

# Gabriel Fauré's Counterpoint

## A Case Study of the Nocturnes

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This essay investigates the first themes of Fauré's piano Nocturnes from a contrapuntal perspective. Using Schenkerian reductive techniques, the paper examines how the tonic produces consonant backgrounds in these themes despite the sometimes discontinuous seeming harmonic progressions in the foreground. In particular, the essay demonstrates how different phases of the tonic harmony can be heard to underly reasonably long passages in Fauré's Nocturne themes. They can take the form of direct unfurlings of the tonic harmony through arpeggiation, but also phases moving through various positions of the tonic harmony. The paper also details the unusual support for linear progressions and chordal extensions that permeate Fauré's themes. All these results extend and augment findings by Fauré scholars such as James Sobaskie and Edward Philips, who argue that Fauré's tonality is obscured by various kinds of techniques. This paper argues that while this is indeed the case, there are also elements of tonality that are readily available to the listener.

Der Beitrag untersucht aus einer kontrapunktischen Perspektive die ersten Themen von Faurés Nocturnes für Klavier. Unter Verwendung Schenkerianischer Reduktionstechniken wird untersucht, wie die Tonika in den Themen, entgegen diskontinuierlich erscheinender Harmoniefortschreitungen im Vordergrund, konsonante Hintergründe erzeugt. Insbesondere wird gezeigt, wie verschiedene Phasen der Tonika längere Passagen eines Themas tragen. Diese Phasen können in Form direkter Entfaltungen der Tonika bestehen, aber auch verschiedene Umkehrungen der Grundtonharmonie durchlaufen. Der Beitrag beschreibt zudem auch die ungewöhnliche Unterstützung linearer Fortschreitungen und Akkorderweiterungen in Faurés Themen. Die analytischen Ergebnisse erweitern und ergänzen die Erkenntnisse von Fauré-Forschern wie James Sobaskie und Edward Philips. Hatten diese argumentiert, dass Faurés Tonalität durch verschiedene Techniken verschleiert wird, so zeigt der Beitrag ergänzend, dass es immer noch Anhaltspunkte für Tonalität gibt, die sich leicht erschließen lassen.

SCHLAGWORTE/KEYWORDS: counterpoint; Fauré; Kontrapunkt; Nocturnes

Reconsidering and rehabilitating the music of Gabriel Fauré has been the chief focus of Fauré research since the first reflections on his art were propagated after his death. In 1945, in the introduction to his translation of Charles Koechlin's *Gabriel Fauré* from 1927, Leslie Orrey wrote of the United Kingdom that "[t]here are signs in this country that Gabriel Fauré is at last about to receive some of the recognition due to him."<sup>1</sup> This came even after a young Aaron Copland's early intervention in favor of Fauré after his study in France in 1924: "The position of Gabriel Fauré in the contemporary musical movement is, in several respects, curious and unique. Perhaps no other composer has ever been so generally ignored outside his own country, while at the same time enjoying an unquestionably eminent reputation at home."<sup>2</sup> Any accrued recognition has not resulted in a settled view of the construction of Fauré's musical language: as recently as 2018, Darryl White felt the need to attempt an overhaul of Fauréan harmonic research, suggesting that

1 Koechlin 1927, vii.

2 Copland 1924, 48.

we view the music as constructed out of tonal layers that contradict one another.<sup>3</sup> Previous theorists such as James Sobaskie and Edward Phillips propose broadly Schenkerian perspectives of Fauré, though emphasizing the unusualness of his harmonies, while early writers took a continuity view of Fauré as a development of earlier masters such as Chopin and Schumann.<sup>4</sup> This flux of perspectives perhaps reflects the anxiety expressed by Copland that Fauré's musical language would be misunderstood:

One must therefore guard against thinking that just because Fauré deals only with rational harmonies, he must be enjoyed immediately or not at all. This point cannot be too greatly emphasized. Whatever is true of the difficulty encountered in grasping Schoenberg's later manner is equally true of Fauré, though he be at opposite poles of the harmonic globe.<sup>5</sup>

Copland's emphasis on the rationality of Fauré's harmonies resonates with the much later ascription by Robert Orledge, who wrote that "Fauré was first and foremost a harmonist."<sup>6</sup> To be sure, the chordal sonorities we find in Fauré are much more tonally derived than those of his early twentieth century contemporaries Arnold Schoenberg, Alexander Scriabin, and Béla Bartók. Yet the question arises, in what way does Fauré's music challenge us despite how rational his harmonies appear? To address these matters, in this essay I will take a distinctly contrapuntal approach to a case study of Fauré's Nocturnes, a piano genre that persisted with Fauré throughout the three periods of his musical career.

Most studies of Fauré's musical language start with descriptions of his *Mémoires*. Edward Phillips writes that "the genre of art song so pervades Fauré's compositional output [that it] makes it the logical starting point for an examination of the development of his harmonic language."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, James Sobaskie pursues Fauré's *Mémoires* as the proving ground for his theory. I will complement these perspectives with a thorough study of the Nocturnes. Both Phillips's and Sobaskie's work deals in main part with the larger sense of harmony: the obscuring of a tonal background by unusual foreground sonorities. While the present essay touches on foreground sonorities, my chief focus is the ways in which musical lines are placed against other musical lines. As Sobaskie describes, a distinctive Fauréan musical trait is the so called "long line."<sup>8</sup> In musical terms, these are voices that move across a long span through conjunct motion in a single direction. I will return to this topic specifically in the section "Linear Progressions," but it is worth noting for now that Fauré's musical language develops not just from harmony, but also through melody. Despite Orledge's injunction that in Fauré's music "melody was 'inseparable,' and a 'sort of emanation' from the harmony, its *raison d'être*."<sup>9</sup> I pursue an analytical method developed from the perspective of melody and counterpoint first, and harmony second.

