

9 *Pierrot lunaire*: persona, voice, and the fabric of allusion

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Since its 1912 composition and premiere, Schoenberg's *Dreimal sieben Gedichte aus Albert Girauds Pierrot lunaire* (Three Times Seven Poems from Albert Giraud's *Pierrot lunaire*), Op. 21 has aroused strong responses and extensive commentary, especially regarding its enigmatic approach to *Sprechstimme* (speaking voice or recitation) and its "atonal" idiom. This chapter, in three parts, synthesizes and extends some themes in the recent critical reception of the work.¹ The first part sketches a history of the Pierrot character in comedy and pantomime, including a description of the genesis and overall shape of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. The second section explores how traditional vocal representations of subjectivity and lyric expression are renatured by Schoenberg's striking approach to *Sprechstimme* in the work. The final part demonstrates, through selected examples, how the music invokes a rich network of musical allusions, in tandem with tonal latencies that permeate its kaleidoscopic surface.

Pierrots old and new – *en blanc et noir*

Over the centuries, the Pierrot character has been portrayed by countless actors, pantomimes, and puppets.² Originating among Italian *commedia dell'arte* troupes active in seventeenth-century France, Pierrot first appears in 1660s comedies as a rustic and dumbfounded bumpkin, but in the eighteenth century he became the paragon of pastoral innocence, a pure (and often silent) fool. The nineteenth century gradually transformed him, radically, into a decadent *fin-de-siècle* dandy, obsessed with the moon. A resemblance with the moon was already suggested by his eighteenth-century *commedia* costume: a powdered white face, soft white hat and large ruffled collar, and loose jacket and trousers of flowing white silk. By the nineteenth century he had become a darker figure, often completely mute, and the distant and intoxicating moon had become his emblem, muse, and mirror. This was his triumphant period on the stages of Paris, where he was reinvented in the 1830s by the pantomime Jean-Gaspard ("Baptiste") Debureau and his apostles. Pierrot's new lunatic persona aroused delirious enthusiasm among a diverse company of

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poets – Baudelaire, Banville, Gautier, Verlaine, Laforgue – because the mute Pierrot’s miming gestures allegorized the sufferings and growing isolation of the modern poet.

Among other things, Debureau restyled Pierrot’s make-up. The pantomime powdered his face to a perfect blankness to heighten its mute expressivity. He rouged his silent but elastic lips, added dark shading around his searing eyes, and topped his moon-like face with a black skullcap – to evoke the dark side of the moon, and an open cranium exposed to pernicious celestial influences. The contrast of this black void atop his white face signifies a deep split in Pierrot’s psyche, manifested thereafter by the two main *fin-de-siècle* types of Pierrots: the moon-like white Pierrots of Aubrey Beardsley’s etchings, who are pale, diaphanous, narcissistic, and androgynous; and the lunatic black Pierrots in tailcoats, seen in the cartoons of Jules Chéret and Adolphe Willette, who are evil geniuses inspired by seductive, grotesque, and sinister comic gaiety, or hallucinogenic and sacrilegious maniacs tormented by every fear and guilt.

Pierrots of both polarities waft and swerve through *Pierrot lunaire: Rondels bergamasques*, the 1884 collection of fifty French poems by the Belgian poet Albert Giraud (1860–1929). As Robert Vilain notes, Giraud uses Pierrot’s inner and outer landscape to explore the artistic challenge of bringing Parnassian poetic restraint into contact with Symbolist poetic sensuousness, without falling into Decadent excesses.³ Pierrot’s white-or-black polarity here symbolizes a debate in Belgian poetic circles, with the Parnassian and Decadent creeds at the respective poles. In his 1893 German translation of Giraud’s poems, Otto Erich Hartleben (1864–1905) preserved their basic Parnassian formal element – the rigid thirteen-line *rondel* form – but he refocused the poems as expressions of subjective crisis rather than aesthetic debate.⁴ Hartleben intensified the imagery and sound of the poems, making them sizzle and blaze in a stunning display of sonic pirouettes and explosions, so that the poems render the mute pantomime’s antic gestures and poses back into a spectacular verbal substance, perfectly suited to the novel mode of recitation Schoenberg would create in his 1912 *Pierrot lunaire*.

