he was a member of les Apaches and a regular visitor of Sunday evenings’ gatherings hosted by Ida and Cyprien Godebski who were close friends of Ravel,⁹ Roussel maintained a healthy relationship with conservative authority, especially with d’Indy, the director of La Schola. Roussel praised d’Indy’s Symphony in B-flat as “of the rare works whose value is augmented by the patina of time.”¹⁰ And he wrote a homage letter to d’Indy celebrating the latter’s eightieth birthday in 1931, and calling him “mon cher Maître.”¹¹ Yet Roland-Manuel, who studied composition under Ravel and Roussel, argued that Roussel’s music represents an extreme singularity, and it would be wrong to place him close to d’Indysme.¹² Some other scholars have also claimed that Roussel dissociated from d’Indy and La Schola in 1914 as he resigned from his teaching post.¹³ It is worth noticing that Roussel’s resignation was largely due to his eagerness to help his country at wartime rather than a personal distaste for d’Indy.¹⁴ Indeed, unlike Ravel, Roussel was at ease in commutating with the authority and he was equally apt in relating to his fellow musicians.

⁷ Nicole Labelle, ed., *Albert Roussel: Lettres et écrits* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 207.

⁸ Nicole Labelle, “Roussel, Albert.” *Oxford Music Online*, accessed 11 February, 2012.

⁹ Rollo H. Myers, *Ravel: Life and Works* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1960), 31.

¹⁰ Labelle, ed., *Albert Roussel*, 252.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹² Lévy Roland-Manuel, “Albert Roussel,” *La Revue musicale* (1922), 12.

¹³ Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France 1914-1940* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 214.

¹⁴ Labelle, ed., *Albert Roussel*, 47.

Influences and Preferences

Besides their dissimilar musical backgrounds, Ravel and Roussel each developed an individual predilection for earlier musical works and composers. Ravel drew influences from Mozart and Chopin.¹⁵ Of the former, He “looked upon himself as a Mozartian, in his view of melody, the melodic line, as distinct from the *thème développé*.”¹⁶ As one can see in many of his compositions, Ravel’s melodies, like those of Mozart, are mostly tuneful though sometimes having a flavor of folksong. Opposing to the “*thème développé*”, a concept more prominent in Germanic compositions indicating a theme that contains germinal development, Ravel strives for the pure lyricism in melody-writing. Of Chopin, Ravel’s incessant admiration can be traced to his frequent playing of Chopin’s works in his student days and later his article published in *Le Courrier musical* honoring the centenary of Chopin’s birth at 1910.¹⁷ Tellingly he quotes from Chopin: “nothing is more hateful than music without hidden meaning,”¹⁸ Ravel values highly the *arrière-pensée* in a composition, though the meaning of his compositions can sometimes be obscure and not easily accessible.

Quite differently, Roussel developed a love for Beethoven’s music at an early age as he studied with M. Stoltz, an organist at Saint-Ambroise at 1884. As Henri Gil-Marchex said, Roussel’s predilection “soon goes to [Beethoven’s] Seventh Symphony and the Pastoral Symphony, up to being eighteen-year-old, the composer of *Fidelio* [is] his only God.”¹⁹ Roussel’s particular interest of German Romantic art music can also be seen in his years at the navy service. “At Cherbourg,” said Roussel, “we get together in a room...we are impassionate

¹⁵ Ravel’s personal library contains largely contemporary works, including Debussy’s and Stravinsky’s. He seems not have a particularly interest in the music of Beethoven, Bach and composers before Bach.

¹⁶ Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader*, 421.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 337.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹⁹ Henri, Gil-Marchex, “La Musique de Piano d’Albert Roussel,” *La Revue musicale* (1929), 37.

during our free nights to play the classical sonatas and trios, which are restricted to the limited resources: Beethoven, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Grieg formed the foundation of our repertoire.”²⁰ Learning from these composers, Roussel inherited several characteristics of German Romantic music, particularly the “thème développé.” He once claimed that the search for form and development are his constant preoccupation.²¹ Although Roussel do have some memorable melodies in his compositions, his main focus is the development of the musical material, unlike Ravel’s major concern for lyricism. As for the meaning of his compositions, Roussel struggles for “pure music” in which “the artistic significance has nothing to do with reference in symbolism, the narration or the representation.”²² The *arrière-pensée*, which is essential for Ravel, seems not to be a crucial element in Roussel’s music.