3 See White 2018 particularly chapter 2.

4 See Sobaskie 1999, 2003; Phillips 1993; Koechlin 1927; Nectoux 1991.

5 Copland 1924, 50.

6 Orledge 1979, 235.

7 Phillips 1993, 3.

8 Sobaskie writes of the *Mémoire* "Accompagnement" that it "exhibits another distinctive trait of Fauré's middle-period music: the 'long line.' Its opening section's vocal part, which declaims the first stanza of Samain's poem, expresses a single, comprehensive, stepwise ascending melodic gesture. Schenkerian analysis is well suited to illuminating this feature" (2003, 230).

9 Orledge 1979, 235.

Fauré's thirteen Nocturnes span his entire career: his first was composed in 1875, while his last comes from 1922. Jean-Michel Nectoux wrote that "[t]he obstinacy he showed in continuing to write for the [piano] proves how important it was for him"<sup>10</sup> despite Fauré's piano works having never found the same degree of acclaim as his *Mémoires* or larger vocal works such as the *Requiem* or *Prométhée*. His piano works provide a useful case study of Fauré's language more generally, featuring many of the same pianistic textures as his *Mémoires*, and a similarly ascetic late style. In the present essay I will limit my comments to the openings of the Nocturnes, as they convey the clearest sense of governing tonic and tonality. Across this small corpus of piano works, we detect a changing degree of tonal clarity between the Chopinesque Nocturne No. 1 and the somewhat ambiguous peregrinations of Nocturnes Nos. 11 to 13.

The main thrust of Phillips's and Sobaskie's research has been to describe the ways that Fauré occludes his tonal structures through foreground ambiguities or complexities. Phillips describes three concepts that support this view: the smokescreen, the mirror, and prismatic writing. These poetic descriptions are presented to mean slightly different things in different contexts, but some concrete examples can be found through his essay:

The imputation of the 'wrong' function to a harmony at one level of structure while that harmony proceeds in its 'right' function at a deeper level is the technique to which the word '*mirror*,' in the title of this essay, refers.<sup>11</sup>

Fauré uses false dominant harmonies elsewhere in 'En Sourdine' to place a *smoke-screen* about underlying, middleground structures.<sup>12</sup>

[...] and the subsequent bars of false harmonic motion represent the first stage of what I shall call Fauré's *prismatic* writing, in which the underlying structure is refracted and distorted by tonal relationships at the foreground level."<sup>13</sup>

In short, for Phillips, features that obscure the diatonic background are functionally unusual foreground harmonies, false function dominants, and "false harmonic motion." Despite Phillips's Schenkerian approach, his three concepts focus on foreground harmonic behavior, reflecting the view that Fauré is first and foremost a harmonist. Sobaskie deals more directly with issues of middleground counterpoint: his concept of diffused tonality resides in features such as a missing fundamental line, though also in the foreground avoidance of the leading tone.<sup>14</sup> Sobaskie builds his argument on the background analysis of the entire Fauré *Mémoires*, whereas my approach takes a more local approach to counterpoint. I identify three common Fauréan approaches to counterpoint at the beginning of his Nocturnes: the expansion of the initial tonic through the expansion of the harmony by 5-6 shifts; the license of contrapuntal use of chordal extensions such as 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths; and the unusual treatment of linear progressions (also known as *Züge*). These categories of contrapuntal treatment complement and support Phillips and Sobaskie; many of the features I find contribute to the effects of a 'diffused tonality' or a tonal 'smokescreen.'

10 Nectoux 1991, 380.

11 Phillips 1993, 4.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 8 (emphases added).

14 See Sobaskie 2003, 237–238.

## STARTING FROM THE TONIC

In most of Fauré's Nocturnes, though not all, the tonic is stated in a stable root position in the first measure. Of those that start with such a tonic harmony, all progress toward a less stable 6/3 position harmony. In many cases this results from a contrapuntal expansion of the tonic toward a submediant (examined below), but in other cases the tonic exerts a kind of gravitational force over the subsequent measures before I<sup>6</sup> is reached. In this section I will treat both these possibilities in turn as well as the ways that Fauré's off-tonic beginnings mirror the kind of contrapuntal expansion so familiar from his tonic openings.

### I<sup>5-6</sup> Expansion

In his monograph *Harmony in Schubert* (2010) David Damschroder describes how two related chords may in fact 'unfurl' one another, a relationship he calls the *5-6 shift*. Describing a hypothetical progression

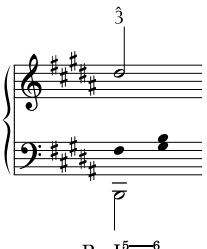
A – B – B  
 F# – F# – G  
 D – D – E

Damschroder describes how "[i]n this context the D-F#-B chord (either in 6/3 position or *unfurled* into 5/3 position may be referred to as the tonic's 6 phase, rather than as VI, to emphasize its voice-leading genesis and the hierarchical relationship with its parent 5-phase chord."<sup>15</sup> This kind of contrapuntal expansion of the tonic harmony can be found frequently at the beginning of Fauré's Nocturnes. Consider the two examples of the relationship shown in Example 1. These are the beginnings of Nocturnes No. 2 (1883<sup>16</sup>) and No. 3 (1883) in reduction with roman numeral analysis. Each features the movement from a stable I harmony to a VI<sup>6</sup> harmony understood as the '6 phase' of the initial tonic. These two examples are not completely identical however: in Nocturne No. 3, what would appear as a neighbor motion above  $\hat{3}$  produces a melody D $\flat$ 5 that fuses with the 6 phase of the tonic harmony creating an 11th extension to the harmony. When the neighbor tone returns to C5 it is as a 13th extension to the new dominant harmony. While I will not demonstrate all the 5-6 shift expansions of tonics in the Nocturnes (the effect appears in Nocturnes Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 13) I will describe two more particularly curious versions of the technique, where the 5-6 shift appears to underlie a longer passage of music.