During the 1910–11 Berlin season, the actress Albertine Zehme gave three recitals featuring the Hartleben translations in melodramatic settings (with piano accompaniments) by Otto Vrieslander. Schoenberg moved to Berlin in October 1911, and Zehme approached him in January 1912 to commission more elaborate and adventurous settings of the poems. Schoenberg was fascinated by her proposal and ideas. On March 10, 1912 he signed a contract to compose at least twenty melodramas, with piano and two additional instruments, and he started composing immediately, writing “Gebet an Pierrot” (with piano and clarinet in A)

Table 9.1 *Titles, poetic character-shading (black/white), instrumentation, and instrumental character-shading in the three parts of Pierrot lunaire. (Instruments in parentheses enter midway through the respective melodrama.)*

1. Monde strunken /Moondrunk	Piano		Flute	Violin	Cello
2. Colombine	Piano	(Clarinet in A)	(Flute)	Violin	
3. Der Dandy /The Dandy	Piano	Clarinet in A	Picc		
4. Eine blasse Wäscherin/A pale washerwoman		Clarinet in A	Flute	Violin	
5. Valse de Chopin /Chopin Waltz	Piano	Clarinet in A	Flute		
6. Madonna	(Piano)	Bass Clarinet	Flute	(Violin)	Cello
7. Der kranke Mond/The Sick Moon			Flute		
8. Nacht /Night	Piano	Bass Clarinet			Cello
9. Gebet an Pierrot/Prayer to Pierrot	Piano	Clarinet in A			
10. Raub /Robbery		Clarinet in A	Flute	Violin	Cello
11. Rote Messe /Red Mass	Piano	Bass Clarinet	Picc	Viola	Cello
12. Galgenlied /Gallows Song			Picc	Viola	Cello
13. Enthauptung /Beheading (wordless reprise of No. 7)	Piano	Bass Clarinet	Flute	Viola	Cello
14. Die Kreuze /The Crosses	Piano	Clarinet in A	(Flute)	(Violin)	(Cello)
15. Heimweh/Nostalgia	Piano	Clarinet in A		Violin	
16. Gemeinheit /Dirty Trick!	Piano	Clarinet in A	Picc	Violin	Cello
17. Parodie /Parody	Piano	Clarinet in A	Picc	Viola	
18. Der Mondfleck /The Moon Fleck	Piano	Clarinet in B\flat	Picc	Violin	Cello
19. Serenade	Piano	(Clarinet in A)	(Flute)	(Violin)	Cello
20. Heimfahrt/Homeward Journey	Piano	Clarinet in A	Flute	Violin	Cello
21. O alter Duft/O ethereal fragrance	Piano	in A/(Bass)	Fl./(Picc.)	Vln/(Vla)	Cello

on March 12. The instrumentation expanded rapidly as Schoenberg worked, eventually requiring five players and eight instruments; each melodrama uses a distinct combination of instruments, sometimes changing midway through. Schoenberg eventually chose twenty-one of the fifty poems, including twelve from Zehme's March 1911 recital, which had featured twenty-two poems arranged in three groups of six, seven, and nine poems, respectively. Schoenberg finished the individual settings in early July, and then completely revised his preliminary ordering so as to fashion an overall narrative in three groups of seven poems each – thus the “dreimal sieben” (three times seven) in the work's title.⁵ Each group represents a contrasting facet of Pierrot's psychology in a multipart narrative of his exploits. After an open rehearsal on October 9 for invited guests and the press, the work was premiered on October 16, 1912. A five-week tour of thirteen cities followed immediately.⁶

Table 9.1 outlines the titles, grouping, and instrumentation of the melodramas. To show continuity and contrast, and observe affiliations with specific instruments, I associate the overall character of each movement with either a white or black Pierrot. (Bold type identifies the “black” Pierrot movements; some movements appear in mixed type, if they combine “white” imagery with “dark” character.) Bass clarinet, piccolo, and viola function like alter egos (to the clarinet, flute, and violin, respectively); they tend to appear

in “black” numbers, and grotesquely distort the music’s registral and timbral proportions. Overall, dark movements outnumber light ones, approximately two to one. Parts I and III are both fairly balanced, though differently paced, while Part II is almost entirely dark and diabolical. The lunar phases also structure Schoenberg’s grouping. Part I begins with Pierrot enraptured by the full moon, but he slips progressively into illness as the moon wanes, and Part I ends with the dying moon as a mere sliver. Pierrot’s depraved exploits in Part II mostly take place during the ensuing moonless phase, but a new crescent moon appears near the end (in No. 13). Pierrot becomes more comic as the moon waxes throughout Part III, until it is full again at “Heimfahrt” (No. 20). Morning sunlight dissolves the whole nocturnal world in “O alter Duft” (No. 21). Only this closing melodrama uses all eight instruments: the “white” instruments appear first; the “black” siblings enter near the end, but their dark connotations fade in the morning light.

