

The contribution of the contemporary music theatre repertoire to the vocal training of the singer/actor

Luciano Berio: A-Ronne

Roger Marsh: Pierrot Lunaire

Abstract

The voice is one of the actor's most important instruments of creative expression. Therefore, the process which leads to learning how to speak and sing onstage with clarity and power forms an inseparable part of the performer's training. The present paper is a discussion of the contribution of the contemporary music theatre repertoire to the actor's training through the liberating effect of music and technical and imaginative work on text and extra musical sound. The paper examines Berio's 'radiophonic documentary' A-Ronne described by Sanguineti as a 'privileged laboratory situation for exploring the human voice' and Marsh's Pierrot Lunaire as representative works of the late twentieth-early twenty first century music theatre, from both a theoretical and a technical point of view. The two works share important common characteristics – the non-conventional relationship between text and music, the juxtaposition of different languages and vocal behaviors, the exploitation of the performer's body resonators through the expression of heightened emotions – whose study offers an invaluable tool to the accomplishment of the vocal performer's most challenging task: to find, using the Word as a starting point, a way through the labyrinth of sonorities towards the Works essence and its inner rhythm.

Keywords: vocal training, contemporary music theatre, actor training, contemporary vocal repertoire

Introduction

The voice is one of the actor's most important instruments of communication and creative expression. Therefore, the vocal process, which leads to learning how to speak and sing onstage with clarity and power and enables one to act with ease, forms a significant and inseparable part of the performer's training. The primary object of this process is to open up the possibilities of the voice and, as Cicely Berry points out in her book *Voice and the Actor*, to do this the actor must start listening 'not to the external sound of the voice, but for the vocal resource he/she has and for what the text contains' (Berry, 1973, 14). The actor often neglects to stretch his/her vocal imagination and limits the range of notes he/she uses by relying too much on fixed vocal means and preconceived ideas of how the voice should sound. (e.g.: bel canto, US pop, Broadway musical...)

The present paper is intended primarily as a discussion – from the performer's point of view – of the important contribution of the contemporary music theatre repertoire to the actor's/singer's vocal training through both the liberating effect of music as well as technical and imaginative work on text and extra musical sound.

More specifically, I will examine (in chronological order) *A-Ronne*¹ by Luciano Berio and *Pierrot Lunaire* by Roger Marsh – as representative works of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century music theatre – from both a theoretical as well as from a technical point of view.

The decision to focus on these particular works is determined by the following factors:

- The two works share an important common characteristic: the devotion of their composers to the sound potential of language and of the human voice which opens an immense field of research.

Both Berio and Marsh exploit a wide range of possibilities of the human voice, from speaking to singing and from singing to shouting, passing through every imaginable shade of expression. They are also aware that by using the voice they are setting in motion a whole chain of situations and psychological reactions which touch the deepest emotions of both performer(s) and audience.

- A further important common characteristic concerns the juxtaposition of languages and of different vocal styles and also the utilization of aspects of everyday vocal behaviour (laughter, sobbing, muttering, shouting...). The two composers place no limits on the imagination of the

¹ Original five voice version, Universal edition (UE 19329)

performers, providing nevertheless a very precise framework – through their detailed indications – within which the actor/singer may experiment with the timbre of his/her sound and, therefore, with different ways of attack and unusual techniques of sound production.

- Finally, in the chamber theatre of Marsh-Giraud (‘peopled by characters of the Commedia dell’ arte’¹), the central character is the modern Pierrot, ‘harking back to the childlike simplicity of the ancient Italian Commedia’ (Marsh, 2002) whereas in Berio’s A-Ronne ‘the spontaneous joy of the commedia dell’ arte lives on’ since the composer’s ‘vocal naïve painting goes back to Monteverdi’s stile rappresentativo, in which the interpretation of texts in madrigals joins with the first hints of the theatrical plot’(Seeber, 2005).

A-Ronne

A-Ronne, composed in 1974² and produced originally for the Dutch Hilversum Radio, was Berio’s and Sanguineti’s fourth collaboration. Berio wanted a text that – in the poet’s own words – ‘...could be read in completely contradictory expressive directions, in the largest possible gamut of significations.’³ (Sanguineti, 1978, quoted in Stoianova, 2003)

Sanguineti’s fragmentary, multilingual text is constructed from a succession of three phases – beginning, middle and end – with references to: the Gospel according to St. John, Dante’s *Inferno*, The Communist Manifesto, a fragment from Faust’s monologue, a few words from a dissertation on Georges Bataille by Roland Barthes, a line from T. S. Eliot’s East Coker (Four Quartets) and the three letters ‘ette, conne, ronne’ which (we are told) used to follow **z** in the ancient Italian alphabet.

The key to A-Ronne as well as to the long collaboration of Berio and Sanguineti is the deep interest with which they both approached the sound of language as well as the non-conventional relationships between text and music: ‘the most significant vocal music of the last few decades has been investigating exactly that: the possibility of exploring and absorbing musically the full face of language. Stepping out of the purely syllabic articulation of a text, vocal music can deal

¹ Marsh, programme notes, 2002

² First version, for five actors and live electronics. The following year Berio wrote a concert version for eight voices (for the Swingle Singers).

³ ‘Je veux un texte qui puisse être lu dans des directions expressives tout a fait contradictoires, dans une gamme de significations la plus large possible’. Original French text translated in English by the author of this paper.

with the totality of its configurations, including the phonetic one and including the ever-present vocal gestures'. (Berio, 2006, 50)

Sanguineti remembers that Berio wrote the musical score of his 'radiophonic documentary' about the continuous processes of verbal communication only after the original recording was made in a 'direct' way, without score, based on the indications that the composer had given during the rehearsals'¹ (Sanguineti, 1978, quoted in Stoianova, 211). The fact that the original version largely depended on the abilities of the actors with whom the composer created the work and 'profited greatly from their imagination and vitality' (Osmond-Smith, 1991, 98), is closely related to the 'openness' of *A-Ronne* – an important dimension of the work, that will be discussed later in an attempt to show the contribution of *A-Ronne* to the vocal training of the actor/singer.

Since a detailed analysis of the work lies beyond the scope of this paper ('*A-Ronne* is not a musical composition in a strict sense...In *A-Ronne* there is a little music'² [Berio, quoted in Ziino, 1991, 815], 'The occasional sung sections do not have an autonomous musical sense...only the brief final episode has got its proper musical autonomy'³ [Berio, quoted in Stoianova, 211]), it is more appropriate in the present context to identify the principal characteristics of the theatrical dimension of *A-Ronne* without losing sight of the educational interest of the work that Sanguineti describes as 'a privileged laboratory situation for exploring the human voice'.

Nevertheless, it must be said that although *A-Ronne* is not – in the composer's own words – a musical composition, Berio does not entirely renounce his customary process of musical writing, in works such as *Sequenza III* and *Laborinthus II*, which is characterized by contrasts of timbre, repetition of words or syllables, superimposition of different vocal behaviors (a technique influenced by Berio's eight years of work for the radio), occasional use of melodic line, precise indication of rhythm and precise or approximate pitch values and techniques such as *hocket*⁴ ('that process of segmentation, subdivision and rhythmic distribution of the melody had already been tried out in Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with the *hoquetus*, which

¹ '...la version qui avait été tournée en directe, sans partition, à partir des indications données par Berio lors des répétitions'. Original French text translated in English by the author of this paper.

