



**Morphing moonlight: Gender,
masks and
carnival mayhem**

**The figure of Pierrot in Giraud, Ensor, Dowson and
Beardsley**

By

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STATEMENT

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I, Allyson Dorothy Kreuter, declare that the thesis submitted by me for the Doctor of Literature and Philosophy degree at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted to any other university or faculty. I also declare that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I, hereby, cede copyright of the thesis in favour of the university.

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SUMMARY

Pierrot's snowy garments with their touch of black, the tragic, frozen mien of the mask above the baggy, over-large habit became a prevailing symbol of artistic expression during the *fin de siècle*. The silent white-masked figure became the disguise for the artist in assailing and exposing the hypocrisy, complacency and posturing that the artist saw as the masquerade of society.

Beneath the clown's guise the artist could imaginatively act out all the forbidden and darker secrets concealed beneath the inscribed societal conventions of humankind. Pierrot could murder, commit incest, get riotously drunk, rape, be a bigamist, commit suicide, be morbidly depressed, steal, be gluttonous, rage, hate, be excessively carnal or ascetic, a hermaphrodite or androgyne or entirely genderless in his transgression, flouting all and every taboo. Using the mask of the clown as a distancing technique, the artist was vicariously experiencing all that was contrary to the societal mores and laws against which he or she was in rebellion. In this the blending of gender became of paramount importance. The androgyne and the hermaphrodite were, like Pierrot, leading images in the arts of the *fin de siècle*. They blurred the reality of the division of gender and called into question all the attributes that were apportioned to what was male and what female. Pierrot was seen as partaking of this gender indecision because the sexuality that lay behind the loose white garments was entirely uncertain, as were the lurking carnal

appetites of the silvery, moonlit clown. Gender was as ghostly and as paradoxical as the clown's own nature.

Pierrot's origins in the *Commedia dell'arte* and his original role as a buffoon had altered by the late-nineteenth century. He had come to represent a silent malevolence and shadowy evil which was subtly contained within the lineaments of his lunar-coloured garments. The pantomime role had involved the challenging and transgressing of boundaries and the world of the demonic was invariably present, though it never triumphed; rather, laughter and love prevailed with repeated beatings and roistering. With the Decadent movement of the *fin de siècle* the demonic became the prevailing tone, filled with a sardonic bitterness and searing, although hidden pain. Pierrot's silence and pallor were seen as the ultimate attributes with which to convey the transgressive and mordant nature of the liminal artistic life. The clown's achromatic colour and his muteness were aspects that resembled the unsullied emptiness of page and canvas, and his mutable, quicksilver nature was as indeterminate and fluid as any interpretation or subjective artistic representation. The artist could thus mould the figure to represent what was wished and in so doing reveal how slippery and subjective any representation is.

In the chapters on Giraud, Ensor, Dowson and Beardsley this thesis explores the carnivalesque and transgressive attributes of the wan clown as a central concern in the work of these artists. Kristevan and Bakhtinian theory on the carnivalesque and the relation of language to transgression will structure and guide the tenets and arguments of the thesis. The mutability and fluid

metamorphosis from one state to another, disregarding boundaries, is what Pierrot will be seen to do in the works of the chosen artists. Indeterminate gender and lunatic emotions will be shown as essential to the shadowy and insubstantial nature that allows the clown to ignore the extant social morals, laws and boundaries.

Giraud, Ensor, Dowson and Beardsley could perhaps be regarded as marginal artists of the late nineteenth century, but considerations of marginality and greatness are based on subjective choice. These artists were a part of the fabric of their time and are strands that braid together the thematic concerns and representations of the *fin de siècle*, and this gives to their work and importance, however liminal that might be.

Keywords: Pierrot, madness, carnivalesque, hermaphrodite, androgyne, Giraud, Dowson, Ensor, Beardsley, semiotic, symbolic, transgression, masks, deadly sins.

OPSOMMING

Opsomming

In die *fin de siècle*-jare het Pierrot se sneeuwit gewaad met sy titseltjies swart en die tragiese, beweginglose maskergesig bo die sakkerige, oorgrootte kledingstuk een van die kunstenaars se belangrikste uitdrukkingsimbole geword. Die swygsame figuur met sy wit masker het as vermomming gedien vir kunstenaars wat die skynheiligheid, leuens, selfvoldaanheid en verheerliking wat as 'n maskerade van die samelewing beskou is, beveg en blootgelê het.

Onder die harlekynsmasker kon die kunstenaar op verbeeldingryke wyse al die donker, verbode geheime uitspeel wat versteek lê onder die mensdom se ingeskrewe gemeenskapskonvensies. Pierrot kon moord, selfmoord en bloedskande pleeg; stormdronk word; verkrag; bigamie pleeg, intens depressief, oormatig seksueel of asketies of vraatsig wees; woedebuie kry; haat, steel; hermafrodieties, androgeen of selfs heeltemal geslagloos in sy vergrype wees en elke taboe verontagsaam. Deur die harlekynsmasker as distansiëringstegniek te gebruik, kon die kunstenaar asof deur iemand anders se oë alles ervaar wat strydig was met daardie sedes en wette van die gemeenskap waarteen hy in opstand was. Geslagsvermenging het uiters belangrik geword. Soos Pierrot, was die androgeen en die hermafrodiet leidende figure in *fin de siècle*-kuns. Hulle het die realiteit van geslagsonderskeid laat vervaag en al die sogenaamde manlike of vroulike eienskappe bevraagteken. Pierrot is beskou as 'n meedoener aan hierdie vae

geslagtelikheid omdat die seksualiteit agter die los, wit gewaad en die verborge aptyte van die silweragtige, maanverligte harlekyn geheel en al onseker was. Geslag was net so spookagtig en paradoksaal as die harlekyn se eie aard.

Teen die laat negentiende eeu het Pierrot se oorsprong in die *Commedia dell'arte* en sy oorspronklike rol as nar verander. Hy het nou 'n stille kwaadwilligheid en skaduagtige boosheid verteenwoordig wat subtiel gesuggereer is deur die lyne van sy maangekleurde gewaad. Sy pantomime-rol het deels behels dat grense bevraagteken en oorskry word. Die demoniese wêreld was altyd teenwoordig, hoewel dit nooit die oorhand gekry het nie. Liefde en humor het geseëvier, terwyl daar herhaaldelik slae uitgedeel en gefuif is. Met die Dekadente beweging van die *fin de siècle* het die demoniese die oorheersende toon geword, vòl sardoniese bitterheid en brandende, fel (hoewel verborge) pyn. Pierrot se stilsweye en sy bleekheid is beskou as fundamentele eienskappe om die oortredende, bitsige aard van die liminale kunslewe oor te dra. Die harlekyn se achromatiese kleur en sy stomheid was aspekte wat ooreengestem het met die onbevleete leegheid van bladsy en doek; sy onbestendige, kwiksilwer-natuur was net so onbepaalbaar en vloeibaar as enige interpretasie of subjektiewe kunsvoorstelling. Só kon die kunstenaar die figuur omvorm om dit voor te stel wat hy verlang het en sodoende onthul hoe ontwykend en subjektief enige voorstelling is.

In die Giraud-, Ensor-, Dowson- en Beardsley-hoofstukke van hierdie proefskrif word die karnavaleske en oortredende eienskappe van die bleek

harlekyn as 'n sentrale kwessie in die werk van hierdie kunstenaars ondersoek. Kristeva en Bakhtin se teorieë oor die karnavaleske en die verhouding tussen taal en oortreding lei en struktureer die beginsels en die argumente van die proefskrif. In die werk van die gekose kunstenaars word Pierrot uitgebeeld in 'n staat van veranderlikheid en vloeibare metamorfose, sonder dat grense in ag geneem word. Daar word aangetoon dat onbepaalde geslag en waansinnige emosies 'n essensiële deel uitmaak van die skaduagtige, onwesentliche aard wat die harlekyn toelaat om bestaande sosiale waardes, wette en grense te ignoreer.

Giraud, Ensor, Dowson en Beardsley mag miskien as minder belangrike kunstenaars van die laat negentiende eeu beskou word, maar oorwegings van marginalisasie en grootsheid is gebaseer op subjektiewe keuses. Hierdie kunstenaars was deel van die weefstof van hul tyd en kan as sodanig beskou word as drade wat die tematiese kwessies en *fin de siècle*-uitbeeldings saamvleg. Hoe liminaal ookal, maak dit hulle werk van belang.

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*«Au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierrot, prête moi ta plume,
pour écrire un mot »*

CONTENTS PAGE

LIST OF FIGURES	3
INTRODUCTION	6
i Semiotic (<i>Le sémiotique</i>)	12
ii The thetic (<i>Le théतिक</i>)	13
iii Mirror stage	13
iv Castration complex	14
v The symbolic (<i>Le symbolique</i>)	15
vi The subject	18
vii The carnival of madness and poetry	19
viii Bakhtin and carnival	21
CHAPTER ONE: GENEALOGY OF A WHITE-FACED CLOWN	41
ix The <i>Commedia</i> goes to France	42
x The <i>Commedia</i> 's expulsion and degeneration	44
xi French pantomime's rise to prominence (1816 - 1846)	46
xii The Watteauesque Pierrot (1840 - 1870)	49
xiii <i>Fin de siècle</i> Pierrot : an inscrutable, decadent dandy (1880 –1900)	51
CHAPTER TWO: PIERROT LUNAIRE AND THE DANCE OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS	58
xiv Structure of the poetic cycle: the rondel	58
xv Pierrot and the pageant of sin: an immorality play	64
xvi A deadly carnivalesque dance	75
xvii Harlequin's vainglorious pride and Pierrot's vanity	76
xviii The malicious poison of Lady Covetous and Mistress Envy	86
xix The instrument of ire	103
xx The yearning of avarice	118
xxi Insidious sloth	134
xxii The hungry edge of appetite: Gormandising gluttony	157
xxiii Wanton lust	171
xxiv The sacrifice of suicide	184
CHAPTER THREE: PHANTASMAGORIC LIGHT: JAMES ENSOR'S MASKS, SKELETONS AND HYBRID BEINGS	242

CHAPTER FOUR: LUMINOUS LILIES AND MILK-WHITE BUTTERFLIES - DOWSON'S <i>THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE</i>	309
CHAPTER FIVE: THE KING OF LACE AND GROTESQUE BEAUTY	356
CONCLUSION	406
BIBLIOGRAPHY	415

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 <i>COITION OF A HEMISECTED MAN AND WOMAN</i>	40
FIGURE 2 <i>ITALIAN COMEDIANS</i>	54
FIGURE 3 <i>PIERROT LISTENING</i>	55
FIGURE 4 <i>PIERROT (GILLES)</i>	56
FIGURE 5 <i>PIERROT PENDU</i>	57
FIGURE 6 <i>THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS</i>	219
FIGURE 7 <i>HANGING TREE FROM MISERIES OF WAR</i>	220
FIGURE 8 <i>THE SWING OF PULCINELLA</i>	221
FIGURE 9 <i>LE MIROIR DU DIABLE II</i>	222
FIGURE 10 <i>THE CURE FOR FOLLY: THE STONE OPERATION</i>	223
FIGURE 11 <i>THE TEMPTATION OF ST ANTHONY</i>	224
FIGURE 12 <i>THE GREAT RED DRAGON</i>	225
FIGURE 13 <i>THE MIRROR OF LIFE AND DEATH</i>	226
FIGURE 14 <i>THE BEETHOVEN FRIEZE « THE HOSTILE FORCES »</i>	227
FIGURE 15 <i>LA FEMME ET LA FOLIE DOMINANT LE MONDE</i>	228
FIGURE 16 <i>ECSTASY OF ST. THERESA</i>	229
FIGURE 17 <i>RÖTTGEN PIETA</i>	230
FIGURE 18 <i>BAT-WOMAN</i>	231
FIGURE 19 <i>LA BUVEUSE D'ABSINTHE (THE ABSINTHE DRINKER)</i>	232
FIGURE 20 <i>L'ABSINTHERE</i>	233
FIGURE 21 <i>LADY LILITH</i>	234
FIGURE 22 <i>LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI</i>	235
FIGURE 23 <i>PANTOCRATOR</i>	236

FIGURE 24 <i>CALVARY</i>	237
FIGURE 25 <i>CRUCIFIXION</i>	238
FIGURE 26 <i>PROMETHEUS</i>	239
FIGURE 27 <i>DEAD CHRIST IN THE TOMB</i>	240
FIGURE 28 <i>THE DANCE OF DEATH</i>	241
FIGURE 29 <i>THE PISSER</i>	294
FIGURE 30 <i>DOCTRINAL NOURISHMENT</i>	295
FIGURE 31 <i>SCANDALISED MASKS</i>	296
FIGURE 32 <i>THE DESPAIR OF PIERROT</i>	297
FIGURE 33 <i>THE ENTRY OF CHRIST INTO BRUSSELS 1889</i>	298
FIGURE 34 <i>THE INTRIGUE</i>	299
FIGURE 35 <i>ASTONISHMENT OF THE MASK WOUSE</i>	300
FIGURE 36 <i>STRANGE MASKS</i>	301
FIGURE 37 <i>DEATH AND MASKS</i>	302
FIGURE 38 <i>SKELETONS TRYING TO WARM THEMSELVES</i>	303
FIGURE 39 <i>DUEL OF THE MASKS</i>	304
FIGURE 40 <i>DUEL AFTER THE MASQUERADE</i>	305
FIGURE 41 <i>MASKS CONFRONTING DEATH</i>	306
FIGURE 42 <i>ENSOR WITH MASKS</i>	307
FIGURE 43 <i>PIERROT WITH MASKS</i>	308
FIGURE 44 <i>ET IN ARCADIA EGO</i>	352
FIGURE 45 <i>PILGRIMAGE TO CYTHERA</i>	353
FIGURE 46 <i>SLEEPING HERMAPHRODITE</i>	354
FIGURE 47 <i>CLOTHO</i>	355
FIGURE 48 <i>THE BURIAL OF SALOME</i>	395

FIGURE 49 <i>LUCIAN'S TRUE HISTORY</i>	396
FIGURE 50 <i>VIGNETTE (PIERROT)</i>	397
FIGURE 51 <i>PIERROT AND CAT FROM ST. PAUL'S</i>	398
FIGURE 52 <i>THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH</i>	399
FIGURE 53 <i>HEADPIECE FOR THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE</i>	400
FIGURE 54 <i>FRONTISPIECE FOR THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE</i>	401
FIGURE 55 <i>BORDER FOR THE LIST OF PICTURES FOR SALOME</i>	402
FIGURE 56 <i>CUL DE LAMPE FOR THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE</i>	403
FIGURE 57 <i>HALF TITLE FOR THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE</i>	404
FIGURE 58 <i>THE DEATH OF PIERROT</i>	405

INTRODUCTION

The Pierrot of the nineteenth century or the *fin de siècle* has come to be exemplified through his portrayal in works of French literature from Baudelaire and Hugo through to Gautier, Laforgue, Verlaine, Huysmans, Flaubert, the caricaturist Willette and others. During the Romantic and Decadent periods, the figure of the sad clown, with his pale, masked face and his silence, his losses in love and ethereality, all characteristics created and popularised in the works of the Romantics and their followers, was very much *en vogue*. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Pierrot's character altered, becoming more macabre and sombre, with a concomitant loss of stoicism and a less lovelorn aspect than that of the figure of the Romantic period figure. The decades from 1880 to 1900 were marked by an increase in the portrayal of the figure of the androgyne and the hermaphrodite within the arts; Pierrot subtly partook and assimilated aspects of these gender-transgressive figures.

The figure of the clown has always had associations with the carnivalesque and grotesque tradition and its implications of boundary transgression, masks and madness. The close of the nineteenth century saw the development of Pierrot's figure in a manner that parodied the carnivalesque and grotesque tradition. The clown's vacillation between lovelorn, ethereal, ascetic presence and murderous, vicious, irreligious behaviour mirrored the multiplicity, pluralism and indeterminacy of nineteenth-century culture. Yet, this irreligious

and unconventional behaviour closely relates the figure of the clown to the carnivalesque tradition, where the Feast of Fools depicted ‘drunken orgies on the altar table, indecent gestures, disrobing’ (Bakhtin 1984: 74-75). Medieval fools were associated with laughter, both mocking and destructive of social hierarchy, but at the same time regenerative. However, as Michael Bakhtin notes, during the Romantic period this laughter lost its regenerative aspect and became merely ‘cold humour, irony and sarcasm’ (Bakhtin 1984: 38). This sardonic disposition accords well with the grimaces of the white mask of the late nineteenth century, where a smile becomes the rictus of sarcastic pain stretched over a white-floured carapace. Pierrot assumes the role of repository for the desires and fears of the late nineteenth century.

Gender in the nineteenth century became one of the major social divisions where an absolute split between the public and the private was instituted and bodies were rigidly differentiated into male and female (Pollock 1996: 6-7). This inscribed a discourse of power and social order which became a part of the cultural representations of the time. These cultural representations ensured the production and maintenance of the relations of power and difference:

Events are presented from within a certain ‘vision’. A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle, whether fictitious events or ‘real’, historical facts are involved. (Bal 2001: 42)

This study aims to analyse the poetic and visual narrative representation of *fin de siècle* Pierrot as a figure of transgression, madness and ambiguous gender in the works of Giraud, Ensor, Dowson and Beardsley. The reading

of a narrative is also the reading of discourse and of its subjects, figures and its representation and thus of representation in and through language (Kristeva 1989a: 293). Narrative is the major contributor to our cultural memory, allowing us to create meaning from the chaotic world which surrounds us, but, as Mieke Bal points out, 'narrative can be used to manipulate' (Bal 2001: 260). It, too, is a discourse that structures ideas, meaning and culturally accepted beliefs; but it also possesses within itself the opposite drive to rebellion against its own hierarchically created structures. This study aims to reveal how the figure of Pierrot became the metaphor, or narrative sign, for the poetic and visual expression of a rebellion that challenged late nineteenth-century social and cultural discourses of meaning and belief. Pierrot will therefore be analysed as a narrative sign producing meaning through the exploitation of the transgressive possibilities of visual and poetic language.

The transgressive possibilities of poetic language will be analysed and discussed using Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic-semiotic theory of language based on her early study entitled *Revolution in poetic language*. It was the theorist Roman Jakobson who emphasized that:

Any attempt to limit the domain of the poetic function to poetry, or to restrict poetry to the poetic function would only amount to an excessive and misleading simplification. Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art, but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. Hence, when dealing with poetic function, linguistics cannot limit itself to the field of poetry. (Jakobson in Kristeva 1989a: 288)

The poetic function of Jakobson's theory relates to Kristeva's poetic discourse, in as much as it is seen not to belong to any one type of discourse, such as poetry or literature. However, Jakobson's definition was not sufficient for Kristeva. She did not agree with his assigning of poetic language to the position of a sub-code within the linguistic code. For Kristeva poetic language stands for 'the infinite possibilities of language, and all other language acts are merely partial realizations of the possibilities inherent in "poetic language"' (Kristeva 1984: 2). Literary practice uses language to free the subject from the restrictions imposed by a number of discourses, whether psychical, social, or linguistic. For Kristeva, all literary practice occurs within a historical dimension in which the subject plays a role. Poetic language and its signifying process constitute the 'semiotic system' (Kristeva 1984: 3). In her detailing of this system in *Revolution in poetic language*, she places great reliance on the work of Lacan and draws on the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce, although the greater influence on her own work was the writing of the French linguist Emile Benveniste. Although Kristeva felt that Benveniste's theory was also caught within the need to categorise and systematise, she could, by making use of his work, affirm both the need for a textual analysis taking into consideration the subject within a given historical context and the removal of the barriers that separate related disciplines. Kristeva also utilised and developed the theories of Hegel, Althusser and Derrida's idea of text as different from itself, which she combined with the Lacanian/Freudian concept of the split subject. Thus she ensured that her theory placed the speaking subject and poetic language firmly in the socio-

political and historical context. Kristeva's strength lies in her ability to explore and combine the different frameworks and methods of her sources in order to make them work against one another; she then uses the insights this interaction provides to support and further her own theories (Grosz 1989: 61-62).

For Kristeva, the 'poetic' text constitutes a new language which transgresses all the rules of the standard language of communication, because it tries to deny the rules of grammar while traversing all discourses. This poetic language is an anarchic revolt and parallels the logic of the unconscious, which in its drive-driven and dark-side represents a *jouissance* of what Kristeva termed the semiotic in *Revolution in poetic language* (Kristeva 1984: 3) This idea of transgression and anarchistic revolt is at the core of the notion of carnival, initially explored by the Russian Formalist Michael Bakhtin, absorbed and further developed by Kristeva in her work *Desire in language*. Carnival and the interaction of the semiotic and symbolic form the central theoretical tenet of this study, as well as being central to Kristeva's own theoretical explorations.

Kristeva felt that carnival was more than a mere fantastical overturning of the rules for a day and in this she was following Michael Bakhtin's lead in his work on carnival and linguistics. Carnival is a transgression because it disturbs the stratified notion of identity and explodes logical communication and structure. It is an inversion of the law whilst simultaneously containing the law within itself. Nothing can represent carnival because it is an ambivalent state

which rational discourses in their structured hierarchy cannot assimilate. The otherness, opposition, negation and ambiguous logic of the carnival transgress and flout the laws of the Symbolic. In Kristeva's work 'the scene of the carnival introduces the split speech act: the actor and the crowd are each in turn simultaneously subject and addressee of discourse' (Kristeva 1980: 46)¹. The carnival is thus a well-defined form of double. The double is non-identical to itself and cannot be represented, as it contains representation inside itself and carnival can thus be seen as containing its 'other' inside of itself (Lechte 1990: 105). Language too is carnivalesque, as it contains within itself the ambivalent word. It is this ambivalence that is a central issue in Kristeva's theory. She reveals how, when a subject communicates, both received and expressed meaning becomes deformed. This process of deformation or alteration inextricably intertwines and joins together subjectivity and textuality in a to-and-fro movement. The ambivalent deformation of meanings forms an inherent part of everyday, rational and logical communication. To describe how these two processes of communication are linked, Kristeva uses the terms 'semiotic' (*le sémiotique*), 'symbolic' (*le symbolique*) and 'thetic' (*le thétique*). These terms are the foundation of the Kristevan theory which details how the representational and symbolic processes form and inform language and subjectivity.

¹ This position can be seen as premised on the Freudian/Lacanian split subject, which Kristeva developed more fully in her discussions of the speaking subject, textual analysis and social transgression.

i Semiotic (Le sémiotique)

Kristeva uses this term in a highly idiosyncratic manner, the accepted meaning of the word 'semiotic' being 'the study of signs and symbols and their relationships in language' (*Cassell giant paperback dictionary* 1994: 1220). The Kristevan term describes the impulses and drives of the foundational processes in the formation of language. Kristeva has also altered the French gender of the word. In everyday French the word is gendered with the feminine (*la sémiotique*); Kristeva has altered the gender to the masculine (*le sémiotique*), as though to add weight to the notion that the semiotic is the process which creates change and the carnivalesque in language. However, as will be seen shortly, the semiotic is connoted as a female process. Kristeva has thus set up an ambivalent word.

The semiotic is made up of sounds and rhythms, it is anarchic and formless and its impulses possess no unity, boundary or law. This means that the semiotic is already present before the subject's stable and defined identity is established. To locate it, Kristeva uses the term *chora* (*La chora*), which has its origins in Plato's *Timaeus*. The Chora is a 'receptacle, unnameable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the one, to the father and consequently maternally connoted' (Grosz 1989: 44). The semiotic, located as it is within the Chora, is merely a collection of drive impulses and desires. These flow through the pre-linguistic body, creating the space from which language and speech will develop. Yet, these drive processes: laughter, prosody, puns, instinctual sounds and silence are always present, though

unnoticed, within everyday communicative language. Semiotic drives precede the positing of subject-object relations. The distinction between subject and object derives from the institution of what Kristeva termed the *thetic*:

All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence, is *thetic*. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects. (Kristeva 1984: 43)

ii The *thetic* (*Le thétique*)

The unstable impulses, drives and desires of the semiotic are unified and structured into the law of the symbolic through the boundary between the semiotic and the symbolic which is termed the '*thetic*'. The *thetic* is the precursor of the symbolic contained within the semiotic and the remains of the semiotic contained in the symbolic, much like the notion of the Chinese Yin and Yang symbol. Kristeva identifies the *thetic* with two important developments in the establishment of a subject's identity, the mirror stage and the '*threat of castration*' or castration complex.

iii Mirror stage

The mirror stage establishes the notion of spatiality. The mirror-double or object-other visible in this space is seen as another distinct identity. The mirror stage develops the representational and imaginary functions. This stage enables the child to distinguish him/herself from the world and sets up the image as a replacement for the felt experience; the start of the field of signifiers is also established during this stage.

iv Castration complex

Having established the imaginary other through difference or by means of the signifier (the object-other), the mirror stage is further structured by the castration complex. The latter develops the signs that structure the signifiers so that they have a defined, accepted meaning:

Castration puts the finishing touches on the process of separation that posits the subject as signifiable, which is to say, separate, always confronted by an other: imago in the mirror (signified) and semiotic process (signifier). (Kristeva 1984: 47)

The mirror stage starts the process of differentiation between the signifier and the signified. It creates their separate categories within the signifying process. It also sets up the relation between image and object. It is the *thetic* that establishes the divide between actual experience and representation, reality and signs, which are the foundations for signification and the signified (Grosz 1989: 46). These two developments within the *thetic* (the mirror phase and the castration complex) enforce the controlling structure and law of the symbolic over the semiotic. The *thetic* acts as a boundary and limitation to the anarchic drives and impulses of the semiotic and the *thetic* organises the semiotic and establishes the imaginary thus helping to create the symbolic.

The castration threat structures the basic 'identity' established in the mirror phase and organises and structures the vocalic sounds into coherence. This organisation is accomplished by the assumption of a position that Lacan termed the *Phallic Signifier* and with which Kristeva tacitly agrees. The phallus is seen as the primary signifier in the subject's ability to assume an

enunciative position. The phallus demands that the child give up an attachment to the mother and subject itself to the law of the father, the law of language and social values. The child thus sublimates the primal drives to the law of the symbolic by repressing them. The child can only obtain a speaking position once it recognises the difference of the other and accepts the law governing its interaction with others (Grosz 1989: 47). Within the subject, the mirror phase and the castration complex, as part of the thetic, represent a unifying force which holds the drives in check, forcing them to accept the boundary of the reality principle:

As a traversable boundary, the thetic is completely different from an imaginary castration that must be evaded in order to return to the maternal Chora. It is clearly distinct as well from a castration imposed once and for all, perpetuating the well-ordered signifier and positing it as sacred and unalterable within the enclosure of the Other. (Kristeva 1984: 51)

The thetic acts as an ordering principle for the drives setting up their relations *vis-à-vis* the imaginary and establishing the symbolic (Grosz 1989: 47).

v The symbolic (*Le symbolique*)

In Kristeva's theory, the term 'the symbolic' is equally specialized. The word 'symbolic' is generally understood as meaning 'exhibiting or expressed by resemblance or signs' (*New shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1993: 3183). For Kristeva, the symbolic is an extension of the thetic and its role is to organise the impulses and drives into a reified and structuring communication system, which includes grammar, logic, syntax and the

notion of the 'I'. This establishment of the notion of the I allows the subject to access discourse and refer accurately to itself; it also provides for a subjective and social identity (Grosz 1989: 48). The various established identities, whether social, linguistic or sexual, are unstable and threaten to disintegrate every time the semiotic breaches the boundary of the thetic. These moments lead to a loss of meaning where identity dissolves and coherence and sexuality are placed in flux. The symbolic as a hierarchical structuring system uses rationality, logic and grammatical structures to enforce a coherent system of laws over the anarchic processes of the semiotic. Thus, the symbolic regulates the semiotic. This is a system of negation; what is negated and silenced are the pleasure, desire and aggression of the semiotic in an effort to ensure stability of identity. Kristeva agrees with Derrida that reason, logic, grammar, syntax and inscribed meaning function only through the violent suppression and repression of the drives and a renunciation of their pleasure. The subject is constituted by a combination of the symbolic and the semiotic; Kristeva regards their interaction as a permanent confrontation between opposing forces allowing change to occur. Together they produce discourse, constitute the subject and regulate social interactions. The symbolic is never completely autocratic, and the semiotic continually transgresses the boundary of the thetic, resulting in crises leading to change

This principle is very similar to that of the Nietzschean Apolline and Dionysian. Nietzsche's Apollonian is formalist, drawing boundaries around

forms or bodies. The Dionysian, being formless and transgressing boundaries, stands in opposition to this Apolline structure. This opposition ensures that states of existence do not stultify or congeal. Apollo is the god of illusion and dream, who hides the reality of humankind's miserable existence. Nietzsche sees culture as the ultimate illusion created by the Apollonian. The Dionysian constantly tears at the veil of illusion, but the Apollonian continually reasserts control, allowing illusion to reassert itself. Nietzsche believed that if humankind were exposed to the truth that the Dionysian contains that the terrifying nature of this truth would cause instant insanity. The interplay of the Apollonian and the Dionysian creates a constant cycle of transgression of boundaries, change, absorption and reaffirmation of boundaries. As Foucault indicated in his writing on transgression:

The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. (Foucault 1998: 73)²

For Foucault, transgression and the limit are interrelated, though not in a system of dualism, but rather 'their relationship takes the form of a spiral that no simple infraction can exhaust' (Foucault 1998: 74).

² La limite et la transgression se doivent l'une à l'autre la densité de leur être: inexistence d'une limite qui ne pourrait absolument pas être franchie; vanité en retour d'une transgression qui ne franchirait qu'une limite d'illusion ou d'ombre. (Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits I*, «Préface à la Transgression». p. 265).

Kristeva also regards resistance to be a transgression of the symbolic limits, without these limits being obliterated; the limits are merely displaced and repositioned elsewhere. Kristevan theory thus mirrors Foucault's writings on transgression. Subversion is contained within the symbolic itself and is subject to regulation and structure. The symbolic can only afford a certain measure of change at any given time and ruptures cannot be allowed to destroy its unity, as this would entirely annihilate representation and identity.

vi The subject

The speaking subject's identity is dependent upon the system of language set in place by the symbolic. This speaking subject becomes the place where both structure and its transformation occur. The interaction of the semiotic and the symbolic establishes the speaking subject as well as the system of signifying and meaning. The 'I' of the speaking subject exists only in language and does not encompass the 'I' as a whole, as there is always a difference between the subject expressed in a sentence and the subject producing the sentence. The 'I' of the sentence is a temporarily adopted position of the ever-changing subject who produces the sentence. A difference exists between the 'I' who speaks (*sujet de l'énonciation*) and the subject of what is said (*sujet de l'énoncé*) (White 1977: 13). This subject who speaks is not the author of the text; instead the subjectivity is constructed within the text.

These two different subjects produce the self of subjectivity. However, the textual 'I' is not entirely distinct from the living social subject: to a large extent, the latter is socially structured and positioned by the symbolic's textual construction of the 'I':

The subject never is. The subject is only the signifying process and he (*sic*) appears only as a signifying practice, that is, only when he (*sic*) is absent within the position out of which social, historical, and signifying activity unfolds. (Kristeva 1984: 215)

Subjectivity is never a case of the subject being totally present to itself, but rather a case of a process of capture and escape, stability and dissolution, a subject who is continually displacing its own established positions (White 1977: 13). However, the notion of the 'I' allows the subject to take control of any rational communication or discourse, as the symbolic creates both a subjective and social identity. These identities are threatened when thethetic is transgressed by the semiotic. This overflow of the semiotic destabilises identity and is visible in the seditiousness of madness and poetry.

vii The carnival of madness and poetry

Madness is the irruption of an excess of semiotic *jouissance* that is also found in the subversiveness of poetry. Kristeva sees poetic logic, like that of carnival, as both simultaneously a form of logic and its inherent negation, thus an ambivalent process. This double aspect of poetic language represents a movement between real and non-real, speech and silence, being and non-being, where the poetic signifier both refers and does not refer to a referent (Lechte 1990: 109-110). Poetry draws attention to the semiotic through its

overthrowing of the grammatical structure, repetition, metonymy, metaphor, disruption of syntax and rhythm. This disruption is contained within the framework of the symbolic ordering structure; but the structure is nevertheless simultaneously transcended and transgressed and the laws of rational communication are subverted. This oscillation is the ambivalence of carnival language and the double in its most heightened form. Poetry and madness therefore question the limits of language by pushing them as far as they are prepared to stretch, without completely destroying these limits. This breaching and subversion of boundaries result in breakdowns in identity (psychosis), meaning and coherence (poetry) and sexuality (perversion, fetishism) (Grosz 1989: 48).

For Kristeva, it is the repressed language of madness which makes itself heard as a speaking subject in the transgression of poetical language. Poetic madness can thus be seen as having strong links with the grotesque madness of the carnival, the ambiguity and fluid transgression of which offers an alteration in 'reality'. The 'real' and its inherent 'reality' are structured by the beliefs of an individual, or defined by social consensus. This idea of reality can be described as follows:

Reality is not a solid, self-contained given but a fluid, unfolding process, an "open universe", continually affected and molded by one's actions and beliefs. It is possibility rather than fact. One cannot regard reality as a removed spectator against a fixed object; rather, one is always and necessarily engaged in reality, thereby at once transforming it while being transformed oneself. (Tarnas 1996: 396)

This violation of boundaries and the ambiguity and ambivalence of poetic madness are closely aligned to the riotous nature of the carnivalesque where all limits are inverted and mayhem and madness tumble free. Madness dominates the world of carnival and the concept of the carnivalesque grotesque which Michael Bakhtin explored in his study *Rabelais and his world*.

viii Bakhtin and carnival

Bakhtin's view of the carnival as subverting hierarchies and transgressing boundaries thereby causing change, can be regarded as too indulgent and Utopian a portrayal of popular culture (Stallybrass & White 1986: 10). Critics of his theory, such as Terry Eagleton,³ have noted that carnival with its degradations was a form of control and of maintaining everyday laws. The carnivalesque inversions are thus seen as merely enforcing how the 'real' world should be run:

Indeed carnival is so vivaciously celebrated that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all, is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. As Shakespeare's Olivia remarks, there is no slander in an allowed fool. (Eagleton 1981: 148)

However, a free space existed within this control where life was transiently liberated from the confines of 'reality'.

³ See also Umberto Eco *The Frames of Comic Freedom* in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed) *Carnival!* (1984 Berlin, Mouton p. 1-9)

Carnival and the original *Commedia dell'arte*, from whence came Pierrot, Harlequin, Columbine, the Doctor, Pantaloon and the lovers were closely associated and carnival time would have witnessed the setting up of the *Commedia* stage with its irreverent productions.⁴ In carnival, as in *Commedia*, everything was turned topsy-turvy. Here hierarchies were subverted or inverted, fools became kings, bishops, masters or lords and all official authority was overturned and transgressed. Appetite, both sexual and gormandizing, replaced everyday asceticism and restraint. Laughter and violence moved hand-in-hand. The violence and laughter of the carnival, though not necessarily conducive to violent acts, could nonetheless be associated with them: 'carnival may not be the source of such violence but its forms certainly accompanied it, laughter may not build stakes, but those sent to the stake sometimes went with laughter ringing in their ears' (Dentith 1995: 75). In contrast, the *Commedia's* violence was harmless and without guilt or consequence; although it could appear extreme and ignorant of limits, it also overrode taboos like death and thus fleetingly transgressed the boundaries of reality through its play of fantasy and laughter.

