

*Esti Sheinberg***TEACHING SCHOENBERG'S *PIERROT LUNAIRE***

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The article offers a fresh methodology for teaching Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* to college students. Relying on the character of Pierrot's historical development, rooted in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Commedia dell'Arte traditions, but enriched during the following three centuries, this approach chooses elements that are relevant to the target audience, with the aim to instigate motivation and emotional involvement toward Schoenberg's masterpiece. Refs 14.

*Keywords:* teaching methodologies, college students, Schoenberg, Pierrot, *Pierrot Lunaire*, Molière, Commedia dell'Arte, 16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Introduction: the problem***Gemeinheit*

In den blanken Kopf Cassanders,  
Dessen Schrein die Luft durchzetert,  
Bohrt Pierrot mit Heuchlermienen  
Zärtlich — einen Schädelbohrer.  
Darauf stopft er mit dem Daumen  
Seinen echten türkschen Tabak  
In den blanken Kopf Cassanders,  
Dessen Schrein die Luft durchzetert.  
Dann dreht er ein Rohr von Weichsel  
Hinten in die glatte Glatze  
Und behaglich schmaucht und pafft er  
Seinen echten türkschen Tabak  
Aus dem blanken Kopf Cassanders!

*Atrocity [1]*

Through the bald pate of Cassander,  
As he rends the air with screeches  
Bores Pierrot in feigning tender  
Fashion with a cranium driller.  
He then presses with his finger  
Rare tobacco grown in Turkey  
In the bald pate of Cassander,  
As he rends the air with screeches.  
Then screwing a cherry pipe stem  
Right in through the polished surface,  
Sits at ease and smokes and puffs the  
Rare tobacco grown in Turkey  
From the bald pate of Cassander.

This rather unpleasant text, describing a sadistic delirium, is the sixteenth song of *Pierrot Lunaire*, a series of 21 poems by Albert Giraud (1860–1929), set to music by Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951). The music sounds no less violent than the text. The cello attacks our ears first, in short motifs, each with quick repeating hits; the violin strings are aggressively plucked, two or three at a time; the piano is mercilessly hit, starting at the bass range. Seven bars later enter a clarinet and a piccolo, screaming at the top of their ranges. The piece continues with sudden, extreme changes of dynamics and tempo. Needless to say: the whole ensemble is completely atonal. On top of this general infrastructure there is a female voice that half-speaks-half-sings the bizarre text, in the *Sprechstimme* technique that Schoenberg envisaged. *Pierrot Lunaire* is generally regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces of the twentieth century.

*Pierrot Lunaire*, more than hundred years old, is taught in most if not all music colleges and musicology departments at universities world wide. Students are required to know it, and quite often, analyze it. Sometimes they are expected to perform it. Undergraduates

and graduates taking music history and music appreciation classes almost unanimously reject the work. They deem it as ‘weird’ (they have a point, it is indeed weird, and not coincidentally so); ‘ugly’ (relative to materials they are accustomed to call ‘beautiful’); ‘incomprehensible’ (untrue), and/or ‘boring’ — a rebellious reaction to being submitted to c. 40 minutes of listening to unexpected, inconsistent and bizarre melodramatic *Sprechgesang*, the artificial ‘pitch recitation’ style in a language that most of them do not understand,<sup>1</sup> over a background of fleeting motifs played in an ostensibly random fashion by six musical instruments. The labeling of *Pierrot Lunaire* is “A Masterpiece,” implying that whoever does not appreciate its great aesthetic value should somehow be subjected to embarrassment or even humiliation. Some students would openly proclaim what they perceive as the nakedness of the King, while others would half-heartedly accept the nomenclature, paying a lip service to the ruling culture’s canonical choices. A student who would actually perceive the work on an aesthetic and emotional level, without being carefully directed toward it, is really hard to find.

Schoenberg’s free atonality could be blamed for these characteristic reactions, which seem to exceed boundaries of culture, education levels and musicality. However, this alone cannot be the reason: so much of contemporary music is atonal, and yet does not seem to alienate young listeners: examples abound even in the music of rock bands. However, in these popular styles atonality is used as an addition, a passage between ‘columns’ of simple triads and well-defined bass patterns. In such works, a very clear rhythmic framework and many repetitions compensate for the unintelligibility of an atonal passage. In *Pierrot*, on the other hand, there are hardly any musical repetitions, and the rhythm is so complicated that is not perceived as a pattern.

The problem is that *Pierrot Lunaire*’s cannot be dismissed. Its nerve-wracking aural experience *does, in fact, present a masterpiece*. An analysis of the work that may “prove this”, actually, misses the point: music is, first and foremost, a sensual-emotional experience. This music *is* disturbing, and naturally instigates apprehension. This poses a challenge to the university instructor: while students can be made to *know it*, how can they be persuaded to *love it*?

### Texts and meaning as starting points

Beyond its avoidance of any comfortable sensual ‘point of reference’ (rhythm, tonality, timbre — all are on the ‘bizarre’ end of the musical axis), there is another reason for *Pierrot*’s lack of popularity: the unfortunate historical constellation, adjoining the canonization of Schoenberg’s music as ‘model’ and the ‘*l’art pour l’art*’ movement, this work is often taught as a purely musical work, and its instructors focus on pitch-class relations of its elements, its orchestration, its structure, etc. However, *Pierrot is not, and was never meant to be, a ‘purely musical’ work*<sup>2</sup>. First, it is music written to given texts, to poems, carrying their own meaning, background, symbolism and historic development. Then, the vocal part of the music was written to be *read, recited* with a certain intonation, inflection of voice, pitch, expression. Third — Schoenberg’s work is a very late link in a long chain of

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<sup>1</sup> Even students whose mother tongue is German may find the highly symbolic, fin-de-siècle poetic style of Albert Giraud and Hartleben difficult to comprehend, let alone to appreciate.