² '*A-Ronne* non è una composizione musicale in senso stretto...in *A-Ronne* c'è poca musica....' Original Italian text translated in English by the author of this paper.

³ 'les sections chantées occasionnelles n'ont pas de sens musical autonome...seul le bref épisode final (...) possède sa propre autonomie musicale'. Original French text translated in English by the author of this paper.

⁴ *Hoquetus*. The medieval definition of *hoquetus* – *truncatio vocis* – implies that 'when one voice stops the other sings and vice-versa'

involved the jerky rhythmic fragmentation of a given melody among two or three voices – a well known pre-polyphonic technique of composition...’Berio, 2006, 59).

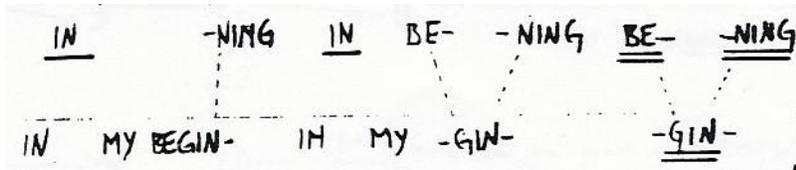


Figure 1: L.Berio, 'A-Ronne'

In A-Ronne, the hoquetus is used for comic effect

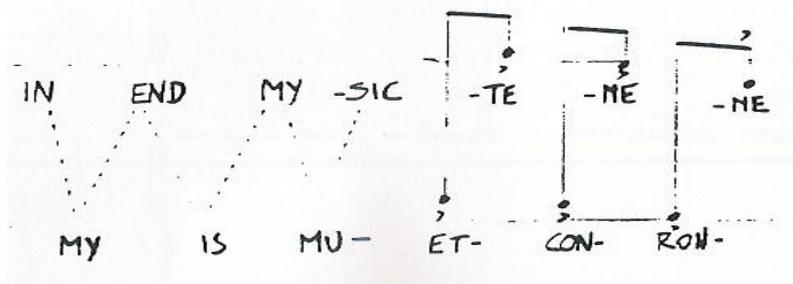


Figure 2: L.Berio, 'A-Ronne'

Moreover, the various levels of intelligibility of the text form an inseparable part of the musical structure of the work, since the words and phrases are – when they are not recognizable as such – ‘timbres’ of the overall sound structure.

Lathar Knessl, in his article in the 1974 Salzburg Festival programme (Kraus, 2004), points out that Berio himself has explained that the meaning of words and their vocal expression ‘can always appear in a new and unexpected light’ thus referring to the conception of the ‘open work’ and to the creative process of viewing a work from different perspectives. This idea coincides with the description of the ‘open form’ in art by Umberto Eco (who had set in motion Berio’s and Sanguineti’s collaboration and friendship): ‘The work of art is not any more an object whose beauty is to be admired, but (it is) a mystery that needs to be solved, a duty that we must fulfill, a stimulus for the imagination. The imposition to the “spectator” of a unique interpretation must be avoided’¹. (Eco, 1965, quoted in Levinas, 2006, 170)

The experience of approaching a work in many different ways and the multiple explorations of verbal material – a subtle palette of nuances, ranging from pianissimo to

¹ ‘L’œuvre d’art n’est plus un objet dont on contemple la beauté, mais un mystère à découvrir, un devoir à accomplir, un stimulant pour l’imagination. Il faut éviter qu’une interprétation unique s’impose au “spectateur”. Original French text translated in English by the author of this paper.

fortissimo, together with the rhythmic possibilities presented by the natural accentuation of the different languages – may sharpen the performer’s intuition and musical intelligence and imagination. The text, intended, according to Sanguineti, to be ‘psychologically transformable according to the treatment and intonation’ demands from the actor/singer the ability to react with spontaneity and to effect rapid emotional changes, using the voice and the breathing system which controls it.

Also, the openness of A-Ronne can be found in the very beginning of the work, in its most recognizable ‘carte de visite’, from the Gospel according to St. John, ‘En arche en o logos’ (in the beginning was the Word).

In the Greek language *logos* has several meanings and can be translated as: i) word, ii) reason (cause), iii) logic. Depending on the meanings that we choose, there can be different theoretical approaches and performance practices of the work.

If we choose *word*, the focal point is the exploitation of words and language for their sonic and symbolic properties, the achievement of a variety of timbral effects (e.g. humming, consonant noises, vowel sounds, rolled sounds, inhaled and exhaled noises) and the ‘imperceptible transition from spoken to sung elements that produces a primary, close connection between music and speech’. (Pousseur, 1967)

If we choose *reason (cause)* or / and *logic* then, the ‘open’ character of the work, its multiple meanings and the absence of narrative become a great challenge to the performer who must search – through metaphors, images, sounds and his/her whole physicality – for ‘traces of musical and non-musical experiences’ (Berio, 2006, 68) and lived-in associations that will guide him/her throughout the journey to Berio’s ‘theatre of imagination’.

Another important element in a piece like A-Ronne is the achievement of balance in terms of distribution of the vocal parts, especially when the work is presented as a staged performance. As Philip Curtis explains: ‘it may be necessary if you’re doing A-Ronne as a staged piece to move from one part to another, according to how it works best with the staging...and also because the person who is fine for part No. 5 might be absolutely perfect for part No. 4 or part No. 3 further on, so you can switch them around...’. (Curtis, 2006, interview with the author)

Originally conceived as a radio piece, A-Ronne’s first staged performance was given in London in the early 1980s by the vocal ensemble ‘Vocem’.

In an interview that took place in Loches, France, in August 2006, Philip Curtis described to the author of this paper ‘the birth of A-Ronne as a staged music theatre work’: ‘it seemed to be a piece that desperately needed staging and the key to that was learning it from memory’. ‘A-Ronne is a good piece that lives on its own as a radio piece but it is different listening to a radio piece in your living room than it is listening to it in a concert. In the concert hall you are in, what I would call, “the museum environment”, you are watching the singers but, in a sense, you have got this distance with the music stands and the microphones, you are cut off..., so we thought “let’s break that up, let’s give the audience something to look at, so that they can get involved”...There doesn’t need to be lots of costumes and make-up, just simple lighting, bare stage, maybe one chair...’.

Philip Curtis’s¹ observations coincide with David Osmond-Smith’s account of Berio’s theatre and his complex exploration of voices and words: ‘made for a theatre of the ear so potent, that its importation on to the real stage was possible only when a certain visual sobriety was observed.’ (Osmond-Smith, 1991, 90)

As Curtis rightly points out, ‘A-Ronne lends itself to an empty space so one doesn’t have to face the “time problem”. A fantastic aural environment is already there (the Cathedral is there, with echo and resonance on the sound system), we know where we are and then we give a simple physical shape and that works perfectly well’.

