twentieth-century music 4/1, 97–121 © 2007 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S1478572207000540 Printed in the United Kingdom

'A Multicoloured Alphabet': Rediscovering Albert Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire*

ROGER MARSH

Abstract

Albert Giraud's cycle of fifty *rondels bergamasques*, *Pierrot Lunaire* (1884), famously became, in Otto Erich Hartleben's German translation, the basis of Schoenberg's Op. 21 (1912). But for many decades the work of the Belgian poet was either straightforwardly denigrated for its anachronism and 'mediocrity' (Boulez), or at least declared inferior to its 'vivid, Angst-filled transformation' (Youens) in Hartleben's hands. This article questions some widely held beliefs concerning the original *Pierrot* and its subsequent reworking. The claim that Schoenberg's selection and reorganization of the poems imposed logic and order on an otherwise jumbled collection is found to be belied by the striking narrative coherence of Giraud's original sequence, which is unified by a clearly defined set of symbols. Meanwhile, Hartleben's putative 'infidelity' to Giraud is challenged by evidence both internal (his careful preservation of the rondel structure) and contextual (an esteem for his Belgian contemporary manifested in further poetic homages). While there is no doubt that Hartleben's translations distance the poems from their background in Parnassian aesthetics – omitting crucial references to Brueghel, Shakespeare, Watteau, and the painter and lithographer Adolphe Willette – it is Giraud himself who deserves the credit for the most strikingly memorable images later absorbed into the expressionistic milieu of Schoenberg's melodrama.

Introduction

> *Pierrot* won't go away, and there is nothing in post-modernism to suggest why it should.[1]

Almost a century after the unexpected sensation of its Berlin premiere in October 1912, Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* remains an icon of musical modernism. More than any other work, bar perhaps *The Rite of Spring*, it has come to symbolize the radical experimental impulse that redefined the boundaries of art-music composition in the first decades of the twentieth century. Its sinister yet alluring sound world represents Schoenberg at the height of his creative confidence, barely five years on from his first departures from tonality and already, in moments of exceptional contrapuntal rigour, anticipating his step a decade later into the highly ordered world of twelve-note composition. The twenty-one individual pieces are scored for a thoroughly distinctive ensemble – a combination, endlessly copied since, of female voice, flute (doubling piccolo), clarinet (doubling bass clarinet), violin (doubling viola), cello, and piano – from which Schoenberg derives maximum variety of colour through the use of constantly changing combinations of instruments. The vocal line, using

1 Dunsby, *Schoenberg: Pierrot lunaire*, 75.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Schoenberg's technique of *Sprechgesang*, suggests a shift away from the concert hall towards the theatre or cabaret, demanding a dramatic as well as musical virtuosity that continues to pose challenges to singers even today.

This much, at least, is what every student of music is required to know. But of course there is much more to be said, and more words have probably been written about *Pierrot lunaire* than about any other work of Schoenberg. The score offers rich pickings for the analyst at every level, for, as Jonathan Dunsby writes, 'no composition of the period seems to combine so many unusual features to such powerful effect'.[2] Most scholarly writing on the work, until recently at least, has been focused on the piece's musical content, that is to say, on its instrumental dimension. The device of *Sprechstimme*, indistinct and variable in terms of pitch, to some extent renders the vocal line redundant in terms of harmonic content; and the instances of melodic or motivic connection between singer/reciter and ensemble are far fewer than one would expect to find in more conventional vocal settings, Schoenberg's included. Inevitably, since *Pierrot* remains nonetheless a vocal piece, a certain amount of attention has also been paid to the texts, which are German translations by Otto Erich Hartleben of French originals by the Belgian poet Albert Giraud (1860–1929). Much existing discussion of the texts centres on their significance in terms of Schoenberg's relationship with musical history and modernity. The way that grotesque expressionist imagery is tempered by moments of pathos and nostalgia lends weight to a view of Schoenberg as hero, a pivotal artist forging a link between old and new worlds. This interpretation is aided considerably by the content of the last number, 'O alter Duft' ('O Ancient Scent'), which yearns nostalgically for earlier times, and in which Schoenberg allows himself, through a brief moment of E major, a wistful nod in the direction of tonality.[3]

Some commentators, notably Jonathan Dunsby, also seek, without success, to solve the problem of voice. Who is the reciter? Is she Pierrot or Colombine? The former persona is implied in some settings, particularly nos 2, 5, 6, 7, and 21, whereas the character of Colombine arguably works only in nos 9 and 12. Rather, for most of the time, the text is delivered by an unidentified and independent narrator. There is no simple solution for the singer in search of character. In the first performance Albertine Zehme (the actress-singer for whom the piece was composed) was costumed as Colombine, which clearly conveyed the right imagery – that of the *commedia dell'arte* – but this single personification has scant dramatic authority. Dunsby concludes that 'in *Pierrot* there is no protagonist at all, no lucid relationship between the focus of attention, the woman reciter, and the focus of textual attention, Pierrot himself'.[4]

These problems arise from the fact that Schoenberg's *Pierrot* is only a partial setting of Giraud/Hartleben's original cycle of fifty poems. Schoenberg's reorganization of the twenty-one chosen poems into three groups of seven is ingenious, and we have grown so accustomed

2 Dunsby, *Schoenberg: Pierrot lunaire*, 75.

3 Such is the power of this interpretation that the composer Luciano Berio gave the title 'O Alter Duft' to one of his 1993 Norton Lectures at Harvard, in which he discusses the relationship of the contemporary composer with the traditions of a bygone age; see Berio, *Remembering the Future*, 79 ff.

4 Dunsby, *Schoenberg: Pierrot lunaire*, 35.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to their sequence that the 'cycle' appears satisfying. But their selection and radical reordering at Schoenberg's hands divorce them from their original context and disrupt Giraud's own narrative sequence, which has a far greater sense of logical continuity. As a representation of Giraud's original conception they fall seriously short. That this explanation has not, so far, been considered of any importance to musical commentators is in part a testament to the pre-eminent position that Schoenberg's *Pierrot* has assumed within the canon of modernist art. Only Schoenberg's *Pierrot* is of interest, it seems, while Giraud's work and, to a lesser degree, that of his translator Hartleben are forgotten.

The Pierrot Texts and their Reception

For ninety years after the appearance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot* the excuse given for so successfully air-brushing Albert Giraud out of musical and literary criticism was that his work was simply not very good, and that his *Pierrot Lunaire* survived only because Hartleben's translation greatly improved it. Pierre Boulez, writing in the late 1950s, set the tone for a number of later commentaries by contrasting the 'mediocrity of the words' with 'the extraordinary dramatic quality of the music',[5] and two decades later Charles Rosen's widely read monograph referred to Giraud as 'a justly forgotten poet'.[6] Luigi Rognoni, meanwhile, declared the German translation 'far superior to the mawkish and over-refined original',[7] a view echoed as late as 1992 by Jonathan Dunsby, with his suggestion that Hartleben 'considerably improved' Giraud's poems.[8] Such influential commentators were able to make their assertions unchallenged because Giraud's work was hard to find in the original (and no English translation existed). A consensus appears to have grown up against Giraud's work, reinforced by two influential articles by Susan Youens, who, unlike many of her predecessors, had at least taken the trouble to read Giraud before coming to the following conclusion: 'It is as if Giraud's pallid pastels were a draft in one language for Hartleben's ''finished'' work in another. The texts of Op. 21 are thus the final result of a threefold process: Giraud's Parnassian incarnation of the fin-de-siècle Pierrot-Artist; Hartleben's vivid, Angst-filled German transformation of that verse; and Schoenberg's final labors as an Editor-Composer.'[9]

Schoenberg himself certainly never read Giraud. One might wonder, indeed, how carefully he read Hartleben, given certain remarks in his essay 'The Relationship to the Text', written shortly before the composition of *Pierrot*. Here he famously proclaims that the

5 'Even *Pierrot lunaire* is composed to a text whose poetics are fairly dated; yet the mediocrity of the words should not allow us to forget the extraordinary dramatic quality of the music' (Boulez, *Stocktakings*, 283; original in *Relevés d'apprenti*, 355).

6 Rosen, *Schoenberg*, 59.

7 'Schoenberg's technique acquires a singular vividness [. . .] which perfectly corresponds to the demented imagery of Hartleben's German text, far superior to the mawkish and over-refined original by the Belgian poet Giraud' (Rognoni, *The Second Vienna School*, 45).

8 Dunsby, *Schoenberg: Pierrot lunaire*, 21. He has since, however, reconsidered this view. In a more recent essay he acknowledges that 'there is a whole tissue of linguistic haze to ponder – whether for example any of the received opinion, including my own, that Hartleben in any realistic sense improved upon Giraud is not in fact a mindless and research-less insult to the original poet' ('Schoenberg's Pierrot Keeping his Kopfmotiv', 67).