<sup>2</sup> The question, whether there is such a thing as a ‘purely musical’ work deserve another, much more expansive, discussion.

historical development, a whole complex of *Pierrot* background, of which the original creator, performers and elitist audience were well aware. However, today's audience lacks this awareness. Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* is not a series of pitch-class set manipulations. It is a deeply expressive work describing a *soul tortured by love*.

Unlike most writings on the general subject of *Pierrot* and/or the specific subject of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, the present paper offers a different point of view, confronting the challenge of *teaching* this work to college students (both music majors and general students). Given the intuitive complications of accessing the work as is, I propose that special instruction techniques need to be devised in order to enhance, among the students, psychological processes of empathy and active semiosis, with the objective of providing a meaningful music listening experience. The system of signs used in the work requires an expansive cultural background. This background, enriched by a historical analysis and a fascinating musical commentary, was supplied by Reinhold Brinkmann in a article following a presentation at the *Schönberg and Kandinsky Symposium* (Amsterdam, 1993) [2]. Brinkmann's paper provided an excellent starting point for the present study, which is also based on a variety of primary and secondary sources, created (and discovered) both before and after his work was published.

As Brinkmann pointed out correctly, Schönberg's opus 21 is, first and foremost, a musical reaction and manipulation of *texts*. Therefore, the texts and their cultural background need to be contemplated first. *Pierrot* is *in love*, and his love is not only unrequited, but betrayed. This is the most important and — for most students — the most relevant element in the whole work. *Pierrot* is far from being just the 'sad clown', as he is traditionally (but superficially) referred to. The entangled mesh of confusion, love, lust, jealousy, yearning, loneliness, narcissistic cruelty and sheer heartbreak, all present in Schoenberg's song-cycle, could encounter empathy and identification among young people, many of whom are experiencing similar emotional turmoil. This, I believe, should be the starting point for the teaching of *Pierrot Lunaire*.

### Who is *Pierrot*?

*Pierrot, as Schoenberg knew him*, is a moon-struck, lovesick, mentally ill, vindictive assassin, a wounded soul enduring a spiritual hell that is expressed through poetic surrealist imagery. Indeed, it is precisely these qualities that are portrayed by the instruments and the vocal performer. Schoenberg's *Pierrot* is innocent but also childishly cruel. He is both naïve and manipulative; a lover and a murderer. On top of that, and seemingly unrelated, he is traditionally dressed like a 16<sup>th</sup>-century peasant and is historically related to *Commedia dell'Arte*'s clownish masks of ridiculous Italian servants. This complex of characteristics is the result of a historical layering of various theatrical characters, all eventually collapsed into one figure: the late nineteenth-century French *Pierrot*. To understand this figure, the various historical layers must be peeled off and then reconstructed, one by one, into Schoenberg's perceived artistic complex.

Although related by costume and name, *Pierrot*, at the turn of the century, has very little in common with the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian witty, down-to-earth *zanni* mask of Pedrolino. The more familiar fin-de-siècle French *Pierrot*, on the other hand, is a product of the decadent movement's artificial melancholy, its symbolic poetry and its fascination with the purely aesthetic. This *Pierrot* developed at the Parisian *Théâtre des Funambules*

through the tremendously influential work of Jean-Gaspard Debureau (1796–1846), the pantomime artist who created and performed hundreds of Pierrot scenarios. The Decadent writings of Giraud and Huysmans, as well as the Symbolist works of Verlaine and Baudelaire followed his model, pulling the figure's characteristics into new extremes of viciousness and insanity. The national-nostalgic wave that affected French artists and literati toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century aspired to close ties with earlier, 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-centuries depictions of Pierrot-figures, such as Gilles, who appears in Watteau's paintings of *Commedia dell'Arte* characters. Debussy's *Suite bergamasque* and Fauré's "Pierrot" are sound impressions of Watteau's paintings as much as of the poems of Verlaine and of Théodore de Banville's *Odes funambulesques*: they relate to an imaginary figure whose character is a multi-layered complex of historical development. Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, based on Giraud's eponymous collection of 50 poems, was therefore just a very late and overripe fruit rendering a phantasmagorical depiction of a figure that was created about 300 years earlier.

It is precisely this psychologically complex transformation that I propose as the focus for instructing *Pierrot Lunaire*, mainly and particularly because the composer himself saw it in the same light. This is why, I believe, that a considerable part of the teaching process of this work should be dedicated to the history of Pierrot, the mask that became human; so human, that it is transformed, through suffering, humiliation, and struggle, into the sick, distorted soul that is described in Schoenberg's work, finally attaining spiritual healing through acceptance and the return to its legendary roots.

### Who was Pierrot and why would we care about that?

What are the story and history of Pierrot? His costume relates him to the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, but his name is French, not Italian. His behavior as a French 19<sup>th</sup>-century clown is very different than that of his alleged ancestor, the Italian resourceful, funny, flexible and ingenuous Pedrolino, a *zanni* mask that appeared first in Venetian groups of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, and yet Debussy (and earlier — Watteau) associated Pierrot (in spite of his French name) with Bergamo, the alleged cradle of Italian street comedians<sup>3</sup>. How did this mongrel of Italian and French cultures come into existence?

Speaking to an audience of young adults, such as juniors and seniors of high school and college students, it is extremely important to make the subject *relevant*. It must speak directly — and, preferably, immediately — to their sense of reality. It must touch their lives. To understand the phenomenon of *Pierrot Lunaire* and, moreover, to make it relevant, one would need to pinpoint exactly the difference between these Pedrolino and Pierrot, or, more precisely, highlight the *reason* for this difference. Therefore it is imperative to clarify that the first Pierrot in the history of drama was not insane, like his 19<sup>th</sup>-century descendant, nor a clown, like his Venetian ancestor. In fact, the authentic Pierrot was a completely healthy and a *very simple and normal* young man in love.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information of the Zanni and their connection to the Italian city of Bergamo, see [3].