Time is irrelevant (‘the dictator’s scene can be Mussolini, Hitler or South America’ Curtis, 2006) because both, Berio and Sanguineti use stereotypes, elementary situations, sentiments that are easily recognizable and actions with which the public is familiar (confessional, a Mass, a love scene, a camp...).

On the other hand, the ‘empty space’ constitutes a great challenge and responsibility for the performer because ‘to make it work, you have got to tell a clear story, you have got to take these people sitting in the audience on a journey and you cannot drop them’ (Curtis, 2006). Thus, the performer must discover the essence of the piece (in spite of the absence of a literal narrative, Sanguineti’s text has got ‘a very strong center of resistance’² [Stoianova, n.d, 203]) and offer it to

¹Philip Curtis, writer and director, was born in London and studied music at York University. He began his professional career as an opera singer and has specialized in contemporary music theatre. He worked extensively with the group ‘VoceM’ with whom he performed numerous world premieres, including the first staged performance of A-Ronne

² ‘un centre de résistance très fort’. Original French text translated in English by the author of this paper.

the public through the flexibility and expressiveness of his/her voice, the intelligibility of his/her facial expressions and a strong stage personality.

We mentioned at an earlier stage of the essay that the crucial step in performing *A-Ronne* as a music theatre work was to learn it from memory. Grotowski, in his book *Towards a poor theatre*, points out that the actor must free himself/herself totally of the text, since ‘searching for the text involves a thinking process, and that is exactly what has to be avoided’ (1991, 167). Learning the text by heart and moving freely within the space, allows the performer’s body to be in a state of readiness and helps the actor realize that proper voice production involves full physical commitment. As the music stand ceases to be the performer’s essential point of reference, the search for the ‘centre’ of the body – through correct balance of power, tension and relaxation – becomes an absolute priority, thus permitting the voice and the breath to work at their most free and efficient levels.

Also, finding a group dynamic as actors, has taught Philip Curtis ‘a lot about ensemble playing in theatre and interacting with each other. The staged performance of *A-Ronne* is completely different than standing in a line with just music stands’ (Curtis, 2006).

In addition, it should be noted that the increased number of rehearsals (‘it needs three weeks rehearsals if you are going to stage the work’ [Curtis, 2006]) demands from the performers a change of attitude, as they start thinking of themselves not as a group of concert singers but as a group of singing actors.

Philip Curtis, when asked whether *A-Ronne* can be performed without microphones, said that ‘it can work in a small space – where it becomes much more intimate – but in bigger spaces you need the microphones because little sounds (the sounds in the church scene) and vocal effects will not be heard’.

With the use of the microphone, the smallest details and nuances may assume great importance. Any single detail, isolated, may acquire autonomous and various functions. What normally goes unnoticed and is taken for granted tends, with the use of the microphone, to become significant. Nevertheless, the most important technical aspect of the use of microphones in Berio’s work is ‘the way of pulling focus like you would in a film’ (Curtis, 2006). Berio himself explains that music can explore new territories when it acts ‘like a movie camera – focusing, analyzing the sound subject – and when the composer, like a movie-director, decides the angles, the zooms...especially when the sound subject is the human voice’ (Berio, 2006, 68).

To sum up, in *A-Ronne* we can choose to leave the work in the concert hall, or play it in another space, giving it any possible context or frame, or make it into a piece of theatre about a concert piece by developing the relationships between the players in terms of ‘character’. The ‘openness’ of the work, where things are in themselves abstract most of the time, suggests that not every line of the musical score can be ‘interpreted’ and that the performer’s task is to find precise and obvious moments where characterization is possible (and is actually indicated by the composer: ‘come un confessore’ No. IV voice 5, ‘come un sergente aggressivo che interroga’ No. V voice 4) and, following Schoenberg’s advice, resist the temptation to ‘add something that the composer did not intend’. (Schoenberg, 1914)

Finally, the real ‘duty that the performer must fulfill’, as Umberto Eco would say, is to find, using the Word as a starting point (‘In the beginning was the word’) a way, through the labyrinth of sonorities, towards the work’s essence, which is purely musical both in terms of structure and of inner rhythm. ‘In my end is my music’.

Pierrot Lunaire

In 2001/2 Roger Marsh set to music Albert Giraud’s¹ *Pierrot Lunaire* for reciter, choir, vocal ensembles and vocal soloists, with various small obligato instrumental parts, which may be taken by members of the vocal ensembles, or pre-recorded.

Unlike the two earlier works, based on Giraud’s poetry – Otto Vrieslander’s music² (composed at Albertine Zehme’s request in order to accompany her 1911 performances, when she apparently transformed Vrieslander’s songs into recitations³) and Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* – Marsh’s music theatre is a setting of the original French version of Giraud’s *Pierrot* and, therefore, it carries its audience far beyond the lively and macabre world of the *commedia dell’arte* hero, into the bizarre landscapes of the inner world of the Belgian symbolist as well as into the atmosphere that dominated late-nineteenth-century art and literature in France.

Both Vrieslander and Schoenberg used Erich Hartleben’s (1804-1905) imaginative German translation – which presents significant adjustments of imagery and tone – as their textual source. It is not the aim of the present essay to examine the onomatopoeic potential of words or the

¹ Belgian poet Albert Kayenberg (1860-1929), he wrote under the pseudonym Albert Giraud.

² Vrieslander, Otto (1905): *Pierrot Lunaire für eine Singstimme mit Pianoforte*. Munich: Lewy

³ A note titled “Why I must speak these songs” was attached to the programme of her Berlin performance in march 1911

representational qualities of language. Nevertheless, a brief citation of the idea that ‘the name given to a thing is a sonic representation of its essence’ (as reflected in Plato’s Cratylus and discussed by Richard Kurth in his essay ‘Pierrot’s Cave’ [Kurth, 2000, 203-241]) confirms the fact that Marsh’s piece is the closest existing musical work to Albert Giraud’s lyric verse and thus, to the real content of his Pierrot Lunaire.

The Cratylist, or mimologist (both terms appear in Gérard Genette’s Mimologics, a study of the idea that ‘the sounds and rhythms of words faithfully represent the world’ [Genette, 1995]) believes that to name a thing is to perceive its essence and to know it truthfully, for ‘the authentic word reveals linguistically the essence of what it names.’ (Kurth, 2000, 214) Therefore, to hear the sound of a word is to conceive its essence, and the very essence of the performance of Giraud’s imagined theatre lies in the sonic properties of the French language – accent, vowel pitch and length, rhythm, the smoothness or explosiveness of the various combinations of consonants – as well as in the position, shape and tension that the vocal organs must adopt to pronounce a word.

The very first phrases of Supplique (No. 31) constitute a clear example demonstrating the closeness of Marsh’s score to french speech intonation.

31. SUPPLIQUE (A Plea)

mf 1. $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 66$ spoken: [The same SLIGHTLY DERANGED WOMAN as No 18. Running on stage in search of PIERROT (who has left)]. spoken, etc. when (.....)