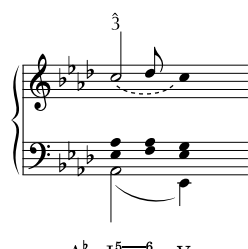
15 Damschroder 2010, 6.

16 All dates for the Nocturnes are drawn from the composition dates suggested in the Edition Peters Urtext *Nocturnes* edited by Roy Howat.

a) Nocturne No. 2

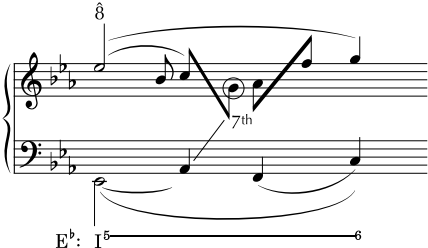


b) Nocturne No. 3



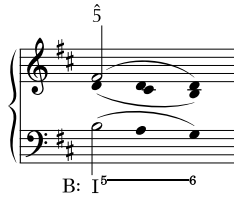
Example 1: Openings of Fauré's Nocturnes Nos. 2 and 3

In Nocturne No. 4, the effect of a 5-6 shift within the tonic takes on greater structural weight and encompasses a slightly longer portion of the beginning of the piece. Example 2 produces a reduction of the beginning of the theme. Starting from the initial tonic bass note  $E^b_2$  and with a congruent arpeggiation of the tonic harmony in the upper voice, the music progresses from  $E^b$  major (the tonic being composed out) to a C minor harmony in measure 2. The bass motion in Example 2 may otherwise produce a coherent progression diverging from the tonic harmony (progressing through I,  $IV^7$ ,  $VII^{6/5}$ , and VI chords), but the upper voice arpeggiation from  $E^b_5$  to C5 to G5 across these two measures dominates the organization of the upper voice. Fundamentally, I hear the entire passage as grounded in tonic harmony, with the upper voice arpeggiation coloring the inner voice shift of the bass with C3 in an inner voice standing against the still notionally expressed gravity of the tonic bass note  $E^b_2$ . What results is a minor flavor within what is otherwise best considered as a tonic passage.



Example 2: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 4

Another version of the abstract idea of a 5-6 shift of the tonic harmony is found in the opening of Nocturne No. 13. Here, as demonstrated in Example 3, passing motion from the bass leads down from the I step to the VI step while the melody leaps away from  $\hat{5}$ . The effect is a shift onto VI harmony. In a literal sense we can think of this simply as a progression from I to VI, but within the context of the ever-present possibility of a  $I^{5-6}$  shift at the start of Fauré's Nocturnes, the progression appears somewhat similar to those described above. If, through some inversion, the lowest voice appeared in an inner voice, we would certainly recognize this passage as a 5-6 shift, and even in the form appearing at the start of Nocturne No. 13 one can detect the sense that the tonic is being contrapuntally expanded upon. This same formula appears in the second half of the theme of the Nocturne when the opening appears again, now transposed up a fourth in measure 5.



Example 3: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 13

A related idea to this passing motion expansion of the tonic in Nocturne No. 13 is the opening of Nocturne No. 9 shown in reduction in Example 4. Emanating from the tonic bass note B3 and  $\hat{8}$  in the upper voice, via passing motion we reach a combination of the subdominant bass and  $\hat{8}$  again. The interior alto voice passes from D4 to G4, while the bass first arpeggiates to the submediant before passing down to the subdominant. Beside the reduction is an abstract version of the contrapuntal elaboration of B minor by the non-harmony tones 6 and 4. This would create a 5/3 to 6/4 shift and a 6/4 phase to repurpose Damschroder's terminology. In Nocturne No. 9, since the bass itself takes part in the motion between the harmonies, we will naturally be drawn toward a subdominant *Stufen* hearing, but like in Nocturne No. 4 (Example 2), the melody helps to bind the progression together. We can appreciate how the 6/4 shift underlies this harmonic situation, with the tonic asserting some influence on the subdominant harmony.

Example 4: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 9

### Moving to $I^6$ and the Gravity of the Tonic

A related situation is the manner in which Fauré's opening tonic assert themselves over larger stretches of music through the progression of the bass to  $I^6$ . For instance, the first half of the theme of Nocturne No. 10 (1908) is organized around a stepwise descent to the supertonic bass, as shown in Example 5. Set against the descending bass the melody ascends through a series of reachings over (see abbreviation "r.o." in Example 5). The effect is that the tonic harmony exerts itself throughout this passage: the passing motion extends from the tonic, the upper-voice harmony by contrast strives *against* the bass line. In this way, I hear the progression from E down to G as a large-scale arpeggiation down a sixth to  $I^6$  on the middleground level.  $I^6$  here supports two rather strong dissonances: initially a 6/4 harmonization of a C major harmony, and then a melodic F#4, creating a major seventh against the bass. Above the next bass, F#, the upper voices act more usually, forming a 9/7/4-8/7/3 suspension to create a local dominant harmony leading to the larger dominant over the bass note B that follows. This dominant is complicated by the pattern of the reachings over leading to the impression that the A#4 seventh resolves within the harmony, but this is best understood as an elaboration of the bass note with A#4 ultimately receiving no satisfactory resolution into G#4 within the theme, after it is reactivated in the very next measure.