## Commedia dell'Arte: Pedrolino, The Servant

The sixteenth-century Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* was rich with characters of *zanni*: figures of servants that were, occasionally and according to their various “masks” — helpful, lazy, resourceful, stupid, ignorant, thieves, funny acrobats, mute, dumb, deaf, etc. etc. The popularity of several *Commedia* figures — Pedrolino amongst them — can be seen in illustrations of the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century. An illustrated gamesboard painted by Ambrogio Brambilla<sup>4</sup> includes eight *Commedia dell'Arte* figures [4, p. 112–113].

The role or, as it was called, the “mask” of Pedrolino appeared in various *Commedia* scenarios, usually as a simpleton but loyal servant who helped the main male *inamorato* character to win over his beloved lady, overcoming the many obstacles posed by the two ‘rich, old and nasty’ figures: Pantalone and Dr Gratiano. Pedrolino’s mask was first created by the actor Giovanni Pellesini sometime in the mid-1570s.<sup>5</sup> Other *zanni* figures of the *Commedia* included Arlecchino (traditionally the handsome, clever servant of the main *inamorato* figure) Burratino, or Pulcinella, who were usually figures of the lazy, stupid and glutton servants, occupying lower positions in the plot. Pedrolino found himself somewhere in between the Arlecchino and Pulcinella extremes, more often than not in the role of Pantalone’s servant: maltreated and even abused by his master, he becomes the Helper. Probably surpassed in popularity only by the Arlecchino mask, Pedrolino was soon adopted by other Italian troupes, including the famous Gelosi troupe that was invited in 1577 by the French King Louis XIII to stay and perform in Paris. The rich and culturally central city attracted artists from all over; soon there were more Italian troupes of *Commedia dell'Arte* that arrived to France and performed in Paris. In 1613 Pellesini visited Paris, too, most likely with one of the Italian theater troupes that resided there. Performing for a new, culturally different audience, prompted changes in both repertory and performing style of the Italians. Around 1620, for example, they ‘eliminate or downplay the sexually explicit farces that until then had been their bread and butter’ [5, p. 142]. The *comédiens Italiennes* received, in 1630, an indefinite royal permission to perform at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in Paris.

An intensive give-and-take process took place among the Italian and French theatre troupes in Paris. Italian scenarios and characters were influenced by the French farce [5, p. 151] and French playwrights absorbed ideas from Italian performances. Pedrolino settled deep into the Parisian stage, appearing in 49 out of the 50 scenarios in Flaminio Scala’s *Teatro delle Favole rappresentative* (1611)<sup>6</sup>. In 39 of these scenarios his mask is the one of the prototype servant, while the other 10 granted him the role of ‘a friend’, ‘an innkeeper’ and once even as ‘*fattore di Villa*’: the ‘handyman’ of the village<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Ambrogio Brambilla was an Italian Printmaker and cartographer, active mainly between 1579 and 1599 in Rome.

<sup>5</sup> Pellesini (1526–1616) was an actor in the company of the *Uniti*, that also featured the brothers Martinelli (the first Arlecchinos), a ‘Pantalone’, a ‘Capitano’ and even an actor who played ‘Franceschina’ — the maid who mostly acted as Pedrolino’s female counterpart.

<sup>6</sup> Flaminio Scala (1522–1624) was for a while the head of the *Gelosi* troupe. They were invited to Paris by Henry III, King of France, in 1577, and resided there until 1604.

<sup>7</sup> The figures of both Pedrolino and Arlecchino evolved, among others, to the plays of Beaumarchais, librettos of da Ponte, and the operas of Mozart and later Rossini, in whose *Il Barbiere de Seviglia* he presents himself as the ‘factotum della città’. The basic plot structure of all these works is still based on the *Commedia dell'Arte*’s traditional scenarios.

From these 35 comedies where he features as a servant, 31 comedies include Franceschina, who performs as a female servant in 25 scenarios. From these 25, 15 end with the marriage of Pedrolino and Franceschina, making them clearly 'a prototype servant couple'. However, in most of these scenarios there is no real developing relationship between the two; Pedrolino's attraction to Franceschina is expressed, at least as far as the scenarios go, mainly in bouts of jealousy and/or in his wish to spend the night with her; he does not seem to have any wish or thought of tender and intimate love<sup>8</sup>.

### Spaniards, Italians, French, and their theaters

The Italian companies' directors in Italy, as well as in Paris, used a variety of sources for their scenarios, including classic French theater, Spanish and Italian sources, Greek and Roman comedies, and traditional French farces. Among the scenarios of the *Commedia* troupes in Paris, one can find several adaptations of a most popular play, often known in English as *The Stone Guest*<sup>9</sup>. Its first appearance was actually in Spain: *El Burlador de Sevilla y Combidado de Piedra* (c. 1620), by Tirso de Molina, a Spanish playwright friar (1579–1648) who wrote the play as a Catholic moralistic warning, tells, for the first time in writing, the story of Don Juan, the rascal womanizer who invites his victim's ghost to dinner, ending his life in eternal punishment. In the original play, the nobleman Don Juan is assisted by Catalinón, his lackey. Both master and servant occupy a social position higher than the 'rustic' fishermen, farm hands, etc. with whom they interact. The play is written in high poetic style, that does not mark social rank by style. Tisbea, the fisherwoman who Don Juan seduces, speaks in short sentences, but with no special dialect or vocabulary that would indicate her lower status; Aminta and Batricio, the two *labradores* (workers) whose wedding celebration Don Juan interrupts, present themselves in very long poetic verses, rich with metaphors and similes. Only when Don Juan enters the stage, Batricio expresses in words his jealousy for Aminta (who will soon be seduced by Juan) but his love for his bride is non-personal, rich with poetic metaphors. Batricio, Aminta and Tisbea are not 'personas' or even 'masks' but rather *social functions* that serve as dramatic demonstrations of Don Juan's frivolity.