Susan Youens interprets Schoenberg’s selection and tripartite framing of twenty-one poems as an allegory on the condition of the modern artist.⁷ Reinhold Brinkmann reinforces this interpretation when he notes that in comparison with other contemporaneous settings of the Giraud/Hartleben poems, only Schoenberg’s *Pierrot* cycle “elevates the puppet Pierrot to the level of an allegorical figure, to a model of identification for the late artist of modernity, for the problematic state of subjectivity, for the crisis of identity and cohesion of the I.”⁸ The eccentric sounds of the *Sprechstimme* certainly contribute to the expression of identity crisis and alienation, in rich and fascinating ways. But the sense of disorientation arises first from the discontinuous contrasts between the many black and white Pierrots that swerve through the poems, representing the obsessions of the modern psyche generally, not just the delusions of a single individual artist.

The electrifying diversity of the instrumental music also challenges the listener. Yet there are many factors, though often concealed, that do help to integrate it. Stephan Weytjens has shown the extensive use of varied motivic repetition in each melodrama, and Jonathan Dunsby believes that a “motivic essence” (and an unidentified *Grundgestalt*) unify Schoenberg’s inventive music.⁹ Many recent critics hear *Pierrot lunaire* as thoroughly parodic – like the eponymous pantomimes and puppets – and replete with satiric musical references and ironic allusions. As Brinkmann puts it, “There is not a single piece in *Pierrot lunaire* that is not based upon pre-existing material. The entire cycle indeed is music about music.”¹⁰ The musical references are concealed and distorted by Schoenberg’s enigmatic harmony, which effaces their original tonal moorings, but the music is nonetheless replete with lambent fragments of tonal sensation. The hidden references also invoke a massive supplementary intertext of musical

works with their own *dramatis personae*, much like the larger cast of *commedia* characters from which Pierrot emerged.

The mimetic voice: *Sprechmelodie* and alterity

The instrumental music in *Pierrot* is so remarkably inventive that some listeners, including Stravinsky, have wished the voice would fall mute – like a pantomime – to let the instruments sound alone.¹¹ But the unfamiliar mode of vocal production is surely the most important component in *Pierrot*, because it transmits and transfigures the word-sounds. The enigmatic quality of the *Sprechstimme* is the paramount aspect of *Pierrot*: it revolutionizes the musical use of the voice, and displaces the artifice of *bel canto* style that hitherto counted as the “natural” and authentic expression of subjectivity.¹² In fact, for her March 1911 recital, Albertine Zehme wrote a passionate program note on the aesthetics of recitation, questioning the naturalness of singing and calling for a wider expressive palette: “The singing voice, that supernatural, chastely controlled instrument, ideally beautiful precisely in its ascetic lack of freedom, is not suited to strong eruptions of feeling . . . For our poets and composers to communicate, we need both the tones of song as well as those of speech.”¹³ Undoubtedly, she showed this program note to Schoenberg, and her ideas probably influenced his approach to *Sprechstimme* in *Pierrot*.

Before *Pierrot lunaire*, Schoenberg experimented with different notations and approaches to modulating *Sprechstimme*, in *Gurrelieder* and *Die glückliche Hand*; and he would do so again in several later pieces.¹⁴ Numerous factors have been proposed as influences on Schoenberg’s unique approach to *Sprechstimme* in *Pierrot lunaire*: contemporaneous melodramatic works by other composers (especially Humperdinck’s 1897 *Königskinder*); the Berlin cabaret world in which Schoenberg briefly participated in 1901; Karl Kraus’s famous Viennese recitations; and perhaps even Jewish cantillation.¹⁵ None of these possible influences is mentioned, confirmed, or denied in any of Schoenberg’s recorded statements about *Pierrot lunaire*.

Schoenberg believed at this time that poetic language conveys meaning directly through its sensuous sounds (rather than through syntax, semantics, concepts), and he had proclaimed in a recent essay that he “had completely understood . . . the poems of Stefan George from their sound alone.”¹⁶ This statement resonates with Symbolist tenets valorizing poetic sound as the purified manifestation of meaning. Schoenberg must have been pleased to discover a similar conviction in Albertine Zehme’s March 1911 program note: “The words that we speak should not solely lead to mental concepts, but instead their sound should allow us to partake of

their inner experience.”¹⁷ The oracular *Sprechstimme* and brilliant instrumental gestures in *Pierrot lunaire* are vividly and inventively responsive to what Zehme calls the “inner experience” of the words. Schoenberg composed the *Pierrot* melodramas very rapidly, describing the experience as the “unmediated expression of sensual and mental gestures. Almost as though everything was directly transcribed.”¹⁸ The music is a transcription of vocal and instrumental gestures that Schoenberg imagined spontaneously in response to each poem’s sonic material. In this period he had complete faith that word-sounds alone could transmit the full poetic content and shading, and he rendered afresh this “inner experience” of the words in new instrumental and vocal gestures, vividly perceived and notated in precise detail. The resulting music is definitely associative and representational, but Schoenberg’s prefatory comments in the 1914 score have often been misunderstood to mean the opposite:

Never do the performers have the duty here to shape the tone and character of the individual pieces out of the meaning of the words, but always only out of the music. So far as tone-painterly representation of events and emotions given in the text was important to the composer, it can in any event be found in the music.¹⁹

Schoenberg is in fact underlining his music’s representational agency.²⁰ But he warns that because the music so precisely captures meanings and associations awakened during the creative moment, any attempt by performers to add expression could distort and destroy its intense specificity. He also wants the reciter (and instrumentalists) to avoid adding *pathos* that would make the performance, and the work, seem either affected or maudlin: “I have always stressed that this piece must be performed in a light manner, without pathos,” he wrote of “Die Kreuze” in 1928, and in 1940 he referred to “the light, ironic-satiric tone . . . in which the work was originally conceived.”²¹ Like all the great nineteenth-century manifestations of the Pierrot persona, Schoenberg’s *Pierrot* is a work of levity and wit, in which macabre images dissolve ironically into cathartic laughter.

Schoenberg actually used the word “*Sprechmelodie*” to describe his approach to *Sprechstimme* in *Pierrot*. Fidelity to the notated rhythms is crucial, but proper characterization of pitch and tone are the crucial properties. In the Foreword to the score, he outlined the concept carefully, first stating:

The melody indicated by notes for the speaking voice [*Sprechstimme*] is not meant to be sung (apart from a few specifically marked exceptions). The performer has the task of transforming it, with due consideration for the prescribed pitches, into a speech-melody [*Sprechmelodie*].²²

Sprechmelodie transforms the sonic material of language into a new musical resource. Schoenberg formulated specific directives for the desired concept of vocal modulation:

[The performer must remain] fully aware of the contrast between singing tone and speaking tone: singing tone strictly maintains the pitch, while speaking tone gives it at first, but abandons it immediately either by falling or rising. But the performer must take great care not to fall into a sing-song form of speaking. That is absolutely not intended. And by no means should one strive for realistic-naturalistic speech. On the contrary, the difference between an ordinary speech and one that contributes to a musical form must be made clear. But it must also never be reminiscent of singing [*Gesang*].²³

The last sentence makes it clear that “*Sprechgesang*” (speech-song) is definitely not what Schoenberg wants; Schoenberg avoided this term, but it has been widely used by others, creating unnecessary confusion even in otherwise perceptive and useful studies.²⁴ Schoenberg uses “*Sprechmelodie*,” by which he means an expressive and artistically coordinated succession of *spoken* pitches, timbres, and rhythms, without the sustained vowels of song. *Sprechmelodie* is already inherent in the continuous frequency and timbre fluctuations of normal speech, and has long been shaped artistically in poetry and drama, by authors, readers, and actors. It is a natural vocal attribute, ready to become a new musical resource when shaped artistically by the composer in specific ways and contexts.²⁵

Spoken pitch is inherently musical. It is in constant motion, across large intervals and microtonal ones; vowel timbres change continuously, and consonants are much more varied and incisive than in song. Schoenberg’s *Sprechmelodie* replaces the bel canto emphasis on sustained pure vowels with a fantastic new mobility. It forces *continuous* change in both pitch and vowel timbre, and by magnifying the profile of the consonants, it also forces *discontinuous* change in vowel sounds. It produces a mercurial kaleidoscope of vocal tones and timbres, giving the voice new articulations and percussive effects, comparable to the extended bowing techniques used by the string instruments in the work. Ferruccio Busoni, after a private performance conducted by Schoenberg in 1913, described the declamation as “affected” but also “almost like a new instrument, charming and expressive.”²⁶ Schoenberg’s student Erwin Stein also compared the *Sprechmelodie* to an instrument in a seminal 1927 essay on the topic.²⁷

This newly enriched vocal instrument can register the sonic material of language with utmost vividness, fulfilling Schoenberg’s and Zehme’s belief that the meaning and inner experience of words is conveyed purely through their sounds. But the heightened expressive capacities of this

“instrumentalized” voice also alienate it from everyday vocalization, in which words function as semantic units, and only secondarily as inflected sound. *Sprechmelodie* still “speaks,” but it also supersedes meaning through its extraordinary sonic palette. As Guy Michaud said of Verlaine’s poetry, “the language is vaporized and is reabsorbed into the melody.”²⁸ The *Sprechmelodie* in *Pierrot* transforms Hartleben’s already heightened language into an acrobatic display of vocal gestures and timbres. It is also grotesque, in that the timbral capacities of the voice are distorted by immense increases in every dimension, to register more vividly the music of the poetic language.