9 Youens, 'The Text of *Pierrot lunaire*', 30. See also her earlier article 'Excavating an Allegory'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

composition of his earlier songs was guided only by the sound of the first words of their poetic text, and that from this he had 'divined everything that had to follow this first sound with inevitability'.[10] Kathryn Puffett, perhaps too readily taking Schoenberg at his word, has attempted to demonstrate that Schoenberg changed his ways for *Pierrot*, at least in the case of three of the settings, by linking their detailed motivic construction to cues derived from the text.[11] Be that as it may, the argument propounded in 'The Relationship to the Text' – that music is perfectly capable of transmitting a poetic idea independently of the intelligibility of its text – has given credence to commentators like Boulez, who would have us concentrate on the musical content of *Pierrot* and not concern ourselves with the inferior texts that support it.

Though republished twice during Giraud's lifetime (the final edition appearing in 1928), by the 1960s, when Schoenberg scholarship was beginning to gather pace, Giraud's work was not readily available, even in French. *Pierrot Lunaire* was never translated into English, although other poems of his were, notably by Jethro Bithell (who clearly rated Giraud highly) in his 1911 collection *Contemporary Belgian Poetry*.[12] On the other hand, English translations of Hartleben, or at least the twenty-one poems set by Schoenberg, seemed ubiquitous; even translations back into French of Hartleben's German were not unknown.[13] In 2001 both Kay Bourlier and Gregory C. Richter, working independently, produced their complete English translations of Giraud's collection (Richter's being published in a volume that also contained the original French alongside Hartleben's German).[14] It was now possible, even for Anglophone readers, to see that Giraud's work was in itself rich and wonderful, made perfect sense as an entity, and was in no sense 'improved' by Hartleben's albeit equally creative translation. The question of why anyone might wish to assert the superiority of Hartleben's work – there cannot be many instances of a translator substantially improving on the original, especially in the realm of poetry, with its attendant problems of rhyme and metre – is one to which I shall return later. The main aim of this article is to focus attention on the real *Pierrot Lunaire* – Giraud's – beside which the text of Schoenberg's Op. 21, far from being a judiciously edited improvement, comes to seem (in dramatic terms at least) a mutilated and impoverished pocket version.

Albert Giraud was born Emile Albert Kayenbergh in Leuven in 1860 and took the name Albert Giraud at the time of the publication of *Pierrot Lunaire* in 1884.[15] A member of the

10 Schoenberg, 'The Relationship to the Text', 144.

11 Puffett, 'Structural Imagery'. An even more exhaustive analysis of structural connections between text and composition can be found in Weytjens, 'Text as a Crutch in Arnold Schoenberg's "Pierrot lunaire" Op. 21?'.

12 There is a large collection of correspondence between Bithell and many of the leading European poets of the time, including Giraud and Gilkin, housed at the University of Leeds.

13 A performance involving such a French text took place as early as 1922. More recently, Michel Butor and Michel Launay have published their translations of Hartleben alongside their own *Pierrot*-inspired poetry. See Richter, *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire*, xxii.

14 Richter, *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire*. Kay Bourlier's English translations of Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire*, used throughout this article, were commissioned for the author's own settings (in French and English) of Giraud's poems; see Marsh, *Pierrot Lunaire*.

15 Richter, Albert Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire*, xvi. See also Polyte, *Albert Giraud – Emile Verhaeren*, 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

circle of young Belgian poets clustered around Iwan Gilkin, he co-founded and subsequently edited the journal *La Jeune Belgique*, which promoted a Parnassian poetic ideal, resistant to the socially motivated and formally progressive poetry of the Symbolists.[16] Parnassians insisted on traditional forms of French verse, in opposition to their bitter rivals the *vers-libristes* ('free-versers'), although this division, which persisted into the early years of the twentieth century, eventually broke down, with ardent Belgian *verslibristes* such as Verhaeren straying into classical forms, and Gilkin himself admitting, by 1910, to increasing flirtations with free verse.[17] In *Pierrot Lunaire* at least, Giraud's strongest influence was Théodore de Banville, who, as Martin Sorrell points out, vigorously defended strict metrical forms, the rondel in particular.[18] Several of the themes in *Pierrot Lunaire* echo Banville directly, as we shall see.

Both *Pierrot Lunaire* (1884), a collection of fifty rondels, and Giraud's surreal play *Pierrot Narcisse* (1887) contain a dedication to Iwan Gilkin. The dedication in *Pierrot Lunaire* reads as follows:[19]

> To Iwan Gilkin
>
> I dedicate these poems to you – poet that you are! You were present at their birth and more than one should be signed with your name since you 'spoke' them during our exquisite dilettante hours, when we were splitting hairs not in four – that would be simple – but into thousandths, and they still seemed thick as ropes. Here they are, untouched, these Moon poems. In them I have not, as modern authors say, 'analysed my era' nor moralized like a Protestant; I have simply been content to affirm – amid a modern plague of literary photographers – a right that we both insolently claim – the poet's right to lyric fantasy.
>
> Albert Giraud

Although Richter does not include this dedication in his translation, I view it as an important key to *Pierrot Lunaire*, and instructive on two counts. First, it serves as a warning that the reader should not approach the poems as allegories or as veiled comment on contemporary issues: in short, not to take them too earnestly. Secondly, it draws attention to what was patently a very close relationship between Giraud and Gilkin, and – in the absence of any hint of 'literary photography' – places them (and their 'exquisite dilettante hours') at the centre of what is to follow: a lyric fantasy which, however 'insolent', is also very personal.[20]

16 For more on this see Vilain, '*Pierrot Lunaire*'.

17 '[J]e me suis senti poussé à pratiquer moi-même le vers-libre tel que je le croyais légitime. C'est dans cette sorte de vers que j'ai écrit mon *Prométhée*, à la grande colère de tous mes amis Parnassiens' ('I felt myself compelled to try my own hand at free verse in the measure that I believed it valid. It was in that style of verse that I wrote my *Prométhée*, much to the fury of all my Parnassian friends'); Iwan Gilkin, letter to Jethro Bithell, 28 September 1910, Bithell Collection, University of Leeds.

18 Banville, *Rondels*.

19 Trans. Bourlier, in Marsh, *Pierrot Lunaire*.

20 The dedication to Gilkin at the start of the absurd play *Pierrot Narcisse* takes the form of six rhymed stanzas beginning (with just a hint of tongue in cheek): 'Voici bien trois ans et demi | Que j'ai rimé "Pierrot Lunaire". | Je suis encore ton ami: | C'est vraiment extraordinaire' ('Now it has been three-and-a-half years | Since I wrote *Pierrot Lunaire* | I

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Décor

The world inhabited by Giraud's Pierrot has a quality quite different from the expressionist milieu of Schoenberg's melodrama. Surprise comes in the very first stanza of no. 1, 'Théâtre':

Je rêve un théâtre de chambre,	I dream of a chamber theatre,
Dont Breughel peindrait les volets,	For which Brueghel would paint the shutters,
Shakspeare les féeriques palais,	Shakespeare, the fairy palaces,
Et Watteau, les fonds couleur d'ambre.	And Watteau, the amber coloured backdrops.

Nothing in Schoenberg could prepare the reader for this scene setting. Brueghel, Shakespeare, and Watteau are not names that come to mind when visualizing the world of Schoenberg's *Pierrot*. The Brueghel referred to here is Jan Brueghel the Elder ('Paradise' Brueghel: 1568–1625),[21] whose paintings *The Animals Entering Noah's Ark* (1613; see Figure 1) and *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden* (1615)[22] depict brightly coloured birds in luxuriant landscapes against a bright blue sky. Giraud's second poem, 'Décor', describes Brueghel's trees populated with 'grands oiseaux de pourpre et d'or'.

Shakespeare and Watteau both offer, in addition to the 'amber coloured backdrops', an association with the *commedia dell'arte*, whose stock characters – Pierrot, Colombine, Harlequin, and Cassandre – are the dramatis personae of Giraud's theatre. Several of the paintings of Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) depict characters from the Italian theatre, which flourished in Paris from the middle of the seventeenth century.[23] In his *Gilles* (*c.*1718–19; see Figure 2), which includes four other *commedia dell'arte* characters in the background, a pale and clumsy-looking Pierrot stands immobile, in baggy white costume and brown hat, exuding an air of resignation, with none of the lithe effeminacy of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century incarnations familiar from Jean-Gaspard Debureau, Aubrey Beardsley, and Jean-Louis Barrault. This is not, in other words, the 'modern' Pierrot already more familiar to Giraud's readers from the many pantomimes popular throughout the nineteenth century at the Théâtre des Funambules, Paris, and elsewhere.[24]

This neoclassical setting is important both as a starting point and as a recurrent theme in the work. Moreover, it chimes in perfectly with the similarly 'antique' rondel form that Giraud employs rigidly for all fifty poems: 13 lines divided 4–4–5, in which lines 1 and 2 recur

---

remain your friend | It's really extraordinary'); Giraud, *Pierrot Lunaire, Les Dernières Fêtes, Pierrot Narcisse*, 107; Eng. trans. Gregory C. Richter, unpubd.