The *Commedia* created this alternate or reversible reality where roles and identities were in constant flux and where no boundaries existed between art and life. Here valets mocked masters and confusion, caused by the ambiguity of disguise and continually changing roles, predominated. As Louisa Jones notes, the clown became a multiple self with no clear

⁴ Pierrot's origins are discussed in the next chapter.

boundaries: his costume revealed his ambiguous nature, as it too was ‘splintered like Harlequin’s motley, being divided into two solid patches of color’ (Jones 1984: 10). For Bakhtin clowns were ‘on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar mid-zone as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic actors’ (Bakhtin 1984: 8).

But this borderland has its darker side, where an excess of ambiguity and violation of limits could easily fall into madness. Madness in the *Commedia* was generally feigned and temporary, like the madness of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, it had a more duplicitous character and was used to get out of scrapes or alter circumstances to the benefit of the apparently mad character (Jones 1984: 18). This madness gradually metamorphosed as the *Commedia* and the clown adapted to changing times, cultures and social milieus. As Bakhtin indicated: ‘The theme of madness is inherent in all grotesque forms because madness makes men look at the world with different eyes, not dimmed by ‘normal’, that is by commonplace ideas and judgements’ (Bakhtin 1984: 39).

The *Commedia* was a markedly grotesque form with an imagination and inventiveness that respected no laws or boundaries and where nonsense was a province to be explored with delight (Jones 1984: 18). Bawdy sexuality and obscenity alongside sexual ambiguity formed a part of the *Commedia*’s double-natured aspects. Bakhtin equates the body which is present in Carnival to that of the body in *Commedia*: it is a grotesque body, one ‘not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries, it is blended with the world,

with animals, with objects' (Bakhtin 1984: 26-27). This body has an ambivalent double nature, where a combination of human and animal traits can occur, being one of the oldest grotesque forms (Bakhtin 1984: 316). This form of satirical grotesque is perfectly shown in the work of Grandville⁵. Bakhtin also indicates that the tendency of the grotesque body is to be revealed as 'two bodies in one' (Bakhtin 1984: 26), merged either one with another or with other objects, and in this duality resides the theme of the androgyne. In relation to the form of the androgyne, Bakhtin mentions that 'in the sphere of pictorial art I will recall a similar presentation in Leonardo da Vinci's "Coitus", showing this act in its inner bodily aspect'⁶ (Bakhtin 1984: 323).

Many grotesque figures appeared as androgynous, for example Harlequin who appeared in the disguise of both a laundress and a male lemonade seller, dressed half as laundress and half as lemonade seller (Jones 1984: 20). This sexual ambiguity had strong ties to the carnival where cross-dressing most readily occurred. The celebration of the upside-down world allowed for an inversion of gender, where transvestism transgressed and revealed the ambivalence of gender boundaries and their definitions as well as the mutable nature of identity.

⁵ Grandville, Jean-Jacques (bapt. Gérard, Jean-Ignace-Isidore) 1803 - 1847. A French caricaturist and illustrator, who contributed to the weekly journal *La caricature*. He depicted satirical animals dressed as humans. In his work *Un autre monde* published in 1844, the universe is full of mutant animals, vegetal/human hybrids and living inanimate objects.

⁶Figure 1 on page 5

All this transgression was fuelled, held together and exploded by carnival laughter. Where Aristotle ascribed catharsis to the high art of tragedy where fear and pity were ultimately brought into balance at the climax, in carnival it was the riotous laughter which released inhibitions resulting in madness, mayhem and an emancipation from reality.

Havoc was reflected in the nonsensical language used in the *Commedia* and in the fact that the actors all spoke in different Italian dialects whilst playing before French audiences. The language was exuberant, wild, uncontrolled and led to confusion as the use of everyday words and meanings disintegrated. This use of nonsense language, a type of Dada before its time, still managed to maintain a dialogue between the actors and the audience. As

Bakhtin notes:

This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. (Bakhtin 1984: 10)

This liberation of language and of desire was particularly applicable to the body and to physical pleasure. The language of the *Commedia* allowed the overflow of expressions of desire and nonsense which were normally held in check or repressed during everyday existence. Poetic language partakes of this liberated language and desire. It is the undermining and transcending of everyday language that makes poetic language so central to Kristevan theory and intimately links it to the carnivalesque grotesque tradition.

Kristeva's work on the uses of poetic language and her psychoanalytic-semiotic approach can be complemented through a close reading of the work of another theorist, Mieke Bal. Both Kristeva and Bal come from a background of linguistic studies and both have utilised the theories of Althusser, Bakhtin, Barthes, Benveniste, Derrida, Foucault alongside other theorists, either linguistic or philosophical, or both.

Mieke Bal's semiotic and narrative theory effectively combines the power of textual structures and the role of the reader in the process of making meaning out of texts. In her theory the word 'text' is not only confined to language but can be applied to other cultural products such as images, paintings and architecture. She believes that when we recognise something in the world it is because we treat it as a visual sign which forms part of a vast field of discourse which we, as sign-using subjects, are all able to interpret (Bal 2001: 8-9). The meaning of an art work is thus to be found in the action that occurs between an 'I' in relation to what the work takes as a 'you' (Bal 2001: 5). In Bal's semiotic understanding of symbolisation, each viewer would bring to a work specific cultural preconceptions, so art of the past exists in the present and continues to produce cultural effects. In the reading of the visual narrative the viewer ensures that a certain perspective is adopted. In exploring visual narrative Bal refuses to privilege linguistic theory, but she also tries to avoid using art historical methods of analysis. As she says:

The method, or, more modestly, procedure has in common with ordinary reading and the outcome is meaning, that it functions by way of discrete visible elements called signs to which meanings are attributed; that such attributions of meaning, or interpretations, are

regulated by rules, named codes; and that the subject or agent of this attribution, the reader or viewer, is a decisive element in the process. (Bal 1996: 26)

Each and every act of viewing takes place within a given socio-historical and political situation and each viewer brings to any reading of an image their own cultural subjectivity, or frame of reference (Bal 1996: 32). Reading becomes an act of interpretation and assigning of meaning during which the reader reframes the work according to a given set of signs that connect together and provide a text with meaning. As Bal writes:

I am contending that every act of looking is - not only, not exclusively, but always also - a reading, simply because without the processing of signs into syntactic chains that resonate against the backdrop of a frame of reference an image cannot yield meaning. (Bal 1996: 32)

Reading is, however, a subjective activity and the image becomes the place where cultural processes collide and become intersubjective in a process that involves the interaction of present tense with past tense, where the present interprets and alters the past. This sets up the interdiscursivity of a painting as an 'intervention in and a response to social discourses that were relevant at the time and are still relevant or differently relevant to our time' (Bal 1996: 32).

Mieke Bal's ingenuity is in her decision to read visual art as a narrative where signs and not scenes are the basis of vision. Each narrative entails a selection that involves omissions, suppressions, emphases and evasions. All narratives are thus focused through points of view (Bal 2001: 12). In Bal's narrative

revision, painter, narrator, received story, revised story, viewer all create a field characterised by their separateness (Bal 2001: 15). The meaning of a work of art is for Bal the action that is carried out by an 'I' in relation to a 'you'. In this exchange between the 'I-you' Bal offers an alternate approach to Lacan's reading of the mirror stage and his use of the terms Symbolic, Imaginary and Real, with which she strongly disagrees. Contrary to Lacan's reading, she proposes that 'self' and 'world' come into existence simultaneously. She believes that the self can only know its position in space if it has a sense of boundary, of where it ends and the world begins, and this can only come from the outside and is present in the gaze of another being (Bal 2001: 33). Bal sees Lacan's theory of subjectivity as offering only the 'I' and third person positions: this subjectivity has no means to assume any other position and therefore lacks the intersubjectivity of the 'I-you' axis that she proposes and which is based on her reading of Benveniste. This 'I-you' offers the option of many subject positions that can be occupied in discourse and is more flexible and ambiguous, avoiding the rigidity of dualistic systems. In this, there is a resemblance to Kristeva's construction of textual subjectivity where the subject is never the author of the text because the concept of the author presupposes the author's existence prior to and independently of the text. The subjectivity that Kristeva is revealing is created within the text and this 'I' while not entirely distinct from the living author, is, to an extent, structured and positioned by the discursive construction of the 'I' in the symbolic (Grosz 1989: 55).

The notion of intertextuality, used by both Bal and Kristeva, is taken from the work of Michael Bakhtin who indicated that signs, both visual and linguistic, have a ready made quality that stems from use in earlier texts produced by a culture. Taking a sign over into a new work from a previous work means that a sign comes imbued with a ready made meaning. This borrowing is also a form of palimpsest as the remains of earlier images and the socio-historical, political and cultural ideas that these bring to the making of an image or narrative are incorporated into the new. The sign's meaning may thus be altered but it will always retain a trace of its former meaning. Intertextuality cobbles recycled forms together to create something new. However, this new work is always contaminated by the discourse of its predecessor; it is therefore flawed and ready to fracture into splinters at any moment as Bal, quoting Benveniste, indicates: the historical narrative is inflected by subjective discourse (Bal 2001: 69). According to Bal, this intertextual practice of the artist is also apparent in the viewer's approach to an image. In making use of the term 'intertextuality', Bal seems to echo Kristeva's use of the term 'inter-textuality' or 'transposition'. Kristeva writes that the term inter-textuality denotes the

transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of "study of sources", we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of thethetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its "place" of enunciation and its denoted "object" are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic

polyvalence - an adherence to different sign systems. (Kristeva 1984: 60)

The viewer reading an image also brings to the work a past that is structured by discursive precedents and their own cultural inheritance so that the image can never have a unified or defined single meaning. This reading of the image through interweaving of the different strands of cultural discourse that the artist uses in his image and that the viewer in turn imposes on the image, results in semiotic framing, a constant activity without which no culture can exist. Bal believes that it is impossible to do away with this framing, but that the framing choices that have been made need to be scrutinised and subjected to questions of accountability. However, there are no definitive limitations to the meaning that an image might have, as signs are ambivalent and produce a plurality of meanings or polysemy. This notion of unlimited meaning was radically and anarchically supported and furthered in Derrida's concept of dissemination which posited that no one interpretation is more valid than any other. For Bal, this is plurality of meaning run wild and she questions whether there can ever really be such chaotic freedom. She indicates that meaning is made up of signs and that these signs, though they can be polysemous and intertextual, are yet events that happen inside of a given historical and social situation and under such specific circumstances that there can only be a certain number of culturally valid, conventional and yet not unalterable rules to which the signs are subject (Bal 2001: 73). Neither the idea of polysemy, or of dissemination, ignores the role of power relations. Since there are no limitations on the meaning of signs, the restriction as to what is the correct

meaning is an entirely social and political outcome. Interpretation, or framing, and the social and institutional forces that drive it are semiotically an inherent part of the work. This resembles Kristeva's unified or thetic text which she sees as conservative and relying on existing codes and conventions and tending to confirm rather than question them. This text tries to deny and suppress its own inherent polyvocality (polysemy) and plurality and the ambiguity that resides within all texts but which, in its desire for univocal meaning, it tries to obliterate. This need to retain unity at all costs involves the institution of limits, rules and procedures. For Bal, following Derrida's idea of the *parergon*⁷, dissemination is also limited from the inside. She postulates that 'the production of meaning takes place not as an ulterior supplement but as something already inscribed, not in the work as a whole but in its semiotic status' (Bal 2001: 74).

Bal's discussion of intertextuality, polysemy of signs and semiosis seems closely allied to the work of Julia Kristeva's psycho-analytical semiotics. Both theorists are at pains to place the text and the subject into a socio-historical and political framework. 'Freedom' of interpretation based on intertextuality and the polyvalency (polysemy) of the sign exists within this framework. Combining Bal's theory of reading visual narrative and Kristeva's theory of poetic language, I plan to explore, through a detailed exploration of narrative

⁷ The *parergon* is the frame and as Derrida writes it represents: '...neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work [*hors d'oeuvre*], neither inside nor outside the work, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work' (Derrida 1987: 9). In this Derrida is trying to show that what is external to the work is as important as what is internal to it. The *parergon* acts as a type of supplement to the work of art ensuring that an ambivalent and constant interaction between outside and inside, inside and outside occurs through the threshold of the frame (*parergon*).

representation, the extent to which the figure of Pierrot represents the carnival tradition with its transgressive and ambiguously grotesque madness. This study will also show how this figure was used to violate the 'symbolic' structure of the textual narrative, thus causing the semiotic to explode through the boundaries of the text in mad play.

This mayhem in poetic language and visual narrative is prominently expressed in the representation of the figure of *fin de siècle* Pierrot. Pierrot became both the catalyst and the accompaniment to the transformation and subversion of artistic culture between 1880 and 1900. In my study, I plan to explore this figure's multiple self, with his ambivalent relationship to both gender and persona, eluding and undermining the confines of identity along with his transgression of social moralities that eventually results in a fall into the phantasmagorical world of madness. I have chosen to use the masculine pronoun when referring to Pierrot even when exploring the figure as androgyne or hermaphrodite, as I felt that the 's/he' construct commonly used in gender studies was irking and cumbersome. It cannot express the fluidity of the imaginary form of either the androgyne or hermaphrodite as it is too constructed.

Chapter one will provide a brief historical outline of the figure of Pierrot and his links with the *Commedia dell'arte*. It will show his rise to prominence and the altered mien he assumed during the *fin de siècle*, which is central to the works chosen for textual analysis.

Chapter two and three of this study will undertake an examination of Albert Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire* through the use of the structuring device of the Seven Deadly Sins, to which an eighth sin has been appended. Using Kristeva's work on carnival and poetic language, a close textual analysis of the representation of Pierrot in these poems will illustrate how the figure's ambivalent gender affiliations and transgressions of social mores embody the madness of the carnivalesque grotesque tradition. The fragmented and destabilizing flux that exists between the semiotic and the symbolic results in what Kristeva has termed 'polysemy' or 'polyvalence' and the ambiguous multiplicity that this establishes will be seen as integral to the textual figuration of Pierrot in Giraud's work. It is in the laughter, violence, silence, vacillating gender and dark desires that Pierrot will be shown to liberate the 'bells of madness' in Giraud's Bergamasque⁸ phantasmagoria.

Chapter four will look at specific works by the artist James Ensor and how they engage and represent the madness of the carnivalesque grotesque. Combining the visual theory of Mieke Bal with Kristeva's theory of poetic discourse and her work on art analysis, the chapter intends to provide a close reading of Ensor's work. This reading of the visual image will reveal and analyse how the symbolic is destabilised by the semiotic, creating a mad vibrancy which opens up the possibility of a multiplicity of meanings and

⁸ This use of Bergamasque is based on the definition and spelling of the word in *the Shorter Oxford English dictionary*. It is one of those polyvalent words that Giraud and Ensor would have loved. It means an inhabitant of Bergamo in Italy, which is where Pierrot comes from originally. It also means a dance resembling a tarantella and all that pertains to the province and place name of Bergamo (*Shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1993: 216). It is spelt with a capital letter in the dictionary and the choice is either to spell it Bergamasque or Bergamask. I have chosen the more French manner of spelling the word to accord with the style and feel of *Pierrot Lunaire*.

readings. Ensorian representations of masks contain continual allusions to the white-faced clown and to the carnival. The figure hidden behind the mask is shapeless and sexless, neither male nor female. Ensor, a capacious reader and follower of current events and trends, was aware of the hermaphroditic and androgynous preoccupations within the works of other artists and writers of his time. Most of his masked figures take on aspects of this androgyny, and though androgyny is not an overt aspect of his work, it is nevertheless subtly apparent. The figure of Pierrot, or his mask, is ever present in Ensor's visual imagery. It is this masked, androgynous figure as visual symbol in Ensor's extensive ribald narrative that will be explored in this chapter.

Chapter five deals with the textual representation of Pierrot within Dowson's apparently slight one act play, *The Pierrot of the Minute*, and reveals how this figure embodies the transgressive aspects of carnival madness and ambivalent gender boundaries. Dowson's play possesses closer ties to Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire* than to the work of James Ensor. With its eerie coldness, the same pale, moon-spun light of *Pierrot Lunaire* dominates Dowson's play, where it is the ambivalent figure of Pierrot and his relationship with the Moon Maiden that is the central pivot. There exists a Kristevan double, or 'one and Other', in the depiction of this relationship, where Pierrot becomes a 'totality not identical with itself', one that 'cannot be represented' (Lechte 1990: 105). It is this lacuna that will allow for a reading of this split-subject as possessing an underlying possibility of gender

transgression; it will be shown how the figure of Pierrot and the Moon maiden can be considered a single, androgynous/hermaphroditic entity. At first glance, *The Pierrot of the Minute* seems not to fit the mode of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque with its bawdy effrontery and mayhem. By making use of Kristeva's reading of the poetic carnivalesque as something more subtle than mere reversal of roles and seeing it as a genuine transgression (being outside the law, yet containing the law within itself), I shall argue that the frozen world of Dowson's play is inherently carnivalesque and transgressive.

Chapter six will evaluate the illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley who was commissioned to illustrate *The Pierrot of the Minute* of his contemporary Ernest Dowson. Beardsley termed this work a 'filthy little play', but the central figure of the play ensured that Beardsley produced five superb drawings. Pierrot occupied a special place in Beardsley's work, as he identified with the figure. This self-identification with Pierrot was a marked fashion of the *fin de siècle* and is therefore an aspect of all the artists and works that I have chosen to examine. It is Beardsley's Pierrot which represents the most flamboyant and vivid expression of the carnivalesque, grotesque tradition and its propensity for gender transgression. In Beardsley's work, Pierrot is shown to be of indeterminate gender, neither androgynous nor hermaphroditic, and therefore possessing close ties with the grotesque where all forms can potentially be joined to create a world of constant contradiction, ambivalence and mutability. Here, definitional

boundaries become fluid and seep into one another. The Kristevan semiotic invades the symbolic, and causes alteration and instability and thus growth. This fluidity also indicates an underlying and threatening madness, an aspect closely associated with the clown, carnival and Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and symbolic.

The stark black-and-white tones of Beardsley's drawings ensure ambivalence and tension in the image that strikes and confuses the viewer's eye. The grotesque elements of the drawings will be seen as undercutting any structured meaning, and though the drawings are narratives, their meaning is constantly deferred beyond the visible: no fixed meaning can be adduced. The outside becomes the inside and vice versa. It will be shown that the drawings, through this blurring of interior and exterior call into question what is being depicted as well as the viewer's response and perception. The viewer is aware of, and simultaneously a participant in, the artificial world of the image that Beardsley depicts. Thus, the viewer becomes implicated in the narrative of the image, both inside and outside the discourse. The fact that Beardsley's work 'demands to be read' (Snodgrass 1995: 92) will be shown to become problematic through the ambivalence created by the carnivalesque grotesque; any reading is revealed as being unstable and ambiguous. Using the theories of Bal, Kristeva and Bakhtin, this chapter will show that Beardsley's work represents the most vibrant and in-depth evocation of the carnivalesque grotesque Bergamasque of the *fin de siècle* period.

In the conclusion it will be shown how the narrative figure of Pierrot, with his ethereal subjectivity, sets up the extremes through which the semiotic process and the carnivalesque grotesque are brought into play, ensuring the ambivalence that allows for multiple meanings within the works of the artists discussed. It will also indicate how this strange white clown with his transgressive tendencies invaded the works of the time period, becoming a focal point for all the transgressive tendencies and flouting of the cultural, political and social preconceptions of the decadence. Pierrot can be seen as the representative figure of the decadence:

Hier comme aujourd'hui, le génie de la Décadence aura été d'incarner ses vacillations et ses hantises dans un personnage éminemment parodique et malléable. Et s'il peut figurer tout à la fois la Décadence et la Modernité, c'est seulement si l'on admet, avec Péladan qu' «Être moderne, c'est avoir tout le passé présent à l'esprit». (Palacio 1990: 248)⁹

This study of the decadent Pierrot was undertaken with all the above in mind.

On approaching the sources it became apparent that a number of studies had been done on the figure of Pierrot, such as those by Robert Storey, Louisa E. Jones, Jean de Palacio and Jean Starobinski. These works concentrated on the history and development of the figure of Pierrot within France itself. In the case of Jean de Palacio's work on Pierrot, it became evident that during the *fin de siècle* the representation of this figure had spread and become a *leitmotif* in the arts of other countries. The figure with its elusively mercurial and pliable character, its traits ranging from drunkenness to sadism, seemed to be the

⁹ In the past and present, the genius of the Decadence has been to embody its unsteadiness and obsessive fears in an eminently parodic and pliable character. He is able to represent both the Decadent and the Modern, but only because we can acknowledge along with Péladan that "being modern is having the entire past present in one's mind".

perfect representative of the decadent epoch's fears, perverse desires and obsessions. Yet, the figure also brought with it the residue of its past in the anarchic transgression which unsettled any work in which he appeared. The decision was to explore this transgressive aspect of the figure and how it was expressed in some of the minor works of the *fin de siècle*, which had slid into obscurity but were nevertheless representative of the ideas of the time expressed through the medium of this flour-faced clown and which epitomised the fantasies and fears of the decadence. Belgium and England were chosen as places where Pierrot had invaded the arts through the influence of what was happening in France. A choice of poetry, painting, drama and illustration seemed to offer a spectrum of the arts, thereby revealing how prominent the *leitmotif* of Pierrot was during this time period. The aim was not to trace a history of the figure through the arts and artists but rather to explore how the figure became a narrative sign through which certain themes pertinent to the decadence were expressed. The idea was to reveal Pierrot as an empty sign or subject with a multiplicity of personae which metamorphosed from role to role without really assuming any definite character or position. Moving from thief to rapist, to committing suicide, torturer, murderer to madman, whilst hiding behind his white mask and voluminous pale garments, he appeared to be able to assume any meaning in a narrative. In the course of preparatory reading it became glaringly apparent that primary sources for the study would be exceedingly difficult to obtain. Remarkably few sources exist within South Africa for a study on the decadent period in Belgian arts. Some sources were accessible via inter-library loan and some could be purchased from book sites

on the internet. However, the primary sources remained unavailable and had to be consulted in Belgium. Even in Belgium, sources on the work of Giraud are limited: the poet and his contemporaries are as liminal as the figure of Pierrot. The decadent and symbolist artists and writers of that time in Belgium are sorely neglected. Even some of the more famous names like Emile Verhaeren, George Rodenbach, George Minne and Ferdinand Khnopff are now little appreciated outside of Belgium and France and even within Belgium sources are reasonably difficult to locate. For artists considered to be minor, the search becomes even more difficult. Sources for the English decadence were more readily available in South Africa and it was a rare pleasure to be able to consult a set of *The Yellow Book* and to hold a copy of *The Pierrot of the Minute* in the original Beardsley designed. A grant from The Ernest Oppenheimer Foundation, for which I was deeply grateful, allowed me to consult the original sources in Belgium and at the British Library, bolstering and adding support to the undertaking of this study of a ‘produit d’eau fade et de blême farine’ (Palacio 1990: 11).¹⁰

¹⁰ Product of tasteless water and white flour



Figure 1

Figure 1 *Coition of a hemisected man and woman*

Leonardo da Vinci.

C. 1492

Pen and ink on paper

Windsor Castle, Windsor

CHAPTER ONE: GENEALOGY OF A WHITE-FACED CLOWN

A dreamy, moonbeam figure floats out of the blackness and takes centre stage. This pallid silhouette mysteriously morphs into the moonlit, ethereal Pierrot in the eponymously entitled collection of poems by Albert Giraud, *Pierrot Lunaire*. The latter is, however, a completely different character from his original ancestor who appeared on the *Commedia dell'arte* stage in the early sixteenth century.

ix) *The Commedia dell'arte* in the sixteenth century

The *Commedia* was improvised comedy based on a loosely constructed plot and enacted by a professional troupe of players, each player having a designated stock character role. The character roles generally consisted of two old men (Pantalone and the doctor), two sets of lovers, a soubrette, a captain and two valets or *zanni* from Bergamo: Harlequin and Brighella. Other characters (such as Pulcinella, Pedrolino and Bertolino) were later added to the cast. Except for the lovers, all the characters wore masks or make-up, and each character wore Italian regional dress and spoke a regional dialect. Many of the characters became associated with the actor playing the role in the manner that modern television soap actors have become identified with their characters in the public mind. However, the stock character, though freely expressing human passions, had to remain within the conventions of the genre, to prevent the play from degenerating into farce.

Pierrot became a member of the *Commedia* family as a *zanni*, although he only assumed his name in late seventeenth century France.¹¹

Pierrot's origins in the *Commedia dell'arte* are still open to debate. He is linked to the character of Pulcinella, but where Pulcinella was mercurial and amorphous with no visible character development, Pierrot was more structured and exhibited an evolving personality (Nicoll 1986: 88). The *Commedia dell'arte* figure constituting the origins, from which Pierrot's character developed, is Pedrolino.¹² Pedrolino's role was always that of a trusted servant who had a tendency to cheat and play jokes, but whose actions, ultimately, were never malignant. His character was a witty and sharp one (Nicoll 1986: 89). Pedrolino and the character Bertolino wore the costume that would become associated with the French Pierrot, consisting of slack white trousers, a blouse and large ruff, all in white.¹³

ix The *Commedia* goes to France

The *Commedia dell'arte* went to France in the middle of the sixteenth century. Here legend has it that in 1665 Molière brought Pierrot into being in his play *Don Juan ou le festin de Pierre*. Molière's Pierrot would have been based on the character of Pedrolino or on a minor variant of the character

¹¹ For further reading see Allardyce Nicoll *The world of Harlequin* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986); Louisa E. Jones *Sad clowns and pale Pierrots* (Lexington, French Forum Publishers, 1984); Pierre Louis Duchartre *The Italian comedy* (New York, Dover Publications 1965); Robert Storey Pierrot : *A critical history of a mask* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978 pp 13-20).

¹² For further information on this lesser known character, see Allardyce Nicoll *The world of Harlequin* (Cambridge, 1986), Pierre Louis Duchartre *The Italian comedy* (New York, 1963).

¹³ For illustrations of this costume and its adaptations during different periods, see Pierre Louis Duchartre *The Italian comedy* (1986 p. 252-253).

Bertholdo (from the Italian *Commedia*) whose name was adapted to the French *Pierrot*. However, Louisa E. Jones (1984: 41) notes that 'Pierrot's history is harder to trace, and a debate rages as to whether he is originally Italian or French'. In Molière's play, Pierrot is a clumsy, rude peasant, a rejected lover and the perpetual butt of jokes because of his *naïveté*. He acts as a foil to Harlequin, who was promoted to a position of sartorial elegance. However, Pierrot's normal role was that of valet and in this he was neither a fool, nor a pining lover, nor a completely clumsy oaf. Rather, like all valets, his was a mixture of candour and artlessness, independence and intelligence alongside ignorance and stupidity. Valets in the *Commedia* had a tendency to appear in pairs, thus establishing the duality of the simpleton and the rogue. These two forces played one another off in situations where the more innocent tended to overcome the sly and duplicitous. This pairing revealed the inextricable links between deceit and stupidity (Jones 1984: 42-43).

By the late sixteenth century the costume that Pierrot would wear for approximately a hundred years had been established. It consisted of the same slack white trousers, but the blouse had altered into a long jacket that was rounded at the base with buttons all the way up the front, a ruff and a soft, rounded, floppy hat (Storey 1978: 22).¹⁴ He had no mask but powdered his face white. Pierrot, who is essentially a creation of French pantomime, was generally a silent figure (Jones 1984: 37).

¹⁴ Figure 2 on page 5

Eight years later the Italian *Commedia* staged a similar play to that of Molière and gave the actor Giuseppe Giaratone the part of Pierrot. The Pierrot that Giaratone created was a lazy creature who was both outspoken and stupid, but who in his stupidity provided his master with commonsense advice, much like the fools in Shakespeare's plays. Pierrot is portrayed as ignorant and clumsy but with a capacity for recognising his own character faults (Nicoll 1986: 90-91). Yet, Giaratone added a side to his depiction of Pierrot, one that was sensitive and delicate, lovelorn, gentle and tongue-tied (Nicoll 1986: 92-93). This sensitive, gentle side of Pierrot would be taken up and developed in the paintings of Jean-Antoine Watteau.¹⁵

x The *Commedia*'s expulsion and degeneration

In 1697 the Italian *Commedia dell'arte* was banished from Paris and only returned 19 years later. The grounds for the banishment are still unclear, but the reason most often cited was that they had staged a play which the King's mistress, Madame de Maintenon, took as a personal attack. Her revenge was to have the players banished from Paris and its surrounds (Storey 1978: 33). In eighteenth century France, the tradition of the *Commedia* was preserved by a return to its street theatre origins, surviving as a theatre of the fairs. In 1716 a new Italian *Commedia* was introduced to the court in Paris. However, this *Commedia* was theatre for the discerning nobility and had no links at all with the original *Commedia* (Jones 1984: 15).

¹⁵ Some of Watteau's paintings of *Commedia* characters include *Italian comedians* (c.1720); *Arlequin, Pierrot and Scapin* (c.1716); *Love in the Italian theatre* (1714) and *Gilles and his family* (1716).

The *Commedia* of the fairground remained inventive. In the eighteenth century, the satirical and parodic treatment of legitimate theatre that the *Commedia* indulged in was seen as threatening. The censors thus tried to restrict the use of language to the extent of imposing silence. The irrepressible nature of *Commedia* and its natural inventiveness circumvented the restrictions through the use of songs and word banners. When the *Commedia* was banned from using music, players held up words and encouraged the audience to sing. The use of nonsense words predominated, but the audience understood the gestures and enjoyed the mad romps. Language had taken on a life of its own that subverted everyday usage and instead led to confusion, disguise and undermining of everything official. This *Commedia* was frowned upon by the literati and condemned as disgusting, base nonsense. A rift was created between the theatre and the *Commedia*, with *Commedia* becoming the theatre of the poorest and least educated members of the population. With the Revolution, all distinctions between dramatic forms were removed, only to be restored by Napoleon. He allowed the *Commedia* to continue, but it was relegated to the poorest area, where tiny working-class theatres sprang up. Here the *Théâtre de l'Ambigu*, with its melodramas of suffering widows and orphans won the *Boulevard du Temple* the soubriquet of the *Boulevard du Crime*. Pantomime was again deprived of speech and reverted to using acrobatic antics (Jones 1984: 48).

This is the debased *Commedia* that Jean Gaspard (called Baptiste) Deburau discovered on his arrival in Paris with his family in 1816. Jean-Baptiste's

family were hired to work at the *Théâtre des Funambules*,¹⁶ though Jean Baptiste was not considered to be the most accomplished acrobat and ended up working as a stage-hand for many years. He studied the art of mime, and it was this art that he brought to the figure which he would make his own, that of Pierrot. Deburau reinvented and recreated the figure of Pierrot in a manner which seems to indicate that he identified with the white, silent clown. In fact, it appears that he brought his own aspect to the clown, a god creating another persona, where the artist is the god of his creation, whether a novel or theatre character. This role mirrored Deburau's own macabre and violent tendencies and Pierrot was a means to make manifest the actor's inner inclinations: 'When he powdered his face, his nature, in fact, took the upper hand. He stood then at the measure of his life – bitter, vindictive and unhappy' (Remy in Storey 1978: 105).

xi French pantomime's rise to prominence (1816 - 1846)

Deburau ensured that Pierrot became the central figure of the pantomime. In French pantomime, Pierrot always appeared in white and had fixed personality traits as well as the ability to use subtle facial expressions and gestures while remaining silent. Deburau altered the costume by removing the ruff and exchanging the floppy white hat for a black skullcap and the tapered buttoned jacket, for a loose cotton blouse, with long, wide sleeves

¹⁶ The *Théâtre des Funambules* was situated on the *Boulevard du Temple*, which dated from 1670. The boulevard was demolished by the renewal programme of Baron Haussmann in 1862. It is remembered on a plaque on the Place de la République. See also Mario Proth *Le Boulevard du Crime* (Balitout-Questroy et Cie, 1872 p.20) www.bmlisieux.com/curiosa/bducrime.htm (viewed 13/12/ 2003)

(Jones 1984: 43).¹⁷ He emphasised his eyebrows in black and painted his mouth bright scarlet. His face thus became the ideal mask for conveying the subtlest expression and emotion. Yet, the mask could be inscrutably blank and this was heightened by his silence. This ethereal paleness and silence at a time when the spectral was highly fashionable naturally drew followers. A sudden interest in things Japanese had arisen and it is possible that the white-faced Geisha girl might also have caught the imagination. At the time, the prevailing attitude towards women required that they appear to be pale, spectral waifs, weak anorexics who would soon die and could then be placed on a pedestal of virtue.¹⁸ Pierrot's appearance of reserved superiority, the icy, blank face epitomising the enigmatic, was emulated by the Romantic Dandy, as these characteristics placed the Dandy outside of accepted fashion.¹⁹ However, at this time the French Pierrot still remained a clown of the streets and of the people; Deburau's Pierrot was a mixture of the *naïve* and the currently fashionable (Jones 1984: 44). Yet, this mixture appealed to the artists and writers of the early Romantic years. They scurried to the small, smelly *Théâtre des Funambules* to watch Deburau as Pierrot. Thus Gautier²⁰ would write:

With him Pierrot's role was broadened, made larger; it took over the whole play and, be it said with all the respect owing the most perfect actor who ever existed, removed it from its origins and perverted it. Pierrot, under the flour and the cap of the illustrious bohemian, took on

¹⁷ See Figure 3 on page 5.

¹⁸ See Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of perversity* (1986: 25-37) which discusses the female body as represented in the art of the time, with specific reference to the idea of the anorexic and spectral woman.

¹⁹ See in particular Baudelaire's description of *Le dandy* in his article 'Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne' in *Selected Critical studies of Baudelaire*. Edited by D. Parmee (1949: 107-139). Also see D. Stanton *The aristocrat as art* (1980) and E. Carassus *Le mythe du dandy* (1971).