The alterity of *Sprechmelodie* arises from this vertiginous liberty. It releases vocal sound and expression from the shackles of an outdated notion of beauty, but its free and rapid inflections also relinquish the ability of bel canto song to delineate subjective states through a more limited scale of positions relative to a tonic. The newly “instrumentalized” voice of *Sprechmelodie* denatures bel canto’s most beautiful artifice – its constructed tonal representations of subjectivity and identity.

However, a growing number of analysts now acknowledge the fleeting tonal residues that arise everywhere in Schoenberg’s music.²⁹ The beginnings of a methodological approach to this complex phenomenon have emerged recently in the theoretical literature.³⁰ Schoenberg’s idiom in this period demonstrates his fine-tuned ability to create multiple *simultaneous* tonal implications that, in constant flux, are neutralized through superimposition or juxtaposition. (The basic elements are diminished-seventh, whole-tone, and fourth chords; they are fragmented and recombined to simultaneously intensify and neutralize their traditional implications.) Schoenberg was not out to destroy tonality, and in 1921 he derided the term “atonal,” offering “polytonal” and “pantonal” as preferable alternatives.³¹ It was the *structural obligations* of tonality that he wished to elide, and it is only from his concept of “suspended tonality” (*aufgehobene Tonalität*), all-too-briefly defined in his 1911 *Harmonielehre*, that we can find any historically relevant theoretical bearings for the music of *Pierrot*.³² Schoenberg’s published discussions of suspended tonality give very few examples, and his music in the period of *Pierrot* realizes the concept far more subtly and intensively, maintaining intricate webs of tonal latencies that collectively suspend tonality without completely negating it. Busoni may have been referring to these sorts of fleeting sensations in *Pierrot* when he remarked in a 1913 letter that it was “as if a large musical mechanism had been assembled from crumbled ingredients . . . put to uses other than those for which they were originally designed.”³³

In *Pierrot*, each instrument projects its own diaphanous shroud of fragmentary, shifting tonal latencies; contrapuntal superimposition of

the different instrumental strata suspends these tonal residues in a neutral balance, something like a Calder mobile. *Sprechmelodie* plays an important role in keeping the suspension in motion, because – unlike sung pitches – it will generally not interfere with the sensitive pitch-specific balancing of tonal residues. Although Schoenberg's preface asks the reciter to give "due consideration" to the notated pitches, the main priority is the agility and timbral variety that characterize *Sprechmelodie*. In fact, recorded performances conducted by Schoenberg attest to his increasing lenience about pitch accuracy in the *Sprechmelodie*.³⁴ Nevertheless, the notated *Sprechstimme* pitches always participate in the musical structure, and not only in the obvious places where they double an instrument or collaborate in strict canonic imitation.³⁵ The optimal *Sprechmelodie* performance will convey the notated pitches as boundaries for the continuous pitch fluctuations in order to help project the specific manner in which tonalities are neutralized and suspended in each passage. After all, the notated *Sprechstimme* pitches are fundamental components of the spontaneous sonic/expressive content that Schoenberg imagined and heard in response to the poems, and of the harmonic/contrapuntal idiom that captured his experience.

The fabric of allusion: echoes of Schumann in the shadows of tonality

Pierrot lunaire, writes Reinhold Brinkmann, "offers a historical diagnosis" and "critical commentary on itself, on its own representational intent. In an extreme state of self-reflection, *Pierrot lunaire* is music about its own presence . . . music about music, music about a specific musical tradition."³⁶ For Brinkmann, fragments of specific musical works constitute what Busoni (quoted above) called "crumbled ingredients"; thus *Pierrot* weaves into its fabric parodic allusions to a panoply of works, genres, and composers – including Wagner's *Parsifal*, Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, and Schumann's *Carnaval* – in addition to numerous contrapuntal devices (passacaglia, retrograde and inversion canons, fugue) and traditional forms (trio sonata, barcarolle, waltz).³⁷ The *Parsifal* and *Ein Heldenleben* parodies appear in the first and second melodramas Schoenberg composed, so the idea of musical caricature – the analog of pantomime – must have been part of his "ironic-satiric" concept from the outset. There are also instances of self-parody: for instance, Jonathan Dunsby hears an echo of Op. 19, No. 4 in "Valse de Chopin," while Stephan Weytjens observes in "Colombine" a clear quotation from *Herzgewächse*, Op. 20.³⁸