How does a Mendicant morality play become one of the most popular stage performances in lighthearted Paris? It is possibly thanks to the supernatural elements of the play and the spectacular stage effects that it calls for. Its immediate popularity with *Commedia dell'Arte* troupes in Italy and France is reflected by the various adaptations of this play that survive, some signed by their playwrights and others left anonymous. They are all supplemented with *Commedia* mask insertions: Pantalone, Gratiano, Capitano and Arlecchino have quite a few appearances. Cicognini's (1606–1651) undated play, *Il Convitato de Pietra* (c. 1640), is 'an Italian version of the Don Juan legend, undated, imitation of Tirso de Molina's famous *Burlador de Sevilla*, but with the insertion of comic scenes acted by characters from the *commedia dell'arte* like Pulcinella (speaking in Neapolitan dialect), Mezzett'<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> To be fair, since Scala's collection includes just scenarios, it is impossible to know the very words used in performance: specific expressions are left to the actors. Therefore it is actually impossible to figure out any real verbal or gestural expressions of tenderness or Romantic yearning.

<sup>9</sup> This, of course, is also the title of Alexander Pushkin's famous play (1830) on the subject of Don Juan. However, Pushkin's play (and its cultural impact) belongs in another discussion.

<sup>10</sup> See [6]. The quote is taken from the library's descriptive abstract. Note the similarity of the name "Mezzett" to Masetto in Lorenzo da Ponte's and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

It is hard to know how many versions, adaptations and translations were made of this play. However, one adaptation is by a *Commedia* actor, Domenico Giuseppe Biancolelli, known in Paris simply as “Dominique”, who wrote for his troupe the scenario *Le Festin de Pierre*, where he himself played as an Arlecchino<sup>11</sup>. Biancolelli’s troupe was the *Comédiens Italiens*, the group that shared with Molière’s ensemble of performers the theater space, in Louis XIV’s Palais-Royale. “Dominique”, who was at the time the most celebrated Arlecchino of the Italian troupes in Paris, added a witty *lazzi* (joke) in his *Festin*’s scenario, marking that Don Juan, when “entre les bras d’une jeune fille de pêcheur” [embraced by a young fisher-maid], speaks about his wish to be saved by her if he drowns again. In Biancolelli’s scenario there is neither a Pedrolino nor a Pierrot. This tiny hint will ignite a creative spark, leading to a genial, completely new scene, invented and written by a French new star: Molière.

### Molière, *Dom Juan*, and the birth of Pierrot

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, known by his stage name Molière (1622–1673), joined an actors’ troupe around 1640, soon becoming their leader. After ten years of wandering in south France his troupe returned in 1648, gradually acquiring a favorable status with King Louis XIV. Sharing the Petit-Bourbon theatre space with the *Comédiens Italiens* troupe, social interaction and mutual artistic fertilization were unavoidable. Molière’s adaptation of Tirso de Molina’s *El Burlador* is clearly influenced by *Commedia dell’Arte*. Marcello Spaziani quotes a report of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century French playwright Thomas-Simon Gueullette: “le *Festin de Pierre* des Comédiens Italiens doit avoir esté [sic] joué par la troupe [sic] de Locatelli, en la année 1658”, probably in March, in the Petit-Bourbon, the theater they shared with the company of Molière [Quoted in 7, p. 29]. However, the Locatelli troupe scenario had no Pierrot, although it might have presented a Pedrolino. This is very likely, since their performances had to avoid blunt satirization of the nobleman Don Juan: unlike *Commedia* scenarios, French theater, under close censorship, could not satirize nobility. [See 5, Introduction] Therefore, the traditional roles of servants, figures that could not be gotten rid of in traditional theater situations, had to develop new, satirizing functions.

By the mid 17<sup>th</sup>-century, the French audience was familiar with plays about Dom Juan (or the “Festin de pierre”, as they were known). Molière, in his *Dom Juan* (1665) clearly relied on earlier Italian versions as well as, most probably, on Tirso de Molina’s play. In fact the French audience (royal and others) perceived Molière’s play as ‘imitation des Italiens’ [7, p. 32]. However, his comic scenes trigger more delicate nerves, quite unlike the farcical nature of his predecessors.

Molière’s use of Tirso De Molina’s play was fortuitous. The Spanish playwright described, in his *El Burlador*, several scenes where Don Juan seduces lower-class maidens. In his play Tisbea is a fisher-maid, and Amintra — a peasant girl, whom Don Juan meets on the day of her nuptials to the peasant Batricio. De Molina’s play exposes the sins of a corrupt nobleman who abuses his position to seduce a simple, innocent girl<sup>12</sup>. Molière had to transform De Molina’s rather direct criticism of the nobility and its abuse of power into a softer comic moment in his play. It is in his version that Pierrot, as a transfiguration of

<sup>11</sup> Biancolelli was born in Bologna on August 30, 1636, and died in Paris on August 2, 1688.

<sup>12</sup> This constellation, rather than Molière’s, appears in the roles of Masetto and Zerlina, in Lorenzo da Ponte’s and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.

a comic 'servo' into a commoner, first appears, raising waves of laughter with his naïveté and use of rural dialect.

The significant scene that marks Pierrot's character happens on the beach. In the aforementioned anonymous and Giacinto Andrea Cicognini's versions, one of Don Juan's conquests is Tisbea, a 'pescatrice': a fisher maid, seduced but not loved. In Molière's play her name is Charlotte, and she is wholeheartedly and naïvely loved by Pierrot. This fact makes her later preference of Don Juan more poignant, and Molière's interpretation of this choice — critically satirizing. Charlotte affections are superficial and fickle: she is way more interested in Don Juan's riches, position and looks, while Pierrot's love to her is pure and genuine. Pierrot as we know him — lovesick, simpleminded, innocent and ingenuous — is Molière's creation.