²⁰ Théophile Gautier 1811 - 1872. French poet, theatre critic, painter and author whose works include *Émaux et camées* (1852), *Voyage en Espagne* (1845) and *Mademoiselle du Maupin* (1835).

all the airs of a master and an aplomb for which he was unsuited; he began to give blows instead of receiving them; Arlequin hardly dared brush Pierrot's shoulder with his bat; Cassandra looked twice before lapping him. He embraced Columbine and put his arm around her waist like a seducer from the Comic Opera...The strong personality of the actor overwhelmed the type. (Gautier in Jones 1984: 44)²¹

With Deburau, Pierrot assumed many roles: valet, lover, murderer, hero and clown, and became Harlequin's rival. Pierrot still represented unrestrained appetite, he was impulsively and arbitrarily violent and neither food nor women escaped this urgent, impersonal greed. Pierrot's superiors, such as Cassandra, tended to be on the receiving end of his jokes and violent actions. However, Pierrot lacked lasting malice and belonged to the fairyland where no action had consequences, allowing one to indulge in self-gratification of any kind without remorse or guilt, as no profound or lasting ill occurred there. Like cartoon characters, the victims of this Pierrot always came back to life. Deburau's Pierrot remained the artless street clown linked to the people, one who incorporated and created the fashion trends of the time. In this setting of a fashion trend Deburau was aided and abetted by the writers and artists who came to identify themselves with the figure of Pierrot as portrayed by him (Jones 1987: 316). The white-faced, silent clown became the perfect foil and double for the misunderstood and unappreciated artist, though at the same time this figure granted the artist a liminal position which, through difference, set him apart from society (Storey 1978: 122-123).

²¹ Avec lui, le rôle de Pierrot s'était élargi, agrandi; il avait fini par occuper toute la pièce, et, cela soit dit avec tout le respect qu'on doit à la mémoire du plus parfait acteur qui ait jamais existé, par s'éloigner de son origine et de se dénaturer. Pierrot, sous la farine et la casaque de l'illustre Bohémien, prenait des airs de maître et un aplomb qui ne lui convenaient pas; il donnait des coups de pied, et n'en recevait plus; c'est à peine si Arlequin osait lui effleurer les épaules de sa batte; Cassandre y regardait à deux fois avant de le souffleter.

xii The Watteauesque Pierrot (1840 - 1870)

Renewed interest in the work of Watteau occurred after Deburau's death in 1846.²² The prominent position which the painter came to occupy was achieved through the writings of critics like Gautier, Nerval, de Banville, Baudelaire, Janin and others. These same authors had also paid tribute to Deburau's Pierrot. Watteau had created a type of painting called the *fêtes galantes*: these were small paintings set in a parkland environment which represented intimate moments between elegantly dressed couples. The figures, clad in contemporary dress, mingle with characters in theatrical costume. The combination blurs the timeframe and the setting or sense of place, highlighting the 'golden age' quality of Watteau's paintings with their warm, amber colouration and soft blue horizons.

Watteau's painting of *Pierrot*²³ (called *Gilles*) is sensitive and dreamy and appears to inhabit his own strange reality. This *Pierrot-Gilles* exudes an air of otherworldly innocence, dreaminess and withdrawal that cuts him off from the world around him; he cuts a strangely peripheral and alienated figure. His hands are at his sides, but somewhat to the front, almost as though he were taking the first ballet position. There is a faraway, almost dejected look about him. He wears an eighteenth century floppy ruff and white hat. His coat is tailored with two pockets and a row of small, white buttons. The sleeves are

²² Jean-Antoine Watteau 1684 - 1721 a French Rococo painter inspired by Flemish genre painters, as well as Rubens and Giorgione. Information on Watteau's life is slight and he died young from tuberculosis. He developed a new category of genre painting called the *fête galante*. Of the nearly two hundred paintings that are accepted as being his, many survive only as reproductive prints done by others.

²³ See Figure 4 en page 5.

fitted but ruched around the elbows and upper arms. The pants are loose and his white shoes are tied with pink satin bows. (Deburau would alter this costume to reflect the more pared-down dress of the ‘dandy’). *Pierrot-Gilles* is raised above the other members of the troupe, fore-grounded on his own piece of stage. The other members seem to be unaware of his existence as they are concentrating on an ass being held by one of the other *zanni* directly behind *Pierrot-Gilles*. It is possibly an allusion to Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the character of ‘Bottom’. *Pierrot-Gilles* is oblivious to events around him. Instead, he stares out of the painting, establishing empathy between himself and the viewer. This ensures that the viewer identifies with, and is drawn into, his dreamy melancholy. *Pierrot-Gilles* has become associated with Watteau: the identification between the painter as outsider and the character of Pierrot excludes them from the world of the *fête galante*:

But here, in another extension of Romantic rhetoric, we meet an outsider, a musician or the man who created the *fête* but is excluded from it – often, hence, the painter himself, or simply a clown or fool rejected in love or incapable of loving. When this figure fails to participate, in love or in the *fête*, it is often because he is too lucid: he who created the illusion is only too aware of its fragility and artifices. (Jones 1987: 317)

Pierrot-Gilles is the figure that most strongly links Watteau to the mask, being a presumed self-portrait according to Jones (1987: 317). ‘*Pierrot-Gilles*’ static appearance maintains the illusion of unity between subject and artist, as the artist and his projection on the canvas appear to have become a kind of double (Jones 1987: 317).

Writers of the mid-nineteenth century also began to conflate the artist with the mask. De Banville's poetry typifies this conflation of Watteau-Pierrot and the artist as a martyred and melancholy soul trapped in a world of economic greed.²⁴ Gautier, Nodier, Janin, Baudelaire and other writers created a form of art criticism which fused the *fête galante* of Watteau with the images of French pantomime that Deburau had inspired. It was this modified form of Pierrot's character that was proffered to the literary public. The Pierrot imagery created by these writers established an abiding admiration and fascination. However, the French Pierrot had always been a street clown supported by 'le peuple' (the people); he was in fact part of their heritage. The Romantic writers, who felt themselves to be outcasts, identified with the tradition of 'le peuple' and with the street clown. These writers and artists ensured that the nature of the clown was formed and maintained by literally writing him into existence. Language became the key to the figure of Pierrot in the nineteenth century *Commedia*.

xiii *Fin de siècle* Pierrot : an inscrutable, decadent dandy (1880 –1900)

At the approach of the turn of the century, the character of Pierrot underwent another change. The play by Paul Margueritte, *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* (1882), set the trend for the new Pierrot.²⁵ Margueritte introduced a sadistic, villainous, pallid Pierrot, who appeared etiolated and malevolent, a creature

²⁴ Théodore de Banville 1820 - 1891. A French poet and literary and drama critic whose works include *Les cariatides* (1842) and *Les stalactites* (1846). For him poetry was a matter of language, style, words, rhyme and metre. He influenced diverse authors like Mallarmé, Verlaine, Mendès, Giraud etc

²⁵ Paul Margueritte 1860 - 1918. A French author and playwright of works such as *Amants* 1890; *La confession posthume* 1891; *Le cuirassier blanc* 1892 and *Paillettes* 1908. He co-authored a number of works with his brother Victor.

of moonlight and darkness. The figure of Pierrot became progressively more androgynous when the actress Sarah Bernhardt²⁶ started playing the role of Pierrot. A nervous, highly-strung, violent and androgynous Pierrot began to make his presence felt and seemed to have absorbed all the fears and boredom of the *fin de siècle*, gradually epitomising the type of dandy who appeared during the so-called 'Decadent' period.

Pierrot left the pantomime stage at this time and moved into the graphic arts, poetry, drama and literature. In graphic art the work of Jules Cheret²⁷ and Willette²⁸ presented an alternate vision of Pierrot. Here Pierrot more often appears wearing a black-tailed evening suit, but is so pallid and transparent that he seems likely to disappear into the page, leaving behind only a mound of dark material instead of the Cheshire cat smile. Pierrot's costume is what had caught Willette's attention:

I needed a character vague enough to construe, by the play of his figure all of the human passions....; the white blouse, the black skullcap and the foamy collarette of Pierrot place him outside the common man and yet close to him; they are the vestments of dream. (Willette in Storey 1978: 122)

Like a dream, the figure of Pierrot and his passions evanesce rapidly.

²⁶ Sarah Bernhardt 1844 - 1923 was born Henrietta Rosine Bernard, a famous French actress, sculptor and theatre founder. Her most famous roles include *Phèdre* (1877) and Marguerite in *La Dame aux camélias* (1884).

²⁷ Jules Chéret 1836 - 1932 was a French lithographer, poster designer and painter.

²⁸ Adolphe Willette 1857 - 1926. A French lithographer, painter, illustrator, poster artist and caricaturist, whose work was often linked to the figure of Pierrot. *Pierrot pendu* is perhaps Willette's most famous lithograph. See Figure 5 on page 5

Pierrot's importance lay not only in his whiteness and his ingenuous but complex emotions, but in what he had come to represent for the writers and artists of the *fin de siècle*: that of the ideal mask behind which to hide. This mask could reveal emotional states that were excessive, almost a farcical parody of real emotions, but which were leavened by irony and the laughter they evoked. The apparently inscrutable innocence of the mask obscured the turmoil of emotions hidden underneath. This duplicity and ambiguity of mask and costume had been a part of Pierrot's allure since the time of Deburau's pantomime, when the mysterious attributes associated with the figure of the clown were created. The duplicity of Pierrot was accompanied by violence and a sense of boredom, distress and instability. He too, it seemed, was suffering from the *malaise* of *fin de siècle* decadence and became its ideal symbolic representative.

The poems of Giraud²⁹ reveal Pierrot's bizarre, etiolated and wraithlike persona, that of a Pierrot who has become a creature of darkness and moonlight. At the same time, these poems are offset by touches of Pierrot's original pantomimic self, the origins of which can be traced to Deburau's theatre of the *Funambules* and to the original *Commedia dell'arte*. This comedic Pierrot is transgressive by nature, a creature of the carnival. Giraud chose to meld the *fin de siècle* Pierrot with the *Commedia* Pierrot, with his ties to carnival mayhem and disorder.

²⁹ Giraud, Albert (Emile Albert Kayenburgh) 1860 - 1929. A Belgian poet and journalist who published his first collection of poems, *Pierrot Lunaire*, in 1884. He was an active writer for the literary review *La Jeune Belgique*. He produced poetry, plays and articles and was nearly blind when he died a solitary death in 1929.



Figure 2
Figure 2 *Italian comedians*
Jean-Antoine Watteau
c. 1720
Oil on canvas
National gallery of art, Washington.



Figure 3

Figure 3 *Pierrot listening*
(Adrien Tournachon) Nadar Jeune
Unknown date
Photograph
Private collection



Figure 4
Figure 4 *Pierrot (Gilles)*
Jean-Antoine Watteau
1718 - 1719
Oil on canvas
Louvre, Paris.



Figure 5
Figure 5 *Pierrot pendu*
Adolphe Willette
1894
Lithograph
Published in *L'Estampe originale*

CHAPTER TWO: PIERROT LUNAIRE AND THE DANCE OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

xiv Structure of the poetic cycle: the rondel

Giraud wrote the 50 poems which make up *Pierrot Lunaire* in the poetic form known as the rondel. The rondel is a fixed, lyrical form which was prominent from the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries. It was revived by the poets of the nineteenth century. Originally, the rondel was a dance, at times enhanced by singing, in which the dancers moved either in circular movements around one another or in a ring around the room. The rondel began with a refrain which alternated with other couplets. The returning refrain provided the dance with its circular movement. During the time of the French composer Guillaume de Machaut³⁰ the rondel changed from a musical form into a purely poetic one. This poetic form has a number of recurring features such as the repetition of the refrain, the two-rhyme scheme and the octosyllabic (sometimes decasyllabic) verse structure.

The recurrence of the refrain provides the rondel with its circular dancing movement, recalling its musical origins. Another melodic aspect of the refrain is that the repeated words create a new meaning each time, thus driving each stanza forward. Rhyme and sonority are added to the cadence of the refrain. The rondel consists of 13 lines of three stanzas. The first and second stanza each consist of four lines and the third stanza has five lines. The first two lines of the first stanza constitute the refrain. They become the

³⁰ Guillaume de Machaut c. 1300 - 1377. A French composer and founder of the polyphonic school in France with his motets, ballads and Masses. He established the musical and literary rules for the lyric with his lays, virelays, ballads and rondeaus.

last two lines of the second stanza and the last line of the third stanza is the first line of the first stanza. In the French rondel the two-rhyme scheme is a strict alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes. The rondel can be represented as follows (the capital letters denote the refrain): **ABab abAB abbaA**

It was Giraud's admiration for the poet Théodore de Banville which inspired him to use the rondel format for *Pierrot Lunaire*. For de Banville, poetry was first and foremost a question of language. He felt that it was only through style, words, metre and rhyme that emotion and sentiment could be poetically expressed. He tried to create the perfect poetic form and rejected the effusive romanticism of the period in favour of the stringencies the techniques involved in the creation of poetry. The following example of de Banville's rondel reveals the recurring refrain, two-rhyme scheme and the masculine and feminine rhymes. Here the refrain is revealed as both enforcing and causing variation in the flow of ideas, yet all the while retaining a lilting musicality:

L'automne

Sois le bienvenu, rouge Automne.
 Accours dans ton riche appareil,
 Embrasse le coteau vermeil
 Que la vigne pare et festonne.

Père, tu rempliras la tonne
 Qui nous verse le doux sommeil ;
 Sois le bienvenu, rouge Automne,
 Accours dans ton riche appareil.

Déjà la Nymphé qui s'étonne,
 Blanche de la nuque à l'orteil,
 Rit aux chants ivres de soleil
 Que le gai moissonneur entonne,

Autumn

Welcome, russet Autumn.
 Hurry in your rich apparel,
 Embrace the bright red hillside
 Decked and festooned in vines.

Bacchus, fill the barrel
 That dispenses gentle sleep for us
 Welcome, russet Autumn,
 Hurry in your rich apparel

The astonished nymph,
 White from head to toe,
 Smiles at the sun-drunk songs
 The happy harvester intones,

Sois le bienvenu, rouge Automne.

Welcome, russet Autumn.³¹

De Banville's work influenced many authors and poets of the nineteenth-century such as Mallarmé, Leconte de Lisle, Verlaine and Catulle Mendès.

Besides de Banville's rondels, other influences on Giraud's poetry might have been the rondels of the last true practitioner of this poetic form, Charles d'Orléans (1394 - 1465), and possibly the sarcastic and darkly imaged work of François Villon (1431 - ?), who had spent some time in the court of Charles d'Orléans in the town of Blois. The rondels of d'Orléans were only revived in the nineteenth century in the rondels of de Banville and other nineteenth century poets.

It was a similar devotion to the purity of technique and the control of words, metre and rhyme, echoing the sentiments on the structure of poetry as expressed by de Banville that became central to Giraud's own poetry. As he said:

Penser c'est prononcer une phrase intérieure ; et les qualités de la pensée sont les qualités de cette phrase intérieure; et écrire c'est tout simplement reproduire cette phrase. Donc qui écrit mal, pense mal. (Liebrecht 1946: 17)³²

³¹ Translation from the French by Richard Stokes

http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=2159 (Viewed on the 05/07/2004)

³² To think is to pronounce an inner phrase; quality of thought is the quality of this inner phrase; to write is simply to reproduce this phrase. Therefore, whoever writes badly, thinks badly.

Giraud also wrote to a poet friend of his, Emile Verhaeren,³³ about a collection of poems entitled *Les Moines* (The Monks) that Verhaeren had just published:

Ce que je réprouve avec horreur, ce qui m'encolère et m'enèrve, c'est ton dédain d'improvisateur pour la forme du vers, ton ignorance profonde et vertigineuse de la prosodie et de la langue. (Liebrecht 1946: 17)³⁴

For Giraud the experimental route that Verhaeren had taken, using blank verse and symbolist ideas and techniques, was anathema. They had been friends and colleagues on the magazine *La Jeune Belgique*. Verhaeren, along with certain other more experimental young poets, had disliked the narrowness espoused by *La Jeune Belgique* with its art for art's sake outlook, and had left to join a rival magazine *L'Art Moderne*. They wished art to have a more political and social focus, as well as to be more progressive and move away from perfect rhyme and structure. It was this that could account for Giraud's rather harsh reaction to Verhaeren's work. A sense of having been betrayed by Verhaeren and a dislike for what Giraud would have regarded as the transgression of the rules and forms necessary for true poetic expression.

Giraud's rondels are even more rigid and exacting in their alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes than those of de Banville. Giraud appeared to be inspired by the tight structural demands of the poetic form and found

³³ Emile Verhaeren 1855 - 1916. A Belgian poet and literary critic. His poetry, which was initially naturalist or Parnassian in nature but became symbolist when he joined the movement of the same name when working for *L'Art Moderne*.

³⁴ What I disapprove of with horror, what angers and irritates me is your improvising disdain for verse form, your profound and vertiginous ignorance of prosody and language.

words with which to evoke unusual imagery. This imagery goes beyond the form's structural boundaries whilst simultaneously distancing the reader:

A l'intérieur du système lexical, c'est la rime même qui, touchant à des mots inattendus, accentue dans le lecteur cet effet de distanciation, par la création d'improbables parallélismes. (Budini, 1989: 72)³⁵

This distancing of the subject from the content of the poems induced by the lexical structure of the poems can be viewed as an example of the Kristevan 'symbolic'.

It is within the rigorous and formal structure of the rondel, with its demands for perfection of language usage and adherence to strict rules that Giraud expresses all the transgressive aspects of the macabre, grotesque and hidden nature of the subject lurking behind Pierrot's mask:

Une grande rigueur - non exempte parfois d'une sorte de rigidité - et même une certaine solennité - non exempte parfois d'une sorte de cruauté. (Budini 1989: 72)³⁶

An example of this rigidity, solemnity and cruelty can be seen in the poem

Les Croix(30):³⁷

Aux glaives les cadavres froids	To the sword the cold cadavers
Ont offert d'écarlates fêtes:	Have provided scarlet feasts;
Les beaux vers sont de larges croix	Beautiful verses are great crosses
Où saignent les rouges Poètes.	Whereupon red poets bleed. ³⁸

There is pronounced and rigid adherence to the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes. At the same time, the poem is both solemn and cruel. The

³⁵ Within the lexical system, it is this same rhyme which, by linking unexpected words, accentuates this effect of distancing in the reader by creating unlikely parallels.

³⁶ A great rigour, which is not always free from a kind of rigidity - and even a certain solemnity - not always free from a kind of cruelty.

³⁷ *Crosses*. The number in brackets denotes the number of the poem in the sequence of the 50 poems.

³⁸ Translation by Gregory Richter in *Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire* (Truman State University Missouri 2001: 61).

cold and sombre distancing of the rhyme is mirrored in the coldness of the dead bodies. This distancing is contrasted by the words ‘scarlet’ and ‘feast’, which add a sense of festivity and warmth. However, the cruelty of the poem lies in the image of death, which is portrayed as a bloody festival. This death crucifies poets, who bleed slowly to death, in the same manner as the cold cadavers. The poets become exsanguinated into the cold paleness that is Pierrot’s mien. The obviously transgressive note is that the word ‘Poets’ is capitalised and that they are crucified. The equation to the notion of Godhead is immediate, as is the knowledge that these poets are only likely to be reincarnated in their posthumous works of poetry, of which they are the acknowledged creators. Thus the rigidity of the poetic structure and its funereal tone simultaneously partake of immense cruelty, coldness, ridicule and festive transgression.

There is also, however, a softness in Giraud’s rondels, for in French there is a homophonic play on the words ‘rondel’ and ‘rondelle’, which have a similar pronunciation. A ‘rondelle’ is a circular entity in the form of a decorative panel, plate or medallion. This decorative aspect forms an intricate part of Giraud’s rondels where each is an intricately frozen but self-contained scene. It is through the use and meaning of the chosen words that Giraud shapes his rondels and brings the whey-faced and spectral figure of Pierrot to life. Pierrot epitomises the contradictions that exist between life and fantasy, light and dark, love and death, good and bad. His ambivalence causes him to oscillate continually between states. He is both one state and its other, simultaneously. He is the carnivalesque split subject. This freedom

ensures that he flouts all moral laws, as he slides from one state of being to another, maintaining none of them.

The whimsical virtues upheld by moral law will be overthrown in a semiotic eruption within the world of the poems. Here, vices will preside, but they are also ambivalent, being carnivalesquely doubled, where dualities interpenetrate in a grotesque fusion, so that something uneasily disparate prevails. It is into this ambivalent pageant of the deadly sins that Pierrot now leads us.

xv **Pierrot and the pageant of sin: an immorality play**

A tree grows out of hell and on the branches of this tree are the Seven Deadly Sins (known as the Cardinal or Capital sins). The twigs that sprout upon these branches are the lesser sins.³⁹ Jacques Callot's⁴⁰ image of the *Hanging tree* seems to be the macabre illustration of another form of tree of the 'Seven Deadly Sins'.⁴¹ It is through these deadly sins, as they appear in *Pierrot Lunaire*, that Pierrot will dance and weave a mad patter of steps. He will not be alone, however; other participants in the pantomime will briefly join him in this sinful dance. The choice of poems from Albert Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire* will mirror Pierrot's haphazard and transgressive steps; little heed will therefore be paid to Giraud's actual numbering sequence. The original number of the poem will be put in brackets next to it. The poems that have been

³⁹ In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, *The Parson's Tale* enumerates and discusses the Seven Deadly Sins and the twigs from which their related (venial) sins grow.

³⁹ See Figure 6 on page 5.

⁴⁰ Jacques Callot 1592 - 1635. A French etcher who worked in Italy and Lorraine in France. A number of his etched works are based on the *Commedia dell'arte*. His masterpiece was the *Grandes Misères de la Guerre* 1633 of which the *Hanging Tree* forms a part.

⁴¹ See Figure 7 on page 5.

chosen are those that illustrate the general order of the Seven Deadly Sins as provided by Pope Gregory the Great, although these sins are never rigidly separate but seep transgressively into one another throughout the poems, as they were seen to do in ‘reality’.

It is the order of the sins that will act as a structuring device in the discussion of the poems, although this order has varied in arrangement during the course of the past centuries. This constant re-arrangement reflects the importance of individual sins for the moral laws of different time periods. The sequence I have chosen to use is the following: Vain Glory / Pride (*Vana Gloria / Superbia*), Envy (*Invidia*), Ire / Anger (*Ira*), Avarice (*Avaricia*), Sloth / Sadness (*Acedia / Tristitia*), Gluttony (*Gula*) and Lust (*Luxuria*)⁴². This sequence is based on a combination of the order of deadly sins as established by Pope Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas as well as other religious thinkers. I have, however, transposed certain sins in order to accommodate their exploration within Giraud’s poetic cycle. To this I am also adding another sin, that of Suicide. This sin does not appear on the original list, but is nevertheless regarded as a Cardinal or Capital sin in most religious systems, particularly the Catholic Church. In the early years of the Christian church, martyrdom was a form of voluntary death or suicide, encouraged by the Christian Fathers. It was a manner of attaining heavenly bliss and redemption. Saint Augustine changed the view on suicide and inspired a feeling of moral

⁴² For further reading on these sins see: Morton Bloomfield *The Seven Deadly Sins* ([East Lansing MI]: Michigan State University Press, 1952); Solomon Schimmel *The Seven Deadly Sins* (New York: The Free Press, 1992); Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Parson’s Tale* from *The Canterbury tales* (ed. F.N. Robinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Dante Alighieri (tr. Dorothy L. Sayers, 1949) *The divine comedy. 1 Hell*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977. (Originally published in 1314).

repugnance towards the act. Suicide became viewed as the most deadly of the mortal sins because the perpetrator was regarded as a murderer and therefore a criminal. Even in our modern age suicide is still regarded as a non-moral action. The dispassionate assessment of the suicide victim hides inherent disapproval and disgust. Suicide is a facet of sloth and melancholy, but it is far graver in nature, as it transgresses the borders of life and forcibly enters the unknown territory of death. Melancholy, or despair, is part of the nature of the suicide; in modern terminology it would be called depression. Melancholy was used as a diagnosis to circumvent the laws regarding suicide which resulted in the body being desecrated and the victim's worldly goods being made forfeit. When the suicide victim was presented as suffering from melancholy these laws were not as strictly imposed. The Early Christian desert fathers suffered from what they termed the 'Noon day demon of sloth', which was considered a deadly sin, often leading to the greater sin of suicide. Chaucer talks of the sin of *tristitia* as being that of the sorrow which kills (Chaucer 1957: 251). The two sins of *acedia* and *tristitia* were combined by Pope Gregory the Great to form sloth. This unity created from two separate parts is an indication of sloth's dual nature and ambivalence. Although the two halves of sloth are similar in nature, they are dissimilar and sloth becomes 'penetrated by the word of others: it includes the other of itself within itself' (Lechte 1990: 106). Pride is another doubled word, one that contains more than one meaning, or its other within itself. Originally known as vain glory and vanity, these were amalgamated to form pride at a later stage in the history of the sins. Vain glory and vanity share similar characteristics but are again dissimilar. This doubling of the sins reveals the inherent ambivalence contained within the notion of sin

itself and of language as a categorising tool. The translation of the poems will not try and follow the rondel format used by Giraud, but will try and express the nuances and meaning contained within the poems. The French rondel makes use of alternating male and female endings to create rhythm and structure. As English is not gendered, the subtleness of this alternation is impossible to translate. No attempt at reproducing the structure that this gendered rhyming gives to the rondel will be attempted, as with all translation of works of an artistic nature the translator brings his / her own subjectivity to the work. Using the theme of the deadly sins to explore Giraud's poems is another of these subjective choices.

The deadly sins with all their topsy-turvy propensities are visible in the first poem of *Pierrot Lunaire*; although Giraud adhered with strict rigidity to the structure of the rondel form, the content expressed is ambivalent and transgressive. The irruption of the carnivalesque within the structured rondel introduces the underlying semiotic drive. This challenges the strictures of the poem's form and as Kristeva comments: 'carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics' (Kristeva 1987: 65). The deadly sins overturn all grammar and language devices in a tumult of joyous exuberance that will release the semiotic drives hiding beneath the appearance of language.

Théâtre (1)⁴³ sets the scene for the poetical production that is *Pierrot*

Lunaire:

Je rêve un théâtre de chambre,	I dream a chamber theatre
Dont Breughel peindrait les volets,	Whose screens Brueghel would paint
Shakespeare, les féeriques palais,	Shakespeare, the enchanted palaces
Et Watteau, les fonds couleur d'ambre.	And Watteau, the amber backdrops.*

At first glance this first stanza appears to be a dream reality governed and structured by the 'I' of the poem around the work of other great (and subjectively preferred) artists. However, the word 'rêve' should alert the reader to the underlying fantastical nature that is present in the poem and which will be extant throughout the poems to follow. This fantasy world represents an escape, a way out of reality into an artificial world of beautiful dreams, filled with lush colours. Lurking in the shadows of this make-believe world, where the 'volets' hide or mask dissimulation and deception,⁴⁴ is something disturbing, menacing, malicious and equivocal. The delusive fantasy of the dream state can be a mixture of the beautiful, the frightening and the grotesque resulting in a macabre interplay of states, where everything and nothing is on show.

The deceptiveness of fantasy with its tinge of madness wavers between the profound and the frivolous, the macabre, the truthful and make-believe, all of which are hidden behind the veiling screens of the poet's theatre. The disturbance of reason by fantasy's hidden madness allows for the transgression

⁴³ *Theatre*

* Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire* are by the author of this thesis.

⁴⁴ This idea of the veil as a means of deception would be used extensively between 1870 and 1900, with specific reference to the figure of Salomé and her dance of the veils.

of reason's boundaries and the attempt to unite disparate ideas and images results in a fluid and volatile incongruity.

Grammatically, 'Je rêve un théâtre de chambre' transgresses normal French sentence construction. The correct grammatical structure would be 'Je rêve d'un théâtre de chambre' (I dream of a chamber theatre). To reflect this peculiarity, I have translated 'Je rêve un théâtre de chambre' by 'I dream a chamber theatre'. The conventional formula would distance the 'I' from the dream, resulting in the theatre being a more concretely viewed and distanced object within a dream. Within the poem, the unconventional grammatical construction of the sentence is more vivid because it catches the attention of the reader through its striking dissonance, and pulls the reader into the fantasy world of the dream. In the sentence the 'I' and the theatre are united. They are one and the same subject. By dreaming it into existence, the 'I' has created the theatre and yet is still a part of it. In this state of simultaneous separation and togetherness they represent the Kristevan 'split speech act', or an ambivalent double. The 'I' and the theatre are each in turn and simultaneously both subject and object of one another in a fluid back and forth movement, thus revealing the constant interchange and ambivalence which representation contains within itself. The subversion of the grammatical structure contributes to the musical aspect of the line of verse as it removes the harsh consonant sound of what would have been a repeated 'd' and makes the intonation of the verse lighter and more lyrical. But this subversion of the grammatical structure simultaneously challenges the symbolic function of the verse by shattering the grammatical linearity, thus allowing for a play of ambivalence. Here, poetic

language transcends the laws of communicative language to reveal the semiotic drives that lie hidden underneath. The movement between the real and the non-real becomes marked and stresses the fantastical and carnivalesque aspects contained in the poem.

The 'I' further constructs the theatre by introducing three famous artists: Breughel, Shakespeare and Watteau as creators of the theatre's décor. Within this trio only Shakespeare is not a painter, although he had the ability to paint the most subtle theatre scenes using words as his brush strokes and pigments. All three artists developed dream worlds, with shadowy and dark undertones that added an aura of ambivalence and ambiguity to their fantastical works.

'Breughel', is Jan Breughel, termed 'Velvet', 'Flower' or 'Paradise' Breughel.⁴⁵ He was a painter of mythical figures in paintings renowned for their delicate, velvet-like texture. Breughel's repertoire of imaginary landscapes and scenes of hell are an indication of the ambiguous and slippery nature of fantasy.⁴⁶ The fairy palaces associated with Shakespeare and his fantasy works are the grand palaces in Athens during the Golden Age, an Arcadian world filled with fairies, mayhem and moonlight.⁴⁷ These palaces are located in a dream world presided over by misapprehension and uncertain hybrid identities as well as a measure of malice and spite.

⁴⁵ Jan Breughel 1568 - 1625. A Flemish painter from a famous artistic family. He executed small paintings in glowing enamel paint on copper. His work varied from imaginary landscapes to battles and scenes of hell and the Underworld. His paintings of many types of flowers in one painting suggest the idea of 'paradise' or 'Eden'.

⁴⁶ Gregory Richter (2001: 3) notes that both Baudelaire and Gautier mention the work of Paradise Breughel and that Giraud when writing on Theodore De Banville's poems wrote that these works seemed to come from "the land of Shakespeare, the happy isles of Watteau, the blue horizons of Paradise Breughel, the clear phantasmagoria of Bergamo".

⁴⁷ Reference here is specifically being made to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which was famous during the Victorian (Decadent) Period and was set to music by Felix Mendelssohn in 1843.

Ambiguous fluidity and fantasy rule, as Jean Pierrot observes; the Decadent period was ‘deeply imbued with the fairy-tale elements in Shakespeare’s comedies’ (Pierrot 1981: 206). Using his trademark amber light, Watteau painted country scenes filled with elegance and melancholy, the ‘*fêtes galantes*’. He also painted images of the theatre, of masks and of Pierrot. Watteau’s works mingle the sublime or paradisiacal with the melancholy and grotesque that adds an edge and ambiguous undertow to his work that appealed to the Decadent aesthetic and the interest in fantasy of that time. The subtle dark shadows of these artists’ fantasies and the poet’s joining together of their different art forms allows image and word to become transgressive partners ignoring all categorised differences and generating a hybrid form of artistic expression the ambivalence and ambiguity of which lies at the heart of *Pierrot Lunaire*.

The actor playing on this stage is both the ‘I’ of the poet and the aphasic figure of Pierrot. What is established is a dialogue between poet, addressee (or character) and the works of the earlier artists and their cultural milieu and context. The poet, or ‘I’, has taken these earlier works and written himself into and over them. Thus the ‘I’ and the object blur together and writing becomes ambivalent, as the works of the past are allowed to talk and are also talked to and challenged by the nineteenth-century poet. Intertextuality has replaced intersubjectivity, and poetic language has revealed its transgressive otherness and double-nature, as visual art and poetic creation are commingled.

The 'I' of the poem with his frozen fingers uses his dream world to try and keep his circumstances and 'reality' at bay. An image of the poverty associated with the life of a poet is evoked in the 'I's' fingers being so cold that they have turned purple:

Par les frileux soirs de décembre,	Through cold December nights,
En chauffant mes doigts violets,	Whilst warming my purple fingers,
Je rêve un théâtre de chambre,	I dream a chamber theatre,
Dont Breughel peindrait les volets.	Whose screens Breughel would paint.

He dreams his theatre in an imaginative two-way movement between himself and the reader. As he disappears into his dream world he begins to hide behind the words on the page and the stage that he has created (and for which he has set the scene) now fills with other figures. Here the figure hidden behind 'le Frileux'⁴⁸ is revealed as being none other than Pierrot. Through a sly play on words and knowledge the 'I' has slid his alter ego Pierrot into the scene and the double-natured aspect of the poem becomes apparent. Word and iconography are again elided into an ambiguous and transgressive relationship that permeates the poem. It is apparent that this ambiguousness is also an aspect of Pierrot himself, as he is evoked by both the words and the iconography; thus partaking of both artistic disciplines in establishing his presence.

The dream stage is illuminated by a warm (if sombre) tone of amber light. This light is accompanied by the intoxicating smell of ginger; the colour of which mimics the light. On stage, ill-favoured Crispins are discovered:

⁴⁸ An engraving of Watteau's *Pierrot* is to be found in the Burcardo Library and Theatre collection, executed by Jean Moyreau in 1731 and entitled *Le Frileux*. Viewed on 17/12/2003. (<http://www.theatrelibrary.org/commedia/stampe2.htm>.)

Emoustillés par le gingembre,
On y verrait les Crispins laids
Ouater leurs décharnés mollets
Pour Colombine qui se cambre.
Je rêve un théâtre de chambre.

Titillated by ginger,
One would see ugly Crispins there
Padding their fleshless calves
For the posturing Columbine.
I dream a chamber theatre.

Crispino, from whom the French Crispin derives, was a male servant or valet in the *Commedia dell'arte*; as a valet he has links with Pierrot, who was also a valet. The 'I' has used one of the little known characters of the comedic theatre, Crispin, to subtly re-disguise Pierrot and place him at centre stage. Here the Crispins pad their legs to make them appear manlier. This is the vain and image-conscious behaviour of men when faced by a woman who is desired with ardour: Columbine.

That there is more than one Crispin brings to mind the image of the groups of Pulcinellas painted by Tiepolo.⁴⁹ It is unlikely that a group of identical characters, either Crispins or Pulcinellas, would be found on a stage, but rather that, in this instance, 'they represent stock characters capable of endless reproduction' (Nicoll 1963: 88). The proliferation of white figures evokes the scene from *Against Nature* by J-K Huysmans⁵⁰ where his character des Esseintes dreams about opening a door and seeing 'enormous white Pierrots'⁵¹ who 'kept increasing'⁵² (Huysmans 1959: 104). Pierrot, Pulcinella and Crispin appear to be blended into a single being. This multiple agglomeration of shadowy reproductions all lust after Columbine. She appears on stage in her

⁴⁹ Giovan Domenico (Giandomenico) Tiepolo 1727 - 1804, son of Giambattista Tiepolo. An Italian artist, who was his father's collaborator, but also a painter in his own right. Father and son shared a passion for the *Commedia dell'arte* and in particular Pulcinella. See Figure 8 on page 5.