Example 5: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 10

Between the bass notes G and F#, it is as if the upper voices have two attempts at a positive harmonization for each: the F#4 above G sounds fictive, while it works as part of a chromatic dominant above F#. The C major harmony above G also sounds rather false, while the E minor that follows above F# would have been more appropriate one bass note earlier. The effect is that we can detect the structural force of the I<sup>6</sup> bass note helping to create the most dissonant effect just before the clarification of the new progression toward the dominant B major. This is an effect of the gravity of the tonic *Stufe*: the problematic combination of voices around the G and F# bass notes are determined according to how the bass ultimately relates to the tonic from which it emanates as a stepwise descent.

The appearance of I<sup>6</sup> as a structural force in the openings of Fauré's Nocturnes is by no means a straightforward affair. Consider the opening of Nocturne No. 12 (1915), shown in reduction in Example 6. The passage begins melodically with an arpeggiation from  $\hat{5}$  down to  $\hat{1}$  and then on further down to  $\hat{5}$  again. The bass similarly arpeggiates tonic harmony in support of the stepwise melodic descent to  $\hat{1}$ . In the further arpeggiation down to the dominant bass note, the bass begins a long stepwise descent from B $\flat$ 2 which ultimately leads to the dominant. While these two structures cut across one another (the melodic arpeggiation down to B $\natural$ 3 and the bass line descent from B $\flat$ 2 to B $\natural$ 1) in one way they support each other. The arrival of B $\natural$ 3 coincides with the bass note G2, creating a I<sup>6</sup> harmony. This tension is captured in Example 6 by the slurring of the large bass line descent set against the indication of the I<sup>6</sup> in the *Stufen* analysis. The effect of the initial tonic in Nocturne No. 12 is rather different from that seen in Nocturnes Nos. 4 and 10.

Example 6: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 12

A related bass effect can be felt at the start of Nocturne No. 1, where an arpeggiation of the tonic underlies the entire first phrase, as shown in Example 7. With  $\hat{5}$  established above the tonic bass, the initial motion of the bass is to arpeggiate the tonic harmony through 6 and 6/4 positions while the melody stays motionless. After the arpeggiated ascent through the tonic harmony, a stepwise descent then connects back to the tonic harmony. Above this bass, the melody begins its own stepwise motion up from  $\hat{5}$  to  $E\flat 6$  and then back down to  $G\flat 5$ . Below  $G\flat 5$ ,  $F 5$  acts as a neighbor to the arpeggiation. The contrapuntal support for the melodic progression from  $E\flat 6$  to  $F 5$  is rather unusual, notes  $C\flat 6$ ,  $B\flat 5$ , and  $A\flat 5$  appear as a succession of parallel fourths against the descending bass line. Like I described above in Nocturne 10, I hear these kinds of license against the backdrop of the influence emanating from the tonic. That is to say, the unusual contrapuntal motion is not really motion at all, but all contained within the controlling influence and harmony of the active tonic.

Example 7: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 1

## Off-Tonic Openings

In the above examples, I have focused on the contrapuntal effects flowing from the expansion of and influence of an initial tonic. There are three examples in the Nocturnes that do not begin with root position tonic harmony. The first sonority of Nocturne No. 7 (1899) is an A major chord in 6/3 position (Example 8), though this sound is only illusory: the melodic A4 descends to  $G\sharp 4$  within the first measure, still above the  $C\sharp$  bass. The wider harmonic context in this theme is a passage between I, III, and V in  $C\sharp$  minor, but producing a tonally ambiguous effect: the initial ascent from  $\hat{5}$  to  $E 5$  with a reinforcing  $A\sharp 4$  come above an encompassing  $C\sharp$  bass. This bass voice conflicts with an inner-voice (see circled notes in Example 8) outlining an E major triad. The way the melody lands on the melodic note  $B 4$ , as the upper third of  $G\sharp 4$ , diverges from the prevailing key. The status of the  $B 4$  within the III *Stufe* remains unclear in the context of the structure of the second half of the theme. I hear the voice, so prominently stated, as ultimately arising



from an inner voice. In the second half of the theme, the initial ascent to E5 is answered with an upper neighbor and a melodic top-voice descent to  $\hat{5}$  within the V *Stufe*. The tonal effect of the theme is that the first half sounds rather inflected by E major, partly because of the off-tonic beginning, and partly because of the prominent insistence on B4, and partly because of the arrival on the E major harmony at the end, complete with its own dominant. Yet E major could hardly prevail since the larger *Stufe* movement is to the dominant of C# minor, and there is such a conjunct upper voice answering the initial ascent in the second half of the theme. The hearing proposed by Example 8 resonates with Orledge's concept of the main theme which he states starts a main theme that "begins on the subdominant chord."<sup>17</sup> That is, Orledge takes the melodic A4 as a proper chord tone and recognizes the prevailing key as E major. Indeed, E major is intimately involved in the melodic organization of the melody of the first half of the theme, but the bass voice firmly establishes a larger motion within C# minor, starting with the 6 phase of the tonic, and moving away from the tonic toward the dominant in the second half of the theme.