SN vs. SMI

The different musical trainings and aesthetics Ravel and Roussel took separated them into two distinct musician groups: the Indépendants and the Scholistes, respectively. To understand the division of the musicians, it is necessary to familiarize with the musical environment in Paris during the beginning of the twentieth century. In light of the patriotic movement, Parisian musicians at that time were eager to organize concerts to preserve old French music and to promote new French composers. “Festival de musique française” and “Ligue nationale pour la défense de la musique française,” both organized in 1916,²³ are two fine examples. Among the patriotic musical organizations, two occupied a major place in promoting contemporary music:

²⁰ Labelle, ed., *Albert Roussel*, 204.

²¹ Alfred Cortot, *La Musique française de piano*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1944), 139.

²² Labelle, ed., *Albert Roussel*, 17.

²³ Michel Duchesneau, “La musique française pendant la Guerre 1914-1918: Autour de la tentative de fusion de la Société Nationale de Musique et de la Société Musicale Indépendante,” *Revue de Musicology* (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 1996), 128.

the Société Nationale de Musique (SN) and the Société Musicale Indépendante (SMI). The SN was founded in 1871 by d'Indy. Roussel, as a student of d'Indy, was a member of SN. Many of his compositions were première and performed at SN concerts, *La Suite pour piano*, op.14 was one of them. The SMI was founded in 1909 by Ravel. It thus became a major venue for Ravel to have his compositions performed, including *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. Although there were occasions when Roussel's compositions were at a SMI concert and Ravel's at a SN concert, Roussel was firmly affiliated with the SN, and Ravel with the SMI. Furthermore, it is not the performances that differentiate the two organizations, rather, the aesthetic and the associated institutions played major roles. The SN was heavily influenced by La Schola Cantorum, a school founded in 1894 by d'Indy aiming to revive the forgotten masterpieces before the common-practice era and to construct a radically different course system than the Paris Conservatoire.²⁴ Consistent with d'Indy's teaching and his own compositions, composers related with la Schola tend to emphasis on counterpoint, cyclical movements and extensive symphonic structures, all of which Roussel learned from d'Indy. The SMI was founded as a reaction against the SN and la Schola. In 1909, Ravel established SMI, "an organization 'independent' of the influence of la Schola."²⁵ The members of SMI were largely affiliate with the Paris Conservatoire, and some of them, including Ravel, are students of Gabriel Fauré who was nominated as the president of this organization. Having trained in the Paris Conservatoire, these composers are more concerned with harmony than with counterpoint, more with sensuous sound than with structural grandeur. As Pierre Lalo suggested: "the foundation [of the SMI] is an event of the battle, which has been going on several years between the partisans of the contrapuntal style, particularly in honor of

²⁴ Andrew Thomson, "Indy, Vincent d'," *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 19 March 2012)

²⁵ Michel Duchesneau, "Maurice Ravel et la Société Musicale Indépendante: 'Projet mirifique de concerts scandaleux'," *Revue de Musicologie* (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 1994), 257.

the Schola Cantorum, and the partisans of the harmonic style revitalized by Debussy.”²⁶ The battle between the two organizations was severe. During the wartime d’Indy tried to fuse the two organizations into one, yet this attempt concluded unsuccessfully.

Personal Connections

It is dangerous to assume that Ravel as an Indépendant did not have much sympathy for Roussel the Scholiste, and vice versa. A few evidences show the two composers’ a certain degree of appreciation toward each other. Roussel, in a letter to his wife addressing a concert in 1916 featuring his work as well as Ravel’s *Shéhérazade*, praised the latter that “the three melodies of Ravel [are] among the best things and for which the orchestration is charming.”²⁷ Moreover, Ravel and Roussel, together with André Caplet and Roland-Manuel, wrote a letter to *Le Courier musical* regarding Louis Vuillemin’s critique on German music, that they “would like to take this occasion to express the hope that patriotism error a bit less in an area where it has nothing to gain, but everything to lose...[they are] delighted in having been able to hear Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Luniare*.”²⁸ Despite this letter and a few comments on the composition, as well as being members of les Apaches, the personal connection between the two seldom exists. There is no direct correspondence, and their names barely appear in each other’s writings.