⁵⁰ Joris-Karl Huysmans 1848 - 1907. French author whose writing was popular with the Decadents. He wrote a number of works his most famous being *A rebours* (1884), (*Against nature*, or, *Against the grain*).

⁵¹ D'immenses et blanc pierrots.

⁵² La série des pierrots immenses se multipliait.

guise as femme fatale, the ultimate vain coquette who poses her body in such a manner as to attract and retain the interest and desire of the ill-favoured Crispins. The slippery nature of these creatures who try so hard to appear other than they are and yet who remain so obviously unattractive and titillated, *emoustillés*, with lust for Columbine, rouses the laughter of the reader and brings to mind a similar valet, Shakespeare's Malvolio.⁵³

The scene of vanity and lust is carnivalesque in its connotations, as the grotesque attempts to become the object of desire for the vainly beautiful. This is a parade of deadly sins that turns social behaviour inside out. It is a revealing measure of the deceptiveness of the dream world and of pantomime where moral values are easily transgressed even when contained within a structure. Dream, like pantomime, is a fluid mutable world where rules and values are irrelevant.

The 'I', who has drifted off during the vanity play, now returns in the last line, still dreaming of a theatre, 'Je rêve un théâtre de chambre', but this time 'théâtre de chambre' takes on more intimate overtones based on the game of vanity and lust which is being played out on the dream stage before the reader. In this play the 'I' has introduced the future poetic subject and alter ego, Pierrot, behind whom the 'I' will assume anonymity and silence. As Jean de Palacio indicates:

⁵³ Malvolio is the valet in Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth night or As You Like It*. He is notable for his overweening vanity, pride and intellectual hubris. He is falsely led to believe that his young Mistress Olivia is madly in love with him. His self-conceit allows him this belief as does his wish for self advancement. He clads himself in yellow cross-gartered stockings under the delusion that Olivia finds them attractive and attempts to make love to her. She rejects him believing him to be mad.

Lorsque Pierrot ne se confond pas avec le je écrivain, il entretient avec lui un rapport privilégié et en est, le plus souvent, la figure dédoublée. (Palacio 1991: 27)⁵⁴

The anonymity of the 'I' both creates and is created as self and other, as man and mask establishing a split-subject (Kristeva 1987: 78). Held in this split is a constant movement between states, which gives rise to madness, split personalities, dreams and death (Kristeva 1987: 83). Pierrot will assume this movement between states as he drifts outside everyday moral, religious and societal structures, a spectral and wispy shadow, who will dance with and epitomise the Seven Deadly Sins.

xvi A deadly carnivalesque dance

A montage of deadly sins, through which Pierrot's presence is finely woven, flickers through the poetic tableaux. As Willette commented, 'Pierrot, c'est l'homme chassé du Paradis! L'âme de Pierrot est le sanctuaire des sept péchés capitaux' (Willette in Jean de Palacio 1990:12).⁵⁵ The oddity here is the ambivalence created between the deadly sins and the idea of sanctuary, a word with very religious connotations. Pierrot seems to be providing a holy refuge for the deadly sins inside himself. The sins depicted in Giraud's poems are fantastically twisted, being themselves and their other in a constant doubling movement. Here the imagery and the words flow vibrantly over the structural containment of the rondel. As 'the word' is the most powerful entity, yet it is also imbued with the serpent of ambivalence. It is Harlequin with his lithe, mercurial form who will take 'the word' and transform it into the sin of vain

⁵⁴ Though Pierrot does not assume the identity of the writing 'I' he maintains a privileged connection with the 'I' and is most often the 'I's' other half.

⁵⁵ Pierrot is man driven from Paradise! Pierrot's soul is the sanctuary of the Seven Deadly Sins.

glory and pride, whereas Pierrot will only silently stare into and out of the reflecting vanity of the mirror.

xvii Harlequin's vainglorious pride and Pierrot's vanity

In *Arlequinade* (8),⁵⁶ Harlequin brings colour and light into the world of *Pierrot Lunaire*. His presence challenges the moonlight and the white ethereal landscape inhabited by Pierrot. He is the prism which refracts the white light:

Arlequin porte un arc-en-ciel
De rouges et vertes soieries,
Et semble, dans l'or des féeries,
Un serpent artificiel.

Harlequin bears a rainbow
Of red and green silk,
And in the golden spectacle seems,
An artificial serpent.

A rainbow reflects and disperses by means of a double refraction the sun's rays through water droplets (*Shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1973: 1741). This dispersed light of the sun shimmers from Harlequin's body. In the line 'Arlequin porte un arc-en-ciel' the word 'porte' can mean that Harlequin 'bears', 'carries' or 'wears' a rainbow, yet it also seems to imply that he brings a physical rainbow with him. The ambivalence of the word 'porte' suits the mercurial nature of Harlequin. This word precipitates the fluidity of this character within the poem, allowing him to slide through its confining structure. He is both the bearer of his costume's rainbow and the bringer of the rainbow's light. The rainbow irrupts in colour through the poem in exuberance and in the warmth of this light the world of *Pierrot Lunaire* appears paradisiacally golden. Though Harlequin has brought this warm light he simultaneously brings a dark and malignant shadow, the artificial serpent of

⁵⁶ *Harlequinade*.

himself. Harlequin is the rainbow serpent which is associated with lightning. The original artificial serpent was Lucifer, the rebel angel and the bringer of light and illumination. Lucifer, the demon of the deadly sin of Pride, brought lies and deceit into paradise, in the form of a serpent. Exhibiting both traits of serpent and light bringer, Harlequin personifies the deadly sin of Pride. The origins of the name 'Harlequin' stem from the Old French Herlequin or Hellequin, the leader of a band of demon horsemen who rode by night (*New shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1993: 1191). Paradoxically, Harlequin embodies both the light and the dark, much as Lucifer himself. The double diffraction results in a fantastical wavering between states that are seemingly merged one within the other. Harlequin is the grotesque carnival-double which, though a single entity, is yet not identical with itself and like the polyphonic word has no fixed point but includes the other of himself within himself (Lechte 1990: 106). This carnivalesque fluidity allows Harlequin to cross the borders between light and darkness. The origins of Harlequin's name associate him closely with the demonic and his behaviour identifies him closely with the deadly sin of pride. Pride spawned deceit and lies and in spreading these seeds of sin the mercurial Harlequin plays a very willing part:

<p>Ayant pour but essentiel Le mensonge et les fourberies, Arlequin porte un arc-en-ciel De rouges et vertes soieries.</p>	<p>Lies and deceit Are his main intentions, Harlequin bears a rainbow Of red and green silk.</p>
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Harlequin's lies and deceptions have a single goal they are intended to wheedle and win Columbine from Cassandra.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ In the nineteenth century pantomime the general plotline was Harlequin and Pierrot's love for Columbine and Harlequin's efforts to win or steal her from her father Cassandra.

In the poem the bass sounds of the vowels and consonants that form the rhythm of the verse are held in the words lie and deceit, but movement and tone are also prominent in the scintillating colours that Giraud used and which explode out of the structure of the text. These rainbow colours enhance Harlequin's allure and spring from his body into the fantasy he creates. Cassandra's response to Harlequin is apparent in his short temper and his bile:

À Cassandre jaune de fiel	To Cassandra yellow with bile
Il dénombre ses seigneuries	He enumerates his Spanish domains
En Espagne, et ses armoiries:	And his coat of arms:
Car sur fond d'azur et de miel,	For on a background of azure and honey,
Arlequin porte un arc-en-ciel.	Harlequin bears a rainbow.

Cassandra's yellow bile represents one of the four humours used in the renaissance to define personality types. He would have been diagnosed as a choleric, someone who tended towards arrogance, imperiousness and hot-temperedness, qualities that fit Columbine's pantomime parent exceedingly well. However, Cassandra suffers as much from the deadly sin of pride as does Harlequin. Cassandra's choleric pride is the foil to Harlequin's oily and vainglorious pride. Two faces of the same sin, inseparable yet separate. Harlequin's pride is far more fluid than Cassandra's rigid and conceited pride. It is the excessive nature of Harlequin's vaingloriousness that emanates from his rainbow and makes the reader smile. It is the humour in the scene that deflates Harlequin's pretentiousness and turns it into mere roguery. This pride is astute enough to know that it is merely deceit.

Harlequin, in his slippery way, ignores Cassandra's choler, as he sets about spinning his lies and deceit aimed at obtaining Columbine. He bends

Cassandra's ear and patience as he details his imaginary status as an aristocrat with domains in Spain, which are as evanescent as the rainbow. His escutcheon is as much a fantasy as his domains and as false. The beauty and serenity of the background colours of the shield are deceptive. The indirect allusion to the paradise of a land of 'milk and honey' is subverted. The azure skyline is the blue of Pride and the warmth and goldenness of the honey is in the slick lying phrases of deceit, the 'voix de miel'⁵⁸ (honeyed voice) that Harlequin employs to inflate and ingratiate himself. Harlequin, in his pride, is himself placed onto this escutcheon bearing the rainbow, which is delusive, as there is no gold or fortune to be found at its end.

Harlequin's costume splinters and reflects prismatic light that bounces out of the confines of the rondel in an explosion of vibrant colour. Pride is the iridescent rainbow serpent that weaves and insinuates itself through the rondel. This iridescence challenges the lunar landscape in which Pierrot exists, as Harlequin's pride and conceit attempt to usurp Pierrot's pallid pre-eminence in the poems. But Pierrot himself possesses the deadly sin of pride which is located in his vanity mirror. Pierrot's vain self-admiration is to be found in *Pierrot dandy* (3), where the mirror is an implied presence, in *Pierrot polaire* (9) where an ice block becomes Pierrot's reflecting mirror and in *Départ de Pierrot* (36) where he is seen 'proudly' adjusting his top knot.⁵⁹

The sin of vanity is always accompanied by a mirror that allows for the admiration of the physical image without shame and with the pride of a

⁵⁸ See *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

⁵⁹ *Pierrot the dandy; Polar Pierrot; Pierrot's departure.*

peacock. Vanity's mirror also contained the image of Lucifer, the most beautiful angel before his fall and metamorphosis into the demon of pride. The concept of vanity and the mirror behind which Lucifer hides was a common theme in art. Generally it is a female figure placed before the mirror admiring her physical form. In Antoine Wiertz's *Le miroir du diable*⁶⁰ this theme is revealingly explored. Here a naked and well-formed young woman is admiring herself in the mirror. This erotic image is made voyeuristic by the presence of the horned male, Lucifer, hiding and tilting the mirror. This knowing voyeur is a reflection of the viewer who is also gazing ardently at the female figure. The viewer is drawn as much by the eroticism of the female as by the macabre nature of the depicted scene. The grinning, horned voyeur makes the viewer uncomfortable as the figure mirrors back the viewers own perverse desires. The beauty appears self-loving and very aware of her attributes. Her jutting elbow with her hand on her naked hip is sensual whilst the other hand hovers over her breast holding her string of pearls. She is the *femme fatale* as coquette; a vain and proud temptress, provocative in her knowledge of the power of her physical attributes. Though Pierrot will stand before the mirror in his vanity, it is the power of the *femme fatale* and her ability to make a cuckold of any man that will triumph. Pierrot's ethereal asexuality cannot compete with the power of the rampant, sexually-aware, and powerful female figure. But the vanity mirror was more than a reflection of vain physicality, it was a revelation of transience and lurking within its depths was the dark shadow of death and damnation.

⁶⁰ See Figure 9 on page 5.

In *Le miroir* (47)⁶¹ Pierrot's black and white night world has had its sky lit up by the '[La Lune qui] s'échancre le ciel bleu du soir'.⁶² This serrated light cuts through the night sky like lightning and the Luciferian light again adds a malevolence to the poem:

En face, dans la paix vibrante
Du limpide et profond miroir,
D'un croissant de Lune hilarante
S'échancre le ciel blue du soir.

On the calm, resonant face
Of a deep and limpid mirror,
A crescent of laughing Moon
Serrates the night-blue sky.

This clear pale light is revealed as being only the Moon admiring herself and her altered beauty in the mirror. Giraud has personified the Moon through the use of a majuscule rather than the normal usage of the miniscule. The Moon is feminine in French and Giraud has altered the accepted use of an inanimate noun by capitalising the Moon and making her a subject in the first person. The distinction between human and non-human is blurred and there is a slippage between states where the boundaries between subject and object are made fluid. The Moon can watch the wavy serration of her light and her laughter ripple upon the face of the mirror. It becomes apparent that the mirror is made of water and this explains the serration of the Moon's light and the rippling of her laughter. The word 'hilarante' is the laughter associated with the use of 'laughing gas'. This, in collaboration with the water, evokes an image of glittering undulation. This image is further underscored by Giraud's use of the word 'vibrante'. This word means to vibrate; or vibrating and such movement can be observed in the shuddering of the surface of the water, which is always apparent even when the water is calm. The word 'vibrante' also provides the water with its voice, as in French it has the added meaning of

⁶¹ *The mirror.*

⁶² [the Moon who] serrates the night-blue sky.

‘manifester une émotion par le tremblement de la voix’ (*Dictionnaire étymologique et historique de la langue française* 1996: 826).⁶³ This vibration and trembling contained in the word creates the rhythm of the water’s voice. The trembling of a voice is an unconscious and semiotic manifestation generally of an overwhelming emotion. The water’s trembling voice laps into the silence of the verse and is joined by the laughter of the Moon. Together they rhythmically undermine the symbolic structuring of words and provide a maternal rocking movement. This is the maternal semiotic as it would be before the institution of the symbolic. The fluidity of the mirror has inverted and made everything it reflects ambiguous. As Jean Pierrot notes,

Because of its powers of reflection water is fundamentally the most natural of mirrors and it is precisely the mirror that provides us with one of the richest constellations of images in the [Decadent] period’s literature. (Pierrot 1981: 208)

He goes on to say that ‘the space perceived in mirrors creates a universe that is the twin of the real universe but also a different and strange one’ (Pierrot 1981: 212). Pierrot might proudly admire himself in this mirror where appearances are deceptive. In the reflection he becomes both a presence and an absence and the self that he sees is ambiguously transient. What the mirror is revealing to the vain and proud self-admirer is an illusion. Pierrot is not what he perceives himself to be:

Pierrot, de façon conquérante	Pierrot with proud manner
Se mire – et soudain dans le noir	Admires himself – suddenly in the dark
Rit en silence de se voir	Silently laughs to see himself
Coiffé par sa blanche parente	Mitred by his white parent
D’un croissant de Lune hilarante!	With a crescent of laughing Moon!

⁶³ To reveal emotion through the trembling of the voice.

The image in the mirror is doubled and altered as the Moon places her crescent above Pierrot's head. Pierrot has been given horns on his now moon-bleached skullcap. He is both a devil and a priest (the Pope normally wears a white skullcap). But there is another interpretation: Pierrot has been made a cuckold by the Moon. She, together with the mirror, has ambiguously altered his appearance. Undercutting his proud gesturing, the *femme fatale* Moon reveals him to the mirror as little more than a puffed-up fool. Pierrot joins the Moon in using the vanity mirror: thus bonded together they are reflected on her face. The mirror is, however, capable of altering the peacockish image into one of death in one shuddering reflective movement, as a skull is her ever-present accomplice and companion.⁶⁴ What the mirror reveals is the egoistic flow between object and subject and vice versa and in her glance the Moon and Pierrot appear to become reflections of one another in a narcissistic palimpsest.

Narcissism is the love that man has for his own image and for his face, as reflected in still water (Bachelard 1983: 21). Ever since Ovid's story of Narcissus and Echo this love for one's own image has been associated with extreme vanity and pride. In the water mirror Pierrot, like Narcissus, sees his reflection in a natural doubling. Gaston Bachelard draws an interesting alternate to the Echo and Narcissus story when he writes:

Echo lives in the fountain. Echo is always with Narcissus. She is he. She has his voice. She has his face. He does not hear her in a loud

⁶⁴ In the *memento mori* or *vanitas* paintings the mirror and the skull were commonly associated as emblems of the transience of life and earthly things. The mirror and the skull were interchangeable as bearing the truth that death was a constant companion to life and the end result of time's passing.

shout. He hears her in a murmur, like the murmur of his seductive seducer's voice. (Bachelard 1983: 22-23)⁶⁵

This passage could apply to Pierrot (Narcissus) and the Moon (Echo) who, in Giraud's poem, appear to become inextricably joined, a doubling of vanity and pride. The joining together also signals a rupturing of separate identities and a fluid interaction of opposites. As Elizabeth Grosz, discussing Kristevan theory, shows:

Kristeva asserts that the imaginary narcissistic structure of mirror-identifications linking mother and child is doomed by irresolvable projections, introjections and identifications that position it in a relation of crippling dependence on a singular other. There is no room for relations with others outside the imaginary dyadic structure. Each defines the other's identity and limits its own relation to the other. (Grosz 1989: 48)

This idea of mother-child is nuanced in the poem by the choice of the word 'parente' which betrays the strange relationship between the Moon and Pierrot. Jean de Palacio comments on:

Parenté ambiguë entre la Lune et Pierrot, tour à tour maternelle, téméraire, incestueuse, allant même jusqu'à l'homologie pure et simple. (Palacio 1991: 62)⁶⁶

The Moon and Pierrot have been joined through the mirror in a manner where one is the expression of the other. The mirror has created a delusion where what is perceived is 'the shadow of a reflected form: it has no substance of its own' (Hutcheon 1980: 11). The devil of Narcissistic pride lurks in the mirror's reflective guile and is central to the unity that the Moon and Pierrot are seen as

⁶⁵ Elle vit au creux de la fontaine. Echo est sans cesse avec Narcisse. Elle est lui. Elle a sa voix. Elle a son visage. Il ne l'entend pas dans un grand cri. Déjà il l'entend dans un murmure, comme le murmure de sa voix séduisante, de sa voix de séducteur.

⁶⁶ Ambiguous relations (or kinship) between the Moon and Pierrot which can be described as maternal, reckless and incestuous in turn and which even goes as far as to be completely homologous.

having become. The swift alteration of the mirror's watery face is unsettling and highly carnivalesque: where everything contains its opposite and is illicitly joined together in the water's limpid but deceptive gaze. This oscillation and fluidity frees the mad deceptiveness of the sin of vanity in its semiotic ambivalence.

In iconography, Vanity was always female and held a mirror in which to admire herself. Allied with the Moon, who washes over and fuses with Pierrot, a doubled female identity is established. Pierrot's gender appears to have been inverted in a carnivalesque transformation. But this is only another fantastic lie of the mirror and it is this lie that causes Pierrot's silent laughter. But Pierrot's laughter would appear pained, a rictus more than a laugh, a grimacing skull seen in the mirror, which is wearing Pierrot's face and is the *memento mori* of death staring at the viewer and the Moon.

Giraud has used a hyphen between Pierrot vainly admiring himself in the mirror and his sudden laughter when he realises that the mirror and the Moon have given him a new hat. The hyphen slows the movement of the poem like an intake of breath: a break between vain contemplation and laughter. This change in rhythm allows the semiotic to irrupt into the grammatical style in the overflow of Pierrot's silent laughter. The Moon joins in Pierrot's laughter and she too is grammatically accentuated as Giraud uses an exclamation mark after the word 'hilarante', which emphasises the Moon's hilarity caused by the playful illusion and joke that she and the mirror have perpetrated on this conceited and pretentious Pierrot.

Laughter has been built up throughout the rondel and now bursts its boundaries and releases the semiotic drives contained beneath the structuring grammar of the symbolic. Silent laughter is itself bizarrely grotesque. The only sounds in the poem are non-sounds. It is the hilarious laughter of the Moon and the silent laughter of Pierrot, welling up out of the rondel that merges with the laughter of the reader. This combined laughter melts the boundaries of the rondel and allows Pierrot, the Moon, the mirror and the reader to merge in a semiotic *jouissance*.⁶⁷ As Kristeva remarks, ‘poetry shows us that language lends itself to the penetration of the socio-symbolic by *jouissance*’ (Kristeva 1974: 80).

It is the pomposity of Pierrot’s vanity that has roused the manic laughter which is edged with a frisson of unease, for the Moon’s laughter can quickly alter into an inverted crescent and vanity’s mirror is known to reflect the envy of the scythe and the skull.

xviii The malicious poison of Lady Covetous and Mistress Envy

The skull and scythe hide themselves behind the malice of envy and her sister covetousness. It is the interplay between these two ladies; faces of the same sin, which will now enmesh Harlequin and Pierrot as partners in their deadly carnivalesque dance.

⁶⁷ For Kristeva ‘jouissance’ means both erotic and psychic pleasure.

In *Arlequin (11)*,⁶⁸ Harlequin reappears with his vibrant multi-coloured warmth and wiles. His sins are those of lively, irreverent desire and his appetite and cheek are boundless. They are filled with the vulgarity and spite of life and its fleeting pleasures. When he enters the poem it is to once more bring the evanescent beauty of the rainbow with him:

Brillant comme un spectre solaire,	Shining like a solar spectrum,
Voici le très mince Arlequin,	Here is slender Harlequin,
Qui chiffonne le casaquin	who rumples the blouse
De la servante atrabilaire.	Of the splenetic maidservant.

The light of the sun is seen to have been prised outwards through Harlequin's slender spangled form, recalling the rainbow associations in *Arlequinade (8)*.⁶⁹ Harlequin is vividly alive and takes lusty advantage when he rumples the blouse of the maidservant. The word 'casaquin' is one of those slippery, multi-layered constructions used by Giraud. 'Casaquin' is an old French word and a synonym for it is 'blouse'. A 'blouse' was originally a short jacket that was close-fitting at the hips, or when referring to female dress, it referred to an adjustable bodice or 'corsage' worn by peasants, reaching the top of their skirts.⁷⁰ Its meaning was later altered to a blouse, smock or loose garment worn over clothes to protect them. A smock has sensual attributes, as it was also a woman's undergarment. The erotic and sexual are thus hidden in this rumpling of the maid's bodice. Harlequin's attentions are less than chaste, but are accomplished in his usual teasing and unrestrained manner, seizing the moment to satisfy a devilish appetite and

⁶⁸ *Harlequin*.

⁶⁹ *Harlequin's tale*.

⁷⁰ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>. English translations by the author of the thesis.

whim. His desire covets women no matter their age or their station in life and is as transient and diverse as his rainbow colours. His advances appear to be peevishly rebuffed. Giraud makes use of an odd word ‘atrabilaire’ one that has a very binary and fluid nature. The word can mean irritable but simultaneously it means the black bile that accompanies melancholy. This irritability, mixed with black bile, gives the servant a poisonous and noxious disposition. Envy is the bitter inner eating of oneself and the black bile of anguish and sorrow. The servant is simultaneously angry and melancholic in a vibration between states. It is these ‘polyvalent and multi-determined’ words which flicker with semiotic motility and slide *jouissance* into and through the syntax of the verse structure (Kristeva 1987: 65).

The servant was in this strangely ambivalent state of peevish irritability and melancholy before Harlequin began to intrude; to humour her irritation, he slyly offers her money as a pandering tool:

Afin d'apaiser sa colère, Il fait miroiter un sequin. Brillant comme un spectre solaire, Voici le très mince Arlequin.	In order to placate her anger, He makes a sequin shimmer. Shining like a solar spectrum, Here is slender Harlequin
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The notion of covetousness is immediate in the word ‘sequin’⁷¹, which twinkles and shimmers with ambiguity. Harlequin is appealing to the maid’s venality. The notion of the duplicity of intent lurks beneath the shining coin, which is a payment for the liberties he has taken in rumpling her bodice and for her collusion with him, all of which co-exist in this payoff. The bribe implicates them both in a multiple form of covetousness, providing a layered

⁷¹ A sequin was an Italian gold ducat coined in Venice at the end of the 13th century.

oscillating movement between their interactions. Harlequin covets a brief moment of pleasure with the maid, as well as desiring to possess Columbine. The maid covets the money and perhaps Harlequin. He in turn covets the maid's silence concerning what has passed between them; both the lewdness and the underhand bribe which she has pocketed are typical of the convoluted plots of pantomime:

La vieille, empochant son salaire,	The old maid pocketing her reward,
Livre Columbine au faquin,	Delivers Columbine to the rascal,
Qui sur un grand ciel bleu turquin	A silhouette against an indigo sky
Se dessine, et chante lanlaire,	Who gleefully sings,
Brillant comme un spectre solaire.	Shining like a solar spectrum.

This notion of covetousness is made more overt through the use of the word 'salaire', meaning not only 'salary' but 'reward' or 'recompense'. The maid is being paid for her favours, but also to hand over Columbine to the rapacious Harlequin. Columbine appears as a static object in this interplay between two unscrupulous and concupiscent creatures. Harlequin could not persuade Cassandra to give him Columbine, so he has resorted to other wiles and means in order to obtain her. The complicity of this erotically charged play of covetousness evokes the laughter of the reader, who is drawn into being an accomplice to this knavery. But the laughter is ambivalent, as the reader is being mockingly laughed at in return. This is the sensuous and playful carnivalesque laughter that is directed back at those who laugh, ensuring an ambivalent wholeness. This laughter is gay and triumphant but simultaneously mocking and deriding. It both asserts and denies and it buries and revives (Bakhtin 1984: 11-12). For Kristeva laughter is aggressive and violent as it tears apart the symbolic. She sees the laughter of the person who produces the laughter as 'always painful, forced, black: both the prohibition to be lifted and

the prohibition necessary to the articulation of the utterance weigh heavily on him' (Kristeva 1984: 225). Kristeva's depiction of laughter seems to have lost the carnival joy which exists as the balance to the painful blackness. Laughter seems a heavy responsibility and a structuring weight. In this it resembles Baudelaire's view in which laughter

comes into the class of all artistic phenomenon which indicate the existence of a permanent dualism in the human being – that is, the power of being oneself and someone else at one and the same time. (Baudelaire in Kristeva 1984: 223)⁷²

This is totally foreign to true carnival laughter which according to Bakhtin 'restores ambivalent wholeness' (Bakhtin 1984: 123). It is a combination of these different aspects of laughter, its violence, pain, ambivalence and wholeness that is at play through this poem.

It is the darker side to the laughter, hidden behind the enactment of covetous desire and eroticism, which creates the maid's peevish spite. This malice allows her to readily accept a bribe and willingly hand her mistress over to an obvious rascal. This is a vindictive act and as Chaucer's Parson observed, servants who murmur, or are irritable about their masters and mistresses, are filled with envy.⁷³ Covetousness has given way to envy, who stands uncloaked in all her naked malevolence. Harlequin uses the maid's envy, and envy's companion covetousness, to buy Columbine in an unscrupulous and fraudulent manner. The word 'la vieille' adds a very ambivalent notion to the age of the servant. The previous undertones of eroticism between

⁷² [...] rentre dans la classe de tous les phénomènes artistiques qui dénotent dans l'être humain l'existence d'une dualité permanente, la puissance d'être à la fois soi et un autre.

⁷³ Robinson F.N. (ed) 1983. *The works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Second Edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 243.

Harlequin and the maid are shattered by the connotations of old age. But the word is again twofold, as it not only signifies an old woman, but an ‘old maid’ or ‘spinster’. Envy assumes another face, the spite of a rejected lover and a rumpled bodice, which leads to betrayal. Columbine is a concept in the poem, not a participant. She appears to be virtuous, innocent and girlish, an antithesis to the servant’s worldly *femme fatale*. This sets up a dichotomy that wavers in ambivalent conflict, where the fearsomely malign opposes the ultra-virtuous. The duality of the decadent view of woman as either ‘whore’ or ‘madonna’ seeps into the verse. An adulterated malfeasance seeps out of the verse and trickles into the other poems as a grotesque and monstrous hybrid in the persona of the *femme fatale*.

The maid’s delivery of Columbine into Harlequin’s possession has him singing, but the song comes with a sting. To describe Harlequin’s babbling song, Giraud uses the word ‘lanlaire’. This is a marvellously ambivalent and semiotically labile word, an onomatopoeical structure used in refrains of popular old songs as a nonsense rhythmical attribute (lan, lan, lanlaire), a glossolalic interjection, or a refrain used to indicate the lack of importance shown to someone or something. In standard French usage it is used in the set expression ‘envoyer qqn (faire, se faire) lanlaire’, which means to send someone to the devil.⁷⁴ This word is carefully chosen to rhyme with ‘salaire’, ‘atrabilaire’ and ‘solaire’. Only ‘solaire’ seems to retain a single, unambivalent meaning. ‘Salaire’, ‘atrabilaire’ and ‘lanlaire’ are words containing their opposite within themselves. The resulting conflict of opposed meanings causes

⁷⁴ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

a continual oscillating rhythm and musicality that ensures the polyvalency of these poetic words. The word ‘lanlaire’, in particular, enhances this polyvalent musicality of the poem and as a nonsense sound or word it becomes a vocalic drive that breaks its way into the symbolic in a semiotic flow of *jouissance*. The madness of the carnivalesque, with its transgression of boundaries, spills out of the word ‘lanlaire’ and infiltrates the whole poem. The syntactical structure of the rondel is the containing boundary of this mad *jouissance* as emphasized by Kristeva: ‘the text’s first criterion: to avoid becoming a free-flow “escape” [*fuite*] of the signifier, this discourse must provide itself with guardrails [*des garde-fous*]’ (Kristeva 1984: 209). The restraint of semiotic *jouissance* by a symbolic structuring device is a guard against the complete dissolution of the ambivalent balance that exists between the semiotic-symbolic and sense and non-sense. This guard prevents a collapse into complete gibberish, but also allows change to occur. Semiotic *jouissance* works its way into the entire structure of the poem through polyvalency, laughter and the silent sound of singing, which is yet restrained and focused by means of the poem’s structure.

Harlequin’s mad, babbling rhythmically sways the verse and the reader gently as upon a swing. Slowly the awareness grows that the song is not mirth-filled nonsense and triumph but touched with mocking disdain. ‘Lanlaire’ is Harlequin’s song of rejection which sends the maid to the devil. This maliciously mocking dismissal is Harlequin’s final payment for her deadly sin of envy and covetous deceit, resulting in betrayal. If malice is the tool of envy, then Harlequin is revealing himself as the envious serpent: he

has metamorphosed into the lying demon Leviathan, the serpent of envy, as he spits the poison of his contempt at his accomplice. However, envy's malice and Harlequin's derision are made nonsensical by the lullaby rhythm of 'lanlaire'. Harlequin has become a mere outline against an indigo sky, as his rainbow starts to fade and dissipate. Evening is falling and the solar spectrum is disappearing, making way for the Moon and Pierrot.

The Moon has undergone a change and her smile is no longer teasing, as in the poem *Le miroir* (47), but has become a scythe which covets life, and in particular the life of Pierrot. This image of the Moon as scything blade is present in both *Mendiantes de têtes* (23)⁷⁵ and *Décollation* (24)⁷⁶ and for Jean de Palacio 'La lune en personne, dans deux de ses phases, figure une lame de sabre prête pour l'exécution' (Palacio 1990: 136).⁷⁷ The sickly envious Moon, as blade bearing *femme fatale*, has assumed her place and figurative shape.

A sick but envious Moon was previously shown in *Lune malade* (21)⁷⁸ where:

Tu meurs d'un amour chimérique,	You are dying from a fantastical love,
Et d'un désir silencieux [...]	And a silent desire [...]

Dying from gloomy silent desires and fantastical love, this Moon is envious of the lover in the poem and of his sensual heedless pleasures. Her melancholic envy causes her to spill her rays of white blood like a consumptive:

⁷⁵ *Begging for Heads.*

⁷⁶ *Beheading.*

⁷⁷ The Moon in person, in two of her phases, appears as a sabre blade ready for the execution.

⁷⁸ *Sick Moon.*

Mais dans sa volupté physique	But heedless in his sensual delight
L'amant qui passe insoucieux	A lover passes by and
Prend pour des rayons gracieux	Takes as gracious rays
Ton sang blanc et mélancolique,	Your white and melancholic blood,
O Lune, nocturne phthisique!	O Moon, nocturnal consumptive!

Her love has become ill. The pale rays of her blood start to mutate and become darker, more perverse and death-driven until in *Mendiantes de têtes* (23) she is transformed into the guillotine. Now she is a lover of emaciated body and scything blade, who awaits and demands continual consummation of her unwearying desire:

Un panier rouge rempli de son	A red basket filled with bran
Balance dans ta main crispée,	Swinging in your clenched hand,
Folle Guillotine échappée,	O, Guillotine escaped lunatic,
Qui rôdes devant la prison!	Prowling in front of the prison!

The red in the basket exacts more of the same colour to soak into its filling of bran. This red calls out to the mirroring red of Pierrot's mouth and it is his blood that is now sought by this lover. The bran in the basket engulfs the staining of blood-red death as it was used to absorb the blood from the guillotine's victims. The word 'son' is another double word, where meaning is fluid. 'Son' in this context can mean either bran or sawdust. This latter meaning dates to 1743 where it formed part of the compound word 'bran de scie' or a fine, light powder which sifts from sawed wood.⁷⁹ The basket of the guillotine was filled either with bran, a mixture of bran and sawdust or just sawdust.

⁷⁹ *Le trésor de la langue française Informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

In Eugène Sue's *Mysteries of Paris* there is a hilarious discussion about what is put into the basket, whether it is bran, or whether the victim is being cheated and sawdust is being used instead.⁸⁰ The word is ambivalent with the meanings interwoven and dichotomous as bran and sawdust intermingle yet remain different. The violent bloodiness of the image jolts, and establishes a sense of uneasiness. This carnivalesque violence raises the semblance of a victim's grim laughter that is directed at the lover who holds out the basket as her begging bowl. 'Son' also means 'sound' and the grim shriek of the guillotine, the tears, moans, hysterical laughter and pleadings of her victims are all swirled together in this small word. The madness of the sounds of death fills the poem and the colour of the sound is the red of blood and violence. A semiotic *jouissance* of macabre proportions is carried on the rhythm of the poem. It is this melodic sound and rhythm of the poem that represents an explosion of language. The macabre and grotesque slippage contained in the word 'son' attacks the phonetic and denotative nature of the symbolic, transgressing accepted meaning and offering something alternate and new. For Kristeva (1984: 225):

Every practice which produces something new (a new device) is a practice of laughter ... When practice is not laughter, there is nothing new, practice cannot be provoking: it is at best a repeated, empty act.