Example 8: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 7

In a rather different way, Nocturne No. 11 (1913) also begins 'off-tonic.' The initial sonority of the piece brings the fifth step in the bass voice underlying clearly tonic harmony and melodic structure. As demonstrated in Example 9, this gives rise not to a dominant harmony, but a tonic in unstable 6/4 position. The arpeggiated descent from  $\hat{3}$  to F#4 ends just at the point where the true tonic bass appears. The melodic course running through the rest of the theme overlays a descent from F#5 down to the larger melodic neighbor B4 elaborating an interrupted structure  $\hat{3} \hat{2} ||$  restarting at  $\hat{3}$  where the reduction ends. I will discuss more the formation of the linear descent in the second half of the theme in the section "Linear Progressions" below. What is particularly unusual in this theme is the balance of a melodic line that first arpeggiates a third before the proper bass voice arrives, and then an ascent to  $\hat{8}$  after that arrival, mimicking the initial ascent as if the piece was starting with  $\hat{8}$ . The balance between the melodic action before the first tonic bass and after is key to the larger contrapuntal effect of the theme.

Similar to the example above, Nocturne No. 8 starts with the dominant bass degree (see example 10). Of chief importance for this Nocturne however is how the implication of a D $\flat$  tonic is completely denied upon the point where the tonic would seem necessary. In Example 10, we see first the dominant bass degree creating a 6/4 sonority. When the dominant bass note returns in measure 8, it now supports a descending soprano line starting from D $\flat$ 5, a pitch that is immediately chromatically reinterpreted as C#4 in an inner voice above the chromatic neighbor G $\sharp$ 2 in the bass. This creates an A major/minor 4/2.

17 Orledge 1979, 95.

This is a feature that Sobaskie might call ‘diffused tonality’ as the avoidance of the tonic bass degree and the chromatic reinterpretation of the tonic note divert us away from the global tonic  $D\flat$ . However, this instance is the start of an expansion of the dominant, leading back to the dominant bass note in measure 10, and the arrival of the proper tonic  $D\flat$  in the upper voice in the same measure.

Example 9: Opening of Fauré’s Nocturne No. 11

Example 10: Opening of Fauré’s Nocturne No. 8

In Fauré’s Nocturnes the contrapuntal significance of the initial tonic is three-fold: often it is a harmony to be contrapuntally expanded upon through a 5-6 shift, at other times it exerts influence over the passage that follows allowing a degree of contrapuntal license, and finally, the delay of its bass voice appearance, in concert with melodic organization that guarantees the tonic’s ultimate presence, can help organize the arrangement of his Nocturne themes in their entirety.

## TREATMENT OF CHORDAL EXTENSIONS

The contrapuntal expansion of the tonic harmony proceeds from the analytical dictum that Carl Schachter called the tonal field: that “complex of horizontalized triadic intervals; the tonal space of the *Urlinie* together with all the additional triadic spaces opened up by the middleground and foreground, including those of the bass.”<sup>18</sup> To be sure, my understanding of the expansion of the tonic in the examples above rarely implicated the *Urlinie*, but rather foreground and some middleground counterpoint. In his Nocturnes, Fauré often deals with triadic extensions (such as seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth) as part of his foreground and middleground counterpoint with the bass. As I detail below, these extensions include those which can receive some kind of traditional license (as reachings over arising in an inner voice, or as related to incomplete neighbors) while

<sup>18</sup> Schachter 1995, 149.

others act in a way we would normally describe in terms of tonal consonance (such as two cases of extensions serving the role of resolution of a dissonant tone).

### As Reachings Over (Arpeggiating To)

A reaching over (German *Übergreifen*) refers to the situation when a descending middle voice is placed above the melodic voice.<sup>19</sup> In effect this allows for an ascending line to be accounted for by a series of reachings over. In Fauré, I find that the technique allows the creation of dissonances with the bass. Consider Example 11, which shows measures 7 and 8 of Nocturne No. 7 in more foreground detail: Marked with the abbreviation “r.o.” for reaching over, the melodic F#5 produces a seventh against the bass note G#2. With the leap to F#5 from the preceding melodic B4, we would have a clear instance of Fauré treating an extension like a member of the local triad. I hear the F#5 arising as a consonance in the preceding harmony above D#3 with the inner voice that reaches over progressing downwards to E#5. To be sure, the treatment of a seventh as the goal of an arpeggiation between harmonies is a rather light license in the context of a tonal work from the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, the treatment of such a license as a result of a re-ordering of the melodic and inner voices remains a relatively traditional manner to treat such a situation. We shall see that the same kind of treatment holds true for other instances of arpeggiations to extensions in Fauré’s Nocturnes.

Example 11: Fauré, Nocturne No. 7, mm. 7–8

A similar example can be found in Nocturne No. 10. My comments above on this Nocturne concerned the dynamic between the descending bassline and ascending melodic line at the start of the theme. Within this ascending line, we may note instances of melodic reaching over as shown in Example 5. Against the descending bass line, we see an ascending melodic line constructed from a series of reachings over. First, E3 reaches over to E4 as a third above the bass C in measure 2 before F#3 reaches over to F#4 as a fifth above the bass B. Between measures 3 and 4, G3 reaches over to G4 above G in the bass, an octave. Finally, A#3 reaches over to A#4, a seventh above the dominant bass B. Each of these reachings over descends by step above the same bass note. Where this resolution creates a dissonance (E4 fourth above B; F#4 seventh above G) the next melody note is reached by step, continuing the reaching over. Only the last of these four instances of reaching over creates an extension to the bass degree (A#4 seventh over B).

19 The first mention of *Übergreifen* by Heinrich Schenker’s published writings was in his analysis of J. S. Bach’s Little Prelude in D major in *Der Tonwille* 5 (2004). In *Der freie Satz* Oster translates that “[w]hen a group of at least two descending tones is used to place an inner voice into a higher register, I call the phenomenon a reaching-over (Uebergreifen).” (Schenker 2001, 47) Nicolas Meeüs provides a thorough account of the technique in Meeüs 2018.