21 'In 1880, commenting on poems of Théodore de Banville, Giraud wrote that they "come from far off: from the land of Shakespeare, the happy isles of Watteau, the blue horizons of 'Paradise' Brueghel, the clear phantasmagoria of Bergamo" ' (Richter, *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire*, 3, n. 41).

22 The latter in The Royal Collection, Windsor, UK.

23 One may perhaps form an image of Giraud's theatrical setting from the paintings *Arlequin, empereur dans la lune* (1708; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes) and *Les Comédiens italiens* (1720; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC). For 'amber coloured backdrops' see, for example, *Sous un habit de Mezzetin* (1721; The Wallace Collection, London).

24 For more on the history of the Pierrots in Paris see Storey, *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Figure 1 *The Animals Entering Noah's Ark* (oil on panel) by Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625). © Musee des Beaux-Arts, Pau, France/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library. Nationality/copyright status: Flemish/out of copyright.

exactly as lines 7 and 8, with line 1 reappearing as line 13, and an equally rigid rhyme scheme – ABba abAB abbaA.[25]

1 Théâtre	**1 Theatre**
Je rêve un théâtre de chambre,	I dream of a chamber theatre,
Dont Breughel peindrait les volets,	For which Brueghel would paint the shutters,
Shakspeare, les féeriques palais,	Shakespeare, the fairy palaces,
Et Watteau, les fonds couleur d'ambre.	And Watteau, the amber coloured backdrops.
Par les frileux soirs de décembre,	On chilly December evenings,
En chauffant mes doigts violets,	Warming my purple fingers,
Je rêve un théâtre de chambre	I dream of a chamber theatre,
Dont Breughel peindrait les volets.	For which Brueghel would paint the shutters,

25 Upper case highlights refrain; lower case represents rhyme only.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

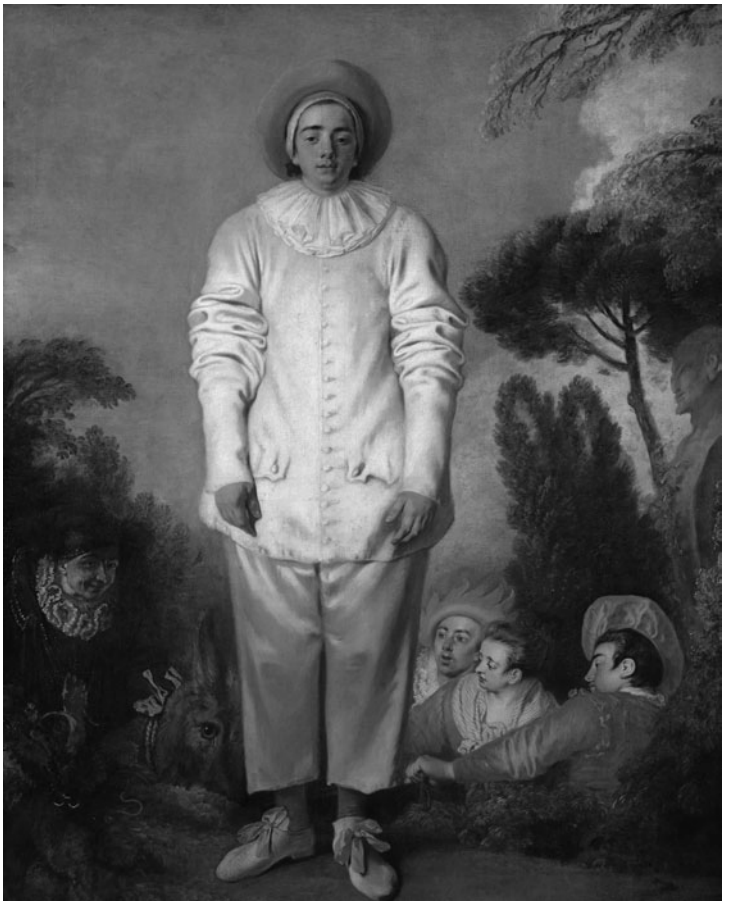


Figure 2 *Gilles*, *c.*1718–19 (oil on canvas) by Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721). © Louvre, Paris, France/The Bridgeman Art Library. Nationality/copyright status: French/out of copyright.

Émoustillés par le gingembre,	Titillated by ginger
On y verrait les Crispins laids	One would see there ugly Crispins,
Ouater leurs décharnés mollets	Padding their scrawny calves
Pour Colombine qui se cambre.	For Colombine, who arches her back.
Je rêve un théâtre de chambre.	I dream of a chamber theatre.

Brueghel, Shakespeare, and Watteau are not only invoked here at the start, but each return once in the cycle to remind us of the visual and theatrical backdrop to the adventures of Giraud's Pierrot. Watteau is invoked powerfully in the single-rhymed 'Parfums de Bergame' (no. 35), which becomes, in Hartleben, 'O alter Duft'. But Hartleben removes the reference altogether:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

35 Parfums de Bergame

O vieux parfum vaporisé
Dont mes narines sont grisées!
Les douces et folles risées
Tournent dans l'air subtilisé.

Désir enfin réalisé
Des choses longtemps méprisées:
O vieux parfum vaporisé
Dont mes narines sont grisées!

Le charme du spleen est brisé:
Par mes fenêtres irisées
Je revois les bleus Elysées
Où Watteau s'est éternisé.
– O vieux parfum vaporisé!

35 Perfume of Bergamo

Oh ancient spray of perfume
Intoxicating my nostrils!
Wild and gentle laughter
Swirls in the rarefied air.

A desire finally satisfied
For things I long disdained:
Oh ancient spray of perfume
Intoxicating my nostrils!

The charm of spleen is broken:
Through my iridescent windows
I see again the blue Elysian fields[26]
Where Watteau was immortalized.
– Oh ancient spray of perfume!

O alter Duft (Hartleben)

O alter Duft – aus Märchenzeit,
Berauschest wieder meine Sinne!
Ein närrisch Heer von Schelmerein
Durchschwirrt die leichte Luft.

Ein glückhaft Wünschen macht mich froh
Nach Freuden, die ich lang verachtet:
O alter Duft aus Märchenzeit,
Berauschest wieder mich!

All meinen Unmut geb ich preis;
Aus meinem sonnumrahmten Fenster
Beschau ich frei die liebe Welt
Und träum hinaus in selge Weiten . . .
O alter Duft – aus Märchenzeit!

O Ancient Scent[27]

O ancient scent of days gone by
Intoxicate once more my senses!
A host of entertaining pranks
Sails through the weightless air.

Good fortune brings me once again
Those pleasures far too long neglected.
O ancient scent of days gone by
Once more intoxicate me.

All my ill humour is dispelled;
And from my sun encircled window
I view afresh the love-filled world
And dream beyond the blissful distance . . .
O ancient scent – of days gone by!

Watteau's depiction of amoral gatherings out of doors in paintings such as *Voulez-vous triompher des belles?* (1716) and *Plaisirs d'amour* (1719)[28] lurk in the background of several of

26 See, perhaps, Watteau's *Les Champs-Elysées* (1717; The Wallace Collection, London), although this is not a *commedia* scene.

27 Translations of Hartleben are from a performable translation of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* Op. 21 by Roger Marsh (1996, unpublished).

28 Respectively, in The Wallace Collection, London; and the Gemaldegalerie, Dresden.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Giraud's rondels. In no. 48, 'Souper sur l'eau', for example, Pierrot, Colombine, and Harlequin carouse together as the cycle draws to a close:

48 Souper sur l'eau

En d'alanguissantes yoles
Au pavillon de bleu turquin,
Pierrot, Colombine, Arlequin
Font saigner les rouges fioles.

Les femmes ont de lucioles
Diamanté leur casaquin,
En d'alanguissantes yoles
Au pavillon de bleu turquin.

Enrichissant ces fanfioles
La Lune luit comme un sequin,
Et sous un rose baldaquin
Madrigalisent les violes,
En d'alanguissantes yoles.

48 Supper on the Water

In long and languid boats
Under sails of Turkish blue,
Pierrot, Colombine, and Harlequin
Make the red flasks bleed.

The women have with fireflies
Bejewelled their bodices,
In long and languid boats
Under sails of Turkish blue.

Enriching all this merriment
The Moon shines like a sequin,
And beneath a canopy of pink
Viols play madrigals,
In long and languid boats.