S

Oh Pier - rot (*Oh Pierrot!*) Le res - sort du rire (*the spring of laughter*) entre mes

dents (*between my teeth*) je l'ai cas - sé (*I have bro - ken it!*) Le clair (*the*)

Le clair dé - cor (*the*)

with appropriate gestures sobbing A mixture of surprise and fear

Figure 3 : R.Marsh, ‘Pierrot Lunaire, *Supplique*’

The use of the text as the source material of this example (Pierrot! Le resort du rire / entre mes dents je l'ai cassé / Le clair décor c'est effacé...) reveals that the rather monotonous and melancholic inflection coincides with the absence of a larger ambitus in Marsh's setting of these phrases. The descending minor seconds in the score (A to G#, 'Pierrot', 'ressort' and G to F#, 'du rire') correspond very closely to the syllable structure (a short unstressed syllable followed by a long stressed one). The descending chromatic progression in 'je l'ai cassé' indicates tension release ('sobbing') and is changed to an ascending progression on the following phrase where the word 'clair' (bright) appears.

On the other hand, the syllable structure and the intonation patterns of Hartleben's text (Pierrot! Mein Lachen hab ich verlernt! Das Bild des Glanzes Zerfloss-Zerfloss!) introduce a completely different, more extrovert setting characterized by downward and (mostly) upward pitch jumps that transcribe musically the two exclamation marks (Pierrot! / verlernt!) and the eruptive aspect of laughter, expressed in the German word Lachen.

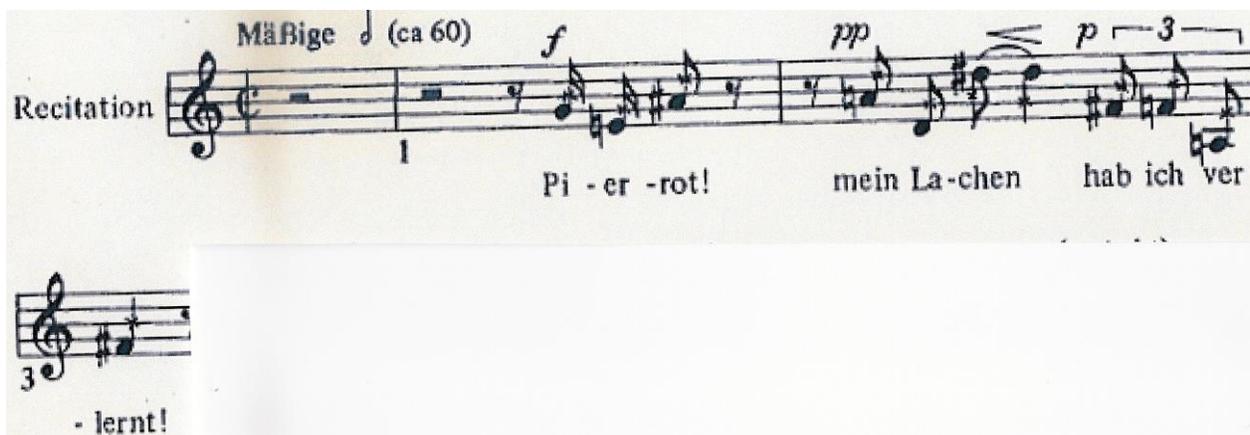


Figure 4 : Arnold Schoenberg, 'Pierrot Lunaire, Gebet an Pierrot'

Moreover, although Hartleben retained the thirteen line rondel form and the pattern of repeated lines (the first two lines return as the second pair in the second stanza and the opening line returns at the end of the third stanza), he also made some considerable changes. As Roger Marsh points out in the programme notes of the first complete staged performance of his *Pierrot Lunaire* by the York Music Theatre Group in November 2002, '...Giraud's "spit of blood" (crachat sanguinolent) becomes a "pale drop of blood" which no longer has "a medicinal flavor – a faintly troubling after taste", Pierrot's "flat viol" becomes a viola (Bratsche). Hartleben also 'altered the line lengths, sometimes considerably, for example in the *Chanson de la Potence*

(Galgenlied) and Supplique (Gebet an Pierrot) where the lines are all very short...this kind of variation is not found in Giraud.’ (Marsh, 2002)

In addition, the fact that Marsh set to music all 50 of Giraud’s poems shows the composer’s concern to preserve the authentic character and context of Pierrot Lunaire. Schoenberg selected for his Pierrot twenty-one of Hartleben’s translations – probably influenced by two parameters:

his deep interest in number mysticism¹ and the decision to retain some elements (mainly relating to the narrative structure and to the progression from a light, colorful mood in Part I, to a dark, macabre and sadistic tone in Part II and then to a bitter-sweet nostalgia in Part III) from Zehme’s earlier selections of twenty two of Hartleben’s translations for her 1911 evenings of recitations – posing thus an insoluble problem: the problem of the identity of the central character in Pierrot Lunaire.

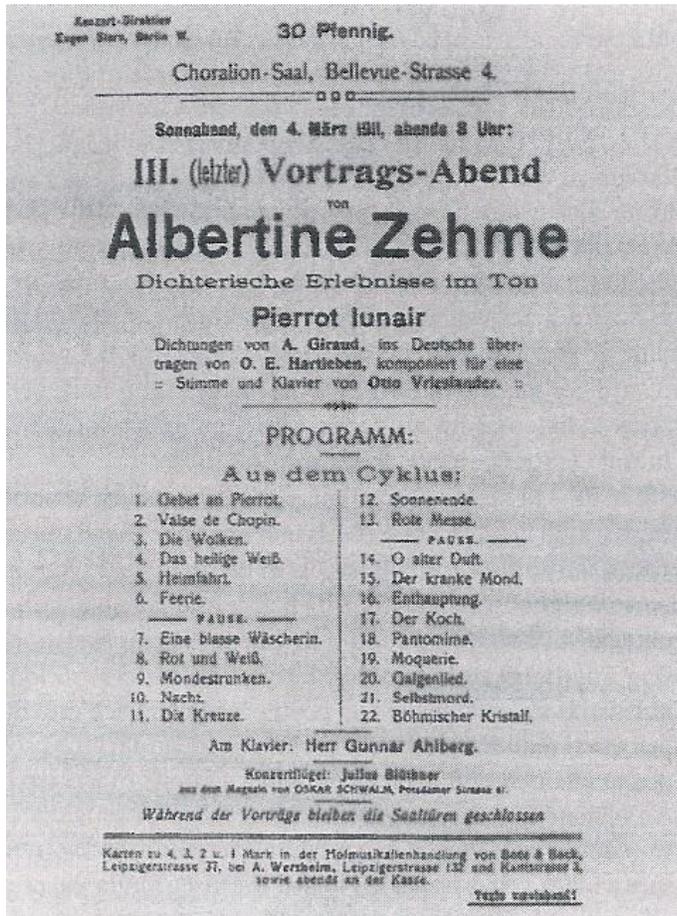


Figure 5: Reproduction of the first page of the printed programme of Zehme’s evening of recitations of Pierrot Lunaire, 4 March 1911. (Simms, 2000, 124)