When the descending bass reaches its goal of the dominant bass degree, the reconnection with the tonic includes three cases of reaching over. As shown in Example 5, a deceptive resolution leads to the bass C# above which a reaching over from the bass voice results in the arpeggiation to a non-harmony tone in the melody, the seventh B4 against the bass that resolves down to A4 as part of the IV<sup>6/5</sup> chord. After this 6/5 chord, the bass again reaches over from C#3 to C#5, an eleventh above the bass G, resolving down to B4 within a I<sup>6</sup> tonic chord. Finally, the inner voice descending from E4 reaches over, creating a melodic arpeggiation to D5, the seventh above the bass E which then steps down to C#5 as part of a vii<sup>o4/3</sup> of the B minor harmony that follows. This concatenation of reachings over creates an ascending melodic line against the downward arpeggiation of the bass which mirrors the dynamics of the opening of the theme.

### As Incomplete Neighbors (Arpeggiating Away)

Another treatment of chordal extensions is to leap away from them in a figure reminiscent of the incomplete neighbor. From an abstract perspective, an incomplete neighbor consists of three phases, an initial consonance, a dissonance one step higher or lower, and finally an arpeggiation to a tone over the next base note. We can see some of these phases in Fauré's treatment of extensions. In Nocturne No. 6 (1894) we find a rather unusual linear progression in the first two measures of the theme, shown in reduction in Example 12. This Nocturne, composed after a near decade gap after No. 5, features a succession of extensions in the descending melodic line between A $\flat$ 4 and F4. We hear two instances of a dissonance phase followed by a local leap away. Each case carries the same kind of resolution. The bass under the melodic seventh A $\flat$ 4 is B $\flat$ 2 with the proper resolution of the seventh delayed until the G $\flat$ 4 above the bass note D $\flat$ 3. Importantly, the seventh A $\flat$ 4 is abandoned via an arpeggiation to F4 on the foreground, while in reduction, I view this dissonance as resolving into the further dissonance of the following G $\flat$ 4. The G $\flat$ 4 is left via a leap to the inner voice E $\flat$ 4 before proper resolution into F4, a sixth above the bass note A $\flat$ 2. Like earlier examples of the influence of the tonic harmony, these extensions all unfold within a larger melodic and bass arpeggiation of the tonic triad. This is a foreground instance of dissonances being quit by leap, which is a feature of Fauré's melodic technique.

mm. 1 2 3

8 7<sup>th</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> 6<sup>th</sup>

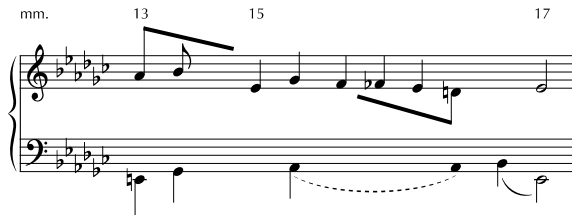
D $\flat$ : I<sup>6</sup> — 6 IV V I

Example 12: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 6

A related example is the rather unusual situation arising during the opening of Nocturne No. 9 (1908), shown in Example 13. The two circled notes are chordal extensions of the bass notes they appear above. The note C#5 is a seventh above D3 while the melodic D5 appears as an eleventh above A2. Neither of these dissonances can be easily explained as

individual instances of reaching over. Rather, there are two facets to the contrapuntal situation. First and foremost, this passage conveys a kind of dislocation between the melody and bass voices. Perhaps we could imagine a situation where the C#5 and D5 were shifted later against the bass to create a third and fifth as indicated with lines? Another viewpoint is that the D5 is an incomplete neighbor to the C#5 which notionally persists above the A bass with a deeper parallel thirds counterpoint. These explanations seem rather complicated compared to the more flexible view that Fauré treats the seventh and eleventh as *bona fide* consonant chord tones. Opening our contrapuntal perspective to include these kinds of dissonances as consonances creates two problems in the context of understanding Fauré's language: first, within the themes of the Nocturnes, the triad is an important structuring musical unit. Adding extensions to the gamut of consonances also opens the possibility that the triad is not the primary consonance of these themes. Second, there are many instances where these extensions are treated as dissonant and in need of resolution. As we saw in Nocturne No. 10 above (Example 5), where a reaching over creates a dissonant extension, this dissonance was immediately addressed with a stepwise descent. Nocturnes No. 9 and 10 were written around the same time, so we can view Fauré experimenting with his dissonance treatment in these Nocturnes.

local extensions are best understood as inner voices receiving resolution, others appear as important middleground tones.



Example 14: Fauré, Nocturne No. 1, mm. 13–17

For example, returning to Nocturne No. 6 (Example 12), the initial arpeggiation of the tonic triad brings first the  $A\flat_4$  dissonance of a seventh above  $B\flat_2$ , followed by a stepwise descent to an eleventh above  $D\flat_3$  in the shape of  $G\flat_4$ . Such a local hearing of these dissonances is chiefly determined by foreground bass motion. The harmony being composed out in this passage is a  $D\flat$  major triad. The note  $A\flat_4$  is a consonance when figured against the more fundamental harmony of  $D\flat$  major, while the  $G\flat_4$  passes between these two members of the triad, and arises melodically from an inner voice. Fauré undergirds his foreground dissonances with a more fundamental consonance. We might recognize in this contrapuntal procedure something similar to what Phillips calls a tonal ‘mirror.’ A single pitch has a seemingly confusing function on the foreground level while receiving a clear function on a deeper level.