Shakespeare returns once in 'Supplique' (no. 31), one of the poems that Hartleben reinvented most radically. Here the important 'spring of laughter' – a wonderful invention: how else would a smile work? – is lost in the German. With the further loss of the 'Shakespearean mirage', and the bullet-like truncation of the metre, Giraud's poem is hardly recognizable.

31 Supplique

Pierrot! Le ressort du rire,
Entre mes dents je l'ai cassé:
Le clair décor s'est effacé
Dans un mirage à la Shakspeare.

Au mât de mon triste navire
Un pavillon noir est hissé:
O Pierrot! Le ressort du rire,
Entre mes dents je l'ai cassé.

Quand me rendras-tu, porte-lyre,
Guérisseur de l'esprit blessé,
Neige adorable du passé,
Face de Lune, blanc messire,
O Pierrot! le ressort du rire?

31 A Plea

Oh Pierrot! The spring of laughter,
Between my teeth, I have broken it:
The bright decor has faded away
In a Shakespearean mirage.

On the mast of my sorrowful ship
A black flag is hoisted:
Oh Pierrot ! The spring of laughter,
Between my teeth, I have broken it.

When will you give me back, lyre-bearer,
Healer of wounded spirits,
Adorable snow of the past,
Moon face, white master,
Oh Pierrot! The spring of laughter?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Gebet an Pierrot (Hartleben)	**Plea to Pierrot**
Pierrot! Mein Lachen	Pierrot! My laughter
Hab ich verlernt!	I have forgot!
Das Bild des Glanzes	My source of light is
Zerfloss – Zerfloss!	Erased – erased!
Schwarz weht die Flagge	Black waves the flag now,
Mir nun vom Mast.	Upon my mast.
Pierrot! Mein Lachen	Pierrot! My laughter
Hab ich verlernt!	I have forgot!
O gib mir wieder,	O give me back,
Rossarzt der Seele,	You farrier of spirits,
Schneemann der Lyrik,	Snow-man of poesy,
Durchlaucht vom Monde,	Princess of moonshine,
Pierrot – mein Lachen!	Pierrot – my laughter!

Hartleben hugely admired Giraud's work, beginning his translation as early as 1886 (only two years after the original publication of the poems), and working on it for five years before reading it aloud to a literary audience in 1891.[29] Following the publication of his translations in 1893, he wrote further poems in homage to Giraud, using the same form and subject matter.[30] Yet clearly Watteau and Shakespeare were not helpful symbols for Hartleben; his Pierrot needed, perhaps, to inhabit a less self-consciously archaic environment.

The classical setting and pervading theme of nostalgia are integral, however, to Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire*, and Watteau's miserable loner Gilles (Pierrot) is central to the argument in a very real sense, occupying a mid-point between sixteenth-century Bergamo, where the rumbustious *commedia dell'arte* had a minor character called Pedrolino, and the decadent modern world of skullcaps and pompoms. These three incarnations of Pierrot tug at one another in Giraud's rondels. The modern 'Pierrot Dandy' (no. 3), who makes up his face with a 'fantastic moonbeam', also admires himself in 'The Mirror' (no. 47) and is excessively concerned about his appearance in 'Brosseur de Lune' (no. 38), where he is referred to as 'Pierrot-Willette' (another name that disappears from Hartleben).

38 Brosseur de Lune	**38 Moon Brusher**
Un très pâle rayon de Lune	A very pale ray of Moonlight
Sur le dos de son habit noir,	On the back of his black jacket,

29 Vilain, '*Pierrot Lunaire*', 140.

30 One of these, 'Die Harfe', is included in Richter, *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire*, 102. Hartleben stays very close to Giraud's rondel structure, with repeated lines in the right places, but he cannot contain his final stanza within five lines and uses six. Others are *Pierrot marié* (1893), a set of five rondels all strictly conforming to the thirteen-line structure, and 'Pierrot und der Esel (nach Albert Giraud)' (1893), which goes further and also employs the strict rhyme scheme in the first two stanzas, before inventing a new scheme, ABCABC, for the six-line final stanza.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Pierrot-Willette sort le soir	Pierrot-Willette goes out in the evening
Pour aller en bonne fortune.	Looking for a good time.
Mais sa toilette l'importune:	But his costume bothers him:
Il s'inspecte, et finit par voir	He inspects it and finally sees
Un très pâle rayon de Lune	A very pale ray of Moonlight
Sur le dos de son habit noir.	On the back of his black jacket.
Il s'imagine que c'est une	He imagines it is
Tache de plâtre, et sans espoir,	A plaster stain, and hopelessly,
Jusqu'au matin, sur le trottoir,	Until daybreak, on the pavement,
Frotte, le cœur gros de rancune,	He rubs away, heart full of rancour,
Un très pâle rayon de Lune!	A very pale ray of Moonlight.

At first glance the reference to Willette seems an obvious one.[31] Adolphe Willette (1857–1926) became well known for his lithographic art, posters, and menu illustrations depicting Pierrot. He adopted the character's persona as a kind of 'alter ego', and for a few years ran a magazine entitled (unsurprisingly) *Pierrot*. It may be tempting to think that his most famous lithograph, *Pierrot pendu*, which depicts a defeated Pierrot hanged by the neck outside his lover's window, as she walks gaily past, semi-naked and oblivious to his act of desperation, might have been the inspiration for Giraud's 'Suicide' (no. 18), in which Pierrot duly hangs himself with his own robe. But this cannot be so. Indeed, it is more likely that *Pierrot pendu*, dating from 1894, was inspired by Giraud. Even the extraordinary *Parce Domine*, created as a mural for Le Chat Noir, which shows a black-suited Pierrot leading a cascade of decadents in an ecstatic parade tumbling from Montmartre down towards the centre of Paris, dates from 1884–5 and would not therefore have been known to Giraud at the time *Pierrot* was written.[32]

Willette's first Paris exhibition was in 1881, his first major showing was in 1887, and his first significant period of fame was the 1890s. By 1884 it is most likely that Giraud would have known him simply as a prominent figure at Le Chat Noir, which opened its doors in 1881, and as the illustrator of some of their menus. In other words, the reference in 'Brosseur de Lune' is by no means an obvious one, and indeed somewhat obscure for most readers in the 1880s. One wonders, moreover (though this is pure speculation), whether Hartleben's removal of the reference a few years later might have been nothing to do with national preference, as Youens implies,[33] but simply on the grounds that he did not understand it. In any case, the Pierrot of 'Brosseur de Lune' is unequivocally flagged up as a creature of the

31 Youens clearly believed so: 'Giraud was certainly influenced by the Pierrot alter ego of the Parisian artist and caricaturist Adolphe Willette' ('The Text of *Pierrot lunaire*', 31).

32 *Parce Domine* also depicts a woman in black, with large black butterfly wings recalling Giraud's 'papillons noirs' (no. 19), clinging onto Pierrot and kissing his cheek.

33 'Hartleben omits the topical-nationalistic reference in his translation, "Der Mondfleck"' (Youens, 'The Text of *Pierrot lunaire*', 31). There may be a point here, especially if Hartleben was aware of Willette's 1889 election campaign as anti-Semite candidate for the XI^{e} arrondissement.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

modern world, and the black jacket in which he sets off to cruise the streets is the dress coat of the contemporary man-about-town.[34]

By contrast, the Pierrot of Giraud's 'Sérénade de Pierrot' (no. 6) is emphatically the Pierrot of the Italian Comedy. Hartleben, deliberately perhaps, mistranslates Giraud's careful use of the word 'viole' (viol) as 'Bratsche' (viola). But the scenario depicted here is a bit of seventeenth-century 'slapstick' (another *commedia* term), and the instrument on which Pierrot scrapes grotesquely is a seventeenth-century instrument, probably a bass viol, played between the legs like a cello. For when the elderly, frequently mistreated Cassander objects to Pierrot's serenade, Pierrot replaces the instrument with the old man, fingering his cravat and bowing his belly (not as Hartleben would have it, his bald head).[35]

6 La Sérénade de Pierrot	**6 Pierrot's Serenade**
D'un grotesque archet dissonant Agaçant sa viole plate, A la héron, sur une patte, Il pince un air inconvenant.	With grotesque dissonant bow, Scraping his viol (which is flat) Like a heron on one leg He picks out a tuneless melody.
Soudain Cassandre, intervenant, Blâme ce nocturne acrobate, D'un grotesque archet dissonant Agaçant sa viole plate.	Suddenly Cassander interrupts To chide the nocturnal acrobat, With a grotesque dissonant bow Scraping his viol (which is flat).
Pierrot la rejette, et prenant D'une poigne très délicate Le vieux par sa roide cravate, Zèbre le bedon du gênant D'un grotesque archet dissonant.	Pierrot throws the viol aside And delicately grasping The old man by his stiff cravat, Streaks the intruder's paunch With a grotesque dissonant bow.