Retrospectivism in Context

Concerned with the popularity of German music in turn-of-the-century France, particularly that of Wagner, French composers fostered nationalism to counteract this phenomenon. The German music became significantly less admissible around 1900s among

²⁶ Ibid., 266.

²⁷ Labelle, ed., *Albert Roussel*, 57.

²⁸ Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader*, 204.

French audience.²⁹ At the same time, the French musicians tried to revive the French masterpieces of the past, thus born the Retrospectivism. The events and activities of the Retrospective movement can be summarized into three categories: the restoration of early music instruments, the revival of French composers before the nineteenth century, and the revitalization of pre-nineteenth-century forms and genres in newly composed works. First, musicians interested in early music sought to perform on the instruments similar to the ones the music originally composed for. Louis Diémer and Henri Casadesus formed two organizations dedicated to the restoration of such instruments, Société des instruments anciens in 1895 and Nouvelle Société des instruments anciens in 1901, respectively. Arguably the most well-known advocate of early music and early music instruments is Wanda Landowska, a Polish keyboardist championed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century repertoire. She had an extensive career in Paris, as she moved there in 1900 and performed frequently at la Schola Cantorum.³⁰ Besides being a performer, Landowska is the author of a book devoted to the revival of early music: *Musique ancienne*. Published in 1909, the year of Haydn's centenary, this book explicitly evokes the urgency of reviving old masterpieces. According to her, "we will be truly in our époque, since the great quality of the last century (the nineteenth century) has aroused us the taste of the retrospective, the sense of comparison and the pleasure of what is old, even though the old is less new than the new."³¹ In addition, Landowska considered the contemporary composers not necessarily superior than Bach, Mozart or Palestrina.³² Of the older masters, she frequently quoted François Couperin. Indeed, Couperin was in the center of this revival of the French tradition. The complete edition of his music and of Jean-Philippe Rameau's came forth at this

²⁹ Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor and London: U.M.I Research Press, 1988), 15.

³⁰ Lionel Salter, "Landowska, Wanda," *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 12 March 2012).

³¹ Wanda Landowska, *Musique ancienne* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1909), 256.

³² *Ibid.*, 24.

time. Furthermore, some institutions and organizations contributed to the Retrospective movement. La Schola Cantorum initially intended the restoration of the Catholic liturgy, in particular Gregorian chant and Palestrinian polyphony.³³ SN and SMI occasionally put pieces by François Couperin and by Rameau with that of contemporary composers in one concert. Of the third category, a trend of using pre-nineteenth-century forms and other musical elements such as ornaments and phrase structure developed among leading French composers around 1900s, as can be seen in many works of contemporary French composers. Since the French musicians regarded François Couperin and Rameau as the models of the true French tradition, it is not surprising that contemporary composers favored Baroque dance forms, which would remind one of the two masters as well as the France in its glorious time. Gabriel Fauré, the beloved maître of Ravel, used the Sicilienne, Gavotte and Minuet; Emmanuel Chabrier whom Ravel admired throughout his life wrote *Dix Pièces pittoresques*, which contains several dances; Vincent d'Indy of whom Roussel is a protégé composed numerous dance suites, including two specifically showing the influence of older styles: *Suite dans le style ancien* and *Douze petites pièces faciles dans le style classique de la fin du XVIIIe siècle*. Ravel and Roussel, though very different in character and style, did not remain untouched by the Retrospective movement. They both employed Baroque dance forms. *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *La Suite pour piano*, op.14 are fine examples, which we will be analyzing now.

Compositional Background of *Le Tombeau* and *La Suite*

In comparing *Le Tombeau de Couperin* with *La Suite pour piano*, two aspects will be considered: the employment of stylized dance forms as associated to the Retrospective

³³ Andrew Thomson, "Indy, Vincent d'," *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 19 March, 2012)

movement, and the compositional differences present in both pieces. First, the pieces are essentially dance suites; yet whereas *Le Tombeau* is one of many instances where Ravel favored stylized dance forms, *La Suite* is the only composition before the War that Roussel used dance forms. One can easily trace Ravel's predilection for pre-nineteenth century forms throughout his career, from *Menuet antique* (1895) and *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899), to *Sonatine* (1903-5) and to *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911) and *Le Tombeau* (1914-17), to mention only the works for piano. For Roussel, pre-nineteenth century forms gained their importance only after the War near the end of his career. He composed *Three Pieces* and *Prelude and Fugue* for piano in 1934 to 1935, and the *Suite in F* for orchestra in 1927. Unlike Ravel's use of stylized forms, which are deep in the tissue of his compositions, Roussel's use before the War suggests a mere temporal interest. As Scott Messing claims, "the *Suite pour piano* clearly [was] exceptional departure form [Roussel's] preponderant pre-war language. Only after 1920 did [his] output suggest a greater reliance upon early sources."³⁴