The melodic blood sound is the greedy lament of a desiring lover. It is the Moon and she has morphed into the figure of the guillotine. Their unity is implied in the capitalisation of both Moon and Guillotine which undermines standard grammatical usage and personifies them as 'real' females. The sense of

⁸⁰ See Eugène Sue *Les mystères de Paris*. Paris: Hatier 1968. Also see Baroness Orczy *The elusive Pimpernel* Buccaneer Books Inc New York, 1984 (chapter XXX) for another mention of Madame Guillotine, her bran basket and Pierrot.

humanness is further emphasized by the poet attributing hands to the Guillotine. The doubled nature of this bequest is the knowledge that these hands would be those of her victim tightly clenched and pinioned inside her stocks, while the voice begging for life would be that of the wretch faced with the prospect of the blade and the basket. The two-sided nature of this image is grotesque, with one body being interpenetrated violently into another while both partake of each other's characteristics. The ambiguity of this interpenetration rises to the surface of the poem in a semiotic explosion of fear, shrieks and death. The Moon and the guillotine are *femmes fatales* lusting for the beheading of the person they regard as belonging to them and as their due. Though he is never directly mentioned, the lurking presence of Pierrot, the intended victim, is implied. He alone is the personage associated with the Moon, but he lies hidden within the poem, an invisible presence. The scarlet of his lips is the only trace that weaves his presence into the world of this poem. This strange absence, though tacit knowledge of Pierrot's presence, provides the poem with a sense of distance. An awareness of the presence of the poet, as a third person, is established. He is a watcher of the scene in which he is also a wraithlike participant. This separation between absence and presence sets up the carnival spectacle where the participant 'splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game' (Kristeva 1984: 78). The poet has intertextually written the historical blood, violence, murder and epic verse (*La Marseillaise*)⁸¹ of the French Revolution over and into Pierrot's fantastical world. Carnival and deadly violence are intrinsically joined together creating a palimpsestic effect which transforms

⁸¹ *The Marseillaise*, composed in 1792 by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, was a patriotic song which in 1795 and then again in 1879 became the national anthem of France.

Pierrot's world into a grotesque nightmare dominated by the blade of the guillotine and the Moon's sabre.

Yet, it is not Pierrot's head which appears to fall but that of the poet as a masochistic double of the silent clown. The poet's association of the Moon and guillotine with *femme fatales* further enhances the grotesque and fantastical feeling of the poem. There is a perversion and transgression of the standard accepted denotations associated with the noun 'woman'. It also plays with identity and idea of gender construction. In French the Moon and the guillotine are both gendered as female. This increases the indeterminacy and wavering instability of the 'real' and the 'non-real' as structured by the logic of the symbolic.

The guillotine and the Moon are fused in the word 'folle'. A 'folle' is a madwoman or lunatic; here the qualities of the Moon are transferred to the guillotine. This overwriting of attributes is emphasized by the realisation that the circular opening on the guillotine, where the head was placed, was known as the lunette, which is the diminutive for 'lune' or Moon. 'To lose one's head', meaning to go mad, takes on an altered aspect when seen in relation to these two *femmes fatales*. The madness of the Moon and the guillotine, in their envious and greedy quest for heads, shatters the poem with a carnivalesque grotesque promise of dismemberment.

To hide her voracious intentions the guillotine has assumed the role of beggar. The word 'médiant', or beggar, in the poem's title, is associated

with the Mendicants who were an order of begging friars, so the title has ascetic religious overtones. The use of this word in the title subverts and subtly plays on religion tying it to the blood and violence of the guillotine. It is a mockery of religion's complicit relationship with violent shedding of blood and greed for power. The word's ambivalence shatters what is usually concealed, the links between religion and violent death, and the semiotic drives split the symbolic, confronting and challenging the ideologies that the symbolic maintains in place through the power and controls of socially instilled 'laws' and 'beliefs'.

The guillotine has donned a monk's habit to cloak her scythe-bearing skeleton which greedily harvests life with rapacious envy. To fill her empty basket she begs aloud whilst, in good *femme fatale* style, she prowls in front of the prison:

Ta voix qui mendie a le son	Your begging voice has the sound of
Du billot qu'entaille l'épée:	A blade cleaving the beheading block:
Un panier rouge empli de son	A red basket filled with bran
Balance dans ta main crispée!	Swinging in your clenched hand!

This begging voice is the voice of death who, envious of life, is demanding to be fed. Envy is the deadly sin of violence with its need to harm, mutilate and commit murder and the guillotine is mistress envy in her sleekest and most sinister form, offering a macabre love that slices and splits in two. The sundering of the head from the body is a grotesque dismemberment by this *femme fatale* with her 'hole' for a mouth which, as an eroticised female maw, is the opening that serves both envy and death. She is Freud's ultimate 'vagina dentata' the toothed, death-giving female.

The sound of her voice brings the homophonic use of the words ‘son’ (sound) and ‘son’ (bran/sawdust) into play. This homophony creates the musicality of the verse. The sound (‘son’) of the slicing blade, sending its trophy to its ultimate destination in the bran (‘son’) of the basket, shows the permanent state of scission of the word ‘son’ which contains within itself an unrestricted difference. Kristeva wrote about the musical rhythm of a text that ‘it bursts out in laughter at the meaningful and demystifies not only all ideology, but everything that aspires to be identical with itself’ (Grosz 1989: 56). This homophony allows the semiotic to playfully peel back the structure of meaning and split the symbolic, thereby introducing both *jouissance* and death into the poem. As the guillotine splits apart head and body in carnivalesque dismemberment, so words and meanings are fragmented and split asunder, transforming the symbolic.

This need for dismemberment and the envious, sexualised and malignant nature of the guillotine are strikingly presented in the final verse. Here the guillotine is:

Bourrèle! Qui veux pour rançon	Tormentress! who wants as ransom
Le sang, le meurtre, l'épopée,	Blood, murder, epic verse,
Tu tends à la tête coupée	You hold out to the lopped head
Crachant sa dernière chanson,	Spitting out its dying song,
Un panier rouge empli de son!	A red basket filled with bran!

‘Bourrèle’ is an unusual choice of word. The manner in which Giraud has employed it ensures that it is not a verb but a noun. There is however a kink to this word as, spelt in this manner, it does not appear in any dictionary. The given spelling is ‘bourrelle’ which is the feminine form for ‘le bourreau’ (executioner, torturer). There is no female form, or version, of ‘le bourreau’

and though most dictionaries will list 'bourrelle' they indicate that it is old and not used.⁸² The spelling Giraud uses seems to be a variant, one which appears in Scarron,⁸³ and the writings of Péladan⁸⁴. The form 'bourrèle' is either a spelling error (unlikely), or a 'neologism' which mingles the verb 'bourreler' (to torment, to torture) with the sense of the noun 'bourreau' to create 'bourrèle'. This adds a very active dimension to the notion of the female as tormentress and executioner, giving the word a fluid, continuous movement that reveals an unrestrained and intense emphasis on her torturing, tormenting and deadly role. The word constructed from composite parts thus imparts a rhythmical movement to the imagery of the verse. This exclamation mark, placed directly after 'bourrèle', emphasises the intimate accursedness that the tormentress represents with its aghast interjection. The exclamation alters the rhythm and the structure of the verse and it extends the verbal impulses of 'bourrèle'. Therefore this punctuation mark does not act as a containing symbolic structural device; rather it adds impetus to the word which swells out of the verse in a discharge of pure semiotic energy. It becomes an exclamation full of repulsion and of fatal attraction and the word see-saws in its oscillating duality. The tormentress hypnotises her prospective victim with her svelte beauty and gimlet eye. She demands 'ransom', which is an incongruous idea, because ransom normally implies payment made to gain freedom, but there is no freedom to be had from her. But ransom has another meaning which is that of 'atonement' or 'payment' for sins. So 'ransom' sets up an ambivalent

⁸² *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

⁸³ Paul Scarron 1610 - 1660. A French abbé and writer of satires, parodies and plays. He wrote burlesque verse; *Typhon* (1644) was a burlesque epic poem. His most celebrated work was *The comical romance* (1651 - 1657).

⁸⁴ Joséph (Joséphin) le Sâr Péladan 1858 - 1918. A French author, who mixed mystical Christianity and the occult in novels, plays and other works. He was very influential in the Rosicrucian movement.

movement between life and death in the vacillating hope of freedom. The verse rhymes ‘rançon’ and ‘chanson’ and ‘son’, so that demand and payment are thus neatly joined together in a semiotic drive towards death. The guillotine has become a thin sliver of envy waiting for her payment. This time though, unlike in the world of Harlequin, the payment is not in the form of coin, but in the form of blood, murder and epic verse. She demands lauding and she inflicts death like the mythical sphynx. She claims recognition in epic verse; to be commemorated as another Helen of Troy, for whom blood was spilt, murder committed and an epic written. The guillotine is the *femme fatale* before whom men and poets must all pay tribute. But she is also the mad maenad who in Bacchanalian frenzy rips Orpheus’s head from his shoulders as it ejects its last song. Instead of a lyre on which to rest, the head she is removing receives a mundane and lowly basket of bran. The epic is being subtly burlesqued; it is not sung, or recited, but spat out in a silent, bloody swan song.

The tonality of the word ‘crachant’ immediately hits the ear with its harsh, hissing timbre. It cracks the verse open as it expectorates music, words and blood into sight and hearing. The word ‘cracher’ can mean either to spit saliva from the mouth; or to eject words or sounds.⁸⁵ Giraud has made use of the gerund instead of the verb to indicate the continuous flow of the blood and hacking movement of the word. The verb would be too finite, a short, sharp action where ‘spitting’ provides a sense of flowing motion. The image that Giraud creates with this word is multiple. The head is seen as paying the

⁸⁵ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

ransom demanded, spitting words and blood as it is severed from the body. But this spitting of blood conjures up an image of the consumptive expectorating blood from his mouth as he sings and recalls the *Lune malade* (21) where the sick Moon has the nocturnal melancholy blood of the consumptive. The victim is now ensnared by the *femme fatale*, personified by guillotine and Moon, and they have exacted a penalty. They have dismembered the victim, splicing his head from his body, ensuring his death as he spits out his lifeblood in poetic words.

The envious desire for death exhibited by the Moon-guillotine is reflected in *Décollation* (24), where in classic *femme fatale* adaptation the Moon is transformed into Salomé⁸⁶ wielding a sabre, with which she wishes to behead

Pierrot:

Il flageole, et, s'agenouillant	He quakes and, kneeling,
Rêve dans l'immensité noire	Dreams that from the boundless black
Que pour la mort expiatoire	An expiatory death
Sur son cou s'abat en sifflant	Sweeps whistling down upon his neck
La Lune, comme un sabre blanc.	The Moon like a white sabre.

The lack of punctuation marks after the first sentence gives to the verse a fluidity that emulates the swift swishing sound of the sabre blade as it cuts through the night air. The Moon, like Salomé, brings with her the dance of death and the Seven Deadly Sins. Obscured by the figures of the guillotine and the Moon, who have acted on her envious behest, lies the strongest *femme fatale* of all. She is carnivalesquely present, yet simultaneously absent. In French she is known as 'la mort': death. The loss of the victim's

⁸⁶ During the Decadence the figure of Salomé was prominent across artistic disciplines as representative of the *femme fatale*. Her dance of The Seven Veils led to John the Baptist's decapitation by Herod. Salomé's mother Herodias had ensured that Salomé requested the head as payment for her dance.

head is an atonement or payment; a sacrifice to her envy of life. She is the alluring *femme fatale* who leads man to his destruction. His desire for her blinds him to the blood, violence, disease and extinction she carries with her and with which she exacts her envious revenge against life.

The *femme fatale*, in either sabre or guillotine form, demands life as an appeasement. She is an envious, devouring creature, whose price is the destruction of life and who ensures that her prey has no means of escape. A mad maenad, she dismembers the body in joyous, bloody delight and her sounds fill the poem: the hiss and whistle of the blade carving the air, which is followed by the spitting song of the victim. These spitting sounds are his dying verse, the rhythmical timbre of the spurting of his own blood. These sounds thrum through the poem, dictating the rhythm and underpinning the grotesque carnival of bloody dismemberment and viciousness. Accompanying envious death are her musicians and their music is the pulsing of the severed head's swansong.

xix The instrument of ire

In good carnival fashion Pierrot's decapitation is only an instant of nightmare in the dream world which is quickly over and as quickly reversed. The ambivalence of the carnivalesque grotesque allows for this fluid movement from one state to another without necessitating the permanent assumption of any. Pierrot himself swiftly alters from being victim to being torturer. His role as victim forgotten, he assumes the mantle of the angry,

mean torturer. In *La sérénade de Pierrot (6)*⁸⁷ Pierrot's mood is expressive of rancorous, irate violence where even the music played is out of joint:

D'un grotesque archet dissonant	With grotesque discordant bow
Agaçant sa viole plate,	Grating on his flat viol,
A la héron, sur une patte,	Heron-like, on one foot,
Il pince un air inconvenant.	He pinches an offensive tune.

The expression 'à la héron' appears to be grammatically incorrect, as the word for the heron bird takes the masculine gender in French. However, Giraud is playing on the word 'héron'. The expression 'à la héron' refers to the ancient Greek mathematician Heron, or Hero, of Alexandria, who devised many geometrical theories, moving machines and, in particular, automata. Pierrot's behaviour and response appear entirely mechanical as he saws away at the viol. Yet, simultaneously contained within the expression is the idea of the bird. Pierrot, seen in silhouette, is poised like a heron, long, thin, angular and sharp edged. The word 'patte' further extends the similarity between Pierrot and the bird, as this word is used in French solely to designate an animal's paw or a bird's foot. Standing, like this bird, on a single foot, with his emaciated frame, Pierrot uses his bow and flat viol to create sounds that resemble the thin and sharp nature of the bird's voice. The instrument seems to serve as Pierrot's own reedy and discordant voice that squawks out of the poem. 'Agaçant' and 'pince' subtly emphasize the fury and spiteful anger that Pierrot is directing towards and out of the instrument, as the sounds from the instrument are tortured, much like the music of courting cats, or singing magpies. The word 'agaçant' is ambivalent, as it can mean 'to grate' but also 'to irritate' and to 'crier comme la pie' (to cry

⁸⁷ *Pierrot's Serenade.*

like the magpie) (*Dictionnaire étymologique et historique de la langue française* 1996: 18). This stems from the word ‘agace’ which in French means ‘magpie’. The heron, too, is gifted with a harsh, cackling cry and has a long bill thus bearing great similarity to the silhouette of Pierrot with his grotesque, discordant bow. Carnavalesque discord and imagery are established and the volatile semiotic drive of ire is to be found in the force of Pierrot’s bow. It is the harsh, scratchy sound raised by the bow on the viol which heightens the sense of irritation and tetchiness in the verse. ‘Agaçant’ thus contains the cause and effect tightly within itself and is a wonderfully carnivalesque word that shrieks for attention. Irritation is the thin edge between normalcy of mood and anger and as the viol’s music stretches out its noisy grating into the night, an atmosphere of unreleased wrath and impending brutality is established.

It is this off-key, scratching and rasping music which is the *Sérénade de Pierrot*. A further slippage is therefore apparent in the ambiguous word ‘sérénade’. In French it means: a piece of night music played by a lover under the window of his lady love; loud reproaches made with raised voices, confused cries and disturbing the peace at night.⁸⁸ The serenade thus pivots on the discrepancies between the love song and the noise of voices raised in altercation. It encompasses the ambivalence of Pierrot’s discordant music and the elevated voices that this music will surely bring about. Serenade working in harmony with the word ‘agaçant’, ensures that the two words form the distorted atonal song of anger and noise, the sounds of which they

⁸⁸ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

release into the poem. The discordant music that Pierrot is making brings with it both an atmosphere of petulance, but also of laughter at the incongruity of this screechy noise being a love song. Standing on one foot Pierrot is as off-key as his music and the image and sound reel with comicalness. But this comedy is tied closely to the irate manner of Pierrot, as he nastily pinches the viol. The poem thus oscillates between ludicrous expressions of the comical and the violent. The semiotic, in the form of ire, hides inside Pierrot's music and the shape of his bow. It is ire who attacks the innocent viol assaulting it so that it squeals. The play on words suddenly becomes visibly apparent. In French 'violier' is the verb meaning 'to rape, to ravish, to violate' (*Collins Robert French dictionary* 1993: 869). As a noun it is 'le viol' to the 'la viole' of the instrument. There is thus a very close homophony between the words which releases the play of the semiotic into the poem and establishes the sense of violent ravishment to which the instrument is being subjected. This ravishment is further seen in Pierrot's treatment of Cassandra. Anger and violation are two sides of the same semiotic drive. The action of pinching the viol has sly but brutal overtones and it is this meanness with its angry violence which is quickly diverted to a new object: the scolding figure of Cassandra:

Soudain Cassandre, intervenant,	Suddenly Cassandra, intervening,
Blâme ce nocturne acrobate,	Rebukes this nocturnal acrobat,
D'un grotesque archet dissonant	With a grotesque discordant bow
Agaçant sa viole plate.	Grating on his flat viol.

Cassandra has been disturbed by the caterwaul of the viola and has come to object and remonstrate with the musician. Pierrot is described as a 'nocturnal acrobat' and the play on the word 'acrobate' is amusing. Here Pierrot's agile

stance of a heron is offset by his lack of skill in coaxing more than tortured squeaks from his instrument. In French there is an expression ‘bon dieu d’acrobate’ which is a reproach used for a demonstrated lack of skill or uselessness and is generally exchanged between good friends or people on good terms with one another.⁸⁹ One can hear Cassandra rebuking Pierrot with just this expression and it would hardly be based on friendship or good terms. The word ‘acrobate’, in its ambivalence, is swirled around by the movement of the grotesque, discordant bow increasing the tension and the ire that is present in the poem. Cassandra’s rebuke is as rude and as sharp as Pierrot’s tune and it causes what was irritation to flare and explode into violent wrath at these reproaches:

Pierrot la rejette, et prenant	Pierrot hurls aside the viol and taking
D’une poigne très délicate	In a very delicate grip
Le vieux par sa roide cravate,	The old man by his stiff ruff,
Zèbre le bedon du gênant	Stripes the nuisance’s pot-belly
D’un grotesque archet dissonant.	With a grotesque discordant bow

This incongruous image of such swift and subtle finesse in capturing and holding the stout old man is contrasted against the angry violence being committed and is hilariously grotesque. Pierrot’s nimble, vicious ire is visible in the hurling aside of the musical instrument and the menacing manner in which he takes hold of Cassandra. He is as stiff with rage as the old man’s ruff, but his delicate, rigid poise is instantly split apart as fury tears through the poem and Pierrot begins to use Cassandra as his musical instrument. Instead of a viol we are presented with Cassandra, as a cello or bass, across whose belly Pierrot saws with his grotesque bow. The caterwaul

⁸⁹ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

of the viol is replaced by that of Cassandra. Pierrot is anger personified as he birches Cassandra's belly with Ire's bow and subjects him to a violent, carnivalesque beating, the noise of which skitters out of the confines of the poem in a maelstrom of wrath and violence that creates a serenade of an entirely different note: an enraged, bawling cacophony. Pierrot's mad frenzy has ripped the poem apart to the tune of Cassandra's infuriated and pained howls. Deadly ire's music is contained in the sound of this punishment, pain and anger. Her laughter polyphonically entwines with the bellows emitted from the victim; yet this laughter is simultaneously mocking the punisher. Victim and punisher become joined together in this act of burlesque violence.

The violent, angry striping of Cassandra's belly is mirrored in Pierrot's cruelty in *Pierrot cruel* (45)⁹⁰ where he trepanns the skull of Cassandra and smokes tobacco in the living head:

Dans le chef poli de Cassandre, Dont les cris percent le tympan, Pierrot enfonce le trépan, D'un air hypocritement tendre.	In the polished pate of Cassandra, Whose shrieks pierce the eardrum, Pierrot sinks the trepan, In a hypocritically tender manner.
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The brutality of the trepanning and the shrieks emitted by Cassandra are juxtaposed with the 'hypocritical tenderness' and the slyness of Pierrot's hand as it sprinkles tobacco into the head:

Le Maryland qu'il vient de prendre, Sa main sournoise le répand Dans le chef poli de Cassandre Dont les cris percent le tympan.	Taking some Maryland tobacco His sly hand sprinkles it In Cassander's polished pate Whose shrieks pierce the eardrum
--	---

⁹⁰ *Cruel Pierrot.*

Giraud uses subtle synonyms to emphasise Pierrot's deceitful, malignant posturing. 'Sournoise' and 'hypocritement' are synonyms that reflect the smug, nasty pleasure that Pierrot takes in Cassandra's discomfit. Pierrot's callousness is tinged with malice and spite and ire dominates all his actions. There is also a grotesque oiliness of demeanour, Pierrot as Uriah Heep,⁹¹ which accompanies the resentful wrath which oozes through the entire poem. It is ire which produces the semiotic 'shrieks' that rip through the poem. The semiotic drive of anger and the shrieks of pain overflow the boundaries of the poem. Pierrot's use of a medical instrument is as incongruously carnivalesque, as is the use to which he puts the hole it creates. Trepanning was believed to release forms of madness but here it is used by a mad, irate clown to exact a carnivalesque and surreal revenge. This brings to mind the work by Hieronymous Bosch representing a trepanning that is equally bizarre. The 'doctor' doing the trepanning is wearing what appears to be a funnel on his head. All the figures in the painting are as bizarre and odd as Pierrot appears to be in this poem.⁹² The semiotic has driven through the boundaries and everything is topsy-turvy and insane. The repulsive imagery of a living head being used as a hookah is revelatory of the malicious menace that lurks inside this fantasy world and in the figure of Pierrot. This is Lewis Carroll's caterpillar and a hookah with a decidedly bizarre twist.⁹³ The semiotic is set free and laughs out at the reader from the disturbing image that has been created, an image that both amuses

⁹¹ An oily, hypocritical, hand-rubbing character in the novel *David Copperfield*, by English novelist Charles Dickens 1812 - 1870.

⁹² See Figure 10 on page 5. This is a work by Hieronymous Bosch that records the operation of trepanning.

⁹³ Charles Ludwig Dodgson 1832 - 1898. English author who wrote under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. In his work *Alice in wonderland*, Alice meets a caterpillar sitting on a mushroom smoking a hookah.

and repulses in equal measure. It is the shrieks which are attached to this image that pierce the poem. But the only blood is that on the very red lips, 'très rouges lèvres,' of the cruel clown as he silently puffs away on his human pipe:

Il fixe un bout de palissandre
Au crâne, et le blanc sacripant,
A très rouges lèvres pompant,
Fume - en chassant du doigt la cendre -
Dans le chef poli de Cassandre!

Inserting a piece of rosewood
In the skull, the white scoundrel
Red, red lips puffing - whilst
Dabbing ash with a finger - smokes
In the polished pate of Cassandra!

This very red mouth attracts attention like a stain of fresh blood. Jean de Palacio has written that during the Decadence it was the female mouth that was a 'chose rouge et pulpeuse, ouverte des deux lèvres, sanguinolente ou saignante, corrosive, déjà vaguement obscene (Palacio 1988: 266).⁹⁴ This is an image of the devouring, carnivorous mouth of the *femme fatale*, blood-red and grotesque. The bloody mouth has, however, been set in the face of the white clown and an implication of gender inversion is subtly established. Pierrot is the *femme fatale* in this scene. He is a prancing, mincing and blood thirstily violent creature whose gender is as unstable and vacillating as the behaviour that is exhibited. Neither moral nor biological laws are being adhered to by this slippery, changeable being. Ire, or anger, is closely associated with the colour red and the scarlet of Pierrot's mouth closely links him to this sin, as do his actions. The puffing of these very red lips seems to inhale Cassandra alive and it is a very similar image to Félicien Rops's⁹⁵ *Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, as described by Camille Lemonnier,⁹⁶ 'avec

⁹⁴ Red and pulpy thing, two opened lips, oozing blood or bleeding, corrosive and already vaguely obscene.

⁹⁵ Felicien Rops 1833 - 1898. A Belgian painter and engraver. See Figure 11 en page 5.

⁹⁶ Camille Lemonnier 1844 - 1913. A Belgian author.

l'éclair pourpré de sa bouche, faite pour aspirer la vie' (Lemonnier in Palacio 1988: 267).⁹⁷

Pierrot's silent, carnivorous mouth speaks only through the agonised sounds that are evoked from the instrument that is Cassandra. Giraud has used the synonyms 'chef' and 'crâne', which mean either skull or head. The skull again appears as the harbinger of death. It was used as the symbol of death and transient life in paintings the main theme of which was the *memento mori*. In Giraud's word paintings it provides the same theme. The skull and sin slide through the poem together.

The rosewood that is inserted into Cassandra's skull was and is used to make pipes for smoking, but originally it was also used to make musical instruments such as flutes or bagpipes. With his insert of rosewood Cassandra is both a pipe, in the form of a hookah or narghilé, and a wind instrument. Pierrot's puffing seems like a bellows that produces both smoke and music. The play on the word 'fume', (the conjugated verb to smoke, or the noun smoke), seems to billow like a cloud into the face of the reader to the accompaniment of the shrieks. Pierrot's sin of ire has again expressed itself through instruments, the blade of the trepan and the rosewood pipe. Combined they have raised the atonal music of Cassandra's shrieks and released the semiotic drives which disturb the surface meaning of the poem and make the reader wince and laugh. Pierrot is the 'blanc sacripant'. 'Sacripant' originates from the Italian

⁹⁷ With the bright crimson of her mouth, made to suck out life.

‘Sacripante’ which was a proper name used in the work of Boiardo.⁹⁸ It means a coward, false gallant or a scoundrel, someone who is capable of any violent action or behaviour. It also once had the meaning in French of ‘fanfaron’, a braggart (*Dictionnaire étymologique et historique* 1996: 708). Pierrot’s false gallantry towards Cassandra is obvious in his hypocritical tenderness that is compounded by his outrageous behaviour. Using a person’s skull as a hookah whilst they are still alive is mad and violent behaviour that exceeds any social barriers. Pierrot does not conform to moral laws; rather, he flaunts them in a semiotic destruction of boundaries which establishes a grotesquely surreal fantasy world. There is nothing sacred about this white scoundrel: he appears as Satan incarnate in his cruelty inspired fury which is furthered in *Pantomime* (37)⁹⁹ where:

Pierrot assomme à coups de longe	Pierrot with blows of a whip stuns
Cassandre académicien,	Cassandra the pedant,
Et le rouge magicien	And the red mage
Sur le fond du tableau s’allonge,	Stretches out at the back of the scene,
Absurde et doux comme un mensonge.	Absurd and sweet as a lie.

The verb ‘assommer’ means ‘to kill or leave for dead, a person or animal, with the aid of a heavy object or violent blow; to stun, to provoke boredom, irritability and contrariness, to crush morally’.¹⁰⁰ The indirect object of this verb is the feminine noun ‘longe’ meaning ‘a leather rein, strap, lash, thong or leash. It also means the loins’.¹⁰¹ The image is immediately and violently split apart by ambivalence. Pierrot seems to be flaying Cassandra alive. The play is on the subtle differences but close relationship of to ‘kill’, ‘stun’ or

⁹⁸ Matteo Maria Boiardo 1434 - 1494. Italian poet famed for his work *Orlando innamorato - Roland in love* (1487). Sacripante appears as a king in this poem.

⁹⁹ *Pantomime*.

¹⁰⁰ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*.

‘crush morally’ and meaning becomes slippery with ambiguity and the semiotic starts to wiggle free.

The whole quivering uncertainty of the image allows the savageness it contains to smash the verse apart. Death, rage and violence dance tauntingly before the reader, as Pierrot’s malignant ire produces repulsion and squirming discomforted laughter. Cassandra seems to be the innocent victim of ire’s instrument in the hands of Pierrot. The word ‘longe’, with its meaning of the loins of an animal, seems to overwrite Cassandra and Pierrot with animalistic traits, which conforms to the overthrow of human nature associated with carnivalesque grotesque imagery and atmosphere.

Pierrot and Cassandra are seen as opposing forces; Cassandra is the ‘académicien’ with all the attributes of pedantry, fixed beliefs and dogmatic stuffiness. Pierrot is the ‘magicien’ with the allure of magic and the black arts, but also of the sage well-versed in occult philosophy, enchantment and illusion. The fluidity and intangibility of enchantment and magic make Pierrot an ambiguous figure intent on wreaking havoc on Cassandra’s stolidity. Pierrot is lashing Cassandra for his moral pedantry and stuffiness and Cassandra’s state reminds one of the ‘Catchpole’ who is beaten nigh to death.¹⁰² The death in Cassandra’s case is that of the dying order of old authority which pretends to be absolute and whose representatives are drearily serious and wear pompous academic gowns of higher learning in which they masquerade as ‘heralds of divine truth’ (Bakhtin 1984: 212-213).

¹⁰² Catchpole is a character in Rabelais. The old French word used was *Chicquanous* and meant someone who liked to quibble or bring lawsuits. (See Bakhtin 1984: 196).

There is also an innuendo to the scourging of the 'King of the Jews' in the thrashing, as Bakhtin notes 'Kings and clowns have the same horoscope' (Bakhtin 1984: 198). The mad spirit of this idea is that the only kingly thing about Cassandra is the beating he is receiving. Pierrot's anger has uncrowned this pedant in an effort to establish the illusionist's higher position. It is pedantry and 'divine truth' which are being opposed by 'the illusionist and black magic'. Pierrot is Mephisto-Faust to Cassandra's Christ-Catchpole, this represents an oscillation of ambiguity where the violence of the beating releases the semiotic drives of Thanatos¹⁰³ and anger into the poem. But ire is also releasing something else, as 'divine truth' is opposed by 'black magic' and the true great play of opposites, that of good and evil, becomes clear. Pierrot, in this role, is seen as satanical and Jean de Palacio has noted that the relation between Pierrot and Satan

[...] n'est qu'un autre de ces paradoxes apparents de la Décadence. Elle participe de ces amalgames, de ces superpositions de figures et de la syncretisme alors couramment pratiqués, et qui puisaient leur force suggestive de l'éloignement même des éléments indûment rapprochés: goût d'unir les inconciliables et d'opérer des alliances contre nature. (Palacio 1990:211)¹⁰⁴

Satan is the demon associated with the deadly sin of ire and the colour red with its symbolism of hellfire and passion for vengeance, violence, blood and war, as well as magic. The most powerful book of Black Magic is the *Grand grimoire* or *Red dragon*; and in the *Book of Revelations* Satan is called a red dragon. William Blake rendered this vision of Satan as The

¹⁰³ Thanatos in Greek mythology was the personification of death. In psychiatric terms it is the 'death instinct' or 'death drive' whereby peace is sought in non-existence. This drive manifests itself in aggressive behaviour.

¹⁰⁴ Just another of the apparent paradoxes of the Decadence. It partakes of the mixtures and superimpositions of figures and of the syncretism then readily employed and which owes its suggestive force to the distance between the elements being brought together: the inclination to unite the incompatible and to effect unnatural unions.

Great Red Dragon in a series of three watercolours, based on the Biblical book of *Revelations*.¹⁰⁵ The immense power of *The Great Red Dragon* is seen in the incredible musculature that Blake provided Satan in the drawing entitled *The Great Red Dragon*. The incredibly huge and rippled structure is grotesquely transformed by the addition of a large serpentine tail revealing the warped, violently reptilian nature of the beast. The twisted horns on his head are also an indication of the change in his nature, from illuminating beauty to grotesque ugliness embodying all the sins. But there is a perverse magnificence that emanates from this figure which, though repulsive in its radiation of powerful tones of pride, anger and evil malevolence, is simultaneously deeply stirring and attractive.

A red mage (magus) is the highest adept of the Black Arts and Pierrot is suddenly no longer the white clown but has morphed into a 'red mage' who brutally scourges Cassandra. Pierrot and Satan are fused into an ambivalent dichotomy. Pierrot's costume shows his relations to Satan, as the black stains on his white front and his black skullcap are representations of sin. The black magic of Pierrot's ire has led him to inflict savage punishment on Cassandra. Suddenly, Pierrot's mood alters, and he lazily, and with smug self-righteousness, leaves off the beating and goes and stretches himself out at the back of the scene like a cat, mocking Cassandra's position. Thus in perfect carnival spirit he swings from violence to absurdly prostrate sweetness: a sweetness that is tinged with the malice of corruption and rightly described as 'absurd and sweet as a lie'. 'Mensonge' denotes 'deceit,

¹⁰⁵ See Figure 12 on page 5.

lie, untruthfulness and illusion' (*Collins Robert French dictionary* 1993: 505). It is a word that wavers and is fluid with etymological associations to the word 'songe' or 'dream'. Illusion and lies are an alteration of reality and truth and in any social context this is entirely unacceptable as it skews the foundations of ideological belief systems and accepted rules. For the liar and the illusionist it is merely a variation on reality, similar to that of the dream world. It is this semiotic ambivalence that vibrates throughout the poem and which reveals that illusion and reality are not truly separable entities. The one is lodged inside the other and this grotesque form allows for the release of the semiotic into the symbolic, ensuring havoc and change. Pierrot's whole mien has progressively altered from an initial scene of Watteauesque tranquillity and gossamer, 'coiffé de tulle aérien',¹⁰⁶ which is exploded by the sickly sweet corruption and violence of Pierrot's malicious ire. Stretching out at the back of the scene is a rather ostentatious gesture. It is the word 'tableau' that is central to the twist in this verse. Giraud is creating a 'painting' or 'tableau' using words. However, 'tableau' is also the closure of a theatrical scene. This scene sometimes created a visual unity between actors and décor which provided the illusion of a fresco; or the scene was constructed to allow the actors to reproduce celebrated paintings or historical scenes.¹⁰⁷ Words, scene and image merge in their ambivalent diversity, which both disturbs and adds levels of meaning hidden within the containing structure of the rondel. The feeling that something unwholesome has illicitly penetrated into something else and that the boundaries between the two have

¹⁰⁶ Draped with airy tulle.

¹⁰⁷ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

started to blur disturbs the reader. This resembles the joining of the thief and the six-legged worm in Dante's *Inferno* where

Till like hot wax they stuck; and, melting in,
Their tints began to mingle and to run,
And neither seemed to be what it had been..... (61-63)¹⁰⁸

All former forms extinct in it,
The perverse image – both at once and neither –
Reeled slowly out of sight on languid feet (76-78).¹⁰⁹

This grotesque intermingling and doubling is found throughout *Pierrot Lunaire*, its ambivalence constantly blurring, altering and changing perspective like a kaleidoscope, as the semiotic vies with the symbolic ensuring that depth and shadow are given to the work.

The grotesque carnival changeability and doubling is noticeable in the title, *Pantomime*. The staged scene of violence, like all carnivalesque acts in pantomime, will cause no lasting harm. Transgression of socially accepted behaviour is at the heart of pantomime and its idealistic scenes conceal the transgressive menace underneath. This is a mirror for the human malice which is contained and hidden beneath social manners; where the semiotic drives are held in check by the rules and structural hierarchies of the symbolic's imposed social etiquette and manners. The grotesque doubling and slippage of Pierrot's persona is carnivalesque in its duplicity, a continual movement of the semiotic

¹⁰⁸ *Poi s'appiccar, come di calda cera
fossero stati, e mischiar lor colore,
né l'un né l'altro già pareva quel ch'era*

¹⁰⁹ *Ogne primaio aspetto ivi era casso:
due e nessun l'immagine perversa
parea; e tal sen gio con lento passo.*

Divine Comedy (Trans. Dorothy L. Sayers) 1949: 228-229 Canto XXV: v 61-63 & 76-78.

impulses which drive and try to dislocate the symbolic constraints of the rondel. This constant flow from semiotic into symbolic fractures the unity of meaning, as it fractures the persona of Pierrot. The scission in Pierrot's persona allows the 'Other' to assume a position in an oscillating, ambivalent doubling which destabilises the surface picturesqueness of the fantasy, allowing that which might be excluded by representation to become visible.