Both the modern Pierrot and his seventeenth-century counterpart experience, in *Pierrot Lunaire*, a degree of world-weariness, and yearn to return to the carefree days of earlier times. Modern Pierrot dreams of returning to 'the blue Elysian fields where Watteau was immortalized', and where 'wild and gentle laughter swirls in the rarefied air' (no. 35: 'Parfums de Bergame'). But Watteau's exiled seventeenth-century Pierrot also looks back,

34 Jean de Palacio refers to Willette as the 'inventor' of the black-suited Pierrot; Palacio, 'Le Recueil comme scène, ou la confusion des genres', 34. But there are several references to Pierrots costumed in unorthodox and modern garb, including black, in earlier pantomimes; see, for example, Storey, *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire*, 20 (illustration), 68. It is certainly true, however, that Willette became firmly associated with the black-suited Pierrot, and Giraud's reference is clearly for this reason.

35 Why Giraud describes the viol as 'flat' is puzzling. I have wondered whether the 'chamber theatre' that contains all this mayhem might be, in Giraud's imagination, a cardboard cut-out theatre, a child's plaything. But nothing apart from this one word supports the idea. An anonymous reviewer for this journal has suggested that this is an instance of the poet constrained by the demands of the rhyme scheme. But which essential word gave rise to this particular rhyme? It seems unlikely to me that Giraud would have saddled himself with a difficult rhyme at the very outset.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and sets sail for his homeland, Bergamo, legendary birthplace of the *commedia dell'arte* itself (no. 36: 'Départ de Pierrot'):

36 Départ de Pierrot

Un rayon de Lune est la rame,
Un blanc nénuphar, la chaloupe;
Il regagne, la brise en poupe,
Sur un fleuve pâle, Bergame.

Le flot chante une humide gamme
Sous la nacelle qui le coupe.
Un rayon de Lune est la rame,
Un blanc nénuphar, la chaloupe.

Le neigeux roi du mimodrame
Redresse fièrement sa houppe:
Comme du punch dans une coupe,
Le vague horizon vert s'enflamme
– Un rayon de Lune est la rame.

36 Pierrot's Departure

A ray of Moonlight is the oar
A white waterlily, the boat;
He returns, the wind at his back,
On a pale river, to Bergamo.

The waves sing a watery scale
Beneath the speeding skiff.
A ray of Moonlight is the oar,
A white waterlily the boat.

The snowy king of pantomime
Proudly smooths his tuft of hair:
Just like punch in a bowl,
The misty green horizon blazes.
– A ray of Moonlight is the oar.

The Poems

Taken together and in sequence, Giraud's set of fifty poems represents an astonishing feat of composition. Susan Youens's claim that Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire* in no way constitutes a 'cycle', but is, rather, a 'jumbled series of fifty poems',[36] is elegantly refuted by Robert Vilain, who summarizes the cycle thus: 'The structure of the original *Pierrot Lunaire* is the progression from easy-going confidence, via disarray, disaster and suicidal despair, back to a renewed but more solidly founded self-possession.'[37] As poetic cycles go, in fact, *Pierrot Lunaire* has more coherence and narrative structure than most. Its disciplined adherence to the rondel form, as well as its internal cross-referencing and structural balance, give it a satisfying consistency of identity. There is no single narrative, but rather, within the general scheme outlined by Vilain above, a number of mini-narratives in which groups of poems follow on from one another in logical sequence. The summary below is intended to help the reader gain a sense of the cycle as a whole. It does not attempt to challenge Vilain's full and excellent commentary on the cycle, but pauses on poems about which he has less to say, and in one or two places offers an alternative reading.

In the first part of the cycle (nos 1–13) we are presented with the theatrical setting (no. 1: 'Théâtre'; no. 2: 'Décor'), and then introduced to the characters. First, we encounter Pierrot (no. 3: 'Pierrot Dandy') preparing his face with moon make-up, ready to meet his guests

36 Youens, 'Excavating an Allegory', 96.
37 Vilain, '*Pierrot Lunaire*', 131.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(no. 4: 'Déconvenue'), who sit frozen in astonishment on finding their food has been snatched away from them, while buffoons ('les gilles') pull faces in the corner. The Moon then appears, seen as a pale washergirl (no. 5: 'Lune au lavoir'), followed by Cassander, Colombine's father, a grumpy old doctor and magician, whose paunch Pierrot bows with his 'grotesque dissonant bow' (no. 6: 'Sérénade') before, in the next poem, cooking an omelette on the roof and hurling it into the night sky (no. 7: 'Cuisine lyrique'). The next character to emerge is Harlequin**,** Pierrot's constant rival for Colombine's affections, who shows off his finery to her father, Cassander (no. 8: 'Arlequinade'),[38] before Pierrot, in similarly narcissistic fashion, waves at a reflection of himself in the icy moonlight (no. 9: 'Pierrot polaire'). At this point we are introduced to Colombine, into whose pubic hair[39] Pierrot would like to scatter moon petals (no. 10: 'Colombine'). Harlequin returns, this time offering a bribe to Colombine's chaperone (no. 11: 'Arlequin'). And then, as the dark clouds of night descend (no. 12: 'Nuages'), Giraud himself steps forward to speak of his own relationship to Pierrot: both are defiant in the face of 'the Law', and for both, words are 'troubling'. Pierrot's solution, of course, is to eschew words altogether, but for Giraud this is not an option (no. 13: 'A mon cousin de Bergame').

13 A mon cousin de Bergame	**13 To my Cousin from Bergamo**
Nous sommes parents par la Lune, Le Pierrot Bergamasque et moi, Car je ressens un pâle émoi, Quand elle allaite la nuit brune.	We are related through the Moon, The Bergamasque Pierrot and I, For I feel a pale emotion, When she suckles the brown night.
Au pied de la rouge tribune, Il chargeait les gestes du roi: Nous sommes parents par la Lune, Le Pierrot Bergamasque et moi.	At the foot of the red platform, He mimicked the king's gestures: We are related through the Moon, The Bergamasque Pierrot and I.
J'ai les vers luisants pour fortune; Je vis en tirant, comme toi, Ma langue saignante à la Loi, Et la parole m'importune: Nous sommes parents par la Lune!	Shining verses are my fortune; I live by sticking out, like you, My bleeding tongue at the Law, And words trouble me: We are related through the Moon!

The sequence of poems that follows (nos 14–30) has a clearer narrative thread. Attention is now focused squarely on Pierrot, with occasional interventions from Giraud himself. Pierrot sets out for a night-time adventure to steal 'sovereign red rubies', which ends in failure (no. 14: 'Pierrot voleur'). Renouncing crime, 'Pierrot of Bergamo' finds himself bored and rain-soaked (15: 'Spleen'); he is drunk on moon wine ('the wine that we drink with our

38 Harlequin is excised completely from Schoenberg's cast list. Vilain is in error when he observes that it is Harlequin whose skull is drilled in 'Gemeinheit' ('*Pierrot Lunaire*', 141); that pleasure is reserved for Cassander.

39 'toison brune': *toison* means 'fleece', which is unlikely to be a reference to head hair.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

eyes'), wherein 'sweet pernicious suggestions | flow freely' (no. 16: 'Ivresse de Lune). He is hanged, perhaps in imagination, from the 'skinny long-necked lover' that is the gallows (no. 17: 'Chanson de la Potence'), after which, still alive but with a powerful hangover, he lynches himself again with his own moon-robe (no. 18: 'Suicide'). Huge black butterflies 'with sticky suckers' descend from the sky to complete the picture of despair (no. 19: 'Papillons noirs'), and then the setting sun slits open its veins, like a debauched Roman reveller who 'lets his unwholesome arteries | bleed into the filthy sewers' (no. 20: 'Coucher de soleil'). Pierrot addresses the consumptive moon, which is 'dying of imaginary love' (no. 21: 'Lune malade'), before he (or, perhaps, Giraud himself) drowns in a sea of absinthe (no. 22: 'Absinthe'):

22 Absinthe	**22 Absinthe**
Dans une immense mer d'absinthe, Je découvre des pays soûls, Aux ciels capricieux et fous Comme un désir de femme enceinte.	In an immense sea of absinthe, I discover drunken landscapes, Where the sky is capricious and crazy Like a pregnant woman's whim.
La capiteuse vague tinte Des rythmes verdâtres et doux: Dans une immense mer d'absinthe, Je découvre des pays soûls.	The heady wave beats With gentle greenish rhythms: In an immense sea of absinthe, I discover drunken landscapes.
Mais soudain ma barque est étreinte Par des poulpes visqueux et mous: Au milieu d'un gluant remous Je disparais, sans une plainte, Dans une immense mer d'absinthe.	But suddenly my boat is grasped By soft and slimy octopuses: Amid a viscous tide I disappear, without a cry, In an immense sea of absinthe.