Besides the unequal level of interest in utilizing dance forms, the two composers had quite different circumstances and approaches in composing these two pieces. For Ravel, *Le Tombeau* comes from an exercise of transcribing François Couperin's Forlane in July 1914.³⁵ The next three years interrupted Ravel's composing career, as he served as an ambulance driver during the War. His patriotism led him to compose a piece that contributes to the old French value. The result was *Le Tombeau*, a piece "[as] the homage addresses less in reality only to Couperin himself, than to the eighteenth-century French music."³⁶ *Le Tombeau* thus

³⁴ Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music*, 38.

³⁵ Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 190.

³⁶ Roland-Manuel, "Esquisse autobiographique" in Jacques Bonnaure, ed., *Ravel par lui-même et ses aims* (Paris: Editions Michel de Maule, 1987), 43.

unmistakably fostered French nationalism by referring to the past French tradition, which lies in the heart of the Retrospective movement.

Unlike Ravel who regarded *Le Tombeau* as a serious manifestation of the French tradition, Roussel treated *La Suite* rather as one of his minor compositions. From September to November 1909, Roussel and his wife traveled to Indies and Cambodia. *La Suite* was written shortly after their return. There is only one instance where Roussel talks about the composing process of this piece. In his letter to Georges Jean-Aubry in March 18, 1910, he said: “I am working on my Suite for Piano, which I hope should be finished in about fifteen days, yet Selva will not play it before next winter.”³⁷ Blanche Selva, whom Roussel mentioned in this letter, is the dedicatee of this piece. Different from Ravel’s dedicatees of *Le Tombeau*—his six friends killed during the war—who carry significance concerning personal histories and patriotism as a whole, Blanche Selva is Roussel’s colleague at La Schola where Selva, a French pianist, studied and taught from 1901 to 1922.³⁸ In fact, Roussel did not mention directly the reason for which he composed *La Suite*. Yet based on the dedication and the composition year 1909 which coincides with Haydn’s centenary and Landowska’s publication of her *Musique ancienne*, one may speculate that *La Suite* is Roussel’s personal reaction to the Retrospective movement, hence the dances; and to the friendship with Selva, hence the piano.

Le Tombeau

Le Tombeau de Couperin represents Ravel’s approach in conveying his own style in a retrospective framework. That is, the Baroque dances lie as the scene in the foreground behind

³⁷ Labelle, ed., *Albert Roussel*, 38.

³⁸ Charles Timbrell, “Selva, Blanche,” *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 26 March 2012).

which Ravel creates illusions and sometimes “imposture,” in his pupil Roland-Manuel’s words.³⁹ On the surface level, Ravel creates conformity to the conventional in meter, mood, form, phrase structure and ornaments. *Le Tombeau* consists of six movements: Prélude, Fugue, Forlane, Rigaudon, Menuet and Toccata.⁴⁰ As Alfred Cortot suggested, the six movements can be properly divided into three groups: Prélude and Fugue, three dances and Toccata.⁴¹ In terms of following the conventions of the forms, Ravel strictly employs binary or ternary structure, appropriate meter and mood in the dances. The Forlane is a lively court dance in 6/8 meter; the Rigaudon a folk dance in duple meter; and the Menuet a dignified one in triple meter. All three dances are in ternary structure with similar outer sections, i.e. ABA’. In the Rigaudon, the beginning of B section is marked clearly by a change of material, key signature, tempo and mood in m.37. The return of the A section in m.93 is almost literal; Ravel only omits the repeat and thickens the first chord in m.93. The Menuet unfolds in a similar fashion, the B section (mm.33-72), a musette, contrasts sharply with the previous and the following music. The Coda (mm.105-128), which is based on the A sections material, decreases the forward motion and leads to a peaceful conclusion. One may argue that there are three different groups of material instead of two in the Forlane. That is, this dance is in ABCA-Coda structure. Yet on a larger scale, the Forlane still represents a three-fold organization: A sections (mm.1-28) as an exposition,⁴² B (mm.29-53) and C (mm.61-92) sections as a departure from the exposition, and the return of A section (mm.93-120) as a restatement. The prelude, though not a stylized dance, appears frequently in a dance suite. Ravel followed this convention, and his Prélude also appears to have

³⁹ Roland-Manuel, “Maurice Ravel ou l’esthétique de l’imposture,” Jacques Bonnaure, ed., *Ravel par lui-même et ses amis* (Paris: Editions Michel de Maule, 1987), 189. The meaning of the French word “imposture” is close to fraud.