Pierrot can be seen as the 'lieu de rencontre, point de convergence, alliance des contraintes, blanc et noir, parfois compliqué de rouge' (Palacio 1990: 223).¹¹⁰ The red is violence, ire, bloodshed and death. The Seven Deadly Sins are silently accompanied by the vestigial shadow of death which continually reveals and cloaks itself as a permanent flickering, peripheral presence. It morphs in and out of Pierrot himself in the black and in the stains of red. The red tendril in the powdered-white face bleeds through the poems, erupting into floods of blood that issue from the clown 'comme si le blanc appelait le rouge' (Palacio 1990: 71).¹¹¹

xx The yearning of avarice

The red associated with Pierrot's mouth is found in both *Parodie* (42)¹¹² and *Pierrot voleur* (14),¹¹³ where it colours the desirous yearning of ancient lady Avarice. In *Parodie*, Avarice's representative is the intense duenna:

¹¹⁰ Meeting place, point of convergence, compelled union, black and white, sometimes complicated by red.

¹¹¹ As if the white were calling out to the red.

¹¹² *Parody*.

¹¹³ *Pierrot the thief*.

Des aiguilles à tricoter
Dans sa vieille perruque grise,
La duègne, en casaquin cerise,
Ne se lasse de marmotter.

Knitting needles
In her old, grey wig
The duenna, in cherry bodice,
Never ceases muttering.

The stain of red covering her breast and the knitting needles in her grey wig combine with her muttering to create a strangely foreboding image of a mad old woman. Chaucer's parson in *The Parson's Tale* indicated that avarice was accompanied by the habit of muttering and murmuring, but this is a habit common to anyone and can also be indicative of a high-level of emotional stress or self-involvement. This duenna appears taut and agitated, as her muttering pours forth from her in a continuous stream. The word 'duègne' or duenna, stems originally from the Latin word 'domina' which means a mistress or lady of rank, or the superior of a nunnery. In Spain the word was applied to the queen's chief lady-in-waiting. The meaning gradually altered to an old lady chaperon, or governess to the young ladies of her employer (*Shorter Oxford English dictionary* vol.1 1973: 615).

The word is strangely polyvalent and grotesquely twisted, containing complete opposites within its own symbolic boundaries. The 'domina' root immediately conjures the sense of dominance or the 'dominatrix', the ultimate *femme fatale*. The strength of this root meaning, combined with the elderliness of the duenna, generates an image of an ancient harpy, or virago, filled with the mutterings of repressed, perverse desire. The odd nature of this image explodes at the reader who is both repulsed and amused at the notion of an elderly woman fulfilling the role of *femme fatale*; one who seems to be driven by some overriding, insatiable passion. The play on

‘mistress’ contained within the term ‘domina’ adds to the incongruity and ambiguity of the duenna, as the idea of a mistress being an elderly hag is grotesque and distasteful, imploding the accepted social expectations. Mistresses are culturally viewed as filled with the freshness of youth and its bloom and never with the wrinkles and sagging flesh of age. However, within the context of this verse, Giraud brings age, youth, desire and death together within the confines of a single word. This incompleting grotesque ambivalence of ‘duègne’ challenges the boundaries of symbolic definition and allows the semiotic to escape and release its transgressive fluidity and desiring greed into the poem. It overturns accepted notions and turns avaricious desire topsy-turvy as it displaces passion from youth to age and the role of hunter to that of huntress. The male is an absent and entirely passive presence.

The splash of cherry red startles the reader. A colour of passion, blood, anger and violence, it is an unusual colour for an elderly duenna to be wearing. This becomes more peculiar when it is understood that the word ‘cerise’ (cherry), figuratively denotes spring, youth and the beginning of life. However, the word has a darker aspect to it, as it can also mean ‘bad luck’.¹¹⁴ An added ambivalence wraps itself around the duenna and this bright cherry splash drives the semiotic to the surface of the poem in a flowering of carnivalesque *jouissance*. The duenna is ambiguously doubled, as she simultaneously contains both age and youth within the confines of her own person. She is the divided subject that is permanently moving between

¹¹⁴ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

states. She epitomises the nature of the grotesque where something is inside something else; an instability and mutability which ensures a sense of unease. Like the 'laughing, pregnant hags' mentioned by Bakhtin (1984: 25), the duenna is a combination of both life and death. This duality is reminiscent of the medieval picture of a young woman who is split in two in a mirror which reflects one half of her as young and the other half as a skeleton.¹¹⁵ This reflection reveals the integral relationship that exists between life and death. All living entities contain their death within themselves, the two states are inseparable. The mutability associated with woman can be seen in a detail taken from Gustav Klimt's *Beethoven frieze: The hostile forces*. The detail is dominated by the lurking, skeletal hag who hangs pendulously and loathsomely over the three young maidens who coyly pose in the foreground of the work. This hag is what is concealed behind each of the beautiful façades. The further title of the painting is revelatory: *The three gorgons: sickness, madness, death*.¹¹⁶ Here is the result of Avarice as personified by these figures and the duenna. Woman is a gorgon who bears madness, sickness and death into the world of humankind.

During the Decadence this vision of woman was prominent and all-pervasive: she was seen as both the bringer of life and, more importantly, the giver of death. Giraud's duenna allows the states of life and death to morph one into the other without any separation, as there are no representational or physical boundaries. The image merely flows through the words in a semiotically transgressive manner, upsetting and questioning the nature of

¹¹⁵ See Figure 13 en page 5.

¹¹⁶ See Figure 14 en page 5.

appearance. The duenna is an illustration of the ambivalent dualism of the carnivalesque grotesque body however; she is also a slightly more sinister figure in her avaricious desire:

Sous la treille elle vient guetter	Under the arbour she lurks
Pierrot dont sa chair est éprise,	Flesh burning with desire for Pierrot,
Des aiguilles à tricoter	Knitting needles
Dans sa vieille perruque grise.	In her old, grey wig

The word ‘guetter’ indicates that the duenna’s intentions are fuelled by motives that bode ill. She is lurking under the arbour, hidden and biding her time, waiting to entrap Pierrot. The word ‘treille’ refers to an arbour made of vines, and though other clinging plants were used, it was generally a vine arbour. ‘Treille’ also means a net used for catching shrimp or prawns.¹¹⁷ Like a maenad, the duenna is fired by mad passion and framed by the vine. In her mad maenad-like state she is closely related to the Moon and lunacy. The frenzy of the maenad was an altered state of mind and behaviour that could lead to murder, but which also denoted violent and agonised love, where the Dionysian spirit and madness were fused. The duenna’s avaricious, mad desire, the burning of her flesh, is a bacchantic sexual desire for Pierrot’s essence. She wants to catch him and consume him. Her desire is taut with a tingling menace, the *femme fatale*’s intensity that ensures that the male object of desire will become a willing or unwilling victim. The savagery and insane passion attached to desire are focused on the knitting needles, so innocently stuck in the grey wig. These needles, with which Giraud opens the rondel, are not the inert sign of the female past-time of knitting, an activity generally regarded as the province of little old ladies, but an

¹¹⁷ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

ominous instrument of frenzy and possible death. In military slang ‘aiguilles à tricoter’ can mean an épée, foil or bayonet.¹¹⁸ A sense of dread is evoked by these glinting needles stuck in the wig as their capacity for aggressive stabbing and violation of the body with the prospect of death slides into the reader’s consciousness. The maenad was allied to death and love, as she could intentionally cause the death of the beloved who refrained from loving her (Schlesier 1993: 110).

The duenna’s desire for Pierrot is so intense that the possibility of the implosion of Eros into Thanatos is creepily apparent; Pierrot is not a love object, but prey. Driven by her avariciousness to possess Pierrot entirely for herself, her greed becomes a lust to consume life. The duenna personifies the sadistic, vindictive and alluring *femme fatale* who brings only death to the object for which she burns with desire. However, the chinks in her delusion are mockingly exposed by the breeze’s shrill whistles:

Soudain elle entend éclater	Suddenly she hears
Les sifflets pointus de la brise:	The shrill whistles of the breeze:
La Lune rit de la méprise,	The Moon laughs at the delusion,
Et ses rais semblent imiter	And her rays appear to mimic
Des aiguilles à tricoter.	Knitting needles.

The shrill whistles, like wolf whistles, deceive the duenna, but the sound does not betoken the presence, or expressive admiration, of the person she craves. The wolf is the animal associated with the sin of avarice and the demon Mammon. The breeze, it seems, is making a pointed comment on the duenna’s insatiable obsession. It also carries with it the laughter of the Moon

¹¹⁸ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

which is aimed at the duenna and both the whistles and the laughter are at her expense. Giraud uses the noun 'méprise' which means 'mistake, misapprehension, error, delusion'. This is very close to the noun 'mépris' which means 'scorn or contempt'. This homophonic play with words and meaning allows the mixing together of scorn and delusion in a semiotic fusion. The Moon mocks the duenna's deluded passion for Pierrot and her foolishness at being deceived by the wolf whistles of the breeze. Pierrot, though physically absent from the poem, is evoked through the presence of his tutelary deity. Pierrot is the invisible glue which unites the Moon and the duenna, subsumed in some manner by both. He is the object of contention but is simultaneously an absence, a lack, which both Moon and duenna crave to fill. This mistaken craving is what raises pointed laughter.

The Moon's laughter is seen in her beams of light which have taken on the shape of knitting needles in mocking parody of the duenna. It is obvious that the Moon sees Pierrot as belonging entirely to herself and she is unlikely to cede him to the duenna. Her rays become a jealous protective crown for what she considers as belonging to her. Virginal, white needles of light appear like the crown of the Lady Mary opposing the earthly avaricious and desiring needles of the duenna as Mistress Eve. The conflict between the *femme fatale* (earth) and the goddess (heaven) is visible in this interaction. The crown of thorns is made up of needles of moonlight but the scolding laughter attached to these rays elides and destabilises any notion of a separation between the evil of the earth and the goodness of the heaven, between *femme fatale* and goddess, as this goddess of the sky is as

bacchantic and lunatic as the duenna. Identity is blurred in a wonderfully grotesque manner as Moon and duenna are conflated in their desire for Pierrot. The Moon's desire for Pierrot is as avaricious and rapacious as the duenna's and equally as dangerous.

Both the Moon and the duenna share the desire for the 'Other' and Pierrot is merely an object that they believe will slake this need. This need swiftly alters from Eros to Thanatos and love becomes perverted into the death drive and wish. Pierrot's life is the only coin that will satisfy their mutual greed. Their laughter and muttering combine in a swell of 'words deprived of language... the obstinate murmur of a language which speaks by itself, uttered by no-one and answered by no-one' (Foucault in Felman 1985: 41)¹¹⁹ that bubbles and boils in a *jouissance* of madness. This glossolalic noise of avaricious desire destroys the boundaries of symbolic definition in a grotesque parody of orgiastic release that is haunted by the greedy spectre of death and the splash of blood red. This trail of avid red blazes forth in the bloodshed and glory found in the gleam of red rubies in *Pierrot voleur* (14):¹²⁰

Les rouges rubis souverains,	Royal, red rubies,
Injectés de meurtre et de gloire,	Inflamed with murder and glory,
Sommeillent au creux d'une armoire	Drowse in a hollow chest
Dans l'horreur des longs souterrains.	In the horror of underground galleries.

The rubies seem to possess some illness or malignancy as Giraud uses the word 'injecté' meaning 'injected, inflamed or congested' which are medical

¹¹⁹ murmure obstiné d'un langage qui parlerait *tout seul* – sans sujet parlant et sans interlocuteur, tassé sur lui-même. (Michel Foucault *Dits et Écrits 1 Préface de 1961*. p. 16)

¹²⁰ *Pierrot the thief*.

terms. The stones appear to be feverishly ill in colour, caused by the taint of murder they contain and which causes them to blaze the red of blood-fuelled passion. Lady Avarice seems to reside at the heart of these blood-coloured jewels. The stones have aroused contradictory impulses, the transgressive desire to commit murder in order to attain them and the craving for the esteem and regality associated with the glory that they represent. The ideal of glory is always accompanied by the darker undertones of bloodshed that has resulted from the display of power and subjugation. Glory is a many-faceted word, containing both positive and negative qualities within itself, that indicate duplicity and ambivalence. Glory and bloodshed oscillate one into the other, becoming inseparable in their joint need to satisfy avaricious desires. Yet glory is also a state of religious exultation ensuring that this word vibrates between the contradictory meanings that it contains. The attainment of earthly possessions or desires confronts the spiritual rapture and transcendence of religious belief.

The rubies represent the red of rapture and spilt blood, a symbol of desire and passion. It is the acquisitive nature of desire and passion that leads to the need for possession bringing with it the cost of death. 'Gloire', 'meurtre' and 'souverain' suffuse the verse with the blazing blood light of the rubies. These words flow and become twisted into one another in a grotesque joining where the primal semiotic drive of avarice gleams and glows out of the rubies and the sinister intrigue between glory, murder and things royal is clearly reflected in the stones. These rubies imbued with murder and glory, appear inflamed and drowsy, demonstrating the ambivalent logic that

Kristeva associates with poetic language. The attribution of traits that would not normally be applied to inanimate objects is a transgression of the laws of the logic of everyday communication. This allows the semiotic to burst free and alter the meaning and the nature of the rubies, by releasing the play of opposites which oscillate in the words used to describe them. As Mallarmé wrote:

The pure work implies the disappearance of the speaking poet, who yields his initiative to words, mobilized by the shock of their differences; they light up with reciprocal reflections like a virtual trail of sparks over jewels. (Mallarmé 1945: 366)¹²¹

It is the differences contained within Giraud's words that glint off the rubies and seep out of the rondel's structure like blood, in a semiotic sundering of the symbolic's control of given meaning.

These somnolent, glowing rubies lying in their hollow chest are not asleep, but neither are they awake, it is as though they are patiently awaiting some event. Like the slitted red-eyes of an avaricious dragon, or demon, they gleam and glint in the dark. An atmosphere of macabre despoilment, bloodshed and doom seems to emanate from the stones. The word 'souterrain' means subterranean, underworld or underground tunnels, passages, galleries, caverns or any constructed underground building.¹²² The rubies are in their natural element in the catachthonian darkness of the earth. They appear to be buried in their own catacomb, where they lie dreaming,

¹²¹ L'œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries.

¹²² *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

illuminated with the fire-like eyes of Mammon, the demon of avarice, who seems to be their guard, one that lies patiently in wait.

‘Souterrain’ is rhymed with ‘souverains’, the subterranean, or underworld, is joined to the sovereign and an image of hell or Hades rises out of the horror of the galleries, which blaze with the red of the stones and their associated sin. These blood stones are reminiscent of fine red pomegranate seeds. In Greek mythology red pomegranate seeds are associated with Persephone who ate these ruby-red grains, either through trickery, or through desire, when she was trapped in the underworld. The pomegranate itself had sprung from the blood of Dionysus when he was killed. Persephone ingested these blood seeds which sealed her fate as the goddess of the underworld and her role as an aspect of the Triple goddess, another face of which is the Moon. Avarice, death and madness seem to be commingled in the ruby-coloured jewel seeds. The passion and desire that these precious red stones evoke is closely attended on by the handmaidens of avarice and death.

Beneath her garb of precious stones avarice bears the hoof of the devil. A *femme fatale* of incredible attraction, she lures through her ability to inflame the human heart with greed. The *femme fatale* as possessed by the devil is nowhere more apparent than in the etching by Félicien Rops called *La femme et la folie dominant le monde*.¹²³ Here a young, luscious, naked female in an alluring pose is given devil’s hooves instead of feet. She is the

¹²³ See Figure 15 on page 5 (*Woman and madness dominate the world*). There is an alternate title to the etching which is *La prostitution et la folie dominant le monde*, which offers a slightly different perspective on it.

femme fatale as the devil's creature and all men who avariciously desire her are damned to madness and to death. Death, avarice's shadow, laughs and reaps the rewards of murderous desire. Avarice spurs and maddens the soul with concupiscence, which leads to death's abode where the rubies lie in languid brilliance.

Drunken Pierrot, along with some brigands, is lured by the siren call of the stones which he decides to steal:

Pierrot, avec des malandrins,
Veut ravir un jour, après boire,
Les rouges rubis souverains,
Injectés de meurtre et de gloire.

Pierrot along with brigands,
After a day's drinking, wants to ravish
Royal, red rubies,
Inflamed with murder and glory.

The word 'ravir' or 'ravish' is an unusual adjective to use in connection with the greed for inanimate objects. 'Ravish' is associated with the human and the fleshly, yet it is also the removal by force or slyness of property belonging to another. This property is not necessarily that which is inanimate. Ravish can mean to seduce, abduct or rape. The sexual, erotic and fleshly connotations that are hidden in the word seem to perfuse the stones with sensuality. The word breathes life into these stones and their colour holds the promise of rapine and pillage and reveals the appeal they hold for the baser, venal nature of humankind.

But the sexual side of 'ravish' is in opposition to the religious meaning that it possesses. This is a rapture that goes beyond the physical: it is the ecstatic ravishment of the soul that elevates it to a higher, spiritual and mystical plane. *The ecstasy of St. Theresa* by Bernini is a magnificent portrayal of this

spiritual ravishment,¹²⁴ which at the same time is an accurate representation of the bliss of orgasm. The little angel with the arrow standing over St Theresa is ambivalent, as his resemblance to the pagan Cupid is obvious. The anguish of the stabbing arrow, a rape of love's bliss, and the statue is filled with the ambiguity that 'rapture' implies. The need to be consumed by this bliss, to be raped into ecstasy, is nowhere better illustrated than in John Donne's poem *Batter my heart three-personed God*,¹²⁵ where the ravishment is fervently desired because it, and it alone, promises exultant rapture. The orgiastic desire for this religious state of possession is only thinly separated from that of the thief's overpowering desire for material possessions. One is condoned as an expression of the purest sanctity, whilst the other is regarded as a sinful transgression of the symbolic laws governing societal interaction. Both are a release of the primal semiotic drives which clash with the governing restraints of the symbolic.

The word 'ravish' thus contains within itself the transgression of boundaries and the fluid alteration of states with the promise of both loss and gain, even if the gain is that of encountering death. Persephone underwent this change when Pluto abducted her. There is a vagueness concerning whether she was raped or merely stolen. The blood-red of the pomegranate seeds, the food of the dead that her desire or greed made her consume clung to her lips, much like the vermilion of Pierrot's lips. It is the same sanguine-colour of the stones that draws Pierrot. He and his cohorts plan to carry out a similar

¹²⁴ See Figure 16 on page 5.

¹²⁵ Smith, A.J. (ed.). 1973. *John Donne: The complete English poems*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p.314.

abduction and ravishment of the stones, in a reversal of Persephone's tale. Giraud's use of the word 'ravish' has sliced through the preconceptions of everyday usage and surprises and unsettles the reader. The thought of rubies as female entities which are open to plunder, conquest and violation adds a physicality to the stones that is incongruous. The semiotic drives, with their violence, undermine and invert expectations and in doing so alter the meaning of the symbolic. As Kristeva indicates:

The text's principle characteristic and the one that distinguishes it from other signifying practices, is precisely that it introduces, through binding and through vital and symbolic differentiation, heterogeneous rupture and rejection: *jouissance* and death. This would seem to be "art's" function as a signifying practice: under the pleasing exterior of a very socially acceptable differentiation, art reintroduces into society fundamental rejection, which is matter in the process of splitting. (Kristeva 1984: 180)

Pierrot's bravura and desire to steal these blood gems has been fuelled by alcohol. His state is therefore doubly transgressive, avarice abetted by drunkenness. Giraud rhymes the word 'boire' (to drink) with the word 'gloire' (glory). It seems that in Pierrot's case drink and glory are tied to one another and this rhythmical linkage to drink further sullies and undermines the concept of glory. All the baser aspects of human nature are combined into a word that used in normal communication, describes religious fervour and honourable jingoistic acts. Here, honour is to be found amongst a band of brigands and a cowardly clown, who has a propensity to alter character in a manner that mirrors the facets of the red stones themselves.

Avarice is the sin that creates thieves and murderers and inflames the heart with avidity, but Pierrot's avarice is never to be satisfied, as the blazing red of the stones scares the cohorts from committing the theft:

Mais la peur hérissé leurs crins:	But dread bristles their manes:
Parmi le velours et la moire,	Amidst the velvet and the moiré,
Comme des yeux dans l'ombre noire,	Like eyes in black shadow,
S'enflamment du fonds des écrins	Blaze from the bottom of the casket
Les rouges, rubis souverains!	Royal, red rubies!

The blaze of the rubies in the dark causes terror in the potential thieves. The rubies lie in royal estate, nestled in velvet and moiré, in all their richness and fluidity. Hidden in the casket in the gloom and shadows, these rubies are filled with a fire the glow of which flames in the dark. The sight of the flames raises the hair on the bodies of the thieves.

Giraud has used a strange word to describe this bristling action. The word 'les crins' in every day French is the term for a mane of a horse. Giraud's use of this word to describe the physical response of Pierrot and his gang is a slippage of meaning, as it grotesquely fuses animal characteristics and human reactions. This hybridity reveals the grotesque doubled nature of Pierrot, as well as the ambivalence and carnival nature of poetic language where a particular logic holds its implicit negation (Lechte 1990: 109). Like spooked animals, sensing that something is wrong, the band of thieves bristles with instinctual fear and supernatural horror. Dread hides in the dark shadows and in the imperceptible presence of avaricious death with her blood price. The fluid grotesqueness and ominous balefulness of the rubies and the cupidity they inspire are juxtaposed to the animalistic fear of the drunken, rapacious thieves. The semiotic breaks loose and the staid controlling normalcy of the symbolic is lost as the drives of fear,

avarice and death collide. The reader, too, bristles at the eerie nature of the verse and the threatening feeling of something maliciously enticing. The stones and their queen are alluring sirens, the *femmes fatales* of the underworld. They cause a *frisson* of fear and attraction that repulses and daunts Pierrot and his accomplices and makes the reader uneasy.

But the title *Pierrot the thief* is laughably ambivalent as Pierrot fails to steal anything. The notion of thief and its 'Other' are therefore held in an ambivalent relation. Pierrot is seen as 'lâche, d'une lâcheté constitutionnelle et invincible' (Henry Ceard in Palacio 1990:14).¹²⁶ Though Pierrot appears to be the disciple of Mammon, his fear and cowardice leave him with only the ruby bloodshed of his silent mouth as prize. Fear of the dark and what it contains allows Pierrot and his cohorts to recoil from the clutching shadowy gloom escaping the hunger of the queen of the dead.

As a cowardly thief Pierrot manages to transgress both the notion of the hero and the anti-hero. His rapidly altering character (the ambivalence of which allows him to be 'many' whilst espousing no fixed traits) confers on him his fantastical allure. This fluidity readily allows him to abandon and forget the pose of thief and assume the role of one suffering from the malaise of melancholic boredom and spleen.

¹²⁶ Cowardly, with a cowardliness that is constitutional and unconquerable.

xxi Insidious sloth

A thread of red dribbles into *L'Église* (27)¹²⁷ and the surrounding tenebrous melancholy exhales softly. Wafting into the fragrant, gloomy church, Pierrot is a moonbeam figure whose presence seems to startle the ponderous atmosphere where

Et soudain les cierges sans nombre, Déchirant le soir expiré, Saignent sur l'autel illustré, Comme les blessures de l'Ombre, Dans l'Église odorante et sombre.	Suddenly tapers without number, Rend the expiring night, On the illustrated altar bleed, Like the wounds of Darkness, In the odorous gloomy Church.
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The candles flare, piercing and tearing the expiring night like fine, fiery swords. An aura of violent death and sombre melancholy, like black bile, bubbles from the verse. This penitential light seems to be trying to stave off the shadows of tenebrous gloom. Yet, the life of this light is short, as the tapers stabbing the night are themselves expiring. They deliquesce and bleed onto the altar like the blood of the night, or of occultic sacrificial victims. Death, darkness and melancholy pervade the scene and an inkling of something ominously wicked and sinful drifts on the vaporous, fragrant duskiness.

The word 'Ombre' (darkness or shadow) is capitalized where this is grammatically unnecessary and places stress upon the word, emphasizing it. This capitalisation is only applicable when reference is being made to the infernal, or the Satanic. The disturbance of the verse line through the use of the majuscule allows the semiotic drives to invade the church. Here they

¹²⁷ *The Church.*

combine with a dark presence to lend an atmosphere of malign reversal to this place of worship. The Prince of Darkness and the sin of sloth dominate the church. They are accompanied by the melancholic presence of death, humankind's punishment for sin. The candles have opened the wounds of Darkness and simultaneously become the blood of these wounds in a form of self-sacrifice. Blood, wounds and self-sacrifice, the end result of mankind's sin, were the elements the church founded itself upon. The gloom and torpidity that reign inside this church, with their stagnant miasma of misery, make it the perfect abode for the sin of sloth. The lethargy and loss of spiritual striving that accompanies melancholy sloth causes an inversion of belief and allows the satanic demon of wanhope to slip free. The semiotic, with its dark transgressive drives slithers into the murkiness and the symbolic is toppled, as it is incapable of controlling death or limiting sloth. So, like the fragrance, sloth and death float freely in the dimness of the church.

The blackness and drive to extinction that sloth represents allies it closely with death. Sloth incarnates the figure of the *femme fatale*, as a disguise for the presence of death, of which sloth is the embodiment, seducing and enticing mankind into sin. It was woman who, according to the teachings of the Church, originally brought sin into the world and with sin came the punishment of death. Woman gives life and in so doing she also imparts the gifts of sin and death which greedily gobble humans up again. Neither sin, nor death can be stopped by the symbolic as they exceed it and yet are contained simultaneously within it. Thus the church is incapable of denying death, but has chosen to expound the belief, in the illusion of eternal life, but

to attain this vaunted state necessitates dying. The only redemption for sin is death and the reason for death is sin: this tautology vibrates and oscillates at the centre of the church and its beliefs.

The capitalisation of ‘Ombre’ is balanced by the capitalisation of ‘Église’ (Church/ Christian religion),¹²⁸ two foes locked in permanent opposition and battle. The ambivalence of the church is found in its attempt to absorb all opposing forces. The darkness of sin, blood and death are thus placed in opposition and confrontation with the offering of forgiveness, everlasting life and bliss. These are all concepts and ideas that are central to the doctrines, beliefs and body of the church and a strange tension holds these contrary forces in place. But it is not difficult for one of them to break free, thereby transgressing and inverting the system. It is the sin of sloth, with its gloom and melancholy, that has floated free and exudes the murky stagnation, desuetude and torpor apparent inside the church. This lugubriousness is aided by the punctuation of the verse, as every line has the pausing closure of a comma, which emphasises slowness and structure, mirroring the ponderous architecture of the building. However, Giraud disturbs the role of the church as nurturing provider of forgiveness, love and eternal life and shows in its stead a sombre edifice built on destructiveness, blood and sacrifice; one permanently dominated by the fear of sin and the eerie presence of death. The fragrant gloom, with its many candles and altar, evokes an infernalism associated with Satanism and the Church’s rites and

¹²⁸ The capitalisation of the word Church ensures that the word takes on more than the simple meaning of the architectural building. In Catholicism it means the entire body of the religion, rites, dogma, belief, practice and all who serve the establishment, in particular the Pope.

dogma are quickly and easily transposed and demonised. The ambiguous nature of good and evil are exposed as is their interdependence.

A sense of macabre, sardonic laughter pervades the gloom as Kayser observed: 'Laughter combined with bitterness which takes the grotesque form acquires the traits of mockery and cynicism, and finally becomes satanic' (Kayser in Bakhtin 1984: 51). This laughter exposes the hidden presence of evil in the sacredness of the Church itself. It is this macabre, mocking laughter that is so well described in the following lines from Kristeva's *Black Sun*:

Clasped in the arms of Death, no one escapes its grip, a fatal one to be sure, but here anguish conceals its own depressive force and displays defiance through sarcasm or the grimace of a mocking smile, lacking triumphancy, as if, in the knowledge of being done for, laughter was the only answer. (Kristeva 1989b: 118)

Anguish and melancholy, the defining aspects of sloth, combine with death and laughter to transgress the seriousness and the ponderous rituals of the Church, in a verse that satanically profanes this institution. The illustrated altar with its wounds of darkness and waxy blood prefigures the wounds of the Madonna and the altar of the poet's verses in the poem *Évocation* (28).¹²⁹ The red eyes of the rubies in *Pierrot voleur* (14)¹³⁰ are mirrored in the 'red, open eyes' found in *Évocation*, the title of which has a mystical, otherworldly allure. A sense of spirits, death, memory and hankering is kindled. Evocation is a calling out to the dead and seems to flow outwards from the poem and the Madonna:

¹²⁹ *Evocation*.

¹³⁰ *Pierrot the thief*.

O Madone des Hystéries!
Monte sur l'autel de mes vers,
La fureur du glaive à travers
Tes maigres mamelles taries!

O Madonna of Hysteria!
Ascend upon the altar of my verses,
The fury of the glaive has pierced
Your meagre, withered breasts!

The Madonna is no longer the stoic, beautiful and grieving Virgin. Hysteria, the madness closely associated with women, has seized her and her passion appears uncontrolled. This hysterical and melancholic disturbance of reason, as the result of sin, represents the triumph of sloth. The seven sorrows of the Virgin seem to have become focused into this single, deadly sin.

The poet offers his verses to the Madonna as an altar upon which to ascend. It is as though his verses will lift her from a low estate to one of superiority, thus ennobling her and allowing her to attain spiritual transcendence. But an altar is also a symbol of sacrifice and bloodletting. In the medieval and renaissance Church the altar was decorated with scenes depicting the life of Christ in which the serene Virgin appeared. She was rarely depicted as distraught and never as hysterical. Yet, there is a *Pietà*, *The Röttgen Pietà*, which represents an entirely different view of Mary, closer to the grotesque portrayal in Giraud's poem. Here the Madonna is not young and beautiful; instead she has a drawn face that seems to wail with the agony of the Man of Sorrows, her son, who lies in her lap. His body is skeletally thin, he wears a crown of thorns and his face and limbs are blood-spattered and large drops of blood well from the cut in his side.¹³¹ But the poet has transgressed and reversed the role and the nature of the Virgin even further than this haggard sculpture. He has made her human and fallible and in her madness he has

¹³¹ See Figure 17 on page 5 .

inserted the seed of sloth with its creeping sadness and misery. He further damages her image by describing her as having been pierced by a sword. The glaive is a double-edged sword that also functioned as a spear or lance, like the sword of Damocles, which symbolised the power and vengeance of a god. The use of the word 'fureur', or fury, drives the glaive with a force and hatred that is unexpected, particularly when aimed at the Virgin. It has pierced her breast and the poet seems to transpose the wound of Christ onto the Virgin. She appears to be suffering severe punishment, as though God were enraged with her and exacting vengeance. It would appear that the death of her son is her fault. Her breasts are also not those generally associated with images of the Virgin, they are like the withered dugs of an ancient crone. In the Catholic religion, divine knowledge came from the breasts of the Virgin. Therefore the description of the breasts as withered is an indication that the poet regards divine knowledge as having dried up. The misery of sloth seems to have emaciated the Virgin's spirit and ability to interceded with heaven and perhaps it is this sinful sorrow that has earned her the fury of the glaive. The poet brings the sacred and the profane together in a carnivalesque grotesque transgression and the Madonna is seen as mortal and sinful. In this she mirrors the Madonna of Baudelaire:

Enfin, pour compléter ton rôle de Marie,
Et pour mêler l'amour avec la barbarie,
Volupté noire ! Des sept Péchés capitaux,
Bourreau plein de remords, je ferai sept couteaux
Bien affilés, et comme un jongleur insensible,
Prenant le plus profond de ton amour pour cible,
Je les planterai tous dans ton Cœur pantelant,
Dans ton Cœur sanglotant, dans ton Cœur ruisselant!

Finally, to complete your role of Mary,
And to mix love with inhumanity,
Infamous pleasure! Of the Seven Deadly Sins,

I, torturer full of remorse, shall make seven
Well sharpened Daggers and, like a callous juggler,
Taking your deepest love for a target,
I shall plant them all in your panting Heart,
In your sobbing Heart, in your bleeding Heart!¹³²

Baudelaire makes his Madonna all too human. To increase the profanation of her sacredness, he pierces her heart with daggers fashioned from the Seven Deadly Sins. This parodies the Catholic iconography of the Madonna with seven swords of sorrow through her heart which she holds in front of her. Though her heart is pierced there are no marks on the Virgin, the heart is symbolic. Baudelaire's depiction is a gleeful and purposeful revenge and inversion of good by evil. However, the evil is seen as inherently present within the sacred object. The poet has juggled a reversal and the sadistic, infamous pleasure of Satanism overwrites and simultaneously co-exists within sacredness. The wounds of darkness are those stains of sin which exist inside the soul.

Giraud uses a similar transgression of the sacred in the depiction of the Madonna. However, he takes it further, inflicting wounds to her breast, which are like open red-eyes:

Tes blessures endolories	Your wounds of suffering
Semblent de rouges yeux ouverts:	Like eyes red and open:
O Madone des Hystéries!	O Madonna of Hysteria!
Monte sur l'autel de mes vers!	Ascend upon the altar of my verses!

Her suffering is inflicted on her life-sustaining attributes of motherhood, which are slashed and wounded. The wounds are part of her hysteria and

¹³² Baudelaire, C. (tr. William Aggeler), *The flowers of evil*: 1954. www.fleursdumal.org/poem/209.

represent the suffering of sloth, but though the wounds are like eyes, yet they are non-seeing and lack any insight. All grace has been drained from this Madonna. She is sterile, through her suffering sloth has leached away her sacredness and her mystical allure. The sense of fatigue and anguish completely enfolds and fills this Virgin. She is the ‘mater dolorosa’¹³³ and she exhibits a spiritual lethargy as she holds out her son in long and ‘exhausted’ hands:

De tes longues mains appauvries,	Your long impoverished hands,
Tends à l’incrédule univers	Offer to the sceptical world
Ton Fils aux membres déjà verts,	Your Son with limbs already green,
Aux chairs tombantes et pourries,	Flesh wasting and rotten,
O Madone des Hystéries!	O Madonna of Hysteria!

The verb ‘appauvrir’ in the past tense means impoverished, lacking in fertility, exhausted; meanings that enforce the spiritual inertness and depleting presence of sloth in the poem (*Collins Robert French dictionary* 1993: 38). The despairing derangement of melancholy that rises from the Madonna releases the underlying semiotic drives into the poem. These drives are focused in the gaze of disbelief and repugnance that the ‘sceptical world’ passes over the remains of the Madonna’s son. The validity of the Madonna and son is sloughed off into the worldly malaise of indifference and doubt. At the centre of this dejection there is an oscillating state of duality. Non-Christians saw melancholy as a state of grace having a spiritual dimension that was not only good but also divine. For the Christian church melancholy arose from original sin and was therefore anathema as it was considered Satanic. Melancholy is in constant ambiguous motion between its ecstatic and satanic components. The

¹³³ Grieving Mother.