Example 9.1 (a) Schoenberg, “Mondestrunken” (No. 1), m. 1 (piano only). (b) Schoenberg, “Entrückung,” String Quartet No. 2, Op. 10, IV, m. 1 (second violin only). (c) Schumann, “Mondnacht,” *Eichendorff Liederkreis*, Op. 39, V, mm. 1–3. (d) Schumann, “Hör” ich das Liedchen klingen,” *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48, X, mm. 1–2. (e) Schumann, “Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen,” *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48, XII, m. 11

The image displays five musical excerpts labeled 9.1(a) through 9.1(e). Excerpt 9.1(a) is a piano part in 2/4 time, marked *pp*, featuring a complex harmonic structure with tritones and an augmented triad. Excerpt 9.1(b) is a second violin part in 2/4 time, marked *ppp*, showing a similar harmonic language. Excerpt 9.1(c) is a piano part in 3/8 time, marked *p*. Excerpt 9.1(d) is a piano part in 2/4 time, marked *p*. Excerpt 9.1(e) is a piano part in 6/8 time, marked *stumm.* (mute).

Brinkmann’s idea that *Pierrot* is replete with ironic referentiality raises many fascinating questions. Are the allusions structural components of the work, or just witty moments of brilliance that emerge and then dissolve? How dense is the network of allusions, and what are its techniques of concealment? What criteria validate a “real” allusion? (Some putative references invoke striking musical or poetic intertextualities, while others may simply reflect a listener’s personal associations.) To begin exploring such questions, the following discussion offers some new examples for consideration and debate, supported by several types of evidence. Passages that allude to tonal compositions will also help expose some of the tonal latencies in Schoenberg’s music.

The “Mondestrunken” motive (see Example 9.1a) is our starting point since it opens the cycle. It nicely exemplifies how Schoenberg concatenates familiar symmetrical harmonic configurations in order to superimpose multiple tonal implications: it contains an augmented triad, diminished-seventh chord, five-note whole-tone subset, and three tritones (the maximum possible in a seven-note set); these subsets are all tonally multivalent, in diverse ways. The motive’s signature rhythm and contour are easily recognized, and it reappears in many guises throughout the cycle. It also evokes numerous musical allusions.

The “Mondestrunken” motive depicts the flooding moonlight that intoxicates the poet (“Den Wein, den man mit Augen trinkt”). It is surely a self-parody of the ascending eight-note motive from Schoenberg’s “Entrückung” (third movement of the Second String Quartet, Op. 10), which depicts pre-sentiments of celestial fragrance (“Ich fühle Luft von anderem Planeten”).

The second violin entry (see Example 9.1b) best illustrates the close similarity, since it shares six pitch classes with the “Mondestrunken” motive (including the same augmented triad and diminished-seventh chord). Both poetic contexts involve celestial rapture, but the parody-allusion makes an “ironic-satiric” and grotesque comparison between the moon-drunk Pierrot and the soul’s transcendental ecstasy in “Entrückung.” The inverted contours of the two motives delineate that contrast.³⁹

The “Mondestrunken” figure also echoes the beautiful descending figure from Schumann’s “Mondnacht” (from the *Eichendorff Liederkreis*, Op. 39), probably the most beloved moonlit meditation in the entire Lied tradition (see Example 9.1c). This parody also invokes ironic contrasts, setting Eichendorff’s affirmative celestial contemplation against *Pierrot*’s decadent intoxication, and the Romantic isolation expressed elsewhere in the *Eichendorff Liederkreis* against the modern alienation allegorized in the Giraud/Hartleben poems.

As noted above, Brinkmann and Youens both interpret *Pierrot* as an allegory on the artist or poet of modernity. This identification emerges in “Mondestrunken” (No. 1), “Madonna” (No. 6), and “Die Kreuze” (No. 14), which are the only movements that specifically mention the poet or his verses. Indeed, the cello (Schoenberg’s own instrument) enters in “Mondestrunken” precisely at the words “der Dichter.” Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48 is the obvious model for a song cycle about poetic subjectivity and psychological crisis. This discussion will henceforth focus entirely on numerous allusions to *Dichterliebe* that emerge in *Pierrot*.