While Pierrot's name was most probably imported from the *Commedia's* Pedrolino, his love, unlike the Italian masks — personal, emotional and hurtful — is totally new. We meet Pierrot for the first time in that particular crucial moment when he confesses his love to Charlotte<sup>13</sup>. The scene is comic not because he *presents* it in a comic way, as it would happen to a traditional Italian farcical mask, but because of his character's inability to achieve the *kind of caring relationship* to which he aspires. His satirical criticism of the overly decorated way of the Don's clothing and manners, perceived by her as something attractive and fascinating, and his desperate attempts to catch Charlotte's attention to his own feelings while she is still fascinated by his description of the rich and handsome Don Juan, are both funny and heartbreaking. His simple rural way of talking, parallel to hers, becomes not a target of ridicule but of deep compassion and sympathy. Finally, his complete naïveté in leaving her alone with the Don in complete trust, since, after all, 'they have agreed that she loves him,' is funny in a way that no farce can achieve. It is Molière who created a more mature, more sensitive, more complex, Pierrot: a *zanni* who is not farcical but deeply and movingly comic.

### Pierrot and Gilles

Following his roots in 17<sup>th</sup>-century French theatre traditions, Pierrot does not wear a mask but has his face whitened with flour: subtle expressions of the face are thus clearer, and the character acquires more complex human characteristics. Pierrot the French was re-adopted into the Italian company, carrying with it the new 'mask' when leaving Paris, first evicted from the King's theater in 1659, and then chased out of the city in 1697<sup>14</sup>. Pierrot, dressed as a *campesino*, a rural worker, in natural colored, wide and baggy clothes (just like Pedrolino, Pulcinella and Burratino: the three simple, uneducated but sometimes quick thinking *zanni* figures), but with a white, *unmasked* face, became an independent figure: a more complex 'second *zanni*'<sup>15</sup>. Like Molière's Pierrot (and unlike the Italian Pedrolino), his personality had gained dimensions: he was practical and dreamy, sim-

<sup>13</sup> See [8, p. 12–14]. A delightful rendition of this scene can be seen in *Dom Juan ou le Festin de Pierre*, a film by Marcel Bluwal (1965) [9]. The use of audio-visual materials, particularly when the subject is theater, music and film, is imperative in today's classes. It is impossible to think of a 45–50 minutes class without the use of this equipment.

<sup>14</sup> It seems that Louis XIV and his court were deeply unimpressed by the Italians' tendency toward critical satire, mainly targeting the French nobility.

<sup>15</sup> Traditionally (and generally) in the *Commedia dell'Arte*, the 'first *zanni*' was Arlecchino.



ple-minded and romantic, capable of owning and expressing feelings of love, tenderness, pain and frustration.

18<sup>th</sup>-century France knew Pierrot sometimes as 'Gilles,' probably the name of the actor who played this mask in the *Comédie Italienne*. This is how he appears in Watteau's *Fêtes gallants* and *Fêtes champêtres*: while belonging to the *Commedia* troupe he is also a bit of an outsider, always an exception while *also* at the center of interest; he became a mask that is not a mask anymore, a Pinocchio who became a real child. Pierrot loves Columbine, an emotionally real but unrequited love. He is Giraud's heartbroken poet as well as Stravinsky's poetic puppet, rejected by a shallow beauty and threatened by a stronger, down-to-earth big-guy. Pedrolino may have fathered Pierrot's name and costume, but their personas and behaviors are eons apart. Arlecchino, the masked 'first *zanni*' — quick, acrobatic, handsome and colorfully dressed — became Pierrot's rival over the love of Columbine ('the little love dove'). She, like Molière's Charlotte (and the 'ballerina' in Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, two centuries later), is a rather shallow young woman who has eyes for Arlecchino (even in later plays, where she appears as Pierrot's wife!), leaving Pierrot feverish with jealousy and rage.

### Pierrot the Showman learns to hide his feelings

The Italians were expelled from Paris in 1697, and Pierrot, as a *Commedia's* pariah, remained an inseparable part of French comedies. French comedies of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century are influenced and related to Molière's Pierrot: the rather clumsy, hesitant, emotional and shy simpleton in love. Both belonging and not belonging to the *Commedia's* masks, Pierrot and his floured face was absorbed into French culture. When Watteau, in the 1720s, anachronistically paints the *Comédiens Italiens*, Pierrot appears at the center, highlighted and separate, but still within the troupe's portrait. His character further developed into its more complex nature: a simpleton who is not stupid, but is innocent and credulous, and completely vulnerable to falling in love. This is how he appears in late 17<sup>th</sup>-century French plays, such as Jean-François Regnard's *La Coquette* (1691), where a "dumbfounded" Pierrot is standing, speechless, watching his beloved Colombine. [10, p. 36] 250 years later this scene would be echoed in Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945), when Jean-Louis Barrault, in his role as Jean-Baptist Deburau ("Pierrot"), simply stands, mute with admiration, marveled at the sight of his beloved (who, like Charlotte in *Dom Juan* and Colombine in *Le Coquette*, is rather casual in her response to him).

However, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Pierrot is far from being an exclusively romantic character: as an action figure he is, first and foremost, an acrobat, a dancer and a clown. He performs mainly in pantomimes, in fairs and town squares. His mask wanders with troupes of actors to other places, accordingly changing and enriching its character<sup>16</sup>. The grotesque, often violent and cruel, bizarre, fantasy-like and even gross exhibitions become the mask's norm. By the third decade of the century Pierrot is often presented in scenarios and plays as an Italian within the Parisian milieu. While his feelings for Columbine stay intact, the street fairground, into which the theater had moved, encourages acrobatics, juggling shows and pantomime.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> In London, for example, his persona is developed into Punch and Judy shows.