⁴⁰ Due to limited time and space, only the Prélude, Forlane, Rigaudon and Menuet are discussed in this paper.

⁴¹ Cortot, *La Musique française de piano*, 48.

⁴² “Exposition” here does not relate to a sonata structure sense.

clear formal structure. It is in binary form with a coda, i.e. AB-Coda. Following the second repeat of the A Section, the B section (mm.34-82) starts after the double bar.

Ravel seems strict and conventional in organizing sections to create a clear larger structure. His phrases appear to show the same conventionality. Most of them have a clear beginning and an end, some form an antecedent-consequent pair, and others are also balanced in length. The opening phrase in the Menuet (mm.1-8) is an antecedent-consequent pair, with the cadences in mm.4 and 8. Although not an antecedent-consequent pair, the first phrase (mm.1-8) in the Forlane also displays balance: the second half (mm.5-8) is the exact repetition of the first half (mm.1-4), and the cadences fall on the downbeat of mm.5 and 9.

The above analysis may suggest that Ravel showed much respect to the traditional and followed it meticulously. Upon closer examination, however, the meticulousness is rather an illusion, which Ravel carefully constructed through creating ambiguities in the music. Although all the three dances confirm to a ternary structure, the division of sections in the Forlane and in the Menuet raise doubt. In between the B section (mm.29-53) and the C section (mm.61-92), Ravel inserted the opening eight-measure phrase (mm.53-60) of the A section. This brief return of A material is rather too short to stand on its own as a separate section; yet since these eight measures unmistakably restate the music from the A section, it thus cannot be grouped with the B section before nor with the C section after. Another instance of ambiguity brings into question in the Menuet. Although it seems that the return of the A section should be at m.73, the left hand, however, still plays accompaniment part from the B section, i.e. the musette. This discrepancy between the music in the right hand and that in the left hand creates difficulty to decide where the A sections properly returns, whether in m.73 or in m.81.

The instances of ambiguity present in the phrases are no less than that in the formal structure. The opening phrase in the Rigaudon consists of eight measures, repeated. Being neither an antecedent-consequent pair nor a balanced phrase, the eight measures seem to contain a two-measure opening gesture, a four-measure building-up and a two-measure concluding gesture. This concluding gesture, however, does not necessarily have a strong cadence: the V chord on the second beat in m.7 should resolve to I in m.8, yet no convincing tonic chord appear in m.8 for all of them are additive harmonies. In the repeat of this eight-measure music, one finds the expected I chord on the second beat in m.2. Thus, it may suggest that this phrase should be flipped, beginning with mm.3-8 and followed by mm.1 and 2. In the Prélude, mm.7-13 should be two four-measure phrases with the first one starts in m.7 and concludes in m.10 and the second begins in m.10 and finishes in m.13. Yet there are only total of seven measures, m.10 serves both as the end of the first phrase and the start of the second. Such elision eludes the pre-assumed balance of the phrase structure. Another type of ambiguity can be seen in mm.79-82 in the Prélude. Although the right hand rigorously keeps four groups of three sixteenth notes in each measure, the slur over the left-hand music shows a forward shift of half a measure, creating a weak-beat grouping different from the grouping in the right hand.

In addition, Ravel tried to evoke the sound of the French Baroque music by emphasizing on the precision of details. The ornaments, or agréments, appeared frequently in the music of François Couperin and Rameau. Landowska quoted Couperin in her *Musique ancienne*, that he “had marked the appropriate ornaments in [his] pieces...listen to the people who learned them without committing to it. It is a negligence that is not pardonable.”⁴³ Ravel inherited this practice and used ornaments in *Le Tombeau*, specifically in the Prélude, the Forlane and the Menuet.

⁴³ Landowska, *Musique ancienne*, 183.