The “Mondestrunken” figure, for instance, evokes a wistful memory of *Dichterliebe* X (see Example 9.1d), a song that in fact is about nostalgic recollection of song (“When I hear the song / that once my sweetheart sang”). The motive also parodies the enharmonically multivalent arpeggiations of *Dichterliebe* XII, in which Schumann’s devastated poet, mournful and pale, falls mute and hears illusory voices – much like a sick and melancholy Pierrot. (Example 9.1e shows m. 11, precisely where the poet falls mute (“stumm”), and where a descending augmented triad D-B flat-G flat and diminished-seventh chord skeleton B flat-E-C sharp strikingly resemble similar components in the “Mondestrunken” motive.)

The preceding allusions all involve detailed intervallic similarities and poetic associations or contrasts. Brinkmann noted a different sort of allusion to *Dichterliebe*: the reprise of the flute monolog “Der kranke Mond” (No. 7) as an interlude – without *Sprechstimme* but with new instrumental parts – between “Enthauptung” and “Die Kreuze” (Nos. 13 and 14).⁴⁰ Brinkmann noted that *Dichterliebe* is the obvious model for this kind of structural recollection, because the postlude from *Dichterliebe* XII (a song just mentioned above) returns at the end of the entire cycle,

Example 9.2 (a) Schoenberg, “Madonna” (No. 6), mm. 1–3. (b) “Madonna”, m. 24.
 (c) Schumann, “Im Rhein,” *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48, VI, mm. 57–8

The musical score for Example 9.2 consists of five staves. The top staff is for Flute (Fl.), the second for Bass Clarinet (Bass-Cl. (Bb)), the third for Violin (Vcl.), the fourth for Recitation, and the bottom for Piano. Section (9.2a) covers measures 1-3, (9.2b) covers measure 24, and (9.2c) covers measures 57-8. Dynamics are marked as *p* (piano) and *ff* (fortissimo). The recitation part includes the text: "Steig. o Mut ter al-ler Schmerzen".

transposed to D flat major. In both *Dichterliebe* and *Pierrot*, the reprise comments wordlessly upon a traumatic experience endured by the poet. In fact, the structural reprise in *Pierrot* also links the waning crescent moon of No. 7 to the waxing crescent moon of No. 13, and thereby also connects the adjacent movements “Madonna” (No. 6) and “Die Kreuze” (No. 14), which are both points of intense musical and narrative climax, share religious imagery, brood on the poet’s suffering, and are the only melodramas that end with *fortissimo* outbursts.

In fact, “Madonna” (No. 6) makes striking structural allusions to *Dichterliebe* VI, and these can also help illustrate the tonal latencies of Schoenberg’s remarkable idiom. In *Dichterliebe* VI, itself a parody of a chorale-prelude in E minor, the rejected and deluded poet ironically compares his faithless beloved to the beatific Madonna in the Cologne Cathedral altarpiece. Schoenberg’s “Madonna” conceals ironic allusions to this song, perhaps initially stimulated by the shared religious iconography. In “Madonna” the poet hails the blood-red moon as the Mother of all sorrows; she rises over the “altar” of his verses, bleeding from unhealable wounds while holding her son’s “corpse” – symbolizing a leaf of poetry – in her emaciated hands. Schoenberg’s music doesn’t parody Schumann’s directly, although “Madonna” is also a mock baroque texture, which many critics interpret as an allusion to Bach’s music.⁴¹ “Madonna” does, however, project specters of Schumann’s E minor that are suspended in its penumbral harmonic fabric.

In the opening passage (Example 9.2a), the cello ascends and descends in distorted scales that nonetheless create a liminal pitch-class focus on E/F flat. Above this, the flute melody projects a very strong sense of

dominant harmony in E minor, highly embellished, but with durations and contours lending constant emphasis to dominant-function scale degrees. (The piano also repeats a B major triad five times near the end of the preceding melodrama.) Meanwhile, the opening *Sprechmelodie* pitches – sharing five pitch classes with the “Mondestrunken” figure! – project a strong sense of submediant harmony from parallel E major (C sharp minor), which morphs chromatically into subdominant harmony (A minor) at the word “Schmerzen.” Multiple harmonic functions in E are thus diversely represented and superimposed contrapuntally, to suggest but suspend the tonality. (The bass clarinet drifts like a specter through fragmentary references to other centers.)