<sup>17</sup> The use of pantomime instead of spoken dialogues started in Paris, toward the end of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century, when the Italian street actors were forbidden of performing dialogues.

## Moving into the 19<sup>th</sup>-century

The more complex figure of Gilles-Pierrot, sometimes presenting a naïve, love stricken peasant, and other times — a grotesque acrobat and/or a violent brute, reappears in 1816 at the Parisian Théâtre des Fonambules, where the role is taken by Jean-Gaspard (Baptiste) Deburau, an actor in the theater's company. Deburau reinvented Pierrot, combining all the various — and contradictory — qualities of former related masks into one: the new Pierrot is a combination of Pedrolino's resourcefulness; Pierrot's simple, down-to-earth intelligence, the malice of a Clown and the gross gluttony of Gilles. It also includes Pierrot's unrequited love to Columbine, his heartbreak, his anger and his jealousy of Harlequin<sup>18</sup>. Perhaps surprisingly, this new figure also absorbed Harlequin's speedy reactions and acrobatic abilities and, additionally, newly acquired poetic qualities and musicality. Deburau became famous by performing this complex role with an acquired and carefully structured indifference, with no particular expression on his face, that is — focusing the grotesqueries solely on action, with no additional gesticulations. A contemporary newspaper review described his Pierrot as “a character whose infinite nuances are difficult to render. Ingenuous like a child, cowardly, crafty, lazy, mischievous by instinct, obliging, jeering, gluttonous, thieving, blustering, greedy, clumsy, ingenious in the arts that tend to the satisfaction of his tastes: he is a naïve and clownish Satan (See [11; 12, p. 78; 10, p. 97]).

### Pierrot the suffering artist is lead to insanity

Deburau's Pierrot was born and 'raised' during the incarnation of French Romanticism, which was as fascinated with him as much as with Shakespeare. Victor Hugo, the great writer and creator of *Les Misérables* (popular to this day) wrote in the preface to his 1827 play, *Cromwell*: “Shakespeare is the Drama; and the drama, which smelts under the same blast the grotesque and the sublime, the dreadful and the clownish, the tragic and the comic — the drama is the proper form... of today's literature” [13, p. 20]. Interest was particularly focused on fool-related figures: Hamlet and King Lear. These contradictory, mystifying figures, are so interesting precisely because they enclose contradictory character qualities, creating and presenting fascinatingly complex psyches.

Pierrot was such a complex figure. He became a symbol not only of the theatrical figure of an actor but also a representative of *human suffering*, thus partly shedding his original 'mask' characteristics. His suffering results not only from Columbine's rejection (which continues even when she appears as his wife), which is a function of his mask, but also from a new, philosophical aspect of his existence as an artist: the very fact that *his profession means deceit*. Pierrot's mask is one of innocence and integrity (ridiculously highlighted in Molière's *Don Juan*, when he shakes hands with Charlotte to mark their agreement of her love promise). This same Pierrot, in the case of Deburau, became one with the person of the actor, who is expected to *act as if* he is in love. A gap is thus created by the contradiction between a persona-in-love who is also a person-in love (which is a main focus of Jean-Louis Barrault in Marcel Carné's film. His role as Jean-Gaspard Deburau, in a double role: Deburau as a private person and Deburau as Pierrot, in Marcel

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<sup>18</sup> Harlequin is the French spelling of Arlecchino.

Carné's film). The artist-in-love who represents a theatrical character-in-love carries an inner falsity, being simultaneously true and false to his very nature. Even when disregarding the emotional suffering of the character because of his betrayal by his beloved, the very existential paradox of loving and presenting-loving offers and points at a logical fall into madness. It is therefore not surprising that a streak of madness is added to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Pierrot. Many scenarios written by and for Jean Baptiste Deburau, whose role was later taken by his son, Charles Deburau, are manifestations of this gradual slide and the blurred boundary between sanity and insanity. In these scenarios Pierrot performs childish acts of lawlessness and often cruelty, eventually losing his sanity and becoming "moon struck" — a *Lunaire*. This mental disease, as known by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, combined with the dichotomy of art-as-truth and art-as-artificiality, became a reflection of the artist's paradox of life. Pierrot became the symbol, a *Doppelgänger* of *The Artist* as a concept, and a model figure for 19<sup>th</sup>-century artists. Indeed, there is hardly an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet, writer or painter that were not engaged, in one way or another, with the figure of Pierrot in general, and the Théâtre des Funambules in particular. The poet and writer Théophile Gautier (1811–1872) published in 1839 a play, *Pierrot Posthume*, where Pierrot dies; Gautier's friend, the poet Théodore de Banville (1823–1891), was known to attend the theatre almost daily, just to watch Deburau. His collection of *Odes funambulesques* inspired a younger generation of poets and artists, such as Paul Verlaine (1844–1896) in his *Fktes Galantes*, and Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), in his essay *On the Essence of Laughter*, where he gives examples from Deburau's Pierrot scenarios. Pierrot's fall into an unhealthy mental state is developed in later scenarios, plays and pantomimes, most famously *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* (1881) by Paul Margueritte (1860–1918) and *Pierrot sceptique* (1881) by Joris-Carl Huysmans (1848–1907). Then, of course, the 50 poems of *Pierrot Lunaire: Rondels bergamasques* (1884) by Albert Giraud, all reaching the meeting point of insane brutality and the ridiculous grotesque, are at the center of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (See Figure 1). Giraud's Pierrot, the artist whose heartbreak and feeling of betrayal brought to the verge of insanity, went through yet another personality transformation in the hands of the poet and dramatist Otto Erich Hartleben (1864–1905). His creative but inaccurate translations (1892) are, in fact, new poems, painting Pierrot's inner self: an innocent, naïve and ridiculous showman, a dancing artist, crazed by his painful, unrequited love (See Figure 2).