## LINEAR PROGRESSIONS

According to Sobaskie, a prominent characteristic of Fauré’s middle period music is the so-called ‘long line.’ In an example from the *Mélodie* “Accompagnement,” Sobaskie describes a long line as a “single, comprehensive, stepwise ascending melodic gesture.”<sup>20</sup> Sobaskie builds his notion of the long line on phrases of description by Marguerite Long and Nadia Boulanger when addressing Fauré’s music. The treatment of these long lines in Sobaskie’s analysis often fulfills the role of what a Schenkerian would call a linear progression (German *Zug*). Schachter writes that a “linear progression is a stepwise motion in one direction between two tones that are related to each other harmonically. That is to say, at a prior level the two tones form a vertical interval.”<sup>21</sup> For Schachter, this creates “a profound connection between line (or melody) and harmony.”<sup>22</sup> This Schenkerian category of analysis and melodic construction resonates with Orledge’s view that Fauré’s melody emanates from harmony. In Fauré’s Nocturnes, clear cut and foreground stepwise motion predominates his melodic language. This exposition of stepwise melodic motion became an ever-clearer trait through Fauré’s middle and late periods. Below, I describe various fore- and middleground linear progressions in the Nocturnes focusing on three features: unusual and dissonant support of tones, mixture of tones in the progression, and ambiguous formulations where the intellectually prior interval is not clear.

20 Sobaskie 2003, 230.

21 Schachter 2016, 1.

22 Ibid.

## Unusual Support

As a linear progression takes on greater and greater proportions, each tone within the progression takes on more local significance. The ultimate example of this tendency is Schenker's *Urlinie* of a composition: every tone of the *Urlinie* has the potential to generate middleground linear progressions and as such the steps in the *Urlinie* are usually consonantly supported by the local bass voice. The members of a middleground linear progression will similarly often carry decorative tones and often consonant bass support. The most local of linear progressions (such as those found within a single harmony), will often not receive any kind of bass support.

Nocturne No. 3 features the *Kopfton* C5 followed by a large descent in register to a neighboring  $\sharp 2$ , as shown with open noteheads in Example 15. The  $\sharp 2$  degree is captured through a dramatic voice-exchange reaching across an octave and a major sixth and this neighbor motion is not properly resolved until the very end of the composition, which I view as a kind of formal compensation.<sup>23</sup> At the start of Example 15, there is a melodic descent of a fifth from G5 back down to C5, with upward stems between measures 3–5. The initial tone of this progression, G5, arises in an arpeggiation C-Eb-G beginning with the *Kopfton*  $\hat{3}$ . The seventh G5 resolves down to F5 above the passing bass note A $\sharp 2$  before further dissonant support produces an eleventh between the melodic pitch Eb5 and the bass note B $\flat 2$ . The eleventh resolves downward to D $\flat 5$ , which passes down to the structural *Kopfton*  $\hat{3}$ . This pattern of dissonance and resolution creates an unstable melodic succession, yet the local melody at this point seems organized around the leap up of the fifth, before a stepwise descent to C5. This is a rather foreground effect and each step in the melodic progression receives little decoration, but the decisively dissonant support of the passage produces an unstable contrapuntal effect. A similarly local effect underlies the sound of the opening part of the theme of Nocturne No. 6 (Example 12) where a third progression produced a succession of dissonant intervals, seventh and eleventh which partially gain melodic legitimacy from the larger context of a melodic arpeggiation of the tonic triad: D $\flat 5$ -A $\flat 4$ -F4-D $\flat 4$ .

Example 15: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 3

A linear progression in Nocturne No. 7's theme creates rather different problems in terms of support (Example 8). We hear first an arpeggiation from E5 to B4 in the first half of the theme, answered by a more orderly stepwise descent from E5 to G $\sharp 4$  in the second half of

23 The origins of this idea can be found in McClelland's essay on destabilized beginnings in Brahms (2009), but later developed in Willis 2022.

the theme. The changing tonal context (which is globally in C# minor but emphasizes E major) creates an unusual situation. Since E major is seemingly confirmed conclusively at the end of the first half of the theme with a cadential arrival, our initial impression of the linear ascent to E5 as  $\hat{8}$  places this pitch locally in that remembered context (mm. 6–8). The bass support for pitches E5, D#5, C#5 and B4 appears totally outside the key of E major (mm. 8–9).<sup>24</sup> The linear third from B4 to G#4 then receives support as if it were a progression between the third and root of a G# minor harmony. The effect is rather complex: we begin with the understanding that the melodic progression might establish E major in a firmer fashion (following the seeming confirmation of E major in m. 5), but the bass simply fails to support this reading, returning to C# minor. The status of the melodic pitches B4, A#4, and G#4 stands in between the local tonal effects of G# minor and E major, and the larger contrapuntal significance of the linear progression within C# minor.

### Mixture

Another aspect of Fauré's linear progressions is how he integrates chromatic tones into the linear progression itself. This appears as a kind of mixture: where we expect tones from one diatonic collection (e. g., major) we find tones associated with another (e. g., minor). In the latter part of the theme of Nocturne No. 12, shown in Example 6, we hear an ascending linear progression of an octave from B3 to B4. The tonal context for this progression is the dominant harmony B major. The notes of this progression however derive from notes not associated with B major such as Eb4 and F#4. These melodic chromaticisms de-emphasize the quality of the major dominant and delay the impact of the dominant until the very last moment of the descending bass voice. The pitch Eb4 arises as an echo of the Eb bass note which produces a consonance with the Bb2 that starts the descending linear octave that leads to B#1 in the lower voice. The melodic tone F#4 naturally follows Eb4 so as not to produce an augmented second in the rising linear progression. The passage beginning with the Bb bass note until the arrival of B#1 as the dominant bass degree along with the mixture of the ascending linear progression creates a strongly contrasting effect within the short passage and perhaps contributes to the tonal loosening necessary for the modulation by third that comes immediately after the passage.