“Madonna” then orbits through numerous other fragmentary tonal references, but E minor reemerges at the final cadence (Example 9.2b), where the dominant chord B-D sharp-F-A-C (with diminished fifth F), is superimposed over E, with the root B prominently sustained in the cello. The tonal function of this sonority is obscured by the low register, loud dynamic, unusual spacing, and the manner of inverting the ninth chord. But it is nevertheless a compressed echo of the ending from *Dichterliebe* VI (Example 9.2c), where the same harmony (except with the perfect fifth F sharp) unfolds linearly, but in the same general register. The final crashing chord of “Madonna” hides this quotation, and all the other facets of allusion and parody between the two pieces, by smashing the whole edifice.

The ending of *Pierrot* on a nostalgic note and in full morning sun (“O alter Duft,” No. 21) also evokes further parallels with *Dichterliebe*. The opening words “O alter Duft aus Märchenzeit” (O ethereal fragrance from fabled times) are matched by languid parallel thirds in mm. 1–2, and an E major triad at the phrase cadence in m. 3 (Example 9.3a). Other similar tonal cues arise throughout the song. Many critics hear the E major triad as a tonic here, and also at the end of song.⁴² This tonal orientation is easy to hear, and it also forges an unmistakable – but so far unnoticed – allusion to the title, key, and final sonority of *Dichterliebe* XV (“Aus alten Märchen winkt es” [Out of the old fairy tales beckons]), which closes with the identical pitches in the piano right hand. The closing words of the Schumann song also describe how morning sun dissolves the idle dreams of the previous night. But like that fleeting dream-image, the sense of tonic function about the E major triad in Example 9.3a can also dissolve, and take on another identity: as a dominant substitute in C sharp/D flat major. The reader can test this idea at the piano, noting in particular the right hand D flat-F third and bass A flat that immediately precede the E triad, the clarinet’s D-D sharp-C sharp sigh above it, the C-C sharp gesture that sets the left hand in motion at the outset, and other factors that emerge with clear tonal potency if a C sharp major triad is appended to the

Example 9.3 (a) Schoenberg, “O alter Duft” (No. 21), mm. 1–3. (b) “O alter Duft,” mm. 26–30

(9.3a)

(9.3b)

excerpt. The fact that there is no literal resolution to C sharp here (except for the subtle clarinet figure) is absolutely typical of Schoenbergian suspended tonality, which necessarily entails suppression of the tonic sonority.⁴³

The ability of the opening passage simultaneously to evoke both E major and C sharp major further strengthens the *Dichterliebe* allusion, because the E major of *Dichterliebe* XV gives way suddenly to C sharp minor in *Dichterliebe* XVI (“Die alten bösen lieder” [The old evil songs], a song with words and images ripe for ironic reference at this point in *Pierrot*). D flat major is attained later, precisely when the postlude from *Dichterliebe* XII (already mentioned earlier) is reprised. The multiple tonal latencies in the opening of “O alter Duft” thus simultaneously allude to both of the last two songs of *Dichterliebe*. Schoenberg’s manner of suspending tonality gives his music this unprecedented allusiveness.

Like *Dichterliebe*, *Pierrot lunaire* also ends with nostalgic retrospection, very faint and subtly nuanced (see Example 9.3b). The strings wistfully remember the piano’s opening thirds, and E major sensations are kept mysteriously aglow – by the piano triads (subdominant and two dominant substitutes) and by the closing low E octave – and then evaporate.

Meanwhile the *Sprechmelodie* is reprising a piano figure from m. 11, and uses C sharp three times, each one longer. As the voice also dissolves into inaudibility, it descends to a low F – intentionally beyond the singer’s range – joining the C sharps to create a delicate echo of Schumann’s closing D flat major. (This can be tested at the piano, again with great care for the fragility of the sensations in question.) In this intricate manner, quixotic tonal fragrances of E major and D flat major are superimposed once more, with the latter especially frail, but dissolving last – along with the entire atmosphere of allusion.

Some may also perceive another lingering diaphanous tonal sensation here: a delicate gravitation towards an F root. The suspension of tonality always produces multiple valences, arising from the counterbalanced instabilities that are needed to suspend tonality. These liminal sensations also heighten the sense of nostalgic yearning that ends Schoenberg’s cycle. Like *Dichterliebe*, there is also a harmonic reference back to the tonal coordinates of the first song, and the analytically inclined reader will find residues of these same three tonalities in “Mondestrunken,” especially at its lambent close. Such delicate and ephemeral harmonic traces, like the dreamy visions in “O alter Duft,” are indices of the diaphanous world of suspended tonal sensibility that Schoenberg uniquely created. Like the imaginary gestures of the pantomime, these evanescent allusions to tonality emerge almost inaudibly and then evaporate into the fragrant air of memory and imagination.