It is worth pausing here to note the importance of absinthe in Giraud, since no reference to the drink is to be found in Schoenberg, who does not set this poem. He does, however, make use of no. 16 ('Ivresse de Lune'), where Giraud has wine that 'flows from the moon in green waves', and a 'religious poet, drunk on the strange absinthe'. Jean de Palacio emphasizes the significance of absinthe in these poems: 'Another characteristic *fin-de-siècle* motif, inconceivable for the Parnassian Pierrot, [. . .] is the substitution of absinthe for wine in Pierrot's cravings. This wine, once red now turned to green, fairy green, Muse green or God green, pervades the entire universe; the countryside, the sky and the horizons are soused in it.'[40] One might wonder in this context whether Giraud's 'Ivresse de Lune' is a deliberate reference to Banville's rondel 'Le Vin', only with the ruby wine turned to decadent green:

40 Palacio, 'Le Recueil comme scène', 28.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Le Vin (Banville)

Dans le pourpre de ce vieux vin
Une étincelle d'or éclate;
Un rayon de flamme écarlate
Brille en son flot sombre et divin.

Comme dans l'œil d'un vieux silvain
Qu'une Nymphe caresse et flatte,
Dans le pourpre de ce vieux vin
Une étincelle d'or éclate.

Il ne coulera pas en vain!
A le voir mon cœur se dilate.
Il n'est pas de ceux qu'on frelate
Et je lirai, comme un devin,
Dans le pourpre de ce vieux vin.

Wine[41]

In the ruby depths of this old wine
There's a sudden golden gleam.
A dazzling flash of scarlet flame
Burns in its swirl, shadowy, divine.

As in the eyes of aged genii,
Pampered objects of the Nymphs' esteem,
In the ruby depths of this old wine
There's a sudden golden gleam.

It shan't spring vainly from the vine!
On seeing it, my heart will leap.
Nothing there is tainted, nothing weak.
And like a seer I'll know what to find
In the ruby depths of this old wine.

16 Ivresse de Lune

Le vin que l'on boit par les yeux
A flots verts de la Lune coule,
Et submerge comme une houle
Les horizons silencieux.

De doux conseils pernicieux
Dans le philtre nagent en foule:
Le vin que l'on boit par les yeux
A flots verts de la Lune coule.

Le Poète religieux
De l'étrange absinthe se soûle,
Aspirant, – jusqu'à ce qu'il roule,
Le geste fou, la tête aux cieux, –
Le vin que l'on boit par les yeux!

16 Moon Drunk

The wine that we drink with our eyes
Flows in green waves from the Moon,
And drowns like a tide
The silent horizons.

Dangerously sweet suggestions
Float freely in the potion:
The wine that we drink with our eyes
Flows in green waves from the Moon.

The religious Poet is drunk
On the strange absinthe,
Inhaling – until his head rolls back,
Gesturing crazily, toward the sky –
The wine that we drink with our eyes.

Hartleben, however, in his translation of this poem ('Mondestrunken') removes the word 'green' from the first stanza and has the poet 'intoxicated by a 'holy liquid', thus losing this important decadent motif.

Returning to Pierrot: the theme of death continues with an old crone holding out her basket of sawdust to the blood-spitting severed head of a guillotine victim (no. 23: 'Mendiante de têtes').

41 Banville, *Rondels*, p. 16; Eng. trans. by Martin Sorrell, unpublished.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

23 Mendiante de têtes

Un panier rouge empli de son
Balance dans ta main crispée,
Folle Guillotine échappée,
Qui rôdes devant la prison!

Ta voix qui mendie a le son
Du billot qu'entaille l'épée:
Un panier rouge empli de son
Balance dans ta main crispée!

Bourrèle! qui veux pour rançon
Le sang, le meurtre, l'épopée,
Tu tends à la tête coupée
Crachant sa dernière chanson,
Un panier rouge empli de son!

23 The Beggar of Heads

A red basket filled with sawdust
Swings from your clenched hand,
Crazy escaped Guillotine,
Lurking outside the prison!

Your begging voice resounds
Like the block struck by the blade:
A red basket filled with sawdust
Swings from your clenched hand!

Executioner! who demands a ransom
Of blood, of murder and epic deeds,
You hold out to the severed head
Spitting out its last song,
A red basket filled with sawdust!

Vilain rightly considers this one of the most 'imagistically complex' of the poems in *Pierrot Lunaire*,[42] for the crone appears to be a conflation of 'tricoteuse', executioner, and the guillotine itself, and her red basket ('un panier rouge') is 'empli de son', which Vilain translates as 'full of sound', while acknowledging that 'son' also means 'bran'. This ambiguity underpins Vilain's interpretation of the poem, and he concludes: 'A basket of sounds may be what the the Symbolists proclaimed as the virtue of their poetry – "de la musique avant toute chose" was Verlaine's battle cry – but at this point in the *Pierrot Lunaire* cycle, it comes as a warning that dislocating sounds from form and substance means death or poetic silence.'[43] There is no doubt that sound is central to the image painted here: the begging voice 'resounding' like the sound of the guillotine and the severed head 'spitting out its last song' create a vivid contrast to the silent submersion in absinthe of the preceding poem. But it should be noted that if 'sound' were the intended interpretation of the word 'son' in line 1, this would be the only rondel in the cycle in which the same word was used twice to fulfil the requirements of rhyme, since 'son' appears unequivocally as 'sound' in line 5. Both Richter and Bourlier, in any case, translate 'empli de son' as 'full of sawdust'.

Away from the gory scenes of the Place de la Révolution, beneath a 'fantastic indolent sky', a 'tall sauntering Pierrot' imagines himself decapitated by the crescent moon, plunging from the sky like a silver sword (no. 24: 'Décollation'), his huge tongue lolling from his decapitated head, blood red against his white tunic (no. 25: 'Rouge et blanc'). By association, Giraud comments that for him these are also the colours he associates with a Chopin waltz – 'like a spit of blood | from the mouth of a consumptive' (no. 26: 'Valse de Chopin').[44]

42 Vilain, '*Pierrot Lunaire*', 134–5.
43 Vilain, '*Pierrot Lunaire*', 135.
44 Ironically, although Dunsby takes Andrew Porter to task for translating Hartleben's 'Kranken' as 'consumptive' (*Schoenberg: Pierrot lunaire*, 40), Giraud's 'phtisique' implies precisely that interpretation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

26 Valse de Chopin

Comme un crachat sanguinolent,
De la bouche d'une phtisique,
Il tombe de cette musique
Un charme morbide et dolent.

Un son rouge – du rêve blanc
Avive la pâle tunique,
Comme un crachat sanguinolent
De la bouche d'une phtisique.

Le thème doux et violent
De la valse mélancolique
Me laisse une saveur physique,
Un fade arrière-goût troublant,
Comme un crachat sanguinolent.

26 Chopin Waltz

Like a spit of blood,
From the mouth of a consumptive
From this music falls
A morbid and mournful charm.

A red sound – a white dream
Brightens the pale tunic.
Like a spit of blood,
From the mouth of a consumptive.

The sweet and violent theme
Of the melancholy waltz
Leaves me a medicinal flavour,
A faintly troubling after-taste,
Like a spit of blood.

Since comfort is not to be found in the waltz, we now find Pierrot in church seeking atonement. There is more red and white to be encountered here, where 'innumerable candles, rending the dying air, bleed upon the decorated altar' (no. 27: 'L'Église'). He calls on the battle-scarred Madonna of Hysteria to present to the congregation her withered crucified son (no. 28: 'Évocation'), and, as priest, he performs a 'cruel Eucharist', tearing out his own bleeding heart from beneath his white vestments (no. 29: 'Messe rouge'). Continuing the theme of crucifixion, we are told (by Pierrot/Giraud) that fine verses are like crosses on which red poets bleed (no. 30: 'Les Croix'). The gradual crescendo of this unbroken sequence, from no. 23 through to no. 30, flows on a stream of blood from the place of public execution to the sanctuary of the church and finally to the sacrifice and transfiguration of the poet.

At this point the poet appears to notice that he has lost his sense of humour somewhat, and urges Pierrot to summon its recovery (no. 31: 'Supplique'). As a means to this end, the power of music is evoked in a gentle moonlight serenade (no. 32: 'Violon de Lune'), and a melancholy calm is restored as evening falls (no. 33: 'Les Cigognes'). Pierrot 'unlearns his fateful air' and yearns first for his moon-home in the sky (no. 34: 'Nostalgie') and then for his ancient Italian birthplace (no. 35: 'Parfums de Bergame'), for which he sets sail aboard a white water lily, a moonbeam serving as his oar (no. 36: 'Départ de Pierrot'). In a moment of slapstick, as though having recovered his *commedia* surroundings, Pierrot bludgeons Cassander with a rope (no. 37: 'Pantomime'). But now a very modern Pierrot – Pierrot-Willette – sets out 'looking for a good time' (38: 'Brosseur de Lune').