Most of them are mordants on strong and/or important beats. It seems that Ravel once again confirms to the conventional, yet he intentionally avoided satisfactory final cadences in several movements of *Le Tombeau*. Via the ornaments, Ravel creates illusion of writing in an eighteenth-century style. The stylish ornaments, however, cannot compensate for having unsatisfactory final cadences. The final chords in the Forlane lacks the third-degree note, which is essential in determining the quality of the chord. The Menuet ends untraditionally with an expected G-9th chord. Although the Prélude finishes with a complete e minor chord, the F-sharp of the previous measure is held over by the pedal, thus the creating an additive rather than a pure e minor harmony.

La Suite

In comparison with Ravel's *Le Tombeau*, Roussel's *La Suite* shows a radically different approach in incorporating retrospective elements. Except for using stylized Baroque dance forms, there are almost no resemblances between the two works. *Le Tombeau*, as analyzed above, is a deception of the conventional; *La Suite*, on the other hand, is a sincere development from the traditional. Upon first glance, one may notice that the dances do not resemble those of eighteenth-century stylized dances; yet the manner by which Roussel develops the musical materials grows directly from the conventional practice, particularly in aspects such as phrase structure, and organization and development of musical ideas.

La Suite contains four movements: Prélude, Sicilienne, Bourée and Ronde. As Demuth pointed out, this composition has "the sprit of dance, but not letter of dances."⁴⁴ Indeed, except the Sicilienne, which Roussel did keep the meter and the mood of an eighteenth-century

⁴⁴ Norman Demuth, *Albert Roussel: A Study* (London: United Music Publishers, 1947), 97.

Sicilienne, all other movements do not conform to their eighteenth-century models. The Prélude does not function as a prelude. That is, rather than being introductory passage to the following movements, it is fully developed on its own—lasting almost seven minutes, which makes the Prélude the longest movement in *La Suite*. Written in 3/8 with no upbeat, the Bourée, as Little claimed, “bears no resemblance to the Baroque form.”⁴⁵ The Ronde appeared rather infrequently in an eighteenth-century dance suite.

Although the movements in *La Suite* are unconventional stylized dances, the formal structure does show a conventional approach. It is true that unlike the movements in Ravel’s *Le Tombeau*, which are mostly in simple binary or ternary forms, the movements in Roussel’s *La Suite* evolve into larger formal structures. The division of sections, however, is not as problematic as in *Le Tombeau*. The Prélude embodies a quasi-sonata structure: after the introduction (mm.1-12), the first theme in F-sharp minor comes in m.13 and the second theme in B-flat major in m.35. The Development starts in m.48. Following the brief retransition (mm.88-89), the Recapitulation changes the order of the themes, i.e. the second theme in F-sharp major arrives first in m.90 and the first theme in F-sharp minor in m.107. The Sicilienne is in a binary form, the A’ section (mm.26-65) develops the music originally presented in the A section (mm.1-25). The Bourée follows an ABA’ pattern. The B section (mm.112-186) begins after the double bar with a complete change of mood, thematic material, rhythm and dynamic. The Ronde presents a slight complexity concerning form, yet with no less clarity. Succeeding the A section (mm.1-26) and B section (mm.27-46), a developmental section (mm.47-81) unfolds until in m.82 when the A’ section (mm.82-99) starts. A Coda (mm.126-142) concludes the piece after the B’ section (mm.100-125).

⁴⁵ Meredith Ellis Little, “Bourée,” *Oxford Music Online* (accessed 31 March 2012)

The phrase structure in *La Suite*, like the formal structure, stays on the conservative side. It is not to say that Roussel did not use asymmetrical phrases or there are no ambiguities in the phrase structure; rather, most of the phrases show sincere respect of the conventional practice, as they fall on roughly three categories: antecedent-consequent pair, sequential and transitional passage based on repeated musical figures. In the *Sicilienne*, the phrase in mm.29-32 shows a fine example of an antecedent-consequent pair. The two-measure antecedent is answered by a consequent in equal length, which also shares similarities in the first halves (compare m.29 to m.31). Another instance can be found in the opening phrase (mm.1-8) of the *Sicilienne*. Again, the consequent (mm.5-8) resembles the antecedent (mm.1-4) in the first half. Sequences frequently appear in *La Suite*. In the *Sicilienne*, the melody in mm.33-34 is transposed a perfect fifth up in mm.35-36, and perfect fourth up in mm.37-38 and again a perfect fifth up in the following two measure. In the *Bourée*, mm.199-204 is transposed a minor third above in mm.205-210. The transitional passages also have numerous recurrences. In the *Prélude*, mm.40-47 serves as a transition to the Development, which starts in m.48. These six measures are all built on repetition of small musical ideas. Similarly, mm.233-243 in the *Bourée* represents such transitional passage as well.