### **Why did Schoenberg choose 21 particular poems for his *Pierrot*?**

In the atmosphere of the turn-of-the-century Europe, anything connected with Pierrot was welcome, and more so, particularly among the artistic élite, everything that had a symbolic, poetic, and preferably decadent character. Giraud's poems in Hartleben's translations were publicly read as melodramas before Arnold Schoenberg musical settings were created. Schoenberg came across Hartleben's translation of *Pierrot Lunaire* through a meeting with the actress Albertine Zehme (1857–1946), who commissioned him, in 1912, to compose music that would be played as background for her reading of these poems. From that point, the ball remained in Schoenberg's playground.

Schoenberg embarked into the new project by first choosing 21 out of Hartleben's 50 poems (See Figure 3). Why did he choose these particular poems? And why did he re-order them differently than their order in the original poem cycle? Clearly, he was lead

THÉÂTRE	DÉCOR	PIERROT DANDY	DÉCONVENUE	LUNE AU LAVOIR
LA SÉRÉNADE DE PIERROT	CUISINE LYRIQUE	ARLEQUINADE	PIERROT POLAIRE	A COLOMBINE
ARLEQUIN	LES NUAGES	A MON COUSIN DE BERGAME	PIERROT VOLEUR	SPLEEN
IVRESSE DE LUNE	LA CHANSON DE LA POTENCE	SUICIDE	PAPILLONS NOIRS	COUCHER DE SOLEIL
LUNE MALADE	ABSINTHE	MENDIANTE DE TÊTES	DÉCOLLATION	ROUGE ET BLANC
VALSE DE CHOPIN	L'ÉGLISE	ÉVOCATION	MESSE ROUGE	LES CROIX
SUPPLIQUE	VIOLON DE LUNE	LES CIGOGNES	NOSTALGIE	PARFUMS DE BERGAME
DÉPART DE PIERROT	PANTOMIME	BROSSEUR DE LUNE	L'ALPHABET	BLANCHEURS SACRÉES
POUSSIÈRE ROSE	PARODIE	LUNE MOQUEUSE	LA LANTERNE	PIERROT CRUEL
DÉCOR	LE MIROIR	SOUPER SUR L'EAU	L'ESCALIER	CRISTAL DE BOHÈME

Figure 1

<i>Eine Bühne</i>	<i>Feerie</i>	<i>Der Dandy</i>	<i>Schweres Los</i>	<i>Eine blasse Wäscherin</i>
<i>Serenade</i>	<i>Der Koch</i>	<i>Harlequinade</i>	<i>Nordpolfahrt</i>	<i>Colombine</i>
<i>Harlequin</i>	<i>Die Wolken</i>	<i>Mein Bruder</i>	<i>Raub</i>	<i>Herbst</i>
<i>Mondestrunken</i>	<i>Galgenlied</i>	<i>Selbstmord</i>	<i>Nacht</i>	<i>Sonnen-Ende</i>
<i>Der kranke Mond</i>	<i>Absinth</i>	<i>Köpfe! Köpfe!</i>	<i>Enthauptung</i>	<i>Rot und Weiß</i>
<i>Valse de Chopin</i>	<i>Die Kirche</i>	<i>Madonna</i>	<i>Rote Messe</i>	<i>Die Kreuze</i>
<i>Gebet an Pierrot</i>	<i>Die Violine</i>	<i>Abend</i>	<i>Heimweh</i>	<i>O Alter Duft</i>
<i>Heimfahrt</i>	<i>Pantomime</i>	<i>Der Mondfleck</i>	<i>Das Alphabet</i>	<i>Das heilige Weiß</i>
<i>Morgen</i>	<i>Parodie</i>	<i>Moquerie</i>	<i>Die Laterne</i>	<i>Gemeinheit!</i>
<i>Landschaft</i>	<i>Im Spiegel</i>	<i>Souper</i>	<i>Die Estrade</i>	<i>Böhmischer Kristall</i>

Figure 2

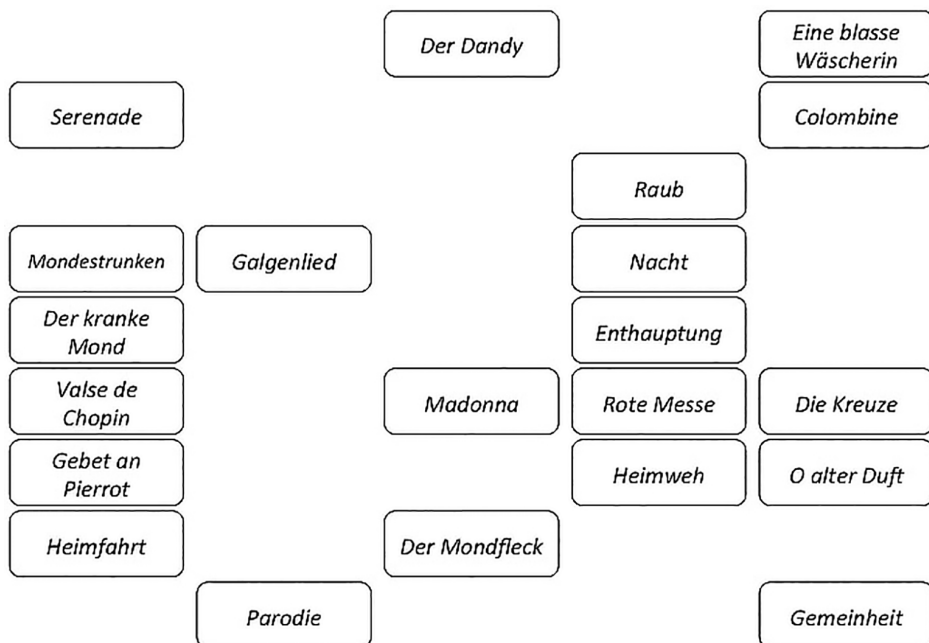


Figure 3

by the texts, and it is the texts of the poems that need to be taken as a narrative, creating a kind of a storyline with a beginning, middle and end. His definition of the work as *Dreimal sieben Gedichte aus Albert Girauds 'Pierrot Lunaire'* draws the framework and structure of his work. Unlike Giraud's, Schoenberg's *Pierrot* is not a collection of poems but a *melodrama*, following a narrative logic in a new, independent structure (See Figure 4).