Although each poem has ‘the same formal pattern including textual repetition which produces a sense of continuous organizational control’ there is no real story overall, but rather ‘a succession of images, ideas, actions, moods...’(Dunsby, 1992, 18). Schoenberg did not choose Giraud’s final poem Cristal de Bohème in which the poet puts an end to Pierrot’s enigmatic muteness by confirming that the voice that is heard through the entire poetic collection is his own voice disguised as that of Pierrot. Instead, he used Parfums de Bergame to bring the cycle to a

¹ Schoenberg’s Op. 21 is grouped into three equal parts of seven poems each, there are seven notes in the score’s most important theme the initial piano ostinato in N^o1, Pierrot is first mentioned in measure 21 in N^o 3 (Der Dandy) the N^o21 appears reversed in Pierrot’s year of composition.

becalmed close characterized by a sense of reconciliation and nostalgia for earlier times, thus leading the musical world to the hypothesis that Schoenberg's Pierrot cycle is 'about' the composer himself, an 'autobiographical narrative, (Simms, 2000, 126), 'a historical representation of the problem of the artist in the modern period...' (131)

In Marsh's Pierrot Lunaire the central character is Albert Giraud himself. Poems 1, 13, 22, 26, 39 and 50 in particular, can be thought of – according to the composer's instructions – as spoken by the poet. Throughout the piece Giraud's voice is represented by a kaleidoscope of voices ('vocal requirements vary greatly from item to item, some requiring many voices, others as few as one' [Marsh, 2001/2002]) and of vocal behaviours, as an allusion to Pierrot's varied incarnations in Giraud's chamber theatre – the commedia dell' arte character, the eighteenth century Pierrot of the Italian theatre in Paris, the modern Pierrot – represented by a series of images by Brueghel and Watteau but also familiar from Jean Gaspard Debureau and Jean Louis Barrault.

Furthermore, Roger Marsh, a connoisseur of the most subtle nuances in Giraud's texts – he set the Pierrot poems in both French and English 'in an attempt to preserve the quality of Giraud's original poetry at the same time as presenting their meaning directly to an English speaking audience' (Marsh, 2002) and also collaborated closely with Kay Bourlier in order to provide a translation that would be an exact insight into the words used by Giraud – transformed Giraud's pun on the manipulation of the illusion of identity (Pierrot Lunaire) into an important element in his compositional process: the utilization of many voices (which is without doubt also related to the fact that the first part on the work was commissioned by the Hilliard Ensemble for the Hilliard Summer School 2001) underlines the non-identical which epitomizes the characteristics of the modern Pierrot and his mimodrama. The white moon-like face of the late nineteenth-century mime is the antithesis of self identity, Pierrot is 'the opposite of being the one (L'une) that is one-self.' (Kurth, 2000, 236) The symbol of Giraud's Pierrot is la lune (the moon) but he is 'the very opposite of l' une: instead of being self-identical, he is lunaire, a moonstruck lunatic' (Kurth, 2000, 236), a blanc (Mallarme's Mime, white 'as a yet unwritten page') whose identity is everywhere and nowhere. Indeed, the first production of Marsh's work featured several Pierrots looking, sounding and moving in different ways.

The following table summarizes the vocal behaviors and sound effects (produced by the vocal apparatus) suggested by the composer that provide the frame for the interpretation of his Pierrot.

Table 1: Vocal behaviors in Marsh's Pierrot Lunaire

Composer's indications	Poem number
<i>Appalled</i>	4
<i>a mixture of surprise and fear</i>	31
<i>a yawn</i>	15
<i>* buzzing</i>	4
<i>beatbox (a disco/catwalk soundtrack produced vocally: drums, bass effects)</i>	8, 39
<i>bocca chiusa</i>	22, 50
<i>* bell-like</i>	3, 47
<i>Bright</i>	42
<i>Calm</i>	13
<i>Chant</i>	8, 38
<i>Collapse</i>	18
<i>Deranged</i>	18
<i>Dark</i>	23
<i>entirely unvoiced, as resonant as possible</i>	15
<i>* finger tapped on a cheek</i>	15
<i>full of suspense</i>	18
<i>freely, like a recitative</i>	18
<i>Freeze</i>	18
<i>falsetto (quasi harmonic)</i>	6, 11, 42
<i>glissando, slow microtonal glissando</i>	4, 45
<i>Grotesque</i>	17
<i>* guttural drilling sound</i>	45
<i>glumly</i>	43
<i>harsh</i>	17
<i>insolently</i>	13
<i>increasingly passionate</i>	28
<i>instrumental sound, not fully pitched</i>	38
<i>* light rain (pli, pla, plo...resonance at the front of the mouth)</i>	15
<i>* like a cockerel</i>	13
<i>* like an old crone</i>	42
<i>like a folksong</i>	5
<i>like a cymbal</i>	38
<i>muttering</i>	42

<i>mysterious</i>	14
<i>menacing</i>	17
<i>nasal</i>	6, 17, 23
<i>pop voices, pop Eurovision style</i>	8, 39
<i>prosaically</i>	17
<i>parlando</i>	28
<i>pleading</i>	31
<i>* percussive (like clacking beaks, like knitting needles...clac clac)</i>	33,42
<i>Rude</i>	6
<i>sobbing</i>	4, 31
<i>shout</i>	6, 8, 14, 23
<i>surprised / surprised intake of breath</i>	6
<i>screams</i>	45
<i>sorrowfully</i>	31
<i>strangled gurgling trill</i>	17
<i>seductively</i>	17
<i>senza vibrato</i>	17
<i>stupid grin</i>	18
<i>slightly hushed</i>	18
<i>suddenly explode</i>	18
<i>suddenly agitated</i>	44
<i>tipsily</i>	18
<i>tense</i>	17, 18
<i>urgent</i>	18
<i>viol – like (but out of tune)</i>	6
<i>voluptuous</i>	17
<i>warm</i>	16
<i>with mounting terror</i>	14
<i>wearily</i>	15
<i>whisper</i>	19

The instructions asterisk in the table above refers to specific images conveyed by the poetry, perceived by the composer's sensitive musical ear and transferred, with a sense of humor, to the 'living' stage. For example:



Figure 6
R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, *Déconvenue*'



Figure 7
R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, *Pierrot cruel*'



Figure 8
R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, *Les Cicognes*'



Figure 9
R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, *Le Miroir*'

Through this large range of vocal attitudes and great variety of moods, the composer completes the expressive palette of his polyphonic and colorful fresco that focuses on the most meaningful sound of all: the human voice.

All Giraud's fifty poems are rendered through a great diversity of vocal combinations (and combinations of French and English) – 'many of the poems are sung in French and "translated" by a reciter, whose part is woven into the music; some are entirely spoken in various combinations of the two languages; one or two are presented only in French and their translation is provided by action' (Marsh, 2002) – and together they produce a performance made up of a series of separate situations and tableaux (linked up by Giraud's recurring presence), thus offering a theatrical experience that forces the imagination of the audience into creative activity.