Besides the formal and phrase structures, one of the most distinguishable differences in *Le Tombeau* and *La Suite* is thematic development. For Ravel, the themes, or better labeled as melodies, generally do not vary much during the course of several recurrences. He prefers strict repetition of the melodies, or sometimes with minor alterations such as change of pitch level, ornaments, and other details in the accompaniment. And the returns of his melodies usually keep the same length as the original. As Kaminsky pointed out, the “musical motion in Ravel results

from varied repetition of musical objects and musical dance units.”⁴⁶ The repetition, rather than development, is essential in Ravel’s treatment of themes. Roussel, in this regard, treated his themes as raw materials, which he constantly manipulated and developed. This practice is nothing new; Roussel inherited this “*thème développé*” probably from his trainings at La Schola and his predilections for the German nineteenth-century composers. There are numerous examples in *La Suite* that can demonstrate this development of themes. In the *Bourée*, the four-measure theme (mm.23-26) at the beginning of the A section transforms and develops several times during the A and the A’ sections. First, it changes pitch level and left hand accompaniment in mm.35-38 and in mm.53-56. Then in mm.80-83, both hands take this theme alternatively. This theme in the A’ section experiences more major transformations. Roussel added a two-measure ascending gesture (mm.203-204) following the theme at mm.199-202. In mm.258-261, the left-hand accompaniment of the theme changes completely from light eighth-note (mm.23-27) and sixteenth-note (mm.187-190) figures to the powerful chords. Not only the texture of this accompaniment varies, this dynamic level and the mood also change significantly from piano to fortissimo, and from playful to forceful.

In addition, whereas Ravel concentrates on the details such as the ornaments and the repetition of phrases in *Le Tombeau*, Roussel concerns himself more with the larger structure and the cyclical character, which he learned from La Schola. Each movement in *La Suite* is considerably longer than that in *Le Tombeau*, as Roussel carefully developed the themes rather than merely restating them as Ravel did in *Le Tombeau*. Roussel inherited the goal-oriented aesthetic common in nineteenth-century German music, as can be traced through the tempo and expression markings in the *Prélude*. In the beginning, he indicated “somber” and “very slow”

⁴⁶ Peter Kaminsky, ed., *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2011), 137.

(très lent) to portray the distanced landscape. As the themes unfold, the music accelerates with more agitation (plus agité dans l'expression). The climax passage starting in m.69 reaches a moderate fast tempo and is specified "very energetic" (très énergique). Roussel marked in m.89 "calming down little by little" (en calmant peu à peu), and finally this movement is back in its original tempo with the gradual dissipation of sound. This Prélude on a whole creates an arch shape in terms of tempo and expression. The elaborate climax in the middle contrasts sharply with the gloomy beginning and end. This is typical in Roussel's music. According to Kelkel, such structure and dramaturgy maintained till his final compositions.⁴⁷ Contrary to Roussel's Prélude, Ravel's Prélude in *Le Tombeau* remains a single mood despite the occasional crescendos to fortissimo. This single mood is captured in multiple perspectives rather than being developed gradually.

Moreover, the cyclical character in *La Suite* helps Roussel construct a more cohesive composition. In the Prélude, the theme of the Ronde presents as a countermelody in mm.90-91. Brief and subtle as it is, this instance of cyclical character nevertheless shows Roussel's concept of unifying the four movements as a whole.

Conclusion

As Messing argued, French composers, in the period immediately preceding the War, intended to "betoken a reverence for the classical past in their works...[They] had recourse to the employment of recognizable conventions derived from a pre-nineteenth-century repertoire...[in order to] count on their audiences to make the appropriate musical and cultural connections."⁴⁸ That is, the French composers relied on using retrospective musical elements

⁴⁷ Menfred Kelkel, *Albert Roussel: Musique et esthétique* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1989), 159.