Madonna is firmly in the grips of sloth with its transgressive hysterical lunacy. The results of sin are visible in the remnants of her son. The body that she holds out to the world is rotting and putrid with gangrene, this dissolution is the result of the evilness of sin that brings about the end of life through a dissolution of the flesh and the abjection of death. Death is the beyond, the border that is established by the rules of life and the physical body. Death beckons and calls and its aim is to disintegrate and alter identity and order. For the Madonna's son, death of the body was payment for sin. The deliquescence of the physical form into the abject horror of the rotting cadaver displays death as:

Immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. (Kristeva 1982: 4)

The image of the son's death is repulsive, but is simultaneously humorous, in a macabre manner. It is a monstrosity that contains the principle of laughter, which cannot be restrained by the symbolic. The corpse can be thrust aside by means of this laughter; the poison and putrid decay of what was sacred both attracts and repulses in an ambiguous see-saw movement. The grotesque nature of the sacred is seen to bear the putrid darkness of sin within itself. This sin makes the boundaries of the corpse permeable and allows the Satanism of the profane to invade the purity of the sacred. For the poet, the sins of the flesh have overcome and defeated the sacred that is now dominated by death and the misery of sloth. The dismal abjection of death is, as Kristeva observes,

A source of evil and mingled with sin, abjection becomes the requisite for a reconciliation in the mind, between the flesh and the law. "It is at

once what produces the disease, and the source of health, [it is the poisoned cup in which man drinks death and putrefaction, and at the same time the fount of reconciliation; indeed, to set oneself up as evil is to abolish evil in oneself]”. (Kristeva 1982: 127-128)

Through this inversion of the sacred the poet has revealed the Satanism beneath and this knowledge explodes from the poem in satirical laughter which is filled with both fascinated temptation, aversion and loathing. The poet has forcibly joined the sacred to the profane in an effort to unveil the hidden corruption, which lurks within the sacred. Sloth and death seem to have overcome and defeated the Madonna and her son through their combined despondency and abjection. The *femme fatale* figures of sloth and death, with their defiling and destructive aims, stand in direct opposition to the sacred nature of the Madonna and her son. The poet is an accomplice to the act of morphing the sacred into the Satanic, but simultaneously he offers his verses as an altar of escape to the Madonna. The fact that it is the poet, and not Pierrot, who suddenly reappears and addresses the Madonna in the first person, is what causes a fracturing duality within the poem. The emotional response of the poet to the Madonna is personalised and the bitter disbelief is made more vivid. However, the personal is sharded and reflected through the distancing figure of Pierrot and through the structure of the verse. It was Pierrot who originally entered the church and the poet seems to have morphed from the moonbeam body of the clown to stand directly before the reader and this *Pietà*. The symbolic is thrown into disarray and the semiotic drives of sin, death, madness and laughter overwhelm the verses and the reader in satanic mayhem. The contents of the poem are in fluid transgression, one image merging into another and only the integument of the rondel's structure

manages to prevent a complete implosion of the symbolic. Everything becomes ambiguous and unstable and the borders of identity blur. The poet's presence flickers and vibrates, slowly metamorphosing into the form of melancholy white storks.

In *Les cigognes* (33)¹³⁴ these white storks are silhouetted against a bile-black horizon and in this stygian landscape the storks are not only mournful, but the sun is 'despairing' and 'dying', as the inky sky of night overwhelms the glowing embers of day. The beaks of the storks clatter together in a solemn dirge to the death of the day that resembles the noise of a skeleton's jaw. This macabre lament and the bodies of the storks, lost in their woe, re-evoke the sad, gawky figure of Pierrot. It is this lugubrious Pierrot who, consumed with languorous dejection and enervated, weary boredom, is found in *Spleen* (15):¹³⁵

Pierrot de Bergame s'ennuie:
Il renonce aux charmes du vol;
Son étrange gaîté de fol
Comme un oiseau blanc s'est enfuie.

Pierrot from Bergamo is weary
He renounces the charms of theft
His peculiar madman's gaiety
Like a white bird has flown.

The verb 's'ennuyer' epitomises the ambiguity of the malaise of sloth, a borderline state that vacillates between emptiness, weariness, boredom, annoyance and nostalgia. The state wavers and ripples as the semiotic roils beneath the surface of the symbolic. It is the perfect verb to depict the grotesque state of sloth in which Pierrot has immersed himself. In the third line of the stanza Giraud uses two strange words, 'gaîté' and 'fol', both of which are obsolete terms. 'Gaîté' is an alternate form of 'gaieté' which

¹³⁴ *The storks.*

¹³⁵ *Spleen.*

means gaiety, but it is the word ‘fol’, which in placement and usage, is even more problematic. The expression that is normally used in French is ‘une gaieté folle’, a feminine construct, which describes a feeling that it is not possible to contain, overcome, or control. Giraud has changed this and split the expression, ensuring a masculine form of ‘fol’. However, in modern French, the form ‘fol’, as an adjective, is used only before masculine nouns commencing with a vowel. In this line the use is in the genitive form and the prevailing French word would be ‘fou’. Giraud has opted instead for the old French usage of the word ‘fol’ dating back to the seventeenth century,¹³⁶ when this word embodied all the meaning that ‘fou’ has come to possess. The fact that Giraud has used a term that dates to the seventeenth century might relate to the origins of Pierrot’s appearance in France, as well as being integral to the rhyme scheme of the rondel.¹³⁷ Here a masculine rhyme ending in ‘ol’ is required to ensure rhythmic and gender continuity with the masculine ending of the word ‘vol’, or theft, in the preceding line. Madman and theft are seamlessly joined together. Yet the fascination, or magical attraction, of theft has lost its power over Pierrot, and avarice has been overcome by the weary, indifference of sloth.

The use of ‘fol’ explodes the grammatical expectations of the reader, yet perfectly retains the structure of the rondel. A pivotal carnivalised poetic word, the double meaning of which plays on the notion of madness and madman and subtly with the idea of gender. Thus, an ambivalence and

¹³⁶ See Dictionnaires d’autrefois: *Nicot, trésor de la langue francoyse (1606)*.

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/dicos/> (Accessed on the 27/01/2004).

¹³⁷ According to *Le trésor de la langue française Informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr> the term, when there is no reason for euphony, ‘fol’ is employed in the archaic style and jokingly.

fluidity is created between words and their ascribed meanings. Giraud unites madness with gaiety and its connotations of laughter and this hybrid element transgresses and bursts the seams of propriety in exuberant, carnivalesque mayhem. Mad gaiety capers through the poem and the faint jingling of the bells on the jester's cap seems to be heard in the verse. However, madness and gaiety have flown away, like a white bird, and the malaise of splenetic sloth has usurped their place. Sloth in Christian belief appeared in two guises: either 'acedia' or 'tristitia aggravans', the latter being described as an oppressive sorrow, which led to spite, malice, weariness and despair. Sloth, spleen and melancholia were considered to be inseparable elements. Melancholia was also one of the four humours used by ancient medicine to determine disease, and was thought to be an imbalance of the humours or bodily fluids. It was considered that an excess of black bile, or spleen, caused melancholia and was regarded as a primary form of madness. Thus, though the madness appears to have flown, it is ever present in a different guise. The mayhem of gay madness has shifted shape and become mad melancholy. The world of this poem is brimming to overflow with moroseness:

Le spleen, à l'horizon de suie,
Fermente ainsi qu'un noir alcool.

Spleen, on the sooty horizon,
Fermenting like black alcohol

The image of the slow, dark, bubbling process of black bile leadens the horizon with the sooty smog of spleen. A sense of dreariness, leadenness and menace prevails. This imagery is reminiscent of Galen's¹³⁸ description of black

¹³⁸ Claudius Galenus of Pergamum ca. 130ca - 200. An ancient physician and philosopher who implemented the practice of the theory of the *Four Humours* (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile) and linked these to the bodily fluids. In Galen's system black bile was characterized by melancholy,

bile as a fluid, which when thick is like the dregs of wine, or is acrid as vinegar and when fermenting it releases bubbles or gas, which cause severe melancholia. Aristotle also equated melancholia to the fermentation process that wine and bile underwent. Melancholy, sloth and spleen were therefore connected in the humoral medicine that was practised by the ancient Greeks. Black bile was believed to be secreted by the spleen which was the organ associated with melancholy. Pierrot's birdlike whiteness seems to have disappeared as it absorbs the colouration of the black and sooty horizon and its melancholy. This macabrely murky state transgresses the frivolous lightness associated with words like flight, charm and gaiety and begets a sense of cumbrous, fluid moodiness. Sloth lours funereally, dampening any spirits like a pall, and there is a malignancy and spite in the prevailing dejection, along with a touch of something unstable and changeable. Fluctuation is central to the word spleen which is slippery with ambiguity. The French word originates from the English.¹³⁹ In English it means melancholy, excessively gloomy, morose, but it also had the meanings of merriment, gaiety, caprice, peevishness and irritability (*Shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1973: 2081). Spleen was the site of both melancholy and mirth, making it an ambivalent word incorporating its opposite within itself. It fills the poem with contrary semiotic drives that tear at the symbolic and overflow in the simultaneous gay madness and morose sloth exhibited by this manic-depressive Pierrot.

which was regarded as a mental illness. Sufferers from melancholy, or too much variable black bile, were considered to be prone to instability or madness.

¹³⁹ Spleen in French poetry tends to refer to a state of pensive sadness, or melancholy, and was popularized by Baudelaire, but had its roots in Romantic literature. For Baudelaire spleen represented everything that was wrong with the world: death, despair, solitude, murder, and disease and particularly women.

The sinking melancholic weariness and despair even affects the Moon who is seen to cry, her tears dying as they strike the ground:

La Lune sympathique essuie
Ses larmes de lumière au vol
Des nuages, et sur le sol
Claque la chanson de la pluie:
Pierrot de Bergame s'ennuie.

The kindly Moon wipes
Her tears of light on the clouds
winging by, and on the ground
Dies the song of the rain:
Pierrot from Bergamo is bored.

The threnody of the rain is the only sound which makes itself heard, but it is lost in the hearing. The Moon and the rain add to the misery and together conjure up the slothful, sullen sinners found in Dante's *Inferno*:

Sobbing underneath the water abide
People who make the surface bubble and froth
As the eye may tell turned to whatever side
Fixed in the slime groan they: 'we were sullen and wrath
In the sweet air made glad by the Sun's fire,
We fumed and smouldered inly, lapt in sloth,
And now we gloom and blacken in the mire.'¹⁴⁰

For Aristotle *aphros*, or froth, was the euphoric counter to black bile. It was a mixture of air and liquid which resulted in white froth such as found on the sea, in wine, as well as in sperm. He therefore linked melancholia to spermatic froth and eroti, making explicit reference to Dionysus and Aphrodite (Kristeva 1989b: 7). Pierrot is subject to the euphoria of mad Dionysian gaiety and concurrently the dark misery of melancholic sloth. He fluctuates in an ambivalent manner, being neither one mood nor the other, but both at once. Like Pierrot, the entire poem floats sinuously between states allowing a

¹⁴⁰ *che sotto l'acqua è gente che sospira,
e fanno pullular quest' acqua al summo,
come l'occhio ti dice, u' che s'aggira.*

*Fitti nel limo dicono: "Tristi fummo
ne l'aere dolce che dal sol s'allegra,
portando dentro accidioso fummo:
or ci attristiam ne la belletta negra".*

Divine Comedy (trans. by Laurence Binyon) 1977: 40 Canto VII: v. 119-124.

carnavalesque doubling to occur. One state infiltrates and merges with another without either one being displaced. Boundaries are transgressed and the states interpenetrate, leaving a sense of disquiet that something forbidden is taking place.

Sloth and death are cuddled in the gloomy blanket of the sky and even the Moon's light is swiftly carried away on the fleeing clouds. All that is left is the rain with its watery lament that ebbs as it begins; the desolation and black sadness glide out of the poem into the ominous gloom of the menacing *Papillons noirs* (19).¹⁴¹ This poem is filled with a whirl of conflicting and disparate imagery. Butterflies have blackened the sun evoking a sense of pervading sepulchral darkness:

De sinistres papillons noirs	Baleful black butterflies
Du soleil ont éteint la gloire,	Have extinguished the sun's glory,
Et l'horizon semble un grimoire	Every evening the horizon seems
Barbouillé d'encre tous les soirs.	Like a black book daubed with ink.

These butterflies are suffused with a sense of foreboding and of deep-seated malignancy. They are no longer diurnal butterflies, but nocturnal butterflies, or moths (*papillons de nuit*). The moth in iconography is regarded as a symbol of death and both moths and butterflies were symbols of the soul or 'psyche'. The Greek word 'psyche' means both soul and butterfly. However the moth, as a nocturnal butterfly, was symbolic of the departing soul of the dead, as well as of the soul in purgatory and of the good or bad spirits that wander the earth. The black butterflies are carnivalesque and ambivalent, and the reader is not sure whether they are moth or butterfly. Giraud has

¹⁴¹ *Black butterflies.*

contrived to perturb the reader with this image of creatures that blot out the sun and seem to fill the verse with a foul, crepuscular presence. These nightmare fantasies devour the light and disturb and blur the boundaries between make-believe and reality. Harbingers, in the poem, of the maleficent, transgressive opacity and of the soul that, filled with this miring inkiness, has had all spiritual lambency doused. These ‘sorcières noires’,¹⁴² with the aid of the grimoire, have conjured away all illumination. The image of a moth as a black sorceress using a grimoire is redolent with the entire grotesque mystery and hybridity that darkness and necromancy can invoke.

The prickly sensation of something baneful pervades the verse and there is a heavy sense of dread and inert sloth. ‘Sinistre’¹⁴³ and ‘grimoire’¹⁴⁴ emphasise the suffocating threat of the butterflies, as these words belong to the lurking world of evil and black magic. The ‘grimoire’ is a book of black magic, as well as a grammar book which uses a set of symbols. When these symbols are combined correctly, they form powerful magic sentences. But ‘grimoire’ has an alternate meaning, that of unintelligible jargon or scribbles. Magic and the nonsense scribbles have ensorcelled and daubed the sun’s light into occultation. The ambivalence of the word grimoire, as both a symbolic structuring form and utterly meaningless nonsense, is another of the pivots of Giraud’s poem. This word improperly fuses the accepted grammatical

¹⁴² A ‘sorcière’ in French refers to what is known as a hag moth. There is also the play on black sorceress in this use of the expression ‘sorcières noires’.

¹⁴³ The French ‘sinistre’ can be translated as ‘sinister, ominous or baleful’. The word baleful was chosen because in archaic English it has the meaning of pain, misery or sorrow. In common usage it means to be destructive and full of evil.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Grimoire’ is the French word for the occult book of spells used in Black Magic to conjure demons and is generally known in English as a Black book. *The Red Dragon*, *The Mage* and *The Black Pullet* are other titles of Black Books.

structure of language with its mad, nonsensical opposite, thus transgressing any sense of meaning. The structuring grammar is overlaid with incantatory evil gibberish and the glossolalia of the Kristevan semiotic irrupts violently into the symbolic sowing disorder and perturbation.

A further pivotal word, one perhaps more important to this poem, is 'barbouillé'. As a verb in the past tense it means daubed, stained or dirtied as well as scribbled or scrawled. It is thus synonymous with grimoire in its meaning of unintelligible scribbles. The twist to this word is that as a noun 'Le Barbouillé'¹⁴⁵ means a clown in old farces.¹⁴⁶ Hidden underneath this ink-daubed blackness, Giraud has craftily palimpsested Pierrot, whose whiteness has disappeared beneath the misery of melancholy sombrousness and evil. The butterflies are symbolic of the state of Pierrot's soul, which is rancid with black bile that has annexed and dyed him with the colour of the butterflies and the sky. The evil misery of sloth permeates the poem in a heady miasma that penetrates everything like cloying perfume:

Il sort d'occultes encensoirs	Seeping from occult thuribles
Un parfum troublant la mémoire:	A memory disturbing perfume:
De sinistres papillons noirs	Baleful black butterflies
Du soleil ont éteint la gloire.	Have extinguished the sun's glory.

Even memory is thrown into disarray as the occult scent of evil clings to and overpowers the senses. Transgression and madness seem to be held in this perfume that emanates from objects of religious ritual which the Satanic has appropriated. The aura of a languorous and stifling female presence is

¹⁴⁵ Barbouillé appears in Molière's very early farce, *La jalousie de Barbouillé*.

¹⁴⁶ See *Harrap's shorter French English dictionary* 1939: 81.

carried by the perfume. Sloth, a foul, depraved presence that clings and drains the spirit, is incarnated as the enigmatic, perfumed *femme fatale*, a succubus that gleans the spirit until the husk is annexed by her shadowy alter ego, death.

Meanwhile, in a strange mutation, the butterflies have metamorphosed into perverse monsters; hybrid vampire bats lusting for blood:

Des monstres aux gluants suçoirs
Recherchent du sang pour le boire,
Et du ciel, en poussière noire,
Descendent sur nos désespoirs
De sinistres papillons noirs.

Monsters with sticky suckers
Search for blood to drink,
And from the sky in black dust,
Fall on our despair
Baleful black butterflies.

The sticky suckers, like those of parasites, sap the life and spirit through the imposition of their evil, black nothingness. They are the female vampire bat, the succubus in all her essence draining strength. Carried on the perfume she floats through the skies in search of male prey to drain and infect with the lethargy of sloth. These phantom-like black butterflies require the blood of lovers and in this they incarnate the decadent representation of the *femme fatale*, who was regarded as a silent drinker of the male essence. The bat woman of the artist Alfred Penot is taunting in her voluptuousness. She lures men with her body into debauch, degeneracy and ultimately death. She is a rendering of the ghoulish *femme fatale* as vampire. She is a kitsch representation of the perfervid, pornographic adolescent male imagination prominent in the nineteenth century. Gazing out of the canvas, arms melodramatically raised to ensure that more of her pert nakedness is revealed, her eyes encircled with dusky colour ensure that her enervated whiteness and vampirism are accentuated. She is such a preposterous

demonstration of decadent fears that she appears ludicrously funny and ‘unreal’, a phantom that is easily and laughingly dismissed into the night sky.¹⁴⁷ Giraud has commingled the voluptuousness and perverse laughter into his hybrid and vampiric *femme fatale* moths.

Just as mysteriously, these mutant, life-draining moths disintegrate into fine sooty dust, the powder of friable moth wings. This fine grime falls onto ‘our’ despair, enhancing the grimness and spite of sloth’s doleful blackness. Even the heavens are no longer propitious: they too are contaminated by the sooty evil of the deadly sin of sloth. With a sly feint, by inserting the pronoun ‘our’, the poet has included all the readers in this situation that is steeped in gloomy, creeping evil. Through this word, he has released all the semiotic drives of the bleak darkness of the noon-day sun and of deep-rooted fear that pour out of the verse and the poem and infiltrate the world of the reader with a shudder of abject nightmare and eldritch ambivalence.

It is the despair that leads to an inner hankering or *Nostalgie* (34),¹⁴⁸ felt by Pierrot. His perfume-addled mind has become a desert where no thoughts exist: there is only an arid, mad, melancholy nothingness:

Dans son triste désert mental	In the desert of his melancholy mind
Résonne en notes assourdies,	Resounds in muted key,
Comme un doux soupir de cristal,	Like a gentle crystal sigh,
L’âme des vieilles comédies.	The spirit of ancient comedies.

The vacuity of Pierrot’s mind is filled with a haze of mental distemper characterised by the spiritual disorder of sloth and folly. Yet, in the

¹⁴⁷ See Figure 18 on page 5.

¹⁴⁸ Nostalgia.

emptiness there is a vibration, a sigh of muted, crystal notes. The word 'sourir' contains a simultaneity of meanings which slide fluidly in and out of one another in an ambivalent, poetic polyvalency that makes the verse oscillate with many different echoes. In French the word 'sourir' can mean 'a heavy sigh occasioned by deep sorrow, pain or in music the silence, or rest note of a duration equal to a black note, thus a crotchet, quaver or semi-quaver rest. In the expression 'rendre le dernier soupir' it means to die or render up one's last breath (*Harrap's standard French and English dictionary* 1934: 797).

The sigh as a silent black note and a final expulsion of breath drift within this word. Giraud has cunningly retained the musical thread of 'notes' by using the connotations of 'sourir'. The 'sourir de cristal', or crystal sigh, could be the slight tinkle of glass or the echo of dying melancholy notes. Perhaps the crystal sigh is the glass clapper in the disturbed bell of Pierrot's mind. Crystal glass is made from lead (the element associated with melancholy Saturn) and has high resonating or sound-making properties, but is also extremely fragile. Containing air, or breath, glass is also formed from the air blown into it that creates its shape. Pierrot's mind, filled as it is with rueful sloth, is as brittle as glass. It seems that any blow or sound will fracture it into pieces and release the air that forms him. But the melancholy, leaden sigh of the crystal still whispers, as its semiotic sound invades the poem and vibrates inside Pierrot's memory. A sigh, sorrowful or otherwise, is an explosion of air in a non-controlled rush, a semiotic drive that transgresses the boundaries of the body and in this instance the boundaries

of the poem's structure. It is an expression of both misery, fatigue and finally of the most semiotically transgressive and abject force, that of the death rattle. It is these almost inaudible puffs of sound that stir the dust of Pierrot's memory with regret for the spirit of ancient comedies. This hankering is odd, as comedies produce laughter and are inimical to gloomy melancholy. The reverberation of the spirit of the comedies stands in opposition to woebegone sorrow.

The twist is in the word chosen by Giraud for the title of the poem - nostalgia. According to the *New shorter Oxford English dictionary* (1993: 1943) nostalgia has two meanings: that of a form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one's home or country; severe homesickness, or regret or sorrowful longing for the conditions of a past age, regretful or wistful memory or recall of an earlier time. Nostalgia was originally regarded as pathological, a mental illness, and was considered a form of melancholia which could result in death. In French it was termed *maladie du pays* or *mal du pays* which in German was *Heimweh* and in English *homesickness*. Nostalgia swirls in simultaneity and ambivalence between meanings which encompass homesickness, regretful or wistful memory and longing for an earlier time. These meanings interpenetrate to create a hybrid and uneasy fusion, the semiotic potential of which spills into the poem. Pierrot fluctuates between these opposing forces as they clash in a profoundly disturbing melding of incompatible spirits. The spirit of the old comedies and their laughter is simultaneously infused with the melancholy regret and sloth, which still hang heavily on Pierrot's fateful air:

Il désapprend son air fatal:
A travers les blancs incendies
Des Lunes dans l'onde agrandies,
Son regret vole au ciel natal,
Comme un doux soupir de cristal.

He forgets his fateful air:
Through the pale fires
Of water enlarged Moons,
His nostalgia flies to home skies,
Like a gentle crystal sigh.

Yet, in the nostalgia lies a forgetting, an amnesia as the melancholy darkness appears to lift with the reappearance of the silvery, pallid light of the Moon.

Giraud makes the Moon plural, as though the reverberations in Pierrot's mind have blurred his vision or made the world vibrate and distort things in the manner of waves of water or sound. Some ancient writers believed that the region around and under the Moon was windy and very wet. This moisture content of the Moon could refract the light and double her appearance in a manner similar to that which occurs with a rainbow. The moisture or wetness associated with the Moon and her regions betokened her feminine nature. She too is a melancholic and it is on her pale, sad light that Pierrot is releasing his nostalgia, allowing it to take flight for his home skies. However, the sense of sloth remains, even if leavened by the silvery light. That Pierrot's air is markedly 'fateful' (fatal) lends an aura of unease and a vague feeling of impending doom and death clings to him. The Moon's light that pours into the poem and through which he is attempting to escape his nostalgic fatefulness, is the colour of death and it burns with malicious phosphorus. She is the *femme fatale* whose scorning gaze burns down on Pierrot. She has, in a bizarrely grotesque split, assumed the aspects of both melancholic sloth and pale death. Her pale fire is as baleful as the black butterflies and the flight of Pierrot's nostalgia to his home skies, accompanied on the gentle sigh of the dying crystal notes, would seem to presage a dire destiny. Mutability is a major feature of melancholy and

Pierrot, like all melancholics, alters his mood on a whim. The Moon is equally capricious by nature, but her power is far stronger than Pierrot's and her light and personage control and direct his moods and actions. He is an ephobic acolyte to this tutelary deity and his mad, empty mind has been brainwashed with her light and filled with sighing crystal echoes the music of this sphere. Pierrot will not escape his deadly fate, but his fluid nature ensures that he is able to mercurially alter his mood. It is an airy, mad and fateful Pierrot who takes flight with his nostalgia and, in the presence of this Moon, morphs with fickle ease, assuming another riotous and transgressively sinful guise. His melancholy sloth becomes an appetising morsel that is greedily consumed by the toad-like sin of gluttony.

xxii The hungry edge of appetite: Gormandising gluttony

Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast?
(William Shakespeare *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*
(Bolingbroke act I, sc.iii: 295)).

The ribald, transgressive nature of gluttony and drunkenness is a major carnivalesque grotesque theme. Feasts and taverns were places dominated by unbridled lust, over-eating and drunkenness, where socially restrained behaviour tilted into the bestial. In the poem *Déconvenue* (4)¹⁴⁹ there appears to be a feast at which guests sit 'fourchette au poing'. This 'fork in fist' posture lacks socially expected table etiquette and reveals a level of dissatisfied irritation. This omission of proper manners and genteel behaviour is of the type expected at a carnival feast and it is the semiotic drive of greed

¹⁴⁹ *Disappointment*.

and gluttony that up-ends respectability. One can picture the bloated, sweaty, red faces of these diners as they glare at the sturdily grasped forks in fat-fingered hands. Giraud provides a ‘menu’ for the feast:

Les convives, fourchette au poing,	The guests, with fork in fist,
Ont vu subtiliser les litres,	Have seen the wine spirited away,
Les rôtis, les tourtes, les huîtres,	Along with the roasts, tarts, oysters,
Et les confitures de coing.	And quince preserves.

The menu is a hedonistic, belly-pleasing cuisine. The prospective post-meal lasciviousness is pandered to by the inclusion of oysters and the quince preserves. Quinces were served at wedding feasts because in ancient mythology they were a symbol of love, being the fruit of Venus. These are items that would not be eaten by any peasant, but are destined for the meals of wealthy bourgeois. A glutton’s paradise, but all is not as it at first appears. A subtle clue is contained within the title of the poem, *Déconvenue*, which can mean: ‘disappointment, disillusion or deception’. This word has then been supported by the use of the verb ‘subtiliser’, which means ‘to refine, remove or carry off by mysterious means, to cheat’.¹⁵⁰ The evidence is that the meal has been purloined and a deception has taken place: the guests have been deprived of the feast they were expecting. In the first line of the third verse ‘pour souligner le désappoint’,¹⁵¹ Giraud has created a noun out of the verb ‘désappointer’ (disappointment), ‘le désappoint’. This alters standard French usage and the noun makes vividly clear the letdown and dissatisfaction that the guests are feeling. The semiotic has wrenched itself free from the symbolic and has subtly pick pocketed gluttony’s satisfaction by slyly creating the illusion of a feast, the reality of which is insubstantial.

¹⁵⁰ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

¹⁵¹ to accentuate the discontent.

The guests have been fooled into partaking of a purely phantasmagoric feast. Gluttony, through a deception, is made ascetic and two opposing drive forces, greed and abstemiousness, clash in the empty-bellied and confused dissatisfaction of the guests with their forks. A travesty has occurred and the guests have been deceived, disappointed and mortified. Gluttony has come undone in this fantasy world where an inversion of the plenty of the carnival feast has occurred. This is an altered banquet, one where food has been withheld from the unneedy. Gluttony's presence is still felt because it is her lure that baited the now puzzled and disgruntled guests. The transgressive nature of gluttony has itself been transgressed in an ambivalent and carnivalesque inversion: gluttony is present, but is not present.

Hidden clowns, figures who are always present at carnival feasting, are all too aware of the guests' position as they pull mocking faces:

Des Gilles, cachés dans un coin,	Fools, hidden in a corner,
Tirent des grimaces de pitres.	Pull clownish faces.
Les convives, fourchette au poing,	The guests, fork in fist,
Ont vu subtiliser les litres.	Have seen the wine spirited away.

These *Gilles*, Pierrot in an earlier guise (as seen in the title of Watteau's painting *Pierrot-Gilles*), are snickering at the guests, using clownish facial gestures to hide their inner hilarity. Contorting the face into mocking grimaces is a semiotic transgression of socially accepted facial expressions. The *Gilles* screwing their faces into mocking attitudes are plainly enjoying the guests' discomfiture. The faces speak in silent, grotesque derision and this impudent grotesquery is a semiotic and carnivalesque transgression, but one that is in keeping with the notion of the feast and of gluttony. It has

become a ‘feast for fools’ as the *Gilles*’s silent, vindictive amusement fills the verse and satirically highlights the situation. The guests have been turned into fools and the laughter that spills silently from the poem is sardonic in its mockery and is directed at the guests, the reader and the poet. The clowns, normally objects of the laughter they provoke, are themselves laughing and this amusement is completely ambivalent. Here is Kristeva’s carnival split speech act in operation where the actors (*Gilles*/guests) and the crowd (readers/poet) are each in turn and simultaneously subject and addressee of this (discourse) laughter (Lechte 1990: 105). The laughter has a tinge of the satanic and in it one senses Gluttony’s delight at her own trickery. The mockery from the shadows ridiculing the deprived gluttons is emphasised in the defiant, droning derision of insects:

Pour souligner le désappoint,	To accentuate the discontent,
Des insectes aux bleus élytres	Insects with blue elytra
Viennent cogner les roses vitres,	Come knocking on the rosy panes,
Et leur bourdon nargue de loin	Their buzzing taunts from afar
Les convives, fourchette au poing.	The guests, with fork in fist.

These insects with their blue elytra are possibly scarab beetles. The scarab is the beetle associated with Beelzebub, the demon of gluttony and the ‘Lord of the flies’.¹⁵² As Jean de Palacio (1990:70) notes, ‘ la présence de l’élément égyptien et notamment des scarabées sacrés [qui] sont, Laforgue le rappelle, l’emblème des Pierrots’.¹⁵³ Gluttony is seen as having an ambiguous relation to both the sacred and satanic. The sacred scarab is a member of the dung beetle family and was associated with excrement, death and regeneration.

¹⁵² The role of the Egyptian Khephri who was the god of beetles was assumed by that of Beelzebub who was Lord of the flies and demon of gluttony. The scarab beetle family includes the dung beetle.

¹⁵³ The Egyptian element, notably the sacred scarab, is recalled by Laforgue as being the emblem of the Pierrots.

Drinking, eating, copulation and defecation are all acts central to the bodily principle of gluttony and to what Bakhtin terms 'the lower bodily stratum'. This stratum represents hell, death and simultaneously regeneration and new life. Gluttony is thus entirely ambiguous, containing within itself both the sacred and satanic, life and death. She is the *femme fatale* who swallows everything up, but who through her excrement and lower parts allows for regeneration and rebirth. She is the ultimate carnivalesque grotesque monster and both the *Gilles* and the insects are ambiguous extensions of herself.

The grotesque nature of the fantasy world has turned the carnival feast inside out and it has taken on a macabre undertone where grimacing and defiance make a mockery of pretentious disappointment. Everything is double with more than one clown, insect, guest and finally more than one meaning or interpretation. This mirage feast exposes the greedy guest and gluttony doubles as asceticism and the two opposing poles of the grotesque body collide in the poem. These guests are ridiculed because their gluttony is not linked to the carnival, but is an everyday feature of their lives. The undercutting mockery directed towards them by the *Gilles* reveal an aspect of the nature of this fantasy:

Carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realise the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (Bakhtin 1984: 34)

The taunting noise of the insects has frozen the guests, like greedy statues, and the silent, transgressive mockery of the *Pierrots-Gilles* trickles out like a thread spun through the poems that follow.

Illusory food and lurking gluttony are hinted at elsewhere. In *Cuisine lyrique* (7)¹⁵⁴ the Moon sleeping on the blue-black horizon becomes a yellow omelette that has been made of large, golden eggs:

La Lune, la jaune omelette,	The omelette-yellow Moon
Battue avec de grands œufs d'or,	Beaten from great golden eggs
Au fond de l'azur noir s'endort,	Sleeps on the dark azure horizon
Et dans les vitres se reflète.	Mirroring itself in the windowpanes.

Dark surrounds the large omelette emphasizing its colour and size. It is a huge culinary delight. The carnivalesque play is on the word 'omelette', a homophonic French pun playing on the word 'hommelette' or 'small, feminine man'. As well as reflected, the Moon mirrored in the windows is apparently doubled in gender. The lunar female egg has become the '(h)om(m)elette', an inclusion of one gendered form within another, establishing a sense of queasy slipperiness and ambivalence. The idea of the 'man in the Moon' is brought to the surface of the poem by this semiotic play on words. The 'man in the Moon' has had many interpretations. In European mythology it is said that he is an old man sent there for collecting sticks on a Sunday which is why he has a fork and a bundle of sticks on his back. According to other interpretations, such as that of Dante, the man in the Moon is Cain who was banished there for killing his brother Abel and is accompanied by a dog and a thorn bush. The thorns are emblems of the fall of man and the dog is the 'foul serpent', or perhaps Cerberus, a symbol of hell. Banishment to the Moon was caused through gluttony, which according to Saint Thomas Aquinas was an overbearing desire, outside the bounds of

¹⁵⁴ *Lyric cuisine*.

reason, transgressing social morals and decorum.¹⁵⁵ Gluttony is therefore far more complex and darkly perverse than merely an over-indulgence in food and drink. This over-indulgence is expressed in the size of the rippling omelette and in the fact that the Moon is sleepy. The more ominous desire is contained in the pun, with its veiled reference to the punishment of the man imprisoned in the Moon. The gluttonous but thwarted need for preferment twisted itself into revenge, resulting in death and the mark of sin.

Pierrot suddenly appears like a pale, birdlike silhouette balancing precariously on the roof:

Pierrot, dans sa blanche toilette,
Guigne, sur le toit, près du bord,
La Lune, la jaune omelette,
Battue avec de grands œufs d'or.

Pierrot, in his white raiment,
On the roof's edge, slyly eyes,
The omelette-yellow Moon,
Beaten from great golden eggs.

He eyes the Moon with sly, greedy intent as though he is about to gulp it down, or jump into, or over, it. There is a gluttonous leering in this surreptitious glance. In his pale garb he could be the double of the 'man in the Moon'. This resemblance is furthered in his stance, precariously perched on the edge of the roof where he vigorously waves a saucepan. With his white raiment he resembles a demented, greedy chef:

Ridé comme une pomme blette,
Le Pierrot agite très fort
Un poêlon, et, d'un brusque effort,
Croit lancer au ciel qui paillette
La Lune, la jaune omelette.

Forehead wrinkled like an overripe apple,
Pierrot strongly flourishes
A saucepan, and, with a sudden flick,
Believes he tosses into the spangling sky
The omelette yellow Moon.

¹⁵⁵ See <http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/SS/SS148.html#SSQ148OUTP1>. (Accessed on 22/07/2005).