The final group of poems begins Giraud's re-ascent into the 'renewed but more solidly founded self-possession' which Vilain saw as the end-point of the poet's journey of self-discovery (see above). In 'L'Alphabet' (no. 39) he explains his fondness for colourful masks and his 'dreams of a Bergamasque Harlequin'. By contrast, he evokes, on Pierrot's behalf, the whiteness and purity of former times (no. 40: 'Blancheurs sacrées'). Cassander mopes about,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

while an orchestra plays Cimarosa (no. 41: 'Poussière rose'); the old Duenna is mocked by the moon for lusting after young Pierrot (no. 42: 'Parodie'); and Cassander is humiliated and sprayed by a unicorn (no. 43: 'Lune moqueuse'). Pierrot walks the streets with his lantern (no. 44: 'La Lanterne'); he assaults Cassander, drilling his bald head with a cranium driller and using the hole as a pipe bowl (no. 45: 'Pierrot cruel'); and the final glimmer of the setting sun, described as a large pink egg, is shattered by the beaks of blackbirds (no. 46: 'Décor'). 'Le Miroir' (no. 47) finds Pierrot back in his boudoir, observing the reflected crescent moon above his head, like a crown. Along with his companions Colombine and Harlequin, he takes to the water for a moonlight picnic, while 'viols play madrigals' (no. 48: 'Souper sur l'eau'). Finally, he spreads his body, either in penance or in sleep, 'before his pale Empress' on the moon-washed marble staircase (no. 49: 'L'Escalier'). It is left for Giraud to deliver the epilogue (no. 50: 'Cristal de Bohême') – but more of that shortly.

Beyond the elements of narrative noted above, and within the dramatically permissive frame of the imagined 'chamber theatre', the cycle is unified by a clearly defined set of symbols: Pierrot himself, the moon, the sun, and the Italian Comedy. Pierrot is central to twenty-seven of the fifty poems and is alluded to in five more; the moon, moonlight, or moonbeams feature in twenty-two of them; the sun is the focus of four poems; meanwhile, Harlequin, Colombine, Cassander, and other *commedia* figures appear in twelve. Richter also points out the consistent, and perhaps obvious, use of colour symbolism, particularly red (sunset, opulence, blood), white (the moon, purity, Pierrot), and green (ocean waves, nature, and, importantly, absinthe).[45]

The Voice of the Poet

In addition (and this has not been given sufficient emphasis, perhaps, by Richter or by Vilain) there is the embracing presence of Giraud himself. The work opens and closes with the voice of the poet, and his intervention at structurally important moments is significant. In no. 13 ('A mon cousin de Bergame': see above), after the 'dreadful fishermen' of night have captured the 'shimmering celestial fish' that are the daytime clouds (no. 12: 'Nuages'), Giraud makes a personal statement in which he claims kinship with Pierrot. In a number of the poems (21, 22, 30, 31, 40) the voice is ambiguously either that of the poet or that of Pierrot. In 'A mon cousin de Bergame', however, there can be no mistake. A personal note is struck again in no. 26 ('Valse de Chopin'; see above). Here, Giraud reveals a little more about his own inability to harmonize with modern life, for this is not the bourgeois view of Chopin, whose waltzes might be expected to bring a sentimental warmth to the heart rather than the 'faintly troubling after-taste' of consumption.[46] The extent to which he has always been 'out of step' with society is further reinforced in no. 39 ('L'Alphabet'):

45 Richter, *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire*, xx.

46 It is worth noting here, also, the difference between this image and these words and those of Hartleben, who has 'a pale drop of blood' ('ein blasser Tropfen Bluts') rather than this stark and violent 'spit' of red, and whose final stanza eschews the wonderful 'medicinal flavour' and 'faintly troubling after-taste'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

39 L'Alphabet

Un alphabet bariolé,
Dont chaque lettre était un masque,
Fut l'abécédaire fantasque
Qu'en mon enfance j'épelai.

Très longtemps je me rappelai,
Mieux que mes sabres et mon casque,
Un alphabet bariolé
Dont chaque lettre était un masque.

Aujourd'hui, mon cœur enjôlé,
Vibrant comme un tambour de basque,
Rêve un Arlequin bergamasque,
Traçant d'un corps arc-en-ciellé
Un alphabet bariolé.

39 The Alphabet

A multicoloured alphabet,
Of which each letter was a mask,
Was the whimsical alphabet book
I spelled out as a child.

In later years I recalled,
Better than my sabres and my helmet,
A multicoloured alphabet
Of which each letter was a mask.

Nowadays, my foolish heart,
Quivering like a tambourine,
Dreams of a Bergamasque Harlequin,
Drawing with his rainbow-hued body
A multicoloured alphabet.

The poet, who dreams an imaginary theatre but who finds words troubling (in no. 13) and dance music morbid (in no. 26), also preferred his picture books to the apparatus of boyish war games (in no. 39). This sequence of personal confessions, appearing at regular intervals of thirteen (the number of lines in a rondel), is brought to a moving climax in the final poem 'Cristal de Bohême':

50 Cristal de Bohême

Un rayon de Lune enfermé
Dans un beau flacon de Bohême,
Tel est le féerique poème
Que dans ces rondels j'ai rimé.

Je suis en Pierrot costumé,
Pour offrir à celle que j'aime
Un rayon de Lune enfermé
Dans un beau flacon de Bohême.

Par ce symbole est exprimé,
O ma très chère, tout moi-même:
Comme Pierrot, dans son chef blême
Je sens, sous mon masque grimé,
Un rayon de Lune enfermé.

50 Bohemian Crystal

A ray of Moonlight enclosed
In a fine Bohemian bottle,
That is the enchanted poem
I have created with my rhymes.

I am disguised as Pierrot,
To offer to the one I love
A ray of Moonlight enclosed
In a fine Bohemian bottle.

By this symbol is expressed,
Oh my dearest, all I am:
Like Pierrot, in his pale head,
I feel, under my mask of disguise,
A ray of Moonlight enclosed.

Giraud's identification with Pierrot should not come as a surprise after the confidences of 'A mon cousin de Bergame', and Vilain is undoubtedly right when he points out that 'this mirroring of the identities of poetic creation and poetic creator is an archetypal Symbolist

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

motif'.[47] But when he asserts that 'the associations of the mirror [no. 47: 'Le Miroir'] with the multiple reflectivity of the crystal – the poet's poems and Pierrot's make-up – mean that a simple, naturalist reading of the final poem, "Cristal de Bohême", is precluded', I am less convinced. Why not read this as a straightforward confession? And why not wonder about the identity of 'ma très chère'? To whom are these poems addressed? Could this be Iwan Gilkin (notwithstanding the use of the feminine form of address), who, according to Giraud's dedication, shared the 'exquisite dilettante hours' with him?

Richter describes Gilkin as Giraud's 'closest friend' in 1882.[48] The dedication to Gilkin in *Pierrot Narcisse* (1887; see above) exults in the continued friendship ('Je suis encore ton ami | C'est vraiment extraordinaire'). Correspondence between Gilkin and Bithell makes it clear that Gilkin was still in touch with Giraud as late as 1920.[49] To suggest a relationship beyond pure friendship would be no more than speculation, although from Richter we learn that Giraud (who preferred his alphabet to his sabres and helmets) 'is said always to have longed for his lost childhood. He adored his mother and his beloved aunt but never found love as an adult: in matters of the heart he was an outsider. In various senses Giraud was himself Pierrot'.[50] Be that as it may, we can see from this that the extent to which Schoenberg's Op. 21 has come to be regarded as a statement in which Schoenberg himself is the central character stands at odds with a reading of the original cycle, in the light of which it appears somewhat absurd. Schoenberg may, like Giraud, have been 'out of step' with his own society, but his isolation is radical and heroic, in complete contrast to Giraud's stubborn refusal to be dragged into the modern age of 'literary photographers'. Like his Pierrots, Giraud looks back to a rapidly disappearing world whose sensibilities embrace playful whimsy, childish fantasy, regular rhythm, and predictable rhyme – the very qualities guaranteed to raise the hackles of the committed modernist. Boulez's dismissal of Giraud's verses as 'mediocre' and 'out of date' ('périmée') is only to be expected from one whose definition of modernity begins with Mallarmé and Debussy. And yet Hartleben had no such misgivings. If his translations frequently deviate from the original in word or structure, it is because he is a poet and not a mere copyist. Unable to re-create Giraud's rhyme scheme without significantly altering his content, he can at least be creative with line length from time to time in compensation. But his translations are largely faithful to the original and never a complete reinvention; on this point too Youens is misleading. Hartleben's claim that he had often not 'translated' the poems 'but had instead taken a motif or two from the original and written his own poem on that basis'[51] does not bear scrutiny, and only approximates truth in those instances where the poems are condensed into short, bullet-like lines (nos 17 and 31). In that sense the judgement that his *Pierrot* is an improvement on the original is at best overstated. Ultimately, this comes down to taste, perhaps; but I would suggest that in a poem like 'Lune au lavoir' (no. 5), for example, Hartleben fails to capture the full liquid sensuality of Giraud's 'young celestial

47 Vilain, '*Pierrot Lunaire*', 138.
48 Richter, *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire*, xix.
49 Iwan Gilkin, letter to Jethro Bithell, 3 May 1920; Bithell Collection, University of Leeds.
50 Richter, *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire*, xv.
51 Youens, 'The Text of *Pierrot lunaire*', 30.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

working girl', dispensing with, among other things, the seductive image of her skirts tied up upon her hips.[52]

5 Lune au lavoir

Comme une pâle lavandière,
Elle lave ses failles blanches,
Ses bras d'argent hors de leurs manches,
Au fil chantant de la rivière.