The content of this narrative makes itself clear when the poems are formally organized according to Schoenberg's plan. The seven first poems present the 'masks', not necessarily *Commedia* masks, but rather the main protagonists of *Pierrot's* poetic narrative: *Mondestrunken* (*Pierrot's* self description); *Colombine*; *der Dandy* (*Pierrot's* visualization of self); *eine blasse Wäscherin* (a metaphorical description of the moon); *Valse de Chopin*; *Madonna*; and *der Kranke Mond*. The seven middle poems bring the drama into a peak of insane rage, and cruel vengeance, all portrayed as a deadly, demonic ritual: *Nacht*; *Gebet an Pierrot*; *Raub*; *Rote Messe*; *Galgenlied*; *Enthauptung*; and *Die Kreuze*. The drama is gradually brought to a calmer closure in the last seven poems, ending in a resigned acceptance: *Heimweh*; *Gemeinheit*; *Parodie*; *Der Mondfleck*; *Serenade*; *Heimfahrt*, and *O, alter Duft*<sup>19</sup>. Reading the poems and understanding their allusions and metaphors is more important for the perception of the composition than is usually estimated. Certain details in the poems are drawn from a variety of literary, poetic and dramatic sources. Knowing

<sup>19</sup> Respectively, the seven first poems are: Drunk by the Moon; Colombine; the Dandy; a Pale Washing-Woman; Chopin; Madonna; and the Sick Moon. The seven middle poems are: Night; Prayer to Pierrot; Robbery; Red Mass; Gallows Song; Decapitation; and The Crosses. The drama is gradually brought to a calmer closure in the last seven poems: Homeward; Nastiness; Parody; the Moon Fleck; Serenade; Travelling Home, and Oh, old Scent.

1. Mondestrunken	8. Nacht	15. Heimweh
2. Colombine	9. Gebet an Pierrot	16. Gemeinheit
3. Der Dandy	10. Raub	17. Parodie
4. Eine blasse Wäscherin	11. Rote Messe	18. Der Mondfleck
5. Valse de Chopin	12. Galgenlied	19. Serenade
6. Madonna	13. Enthauptung	20. Heimfahrt
7. Der kranke Mond	14. Die Kreuze	21. O alter Duft

Figure 4

these sources and having even a short glimpse at them and their context will enhance empathy and encourage further listening.

As an example, the poem “Parodie” relates to a story in Aloysius Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la Nuit — Fantaisies a la maniere de Rembrandt et de Callot* (1842), a collection of “prose poems” presenting a *fin de siècle* style that was popular at the time, mixing the supernatural, the eerie and the demonic: quite the combination suitable for a sickly mind. Pierrot appears in the seventh of these stories, “La Viole de Gamba”. The story opens with a quotation from another work: Théophile Gautier’s *Onuphrius*, which relates to Jean-Gaspard Debureau, and continues with a bizarre, almost horror-tale description that includes Cassandre, Columbine and Pierrot, as well as the “duègne Barbara”, in a bizarre amalgam of the *comédie italienne*’s *lazzi*. Traces of this story can be found in “Parodie” as well as in “Gemeinheit” (“Atrocity”), which is quoted at the beginning of this essay. The following short but characteristic quote from “La Viole de Gamba” shows these connections: [14].

Et M. Cassandre de ramasser piteusement sa perruque, et Arlequin de détacher au viédase un coup de pied dans le derrière, et Colombine d’essuyer une larme de fou rire, et Pierrot d’élargir jusqu’aux oreilles une grimace enfarinée.

[And Mister Cassandre pitifully picking up his wig, and Harlequin giving a kick in the rear to the moron, and Columbine wiping off a tear of mad laughter, and Pierrot cracking a floury grimace from ear to ear.]

Paragraphs of this bizarre poem-story are intercalated with quotes from the popular “Au clair de la lune” song, usually related to as a children ditty in spite of its clear sexual suggestions. The main protagonist of this song is, of course, Pierrot. Understanding the meaning of “Parodie”, therefore, requires an acquaintance with its alluded source(s), and the perception of the composer’s manipulation of the referenced materials.

## Teaching *Pierrot Lunaire*

Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* is, therefore, not just difficult to listen to because of its atonal musical content: today's students — teenagers as well as older students — are quite accustomed to atonality, as long as it is associated with an intelligible semantic content. The challenge of accessing this work is, precisely, its *semantic content*, which is built over layers of historical developments in various fields, from theater, poetry, history and literature. Even if we take into account the need for a translation from the original German, the intricate web of signs — metaphors, allusions, quotations, etc. — still poses a latticed fence inhibiting immediate access.

Often, *Pierrot Lunaire* is taught through a series of music analyses: motifs, pitch-class collections, their manipulations and inversions, etc. These attempts, as far as I could witness, are bound to fail. Music and openness to its aesthetic charm are not dependent on analysis but on a feeling of empathy and direct communication with the work as a whole. Making *Pierrot Lunaire* accessible and — hopefully — appreciated and loved by intelligent public requires the supply of the necessary information tools that will make its texts and context intelligible. Teaching this work necessitates a starting point common to all students, regardless of background. Such starting point must be a feeling and life experience that they all share. Pierrot's unrequited love is such a point. His feelings of jealousy, humiliation, and revenge are the next step. Creating an empathy to Pierrot's character will open minds and hearts to learning more about his story, cultural and historical points of reference, and to an understanding of *Pierrot Lunaire* structure and content, including its musical content.

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