⁴⁸ Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music*, 59.

such as stylized dance forms to declare their national identity and to further cultivate their patriotism. Although many French composers participated in this Retrospective movement, they did not incorporate retrospective elements in a unified manner of expression. Maurice Ravel and Albert Roussel, to varying degrees were under influence of the Retrospective movement, applied the conventional into their music very differently. Lockspeiser even claimed, “In almost every respect the two composers are utterly dissimilar.”⁴⁹

Indeed, from their musical training, aesthetics, to performing groups and venues, Ravel and Roussel had little in common. Ravel has been regarded the composer who has captured the true “French spirit.” Cortot once said, “Ravel [is] the most sufficient witness of national aspirations...[his works] has enriched the musical patriotism of our time.”⁵⁰ He also claimed that Ravel’s *Le Tombeau* could honor the French the best.⁵¹ Lockspeiser equally considers Ravel as “the very embodiment of the French spirit in music.”⁵² Inheriting Rameau’s “l’art pour cacher l’art” (art for hiding art), Ravel’s music has “emotional depth [which] is concealed behind its hard, sculptured, classically ordered form.”⁵³ As can be demonstrated in *Le Tombeau*, the retrospective elements that Ravel integrated in the music are like a beautiful antique veil under which the unconventional is hidden. Roland-Manuel argued, “[art] in Ravel’s eyes is not the supreme truth, but the most brilliant invention: a marvelous imposture...none of Ravel’s works was not initially a pastiche.”⁵⁴ Although it might be overstated, Ravel did construct an illusion and in *Le Tombeau*: the superficially strict and conventional form, phrase structure, and details such as the ornaments are objects that he intended for deception. By creating ambiguities

⁴⁹ Edward Lockspeiser, “Roussel and Ravel,” *Music & Letters* (Oxford University Press, 1938), 248.

⁵⁰ Bonnaure, ed., *Ravel par lui-même et ses amis*, 18.

⁵¹ Cortot, *La Musique française de piano*, 48.

⁵² Lockspeiser, “Roussel and Ravel”, 249.

⁵³ Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, Samuel R. Rosebaum, trans. *Maurice Ravel: variations on his life and work* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1969), 174.

⁵⁴ Bonnaure, ed., *Ravel par lui-même et ses amis*, 190.

between the conventional and the unconventional, Ravel successfully reconciled them into one musical illusion.

Roussel is the “antithesis” of Ravel, according to David Drew.⁵⁵ Unlike Ravel who was considered a musical genius at a very young age and has achieved to be a leading force in French contemporary music shortly after Debussy’s death in 1918, Roussel, though a major composer of the early twentieth-century France, did not attain such reputation as early as Ravel: only after the War did his reputation grow internationally. The peak of his career is around his sixtieth birthday in 1929, when *la revue musicale* devoted a special issue to him.⁵⁶ One may argue that the appeal of Roussel’s music is limited compared to that of Ravel.⁵⁷ In fact, whereas Ravel creates sensuous sound and refined upon details, Roussel “pruned away the decorative elements in his texture and developed a lean, forceful style, tremendously earnest and sincere in purpose.”⁵⁸ As can be seen in *La Suite*, the sincere development from the traditional contrasts dramatically with Ravel’s illusionist approach. Gil-Marchex compared Roussel to Beethoven, suggesting that the two composers’ music show austerity and mysteriousness, and the clumsy boldness is used as a source of expressions.⁵⁹ Rather than concerning refined details, Roussel emphasized more on the grandeur of the formal structure and the thematic development, a tradition inherited from the nineteenth-century German composers.

⁵⁵ David Drew, *European Music in the Twentieth Century* (Westport and Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1957), 238.

⁵⁶ Henry Doskey, *Albert Roussel* (Indiana University, 1980), 12.

⁵⁷ Lockspeiser, “Roussel and Ravel”, 248.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Gil-Marchex, “La Musique de Piano d’Albert Roussel”, 36.

Further Studies

Besides *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Ravel had many other works under the influence of the Retrospectivism movement. One may explore how these compositions are connected musically or aesthetically. Most of Roussel's retrospective works were written after the War. One may compare these works with *La Suite*, which is one of his earliest instances of using stylized dance forms. The retrospective compositions of other contemporary French composers such as Vincent d'Indy and Gabriel Fauré are also worth examining. The Retrospective movement also had impact on other European composers at the beginning of the twentieth century. One may trace the relationship between Nationalism and Retrospectivism through musical compositions.

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