A somewhat larger example of mixture in linear progressions can be found in Nocturne No. 11, shown in reduction in Example 9. Earlier I described how the passage before the arrival of the tonic bass conveys a straightforward arpeggiation of a descending third, which is balanced by the ascent to F#5 and the larger melodic descent leading to the interruption on  $\hat{2}$ . Initially, we hear a descent from F#5 to Bb4 at the start of measure 11, notated as an A#4 in the reduction. At this point, as seen in the score but not the reduction, a decidedly flatward turn in measure 11 presents an arpeggiation to Gb4 (an enharmonic respelling of F#4). The harmonic support for Bb is strongly chromatic to the prevailing tonic harmony being composed out. A little later, we find another  $\hat{4}$ . This time B#4 finds support from a chromatic upper neighbor (D#) of the framing dominant voice (C#). I hear these two  $\hat{4}$ s (in the reduction notated as A# and B#) as adumbrating a local progression to B, with the Bb/A# acting as a leading tone to  $\hat{4}$ . This tone then takes part in

24 This effect is so pronounced that the disparity between the voices appears to recommend a tonally layered reading like that found in White 2018.



an elaboration of the pattern of interruption that structures the entire theme as an incomplete upper neighbor. In the final part of the theme, a summarizing linear progression from F#5 down to the tone of interruption  $\hat{2}$  conveys another effect of mixture (reducing mm. 16–19). This progression is very compressed (into the second half of a single measure) and contributes two lowered degrees, C#5 and G#4 above a bass arpeggiation starting with G#3. The upshot is of minor mixture of the predominant preceding the dominant at the point of interruption. Overall, the linear progressions that color the middle of Nocturne No. 11's theme are themselves chromaticized and therefore reflect the need for harmonic contrast through the intervening section, while problematizing the sense of key. This melodic chromaticism is balanced by the larger framing of the bass voice by I and V as well as the simplicity of the interruption that outlines the melodic progression.

### Transformations Between Linear Progressions

The final example in this section concerning various linear progressions is the rather unusual formulation of the beginning of Nocturne No. 5 (1884), shown in reduction in Example 16. The larger key of the Nocturne is B $\flat$  major, but locally we find a slightly unusual move toward the major mediant. At first, there is a linear progression of a third rising to the tonic, expanded by a 5-6 shift with a long 6 phase extending above the pedal. The 6 phase of the tonic sounds like a G minor harmony, and indeed, the linear progression we find across the start of this theme might have fit easily into a G minor harmonic setting (descending from D5 through the A4 supported by a D major harmony). Undermining this hearing is the recapturing of D5 immediately after the D major harmony. Therefore, the progression of the melody is best read as a third progression with A4 as a neighbor tone supported by the third in the bass, modally shifted to a major harmony. This understanding of the third progression is uneasy because of the strong metric placement of the melodic A4. Fundamentally, the aural image is bistable: the reading in B $\flat$  major must allow for the license that  $\hat{1}$  feels almost unsupported due to the neighbor motion of the bass and relies on the pedal for its vindication, and reading of a fourth *Zug* in G minor relies on drawing the entirety of the first part of the theme into a somewhat uneasy prolongation of a D major harmony. The evidence of the composition as a whole means the B $\flat$  hearing ultimately prevails, but the instability and ambiguity of the linear progression that seems to switch between a third *Zug* and fourth *Zug* depending on which *Stufe* takes precedence remains an important factor in the experience of the theme and the initiation of the Nocturne as a narrative.

mm. 3 2 4 6

B $\flat$ : I<sup>5-6</sup> — (II<sup>7</sup>)-<sup>5</sup> V-III<sup>#</sup>

Example 16: Opening of Fauré's Nocturne No. 5

## COUNTERPOINT IN FAURÉ'S NOCTURNES

The contrapuntal techniques I have detailed in the examples above contribute to the kinds of effects described by Phillips and Sobaskie, whereby foreground tonal events partially obscure or refract the tonal background. While the focus of this study is not to find and analyze stylistic evolution across Fauré's Nocturnes, there are distinct differences to be found among his three stylistic periods. The early Nocturnes (Nos. 1–5) encompass a wide range of procedures but broadly background tonal relationships remain obvious and unobscured in the openings of these works. The most unusual of this collection is the theme of Nocturne No. 5 which problematizes the relationship between the two keys B♭ and G minor. The middle Nocturnes (Nos. 6–10<sup>25</sup>) produce much less clear middle-ground linear progressions, with frequent instances of totally unsupported tones in the middleground. Nocturne No. 8 is a particular achievement in the production of a theme with unclear tonality: while some of the clues of the D♭ major tonality remain, the lack of a clear linear progression, or indeed the tonic harmony and bass note, gives a strong effect of what Sobaskie calls 'diffused tonality.' The last Nocturnes (Nos. 11–13) return to a contrapuntal simplicity compared to the foreground sophistication of the middle Nocturnes. The latter Nocturnes demonstrate an economy of means with the counterpoint comprising mainly parallel simple intervals such as thirds, fourths, and sixths. In total, the contrapuntal technique that suffuses the Nocturnes remains relatively consistent even while we can observe some of these differences between the periods. Fauré's musical language urbanely interacts with the rules of counterpoint and throughout his musical career he wrote music that sometimes problematized these codifications, but generally kept their conventions in order that they could be pushed against.

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25 The reader may notice that I place Nocturnes Nos. 9 and 10 with the middle Nocturnes despite some placing Fauré's middle period ending in 1906 (see Orledge 1979).

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