Looking at the printed programme for Pierrot's 2002 staged production we notice that the poems are not included. The reason for this, as the composer points out, is that 'we want you to watch the stage and not your programme'. Nevertheless, a headline synopsis is provided, and we consider the inclusion of the synopsis in the present study to be an excellent and rare opportunity for the reader (even for he/she who is already familiar with Hartleben's translations) to get acquainted with the totality of Giraud's Moon poems and to become Pierrot's companion 'in all

of his adventures and roles, from high priest in the temple of art (L'eglise, Evocation, Messe Rouge, Les croix) to the home-sick vagabond (Nostalgie, Parfums de Bergame, Depart de Pierrot).' (Simms, 2000, 122)

Table 2: R.Marsh *Pierrot Lunaire*, contents

Pierrot Lunaire – 50 Rondels Bergamasques	
Part One	
1) Théâtre <i>(Giraud introduces his imagined theatre)</i>	2) Décor <i>(Brueghel's purple and gold birds)</i>
3) Pierrot Dandy <i>(Pierrot and his wash-stand)</i>	4) Déconvenue <i>(some disappointed dinner guests)</i>
5) Lune au lavoir <i>(the moon is a pale washer-girl)</i>	6) La Sérénade de Pierrot <i>(Pierrot plays Cassander)</i>
7) Cuisine Lyrique <i>(Pierrot cooks a moon omelette)</i>	8) Arliquinade <i>(Harlequin's fashion show)</i>
9) Pierrot polaire <i>(Pierrot's alter ego – the moon)</i>	10) Colombine <i>(Pierrot's longs for her)</i>
11) Arlequin <i>(Harlequin has designs on her too – and will pay)</i>	12) Nuages <i>(Clouds like fish)</i>
13) A mon cousin de Bergame <i>(Giraud is like Pierrot)</i>	14) Pierrot Voleur <i>(stealing red rubies)</i>
15) Spleen <i>(Pierrot is bored, and it's raining)</i>	16) Ivresse de Lune <i>(and is drunk on moon wine)</i>
17) Chanson de la Potence <i>(the gallows will be his last over)</i>	18) Suicide <i>(hung over – end it all)</i>
19) Papillons noirs <i>(black butterflies of despair)</i>	20) Coucher de soleil <i>(sunset and slit wrists)</i>
21) Lune Malade <i>(paying last respects to the dying room)</i>	22) Absinthe <i>(drowning in a sea of it)</i>
Part Two	
23) Mendiante de têtes <i>(an old lady executioner)</i>	24) Décollation <i>(the moon decapitates Pierrot)</i>
25) Rouge et blanc <i>(and his bloody tongue sticks out)</i>	26) Valse de Chopin <i>(a consumptive waltz)</i>
27) L' Eglise <i>(to church for attonement)</i>	28) Evocation <i>(the blessed Madonna of hysteria)</i>
29) Messe rouge <i>(Pierrot – priest offers his heart)</i>	30) Les croix <i>(poets bleed on the cross)</i>
31) Supplique <i>(the spring of laughter is broken)</i>	32) Violon de Lune <i>(moonlight serenade)</i>

33) Les Cigognes (great melancholy storks)	34) Nostalgie (Pierrot longs for the old days...)
35) Parfums de Bergame (back in Bergamo...)	36) Départ de Pierrot (and he sets sail)
37) Pantomime (some slapstick)	38) Brosse de Lune (Pierrot on the town, is bothered by a spot...)
39) L' alphabet (Giraud's coloured alphabet book)	40) Blancheurs sacrées (but Pierrot is white)
41) Poussiere rose (a pink dusk)	42) Parodie (the old Duenna yearns for Pierrot)
43) Lune moqueuse (poor old Cassander, and a unicorn)	44) La Lanterne (Pierrot and the lamp)
45) Pierrot cruel (poor old Cassander...and a cranium driller)	46) Décor (the sun, a pink egg)
47) Le miroir (back to Pierrot's boudoir)	48) Souper sur l'eau (Commedia characters re-united)
49) L'Escalier (Pierrot prostrates himself on the stair; all done now)	50) Crystal de Bohême (like a moonbeam in a bottle: Giraud and Pierrot, Pierrot and Giraud)

Taking one step further in the mimologist idea, mentioned at an earlier stage of the paper, and looking at the strictly musical content of Pierrot, we notice that often in Marsh's score words are faithfully represented by the rhythm and shape of the music and that their visual image is the source of the compositional inspiration.

In numbers 36 (Départ de Pierrot, figure 10) and 48 (Souper sur l' eau, figure 11) the sonic image of water is evoked by the triple meter, which creates a sense of circular motion. The intervallic identity is also characteristic and underscores the undulating, wave-like qualities of the water, first by the repeated group of descending interlocking thirds and, at the same time, by the strong sense of tonic harmony articulated by the open fifth chord strengthened by the elaboration of the tonic pitch by its two alternating neighbour-tones.

Figure 10
R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, Départ de Pierrot'

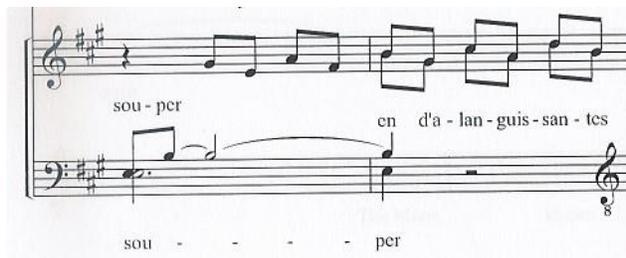
Figure 11
R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, Souper sur l'eau'

The ‘water leitmotiv’ generates in No. 48 (figures 12, 13) larger harmonic form by half-step transpositions that also surround the opening E major tonality, strengthening the identity of the material by transferring the same principle of cyclic motion to the harmonic domain.



Figures 12, 13
R.Marsh, ‘Pierrot Lunaire, *Souper sur l’eau*’

It is noteworthy that the shape and identity of the ‘water leitmotiv’ comes – and is actually enclosed in it! – from Schoenberg’s initial piano ostinato (figure 15) which also opens Marsh’s No. 6 (figure 14, *La Sérénade de Pierrot*), a humorous ‘clin d’oeil’ of the composer to Schoenberg’s *Pierrot*.



Figures 14
R.Marsh, ‘Pierrot Lunaire, *La Sérénade de Pierrot*’

Figure 15
Arnold Schoenberg, ‘Pierrot Lunaire, *Mondestrunken*’

The gesture of the extended downward glissando under a fermata in the ‘ze’ syllable (as a part of the word ‘zèbre’) in *La Sérénade de Pierrot* (figure 17), that is the same vocal gesture of the emphatic downward jump in ‘zerreist’ used by Schoenberg ‘for dramatic effect’ (Rapoport, 2006, 10) in the second stanza of his No. 11, *Rote Messe*, (figure 16) is another reference of the composer to Schoenberg’s *Pierrot*.