Les vents à travers la clairière
Soufflent dans leurs flûtes sans anches.
Comme une pâle lavandière,
Elle lave ses failles blanches.

La céleste et douce ouvrière
Nouant sa jupe sur ses hanches,
Sous le baiser frôlant des branches,
Étend son linge de lumière,
Comme une pâle lavandière.

5 Moonlight over the Washing-Place

Like a pale washer-girl,
She washes her white silks,
Her silvery arms out of her sleeves,
Dipping into the singing stream.

The winds through the clearing
Blow on their reedless flutes.
Like a pale washer-girl,
She washes her white silks.

The soft celestial working girl,
Tying up her skirts upon her hips,
Caressed by kissing branches,
Hangs up her sheets of moonlight
Like a pale washer-girl.

Eine blasse Wascherin (Hartleben)

Eine blasse Wäscherin
Wäscht zur Nachtzeit bleiche Tücher,
Nackte, silberweisse Arme
Streckt sie nieder in die Flut.

Durch die Lichtung schleichen Winde,
Leis bewegen sie den Strom.
Eine blasse Wäscherin
Wäscht zur Nachtzeit bleiche Tücher.

Und die sanfte Magd des Himmels,
Von den Zweigen zart umschmeichelt,
Breitet auf die dunklen Wiesen
Ihre lichtgewobenen Linnen –
Eine blasse Wäscherin.

A Pale Washergirl

Here's a pale washergirl
Washing nightly faded garments;
Naked, silver white her arms are,
Stretching down into the flow.

Through the clearing creeps a slight wind,
Lightly stirring up the stream.
She's a pale washergirl,
Washing nightly faded garments.

And the spotless Maid of heaven,
Now caressed by wispy branches,
Lays out, on the dusky meadow,
All her linen woven with moonlight.
She's a pale washergirl.

Ironically, however, because of Schoenberg, Giraud's Parnassian world now finds itself firmly embedded in the story of modernism. Boulez's protestations that Schoenberg's *Pierrot* is of value because of the music and in spite of the texts cannot be taken seriously. Indeed, one

52 As Kay Bourlier wrote in a note to her translations for Marsh, *Pierrot Lunaire*: 'La lavandière has the romantic and erotic connotations of the shepherdess – lower class availability and vulnerability, as well as semi-nudity (arms, ankles), suggestive actions (leaning over, reaching up) and wetness'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

could argue precisely the opposite – that the lunatic palindrome of Schoenberg's 'Der Mondfleck' and the cacophonous bagatelle of his 'Galgenlied' (which Dunsby calls 'a severe test of comprehensibility')[53] are given meaning only by the brilliance of Giraud's imagination (and only in retrospect, since neither setting allows the text to be understood in performance). It should not be necessary to argue that the whole *raison d'être* of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* derives from Giraud; without Giraud there would, quite literally, be nothing. Indeed, Schoenberg's much quoted 'light ironic tone' in Op. 21, although it may have been novel for this particular composer, is not to be wondered at, since it would be hard to imagine approaching these poems otherwise. And now that, as Jonathan Dunsby points out in the quotation at the head of this article, most of us have moved on from our positions of heroic modernism, Giraud's quaint archaism need not blind us to the staggering ingenuity and originality of his Bergamasque rondels. His moon-omelette (no. 7), peeing unicorn (no. 43), and trepanned smoking skull (no. 45) pre-date Jarry's *Ubu roi* by twelve years. His quivering violin, erotically stirred into sound by the gentle bowing of a moonbeam (no. 31), his filthy gutters flowing with blood from the slit wrists of the setting sun (no. 20), and his monstrous black blood-sucking butterflies of despair (no. 19) are images that assault the imagination and stay in the mind. If only on the basis of *Pierrot Lunaire*, Giraud is a poet worthy of wider recognition, deserving more than a dismissive footnote in histories of modern music. I would argue further that any claim that the power of Schoenberg's Op. 21 owes little or nothing to Giraud, and that students of the work need not bother themselves with investigating its literary source, is short-sighted, chauvinistic, and, now that Giraud's work is easily accessible once more in its entirety, no longer tenable.

Bibliography

Banville, Théodore de. *Rondels*, ed. Martin Sorrell. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1973.
Berio, Luciano. *Remembering the Future*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
Bithell, Jethro, ed. *Contemporary Belgian Poetry*. London: Walter Scott, 1911.
Boulez, Pierre. *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, trans. Stephen Walsh. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Originally pubd as *Relevés d'apprenti*, ed. Paule Thévenin. Paris: Seuil, 1966.
Delaere, Mark, and Jan Herman, eds. *Pierrot Lunaire: Albert Giraud, Otto Hartleben, Arnold Schoenberg*. Leuven: Peeters, 2004.
Dunsby, Jonathan. *Schoenberg: Pierrot lunaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
———. 'Schoenberg's Pierrot Keeping his Kopfmotiv', in *Pierrot Lunaire*, ed. Delaere and Herman. 67–76.
Giraud, Albert. *Pierrot Lunaire*. Paris: Lemerre, 1884.
———. *Pierrot lunaire*, trans. Otto Erich Hartleben [1893]. Munich: Georg Müller, 1911.
———. *Héros et Pierrot*. Paris: Fischbacher, 1898. Repr. as *Pierrot Lunaire, Les Dernières Fêtes, Pierrot Narcisse*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004.
Marsh, Roger. *Pierrot Lunaire: 50 Rondels Bergamasques*, settings of Albert Giraud in original French and in English translations by Kay Bourlier. Kenley: Maecenas Contemporary Music, 2002.
———. Recording: *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire: 50 Rondels Bergamasques*. Linda Hirst, mezzo soprano, Joe Marsh, narrator, Red Byrd, Juice Trio, Hilliard Ensemble, Ebor Singers, cond. Paul Gameson. CD, NMC, NMCD127. 2007.
Palacio, Jean de. 'Le Recueil comme scène, ou la confusion des genres', in *Pierrot Lunaire*, ed. Delaere and Herman. 25–35.
Polyte, Jeanne. *Albert Giraud – Emile Verhaeren: Parallèle sentimental*. Brussels: Office de Publicité, 1930.
Puffett, Kathryn. 'Structural Imagery: "Pierrot lunaire" Revisited'. *Tempo* 60/327 (2006), 2–22.
Richter, Gregory C. *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire*. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2001.

53 Dunsby, *Schoenberg: Pierrot lunaire*, 55.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rognoni, Luigi. *The Second Vienna School: Expressionism and Dodecaphony*, trans. Robert W. Mann. London: Calder, 1977.
Rosen, Charles. *Schoenberg*. London: Fontana, 1976.
Schoenberg, Arnold. 'The Relationship to the Text', in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black. London: Faber & Faber, 1975. 141–5.
Storey, Robert. *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire: Nineteenth-Century French Literary Artists and the Comic Pantomime*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
Vilain, Robert. '*Pierrot Lunaire*: Cyclic Coherence in Giraud and Schoenberg', in *Pierrot Lunaire*, ed. Delaere and Herman. 127–44.
Weytjens, Stephan. 'Text as a Crutch in Arnold Schoenberg's ''Pierrot lunaire'' Op. 21? An Analytic Study of the Relationship between Textual Aspects and Musical Structure in Free Atonality'. PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, 2003.
Youens, Susan. 'Excavating an Allegory: the Texts of *Pierrot Lunaire*'. *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 8/2 (1984), 94–115.
———. 'The Text of *Pierrot lunaire*: an Allegory of Art and the Mind', in *From Pierrot to Marteau: an International Conference and Concert Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute, University of California School of Music, March 14–16, 1987*. Los Angeles: Arnold Schoenberg Institute, 1987. 30–2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572207000540 Published online by Cambridge University Press