Figure 16
Arnold Schoenberg, 'Pierrot Lunaire, Rote Messe'

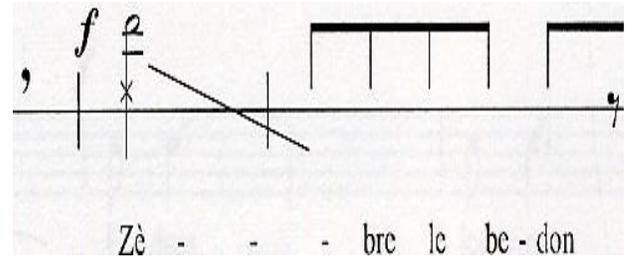


Figure 17
R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, La Sérénade de Pierrot'

Also, the very last gesture of Marsh's No. 6 (La Serenade de Pierrot, figure 18) is a quote from the beginning of Schoenberg's Serenade (figure 19).



Figure 18
R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, La Sérénade de Pierrot'



Figure 19
Arnold Schoenberg, 'Pierrot Lunaire, Serenade'

Instruments are used in only a few numbers in Part two (viols and/or 'baroque' violin or string instruments to give a similar effect in numbers 24 & 25; various bells in numbers 27 and 29; organ or freebass accordion to imitate church organ in numbers 27-28; piano in No. 26). These (except for numbers 24, 25 and 32, where live playing is much preferred), may be pre-recorded. The discreet presence of the obligato instruments suggests that the real protagonist in Marsh's musical score is the voice.

I will now use numbers 18 and 31, written for solo voice a capella - 'a slightly deranged female clown that recounts Pierrot's suicide accompanying the tale with appropriate actions' (Marsh, 2001/2002) - as starting point for a brief discussion of the contribution of Roger Marsh's Pierrot Lunaire to the vocal training of the actor, thus establishing an important aspect of the work: its educational dimension.

The preparation of both Suicide (No. 18) and Supplique (No. 31) constitutes a voice lesson that deals with a great number of vital issues of a singer's/actor's technique.

Throughout the entire work and in No 18 particularly, the vocal line develops from the text and is generated from the French speech intonation. In spite of its apparent simplicity, the opening phrase ‘en sa robe de lune blanche’, a seven syllable entity of repeated notes with an octave jump that reflects the syllable structure and sentence stress (figure 20), poses a challenging target to the performer: to keep the exact intonation, maintaining without the slightest alteration the precise pitch while she articulates in rapid succession different combinations of vowels and consonants.

18. SUICIDE (for Linda)
 1. Fast, tense, deranged
 f
 S
 En sa ro - be de Lune blanche, de Lune blanche, sa ro - be de Lune blanche,

Figure 20. R.Marsh, ‘Pierrot Lunaire, *Suicide*’

In order to accomplish this, as well as for the sake of clarity in diction and homogeneity of sound (the aim in this particular melodic pattern, which appears very frequently throughout No. 18, is to prevent extreme difference in ‘colour’ and intensity during the upward jump), each syllable must be placed as far forward in the mouth as possible. The correct placing of both

vowels and consonants requires great flexibility of the vocal apparatus that is, of the tongue, nose, palate, lips, larynx, chest and diaphragm, and constitutes a goal toward which all singers / actors strive constantly.

As Lilly Lehmann points out in *How to Sing*, ‘the mixing and connecting of several vowels in the different vowel-forms on single tones is a study in itself...To begin with, we must try clearly to understand that every letter demands its own form, that every union of the vocal organs from one letter to another must again create a new form or, better, a new quality of the form’ (Lehmann, 1993, 110).

In addition, the above mentioned upward jump, that reflects and transcribes the French speech intonation to music (lune blānche / Pierrot rīt / son rīre / troublānt etc), is not always an octave but also appears as a seventh (C / B) and a ninth (C / D) – both rather ‘uncomfortable’ intervals for the human ear and, consequently, for the human voice. The study of those intervals

offers a great opportunity for ear training, and an effective exercise in order to gain some acquaintance with them would be to reach the desired note in two steps, in other words, either by first reaching the octave and then going a semitone lower (C-C-B) or a tone higher (C-C-D), or by first inverting the seventh or the ninth to a descending / ascending second respectively and then raising the note by an octave (C – B – B / C – D – D).

Numbers 18 (figure 21) and 31 share an important characteristic: the frequent transitions from singing to the spoken quality of the voice, as the woman who recounts Pierrot’s suicide attempt (in No. 18) and later (in No. 31) returns in search of Pierrot (who has left), acts at the same time as a ‘translator’ of her own words presenting their meaning to an English speaking audience. The performer, in order to acquire a flexible, controlled sound that will enable her to move freely throughout her entire vocal range and to bridge the gap between speaking and singing, thus preserving the continuity of the narration – and, in some cases, even the integrity of a single word – must perceive the voice as a whole, as a single instrument capable of many different actions.

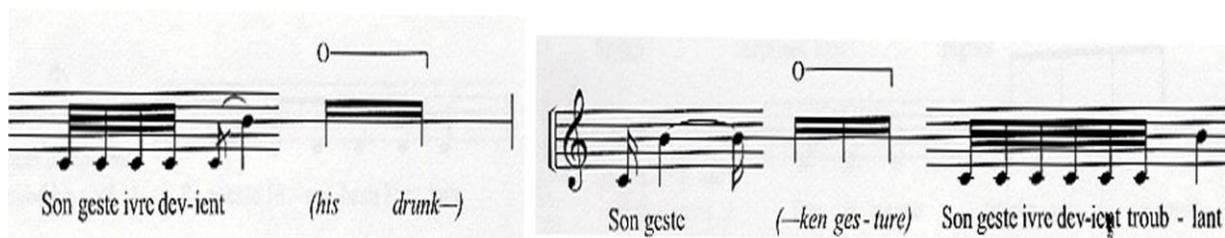


Figure 21. R.Marsh, ‘Pierrot Lunaire, *Suicide*’

The achievement of this task depends on the performer’s ability to first identify the different principles that rule the production of a spoken and a sung tone and work separately on each technical area, and then fuse all the aspects of vocal technique into a ‘well-modulated actor sound’ where the barrier between speaking and singing no longer exists. This process must mainly focus on the two key areas of vocal production: the use of the various resonating cavities of the body and breathing. When we speak, we tend to limit our voice to a low register, keeping the pitch down and mostly using the chest and throat resonators whereas when it comes to singing we invest more in the head, nose and face cavities. The minimization of the switch from chest to head tones during the transition from the spoken to the singing voice and vice-versa may be achieved through the mastery of the breathing mechanism and breath support. Supplique (No. 31) is a great exercise for the abdominal muscles, since the performer must be free and relaxed

enough to allow frequent inhalations of small quantities of air that match the short phrases and the continuous alternations of speaking and singing.

Moreover, the last part of No. 18 (figure 22) presents a further and even more challenging task to the performer: the alternation of singing and speaking now acquires a complex psychic background as it becomes an alternation of conflicting moods. While the singing voice narrates Pierrot's suicide attempt in a monotonous, alienated one-note recitative, the speaking voice re-enacts the suicide scene with a constantly augmenting intensity that leads to a climax of both the performer's vocal means of expression and her bodily gestures.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for R. Marsh's 'Pierrot Lunaire, Suicide'. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a single note on a high line, labeled 'low voice' with a curved line above it. Below this is the instruction '(he quivers like a fish...)' and the lyrics 'Se passe au col un noeud cou-lant'. The melody consists of a series of eighth notes on a high line. The second part of the staff is labeled 'higher' with a curved line above it, with the instruction '(places a slip-knot around his neck...)' and the lyrics 'Re-pousse l'e - sca-beau brou-lant'. The melody continues with eighth notes on a high line. The second staff begins with a treble clef and a single note on a high line, labeled 'higher' with a curved line above it. Below this is the instruction '(kicks away the shaking stool...)' and the lyrics 'Tire la languc'. The melody consists of a series of eighth notes on a high line. The next part is labeled 'surprised look!' and 'higher' with a curved line above it, with the instruction '(sticks out his tongue)' and the lyrics 'et se dc-hanche'. The melody consists of a series of eighth notes on a high line. The final part is labeled 'do it : tongue out and swing...' with a curved line above it, with the instruction '(and sways...*)' and the lyrics '(and sways...*)'. The melody consists of a series of eighth notes on a high line.

Figure 22. R.Marsh, 'Pierrot Lunaire, Suicide'

Noteworthy is that each time the speaking voice of the internally divided performer returns to the recitative, it generates a claustrophobic sensation that suggests Susan Youen's characterization of Giraud's Pierrot poetry as 'breathless' (in her article 'Excavating an Allegory: the texts of Pierrot Lunaire, she describes Pierrot as a figure 'submerged in an airless inner world' [Youens, 1984, 96, 105; quoted in Kurth, 2000]). It also generates the image of a voice that appears and disappears simultaneously, a scene reminiscent of Pierrot's pantomimes in the Parisian stages at the end of the century where a visual play of light and shadow reflected the ephemeral presence of the moon-faced apparition. This image also relates to the constant switch of character in Berio's A-Ronne and Sequenza III.

In addition, the study of Marsh's score leads to the awareness that different languages have different cultural and emotional overtones and also contributes to the exploration of the performer's vocal possibilities and to the enlargement of his/her means of vocal expression. Returning to the examples of numbers 18 and 31, the accomplishment of the challenging task for

both the listener's ear and the actor's vocal apparatus, in adjusting listening and sound production from one language to another, invites a consideration of the formation of the sound of different languages. This may be achieved through a detailed work on the rhythm and stress of a language, the examination of the resonating cavities where the accent is mostly placed – nose, throat, face, head – the observation of the movement required in the facial mask in order to produce the sounds. Patsy Rodenburg suggests in her book *The right to speak*: 'hum the tune of an accent and that will tell you a lot about its musicality' (1992, 251). Thus, the performer realizes that the sound he/she produces from his/her mouth is only the end result of a process that involves an enormous variety of language codes and systems of signs (each language has got a different body vocabulary) and goes beyond the dictionary definitions of the words.

Furthermore, the various vocal behaviours, acoustic effects (produced by the actor's voice) and vocal sounds in any imaginable form, summarized in the table in pages 14-15, offer to the performer an ideal opportunity to investigate closely the possibilities of his/her own organism and stimulate his/her vocal imagination.

Through the imitation of natural and mechanical noises (light rain, guttural drilling sound...) and the expression of heightened emotions (shouting, screaming...) that 'release powerful and intense feelings through the voice' (Rodenburg, 1992, 251), the performer exploits his/her body resonators (and discovers that their number is practically unlimited!) and also mobilizes his/her hidden expressive resources.

The various colours and means of vocal expression may also be significantly enlarged through the exploration of the different singing styles required by the composer (liturgical chant, folksong, straight pop voices, school playground chants), thus 'unblocking' the performer from self-censoring, which very frequently is a result of fear of judgment or shame at the sound that may come out. This particular aspect of Marsh's *Pierrot* inevitably leads to the association of the work with another important piece of music theatre, *Aria*, written by John Cage in 1958 for Cathy Berberian and performed for the first time later that year in Rome¹. I consider both works to have an important place in contemporary music theatre and to be an indispensable part of the repertoire of today's actor and singer.

¹ The work was performed together with *Fontana Mix* and in the summer of 1959 Berberian took *Aria* to Darmstadt. 'Through different colours, the score prescribes to the interpreter a timbre change. The different timbres are not predetermined by Cage on the score but chosen by the performer...Berberian, for example, chose in this way: dark blue=jazz, blue=baby, violet=Marlene Dietrich, green=folk...' (Cianciusi, 2005)

Cage's *Aria* is not the only earlier music theatre work towards which Roger Marsh's *Pierrot* opens the door to the performer. In *Pierrot's* No. 26 (*Valse de Chopin*), 'a recorded collage of Chopin waltzes begins, played un-naturally slowly on piano and recorded with a slightly antique quality...*Pierrot* remains still, while the crowd around him pair off to begin a ghostly waltz – waltzing in time – but with tiny steps, waltzing almost on the spot, occasionally freezing an extravagant gesture...some dancers have physical disabilities...' (Marsh, 2001/2002). This excellent exercise on the observation of 'the body's centre of gravity, the mechanism for the contraction and relaxation of the muscles, the function of the spine in the various movements' (Grotowski, 1991, 104), may suggest the study of Kagel's *Pas de cinq*,¹ if the performer wishes to further investigate movement, the plasticity of the body and the importance of the vertebral column as the centre of expression.

Moreover, *Valse de Chopin*, may constitute, together with *Lune malade* (No. 21) the starting-point for workshops and creative group work. In No. 21, a sick white faced moon, close to death (represented by an actor), sits in a dim white spotlight, centre stage, and is approached by singers who offer words of condolence or comfort in their own language ('A mixture of languages is to be welcomed', Marsh 2001/2002). Although the style of delivery is, according to the composer's staging instructions, 'serious and un-emotional', the visitor's personal association with situations, people, memories, may cause various reactions ('one or two outbursts may be good if it seems the right thing to do...' Marsh, 2001/2002). As the reactions increase in intensity, the whole body is activated and this process is one of the most important lessons an actor / singer (who often suffers from over-straining of the voice because he/she 'forgets' to speak with the body) must learn: that the voice cannot be detached from the body and the performer should not think of the vocal instrument itself or of the words, but must always react with the body (Grotowski, 1991, 153).

In summary, the second part of the essay discusses the different aspects of Roger Marsh's multi faceted *Pierrot Lunaire*, mainly focusing on the important contribution of the work to the actor's/singer's vocal training. Marsh's *Pierrot* is a theatre laboratory where through self observation, experimentation and interaction, the exploration of the performer's vocal possibilities to the utmost may be attained.

¹ Mauricio Kagel *Pas de cinq* (1965), written for five male or female actors that walk along lanes – constructed to form a regular pentagon – in obligatory rhythmic patterns

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