In his mad delusion, Pierrot believes himself to be the maker of this large omelette-Moon. He and the Moon are tightly bound together as his white raiment is the colour of her light; and he also has the appearance of a worshipful chef or druid, but at the same time he is the '(h)om(m)elette' enmeshed and contained in her presence. Everything is constantly doubled and reversed in a grotesque, serpentine rippling motion. The word 'ridé' can mean 'to wrinkle or to ripple'. There is the ambiguity of whether this refers to Pierrot's wrinkled brow or to the surface of the omelette-Moon, as its reflection ripples across the windowpanes like the surface of an omelette which undulates and ripples in a saucepan as it cooks. Pierrot is so thoroughly engrossed in the brandishing of his saucepan and his making of the omelette-Moon, that his wrinkled concentration is compared to an overripe apple.

According to Chaucer in *The Parson's Tale*, gluttony was the 'synne of Adam and Eve'.¹⁵⁶ As the symbol of knowledge the apple was greedily devoured by Adam and Eve and this gluttony led to death, which was the punishment for their crime. Pierrot is compared to an overripe apple and knowledge seems to have become overblown and to have fallen into the wrinkled aridity of his madness. Death and decay are present within the deadly sin of gluttony. The knowledge of the apple has waned until all that exists is the dementia of Pierrot's Moon-inspired delusions.

¹⁵⁶ Robinson F.N. 1983. *The works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Second Edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 254.

There is a mad *jouissance* in his flick of the saucepan and the stars seem to be shrilling with laughter as they spangle the sky. Perhaps they are laughing in delight at the thought of devouring the large omelette-Moon. Or maybe they are amused at the queer, tottering figure who appears to believe that in his gluttonous grandeur, he has created this large omelette, that hangs with mellow heaviness in the sky. Pierrot's world appears to be flaccid and blowsy and suffering from a malaise of dissolute, gluttonous indulgence and excess.

The phantasmagoric and grotesquely unstable nature of this debauched gluttony is further explored in the poems: *Ivresse de Lune* (16)¹⁵⁷ and *Absinthe* (22).¹⁵⁸ Here the hallucinatory effects of the decadent over-indulgence in absinthe are apparent. In *Ivresse de Lune*, this drunkenness flows from the Moon herself:

Le vin que l'on boit par les yeux	The wine one drinks with one's eyes
À flots verts de la lune coule,	Pours from the Moon in green waves,
Et submerge comme une houle	Whose swell floods
Les horizons silencieux.	The silent horizons.

This green wine is not imbibed through the mouth but through the eyes. The Moon's light is the heady, green brew which makes the resulting drunkenness as grotesquely illusory as the feast and the large omelette. This is a largesse that exists only in the realm of the imaginary and phantasmagoric.

¹⁵⁷ *Moondrunk.*

¹⁵⁸ *Absinthe.*

The title of the poem *'Ivresse de Lune'* plays on the attributes of drunkenness, exhilaration, ecstasy and rapture. Yet, the ambiguity resides in the uncertainty as to who is drunk. Is it the Moon or the poet or are they both rapturously intoxicated in a mutually insatiable orgy of intemperance? Again it is the Poet or 'I' who assumes prominence in both poems in a displacement of Pierrot. The Poet or 'I' is placed in direct relation with the maddening hallucinatory effects of the Moon. Greedily he assumes the dipsomaniac attributes of his alter-ego and shadow, Pierrot. Both are enslaved to the charms and lunacy of the Moon. The Poet and Pierrot are separate yet joined, fading into and out of one another in an oscillating rhythm. This semiotically disturbs the notion of the unified subject in the poems placing the 'Poet' and Pierrot not into subject-object roles but into subject-subject roles, splitting the subject into two personae and destroying any fixity or unitary structure that the concept of the subject possesses.

The Poet's drunken state is also doubly bizarre because it occurs not through the mouth but through absorption by the eyes and the lines:

'Drink to me, only, with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine'¹⁵⁹

seem to hold true in this fantastically weird world. The semiotic is wildly at play as the inebriation of gluttony releases all symbolic restraints and everything is turned inside out and meanings start interpenetrating, fusing and separating in a flood of strange, green, hallucinatory light.

¹⁵⁹ Ben Jonson, *To Celia*. In *The Norton anthology of poetry*. Third Edition. Edited by Alexander W. Allison. 1983. New York: W.W. Norton, p. 230.

The Moon is the ‘fée verte’, or green fairy, the name by which absinthe was known. She rules the poem and the poet, as the goddess of the absinthe which flows into the world of the poem she causes everything to mysteriously shift and transform as in fairyland. Like the horizons, which are flooded, the boundaries of the poem are deluged and an otherworldly drunkenness overflows. The silent horizon is inundated with noiseless waves and it is only the eyes which drink instead of the silent and shut mouth. The stillness of these waves pours into the eyes of the reader, who becomes as drunk on its strange intoxication as the Poet. It is an anarchic flood of bibulous light and the excessive silence of the waves of light is semiotic in its grotesquely stylised rapacity. All in this world is bizarrely transgressed and contradicted and ambiguity holds sway.

Suddenly the strange wine flowing from the Moon is filled with elfin-like voices that whisper and entice with wicked promptings and a sense of noxious dread arises:

De doux conseils pernicieux	Gentle pernicious promptings
Dans le philtre nagent en foule:	Swim throngingly in the philtre:
Le vin que l'on boit par les yeux	The wine one drinks with one's eyes
A flots verts de la lune coule.	Pours from the Moon in green waves.

Death is cloaked in the word ‘pernicieux’, which means destructive, fatal, wicked, or villainous (*Shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1973: 1558). The word ambiguously merges the wicked with the fatal, or deadly, and the semiotic peeps leeringly at the reader. Though the promptings of gluttony are contained in this green absinthe there are darker undertones attached to the word ‘philtre’, as it is always used in connection with love and is thought of as

a love potion. Absinthe was a strange, hallucinatory drink, opalescent green and was considered to be addictive. It was a drink thought to lead to moral decline and death, the carcinogenic colour of which hinted at the decay and disease which awaited the avid imbiber. A drink personified by the *femme fatale*, who was also regarded as an addiction, disease-bringer and death giver. Images such as those by Félicien Rops and Joseph Apoux clearly reveal the view of the nineteenth-century male of the connection between women, absinthe, disease and death. Rops's *Absinthe drinker*¹⁶⁰ shows the ravages of the drink in her fevered eyes. The prostitute or fallen woman's stance is in her leer and her bodily position, enhanced by the one word above her head on the pillar: 'bal'. The 'bals' were like the music halls in England. A lot of absinthe was consumed here and fleshly transactions arranged, where the men paid for the women's absinthe addiction in order to utilise their bodies afterwards. It is this absinthe drinker's fixed stare and the shape of her mouth which reveal the evil tendencies of the vampiric and noxious *femme fatale*. She would use the men's money for absinthe and give them her body and the syphilis she carried. Thus she contains death within herself. In Apoux's etching the *Absinthère*¹⁶¹ arises directly out of the absinthe glass as though formed by the vapour of the liquor. She has a voluptuous, naked body posed like that of the alluring prostitute, semi-clad with draped negligée and one garter stocking with shoe on a provocatively bent knee. It is her head that reveals the reality: a skull, disease-ridden and decaying which is accompanied by the joker's rattle, a symbol of madness, (syphilis), tucked in the crook of her arm. She has a captivatingly wicked and enticing body that is yet the portent of addiction,

¹⁶⁰ See Figure 19 on page 5.

¹⁶¹ See Figure 20 on page 5.

madness, disease and ultimately, death. As Bram Dijkstra writes, ‘these women with livid eyes had the sharp teeth of the vampire and carried with them the scythe of death in the form of syphilis’ (Dijkstra 1986: 360). The Moon is the vampiric, livid-eyed *femme fatale*, the *Absinthère*, of this poem and the Poet is her worshipper and victim:

Le Poète religieux	The reverent Poet
De l'étrange absinthe se soûle,	Drunk on the strange absinthe,
Aspirant – jusqu'à ce qu'il roule,	Sucks it up – until he sways,
Le geste fou, la tête aux cieux –	Gesturing madly, head in the heavens –
Le vin que l'on boit par les yeux!	The wine one drinks with one's eyes!

He gluttonously sucks up her opalescent, green light until this voracious imbibing makes him sway. He is in a drugged state of rapture, a shaman's acolyte, whose overindulgence in the drug has resulted in delusive madness.

In this state of mad intoxication and plunged in a sea of absinthe, *Absinthe* (22),¹⁶² things distort and mirages appear:

Dans une immense mer d'absinthe,	In a boundless sea of absinthe,
Je découvre des pays soûls,	I espy intoxicated lands,
Aux cieux capricieux et fous	Under temperamental skies wild
Comme un désir de femme enceinte.	As a pregnant woman's desire.

From the crow's nest of his drunken imagination the 'I', like a desperate sailor, sights strange, drunken lands. Everything about the lands, especially the skies, is cock-eyed and whimsically capricious and unreal. The skies are compared to the desires of a pregnant woman, those driven carnival cravings marked by their disjoint combining of estranged and odd things. This is the ultimate carnivalesque gluttony where the basic semiotic drives take

¹⁶² *Absinthe*.

precedence over the rational logic of the symbolic. Giraud blatantly undermines the 'rational religion' associated with the sky god by likening these skies to pregnant female desires renowned for their semiotically changeable and illogical nature. The heavens are inverted into a female, and not a male, domain. This hallucinatory environment is filled with the sounds of the waves:

La capiteuse vague tinte
Des rythmes verdâtres et doux:
Dans une immense mer d'absinthe,
Je découvre des pays soûls.

The heady wave rings
with gentle greenish rhythms:
In a boundless sea of absinthe,
I espy intoxicated lands.

The waves produce the only sound in the poem as they ring the lapping rhythms of the sea's body. The ringing is gently sonorous and lulls the reader and the 'I' with its semiotic, womblike motions as the sea becomes the all-encompassing body of the mother.

The 'I' is overcome by this rhythmic absinthe sea, but suddenly the serenity alters and the sea changes from the nurturing mother to the *femme fatale* as she produces strange, soft octopi that grab the 'I's' boat in a slimy embrace:

Mais soudain ma barque est étreinte
Par des poulpes visqueux et mous:
Au milieu d'un gluant remous
Je disparaiss sans une plainte,
Dans une immense mer d'absinthe.

Suddenly my barque is grasped
By viscous and soft octopi:
In the midst of a sticky whirlpool
I disappear without a sound,
In a boundless sea of absinthe.

The horror of the 'fishy, female jellies' (Paglia 1991: 52) oozes from these octopi and calls to mind the sea monster or Scylla. These octopi, the agents of Scylla, grasp the 'I' before giving him to the Charybdis of the whirlpool.

Camille Paglia writes the following about Scylla:

Like the Harpy, she is a Snatcher, a gnawing female appetite. Scylla's female companion, Charybdis, is her upside-down mirror image. Sucking and spewing three times a day, the killer whirlpool is the womb-vortex of the nature mother. (Paglia 1991: 52)

This sticky, gluttonous maw is the female as devouring death-bringer. Hidden in the sea, the mother of all life, lurk these voracious, gluttonous *femmes fatales*, who bring only death and destruction to the intoxicated 'I'. The 'I' disappears into this whirlpool without a sound, consumed by gluttony and by lustful desires. The lure of the chthonian, sticky ooze of sex has captured him and swallows him into its lubricious depths where the deadly sin of lust or luxuria resides.

xxiii Wanton lust

For Chaucer's Parson 'lust' and 'gluttony' were so closely related that they were comparable to twins or cousins. Lust, luxuria or voluptas were associated with inordinate desire and not only that of a sexual nature, which is the interpretation given to the word lust in modern times. Lust is violent and seeks for power, self-aggrandisement and self-gratification in its quest to obtain what is denied or disallowed to it. The desire of lust belongs to any of the sensual appetites and is entirely lawless. It is this chaotic transgressiveness which releases the basic semiotic drives throwing controlled desire into disarray as the mayhem of carnivalesque lasciviousness leaks out of the poems.

*A Colombine (10)*¹⁶³ is a strangely evocative piece of desire, a troubadour's lyric filled with malice and bitter aggression. It is a Manichean paean to lust filled with the white, icy light of the Moon:

Les fleurs pâles du clair de Lune,
Comme des roses de clarté,
Fleurissent dans les nuits d'été:
Si je pouvais en cueillir une !

The pale blossoms of moonlight,
Like damask roses of light,
Flower during summer nights:
If I could only pick one!

The poem has again reverted to the first person. The 'I' of the poet has usurped Pierrot's subjective position in a doubling and semiotic slippage of personas. This elusive persona is mirrored in the object of lustful desire, the unobtainable blossoms of pale moonlight. It is these blossoms that inspire the urgent, driving desire of the poet and are compared to 'roses of light'. The rose is a symbol of love. In mythology, Aphrodite, in her haste to reach her dying lover Adonis, stepped on the thorns of a white rosebush which ripped into her flesh, causing her to bleed. Her sacred blood stained the roses red and it is these Damask roses that are linked to the death of Adonis and the passion of the lovers. These roses flower only during summer which is the celebratory time for the passion of Adonis.

Giraud has intricately interwoven the title of the poem and the 'roses'. The word 'Colombine' in French means more than just a serving girl. It has multiple meanings, being 'a dove' or the pinkish-grey, dove-colour, associated with the bird, or a flower that has five spurred petals which resemble a group of doves. Giraud plays on the meanings associated with the word 'rose', which in French can mean either the flower or the colour pink.

¹⁶³ *To Columbine.*

Here the play centres on the ambiguity because both the rose and its coloration are being intermingled through the use of a single word. This is not a red rose but one of pale pinkish hue, like the colour of skin; it is the pinkish colour of the dove's feathers that are reflected in the colour of the roses. Passionate love and the Christian symbol of peace are thus merged together. That these roses flower only in the voluptuous summer nights lends a languid sensuality to the verse; and the passion of lust that is contained in their pale, dove-pink radiates desire. The pagan symbolism overpowers and melds with that of the Christian as the semiotic undoes the symbolic definitions and categories striving to alter and transgress boundaries.

It is the thwarted lust and desire of the poet that is apparent in his inability to pluck one of these blossoms for himself. His frustrated exclamation is one of sheer and utter need. The image of plucking a single flower can be regarded as the allegorical yearning of the poet to possess the human, female blossom that he lusts after, to be able to pluck her as you would a flower. But everything in this world that the poet hungers for is unattainable, being whimsically intangible and unreal. He cannot pluck blossoms of light anymore than he can attain an imaginary and elusively dovelike Columbine. Lust is evanescent, a mirage, the ultimate in semiotic drives that will never attain satisfaction. This drive is aggressive in its craving and bursts frustratedly through the structure of the verse. These words are the only sounds in the nocturnal silence surrounding him. They are words that Pierrot could not say but which his alter ego produces in the bursting, passionate

need of his driving semiotic passion. To release his growing frustration and the woes of unrequited desire the poet searches elsewhere:

Pour soulager mon infortune, Je cherche le long du Léthé, Les fleurs pâles du clair de Lune, Comme des roses de clarté.	To ease my woes, I search along the Lethe, The pale blossoms of moonlight, Like damask roses of light.
--	---

On the banks of the river Lethe he continues to look for these icy, pale Moon blossoms. The Lethe was a river found in Hades, or the underworld, the waters of which, when drunk, brought forgetfulness of the past, oblivion or death. Adonis was confined to the underworld by Persephone who desired him, so the woes of lust and longing are not unknown in the world where the Lethe flows. The poet seeks forgetfulness, but at the same time still quests for the Moon's unobtainable blossoms.

In the French verse the Lethe and the Moon are joined as both are capitalised. The darkness of the underworld and the oblivion of death seem to rise from this eerie juxtaposition. A claustrophobic exhalation breathes from the verse carried on the pallid light of the Moon. The roses are tinted with blood and the Lethe contains death. The Moon is allied with this death and her pallid light is that of the shades of the souls found in Hades. She is the icy *femme fatale* who seems to demand the poet's obeisance, wishing to be the only object of his lust-filled longing. But, ultimately, she will slay the poet because of his hankering for her pale blossoms. As Joseph Campbell writes about the myth of the love-death:

the slayer and his victim, though on the stage apparently in conflict, are behind the scenes of one mind – as they are, too, it is well known, in the life-consuming, life-redeeming, - creating, and - justifying dark mystery of love.(Campbell 1976: 235)

Desire and death belong to one another, a semiotic interpenetrating state and the ultimate carnivalesque grotesque. The oblivion offered by the Lethe does not bring the poet the hoped-for forgetfulness from his lust and longing. Instead this carnality aggressively alters itself, as most thwarted and intense passions can:

Et j'apaiserai ma rancune,	And I will assuage my rancour,
Si j'obtiens du ciel irrité	If I obtain from the angry sky
La chimerique volupté	The chimerical delight
D'effeuiller sur ta toison brune	Of shredding on your dusky mane
Les fleurs pâles du clair de Lune!	The pale blossoms of moonlight!

The lust has become an excessive spite-filled malice of which the poet is attempting to rid himself. But, as in the first verse of the poem, this release is dependent on a conditional sentence. It is something that he will obtain only if he is given the rights to something else. This is the typical pique associated with lust that has been frustrated. Feelings of longing have mutated into those of bitterness and the need for some form of revenge. The sky is as angry as the poet, but that is because the Moon is peeved with his betrayal. Yet, it is from this angry sky that he is still hoping to obtain some form of gratification. The word 'rancune' or rancour reveals the ill-will that the poet is feeling at not being in possession of the object he lusts after. Giraud weds rancour to the word 'volupté', with its notions of sensual, physical enjoyment of a carnal and sexual nature. The adjective 'chimerical' is employed to describe the word 'volupté' (sensual delight) with all the fantastical and fanciful properties that this adjective possesses; it is an indication that the sensual delights of concupiscence are always going to be denied to this poet. Voluptuous, sensual delight has been perverted into something nasty and spoilt by repressed and denied lust. The word

'effeuiller' has the destructive sense of 'plucking apart, or shredding' and the malevolence of this violent action permeates the poem and underscores the mutated lust and desire that is now aimed at destroying the longed for object. The poet wants to shred the blossoms of moonlight over the 'toison brune' or 'dusky mane' of the object of his desire. The use of the word 'toison' joined to the word 'brune' turns the mythological aspects of the poem upside down in a very amusing transgression. In French the expected expression is 'toison d'or'¹⁶⁴ or the 'golden fleece' of mythology.¹⁶⁵ When 'toison' is used with reference to the human it can be pointedly obnoxious as it overwrites the human with animalistic qualities.¹⁶⁶ The human tresses are drained of any gold light having become tenebrous. Thus the object of lust is subjected to violent, aggressive disparagement as frustrated desire twists into perverse and vengeful spite. It seems that the urge to shred the blossoms of white light is a sowing of death or disease upon the once desired object.

Through the thickness of this vituperative malevolence the burning desire of lust still gleams and the reader realises that the object of its desire is no longer the female form of Columbine. The dusky mane belongs not to her but to the sky from which the golden fleece of sunlight has departed and in which the tawny rose of twilight has settled. The roses of light have

¹⁶⁴ The Toison d'Or was an art salon founded in Brussels in 1894 which included writers like Emile Verhaeren and Edmond Picard, Giraud's arch-enemy.

¹⁶⁵ In the Greek myth the ram with the Golden Fleece was a gift from Mercury to Nephele, queen of Thessaly. This ram flew her children to safety, though one of the children fell off his back into the sea. On arrival in Colchis the remaining child sacrificed the ram, and the fleece was given to the king of Colchis, who placed it in a consecrated grove guarded by a sleepless dragon. Jason and the Argonauts quested for the 'golden fleece' so that Jason could regain his throne. Medea, daughter of the King of Colchis, fell in love with Jason and through her arts of sorcery helped him attain the fleece.

¹⁶⁶ Yet in many writers and poets of the nineteenth century the tresses of hair, or 'toison' of women were markedly erotic objects. Guy de Maupassant wrote a short story called *La Chevelure* which starkly reveals the nature of the perverse eroticism that hair held for the male of the nineteenth century.

disappeared and have been replaced by the blossoms of moonlight. The poet's lust has returned and is focused on his one true delight: the Moon. It is her blossoms of light that he wishes to shred and sow upon the dusky mane of the sky as stars. These blossoms glow with a radiant, incandescent light like the embers of the mad lust that flourishes in the mind and soul of the poet. His dismemberment of the blossoms is a violent *jouissance* but it is as evanescent, intangible and unreal as the object of his lust. The desire inspired by these moonlight blossoms poisons and devours the poet's being. For is this poet not Pierrot and is Pierrot not this poet and in this strange, sliding and carnival doubling are they not both captives of the imperious white *femme fatale*, the Moon, and infected with her light? As Jean de Palacio comments: 'le lien entre Pierrot et la lune inspiratrice serait de l'ordre de la contagion' (Palacio 2000: 185).¹⁶⁷ There is a definite dread attached to the lust expressed by the Poet as Pierrot for the Moon, a sense of evil and perverse disease in which the spectre of death is ever present.

This perversity and contagion of lust is the blight found in *Lune malade* (21)¹⁶⁸ where even the pale astral planet is tainted with desire. Her lust is a feverish, consumptive disease that is killing her:

Tu meurs d'un amour chimérique,	You are dying from chimerical love,
Et d'un désir silencieux,	And of silent desire,
O Lune, nocturne phtisique,	O Moon, nocturnal consumptive,
Sur le noir oreiller des cieux!	On the black pillow of the skies!

The Moon, like the poet and Pierrot, is dominated by this silent, fanciful and imaginary desire. But this love is a form of contagion which has infected the

¹⁶⁷ The bond between Pierrot and his inspiring Moon can be seen as a form of contagion.

¹⁶⁸ *Sick Moon*.

Moon with consumption. Her desire has been repressed and become silent, like that of Pierrot, and in being silenced it has altered and become deadly, riddling her with illness. Her spilt rays of light are her pale consumptive blood that pours out of her silent lust as she ebbs away. Lust, disease and death are found in the pillow of the skies and in the world upon which the Moon drips her pallid, sick desire. The carnivalesque nature of the relation between desire and death seamed together by the thread of disease weeps out of the poem like the white, infected blood of the Moon. It is this combination of Eros and Thanatos which will draw Pierrot to his last mistress in *La chanson de la potence* (17).¹⁶⁹ This lascivious *femme fatale* is of skeletal, elongated thinness that accords well with the decadent artistic portrayal of this type of woman. Death and lust are combined in her meagre form:

La maigre amoureuse au long cou	The lean lover with long neck
Sera la dernière maîtresse	Will be the last mistress
De ce traîne-jambe en détresse,	Of this woebegone loiterer,
De ce songe-d'or sans le sou.	Of this penniless dreamer of gold.

For Pierrot, the loitering, woebegone dreamer, this lover will be his last lustful indulgence. He shuffles and sways along and though his dreams are filled with a hunger for gold, he is a destitute wastrel. Giraud has created two hyphenated nouns ('traîne-jambe' and 'songe-d'or') to refer to Pierrot. They are not words found listed in the standard French dictionary, though similar verbal expressions are found. These created nouns seem Rabelaisian in inspiration and could be the names of characters in his work, or characters

¹⁶⁹ *Song of the gallows.*

found in the Mystery plays who represent aspects of the sins and, perhaps, names of minor, troublesome characters in a pantomime.

‘Traîne-jambe’ is very descriptive of Pierrot’s tardy, swaying movements as he wanders drunk and dreaming. ‘Songe-d’or’ is his lust or desire for gold that will never materialize, as it is pure fantasy. The nouns are a combination of the physically material (a leg / gold) and the intangible and fantastical verbal movement of ‘to loiter’ and ‘to dream’, which both have an aimless circularity to their rhythm. Combined, the nouns are carnivalesquely grotesque with their ambivalent interpenetration which makes them semiotically fluid and contests the logic of the symbolic. The forward/backward motion is bridged by the hyphen and is further enhanced by the phrases in which the nouns appear. The loiterer is woebegone and the dreamer of gold is penniless. These images are exceedingly amusing in their misery and negativity. The hangdog expression of the penniless wastrel is easily pictured. How he is going to pay for this last, lustful indulgence with this mistress and what she is likely to claim as recompense for her favours seem to account for his woebegone demeanour and his fantastical dreams of gold. Lust always comes at a price.

These nouns undermine the symbolic structure of the language and allow the semiotic drives of lust, desire, drunkenness and fantasy to sway and stagger into the poem in the person of this mad, pallid clown. The thought of this wanton interaction fills and pounds in Pierrot’s intoxicated brain:

Cette pensée est comme un clou	This thought is like a nail
Qu’en sa tête enfonce l’ivresse:	That intoxication hammers into his head:
La maigre amoureuse au long cou	The lean lover with a long neck
Sera sa dernière maîtresse.	Will be his last mistress.

Pierrot is in a state of lust-fuelled euphoria and drunkenness; a doubly transgressive state which overthrows socially acceptable actions. The word 'ivresse' (drunkenness or intoxication) plays on the altered state of consciousness of the drunk and the elation of mind is associated with inebriation. Intoxication is not only linked to drink but to a state of rapture. These semiotic states override sobriety and the rules of symbolic rational logic in the elation of mad mayhem, disorder, violence, feelings of omnipotence and lust. Pierrot's brain is fevered and driven mad by lust for this alluring skeletal siren. Her form is likened to gracefully sinuous bamboo, a tropical tree-like grass that grows rapidly; and a sense of a stifling, heated over-abundance of tropical vegetation breathes from her sleek form:

Elle est svelte comme un bambou;	She is svelte as bamboo;
Sur sa gorge danse une tresse;	On her breast dances a tress;
Et, d'une étranglante caresse,	And with strangling caress,
Le fera jouir comme un fou,	She will pleasure him madly,
La maigre amoureuse au long cou!	The lean lover with a long neck!

She is the epitome of the alluring and seductive *femme fatale*: Jael, Lilith, and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* all combine in her single, skinny form. The nail that is hammered into Pierrot's fuddled brain seems to enforce the thoughts of lustful desire for the lean lover in an exceedingly violent manner and brings sinister associations with it. It was Jael who used her seductive *femme fatale* powers to lull and then to lure the soldier Sisera into her tent.¹⁷⁰ Here she brought him to an orgasmic death, finally hammering a nail (tent peg) through his head into the floor. The nail in Pierrot's brain with its sinister symbolic ties to the story of Jael and with its dark eroticism is

¹⁷⁰ Jael was the wife of Heber and killed Sisera by driving a nail through his head after luring him into her tent. (see the Biblical book *Judges* 4).

projected onto the lean lover and ensures that she is tainted with the evil, violent, devouring and death-dealing characteristics of the *femme fatale*. She seems to hold the promise of the same, or similar, violent and perversely erotic death filled with sensual and dangerous power, where Eros and Thanatos are in semiotic flow. Referring to the single tress of hair on her breast she is, as Jean de Palacio writes,

[...] la femme qu'une tresse, dont elle étrangle comme la
Lilith de Rossetti avec le lac de ses cheveux. (Palacio 1990: 106)¹⁷¹

Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* (1864 -1868)¹⁷² shows Lilith sitting brushing her hair whilst staring into a mirror. She is surrounded by roses and poppies and the waves of her hair, like serpentine tendrils, undulate and ripple through the entire painting. She stares vainly and with self-absorption at her own reflection in the mirror in a perfect study of lust and its symbolism. In symbolist iconography, lust was always accompanied by a mirror (vanity) and by a rose. The flowers in the Rossetti painting reflect the ardours of passionate, carnal love (the rose) and of forgetfulness, sleep and death (the poppy). Lust and death are presented as attributes belonging to Lilith. Rossetti's sonnet *Body's beauty* was written as a poetic commentary on his painting:

Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
(The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,
That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,

¹⁷¹ In this tree-like slenderness that Giraud gives her, all that remains of a woman is a tress of hair which she uses to strangle with, like Rossetti's *Lilith* with her lake of hair. Lilith was a demon and was thought to have been Adam's first wife who deserted him because he insisted on the sexual male superior position. Lilith was thought to have coupled with demons instead. Eve was created in the place of Lilith as a docile, biddable female companion.

¹⁷² See Figure 21 on page 5.

And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?
Lo! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.¹⁷³

This Rossetti poem strangely mirrors the images and themes to be found in Giraud's poem. In Rossetti's poem, Lilith's ability to seduce is emphasised, as is her dangerous and lethal power to destroy the male. Lilith's power is to 'leave a straight neck bent' and round a heart a single 'strangling golden hair'. Thus her tresses, or at least a single tress, form a strangling noose around the lover's heart and neck. In Giraud's poem a similar fate awaits Pierrot, as the lean lover with a tress that dances on her breast functions solely to offer him a caress that strangles. She, too, is a Lilith and like Rossetti's Lilith, Pierrot's lover remains silent. Jean de Palacio regards this attribute of Pierrot's lover as perfect because she is 'la partenaire de Pierrot, avec qui l'accord parfait n'a pas besoin du discours pour s'accomplir' (Palacio 1990: 106).¹⁷⁴ This silent understanding allows Pierrot's Lilith to accomplish her only non-passive action; that of the golden strangling caress. It is this 'gold', perhaps, that filled Pierrot's dreams in the first verse. As his mistress this lover will wilfully sell him her golden tress in a fusion of lust and avarice. Her tress is traded for pleasure and the ultimate perverse delight: death. The reader realises that this mistress is the 'Belle Dame Sans Merci' and that she will never let Pierrot escape her choking caress. Though

¹⁷³ Trilling, L. & Bloom, H. (eds.) 1973: 629.

¹⁷⁴ Pierrot's partner with whom mutual understanding is achieved without the need for any conversation.

Pierrot is ‘alone and palely loitering’,¹⁷⁵ he is no knight but is held in thrall by this lethal lover whom he lusts after. In a picture by Waterhouse called *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1893)¹⁷⁶ the symbolism of the strangling tress that dominates the work of *fin de siècle* artists is very apparent. *La Belle Dame* has ensnared the knight in a coiled loop of golden hair very reminiscent of the gallows’s noose.

Pierrot’s *Belle Dame* is the gallows and her golden strand promises him a love affair with death. This serpentine, braided coil will provide Pierrot with the final erotic and orgasmic delights of lust and simultaneous death. The ‘petite mort’ of orgasm is engulfed and exceeded by the orgasmic extinction of death. The gallows’ lethal love is malevolent and Pierrot is ensnared by this fatal temptress into the interstice between death and desire. The semiotic has erupted through this final verse with mad abandon as lust and death grotesquely dance on the coil of a single golden tress.

This image provides the gallows with the attributes of a *femme fatale* of extremely alluring and seductive powers who kills the object of her desire. However, this is a willed death. Pierrot goes to it with lust-filled anticipation as he and his *femme fatale* are in total accord, both speaking in the strange language of silence which transgresses the confines of symbolic communication. In their mutual imaginary world, where the semiotic drives prevail, all is fantasy, illusion and seduction. Here identity becomes

¹⁷⁵ This is a reference to John Keats’s poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. In *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Third Edition. Edited by Alexander.W. Allison. 1983. New York: W.W. Norton, p. 658.

¹⁷⁶ See Figure 22 on page 5.

ambiguous and lusty passion is directed towards a skeletal *femme fatale* who personifies the ambiguous and interpenetrating semiotic drives of Eros and Thanatos. Alone and palely loitering, the madly lust-intoxicated clown with the lascivious red mouth seems set, in the sways of his mistress's long neck, to undergo the self abandon of suicide.

xxiv The sacrifice of suicide

The eighth deadly sin is one of the darkest and most disturbingly transgressive actions that individuals can commit against themselves. It is the bleakest face of the sin of Sloth and melancholy and the final result of *tristitia*. In his *Anatomy of melancholy* Burton was clear on the relation between melancholy and suicide. He writes that 'if there be a hell upon earth it is to be found in a melancholy man's heart' (Burton in Fedden 1938: 179). For Burton suicide, melancholy and madness were all bound together. He was aware that melancholy could lead to self-destruction and said 'tis a common calamity, a fatal end to this disease' (Burton in Fedden 1938: 179). Suicide as the act of voluntary death, of taking one's own life, is a desperate escape from the pain of inner torment, nihilism and darkness of soul, but in ancient times it was a rational and honourable means of exiting the world. However, in all religious and mythological systems, suicide came to be regarded with horror as it was seen as a criminal act of self-murder. It was an offence against both the gods and the human community (Fedden 1938: 39). Pierrot attempts to commit suicide in a number of diverse ways. He hangs himself, rips his heart out and is crucified. These forms of self-sacrifice, or suicide, all have religious overtones. In the religious rites of the

pagan gods Artemis, Attis, Bacchus (Dionysus) and Odin, self-sacrifice was common and ‘all were involved at some time or other with the hanging of a voluntary priest’ (Fedden 1938: 39-40). A sacrifice by hanging was regarded as a semi-sacred death. Pierrot assumes this mantle of priesthood, as he mimics the sacrificial role of Dionysus, Christ and Odin in his fantasy world. Even this world comes to reflect a preoccupation with self-murder. As Jean de Palacio writes, Pierrot is ‘un personnage qui mieux que tout autre, y accomplit sa destinée’ (Palacio 1992: 99-100).¹⁷⁷

Pierrot’s destiny appears to lure him on to the act of suicide where he will transit the interstice between life and death. Previously, he found lust lurking in the hanging noose and now, in the mortal sin of suicide, he finds the *jouissance* and escape of self-inflicted death. The Moon dominates Pierrot’s self-murder in *Suicide* (18),¹⁷⁸ just as she is ever present in his mien and garments:

En sa robe de Lune blanche,	In his Moon white robe,
Pierrot rit son rire sanglant.	Pierrot laughs his bloody laugh.
Son geste ivre devient troublant:	His drunken motions become disquieting:
Il cuve le vin du dimanche.	He is working off Sunday’s wine.

Pierrot’s white robe contrasts sharply with the colour and sound of his laughter. The pallid white is fractured by the bloody laugh and it is this laughter that strikes the reader. Giraud has used the adjective ‘sanglant’ to describe the sound of the laughter, which evokes a violent and ambivalent image. The word ‘sanglant’ can mean ‘bloody or blood-stained’ but it has added overtones of meaning, being ‘cruel or bitter’. It is a bloodcurdling and

¹⁷⁷ An individual who, in so doing, accomplishes his destiny there.

¹⁷⁸ *Suicide*.

satanic sound which slices through the silence and splinters the icy pallor of the scene. Laughter is thought of as an uncontrolled action that occurs when something is found to be funny, even if it is something awful happening to someone else. It is also a release mechanism for all the pain and suffering inside a person, but it can be indicative of a state of derangement. Laughter explodes from this dark centre and in so doing, shatters the carapace of the symbolic, which demands lugubrious seriousness and stoicism in the face of suffering. As a semiotic drive, this laughter pulverizes the accepted façade and in its savage release allows all the anger and repressed pain of the emotional drives to escape. This semiotic *frisson* sears through the poem as the biting sound irrupts from the crimson lips and wine-stained mouth of the clown in a mad, cruel stream.

He is in a state of drunken dementia, and his gestures are as disturbed and violent as his laughter. This grotesque disequilibrium is the mere insane precursor to the actions that follow. Pierrot's white robe, the colour of moonlight, establishes an aura of purity and priestliness around the clown for which the line, 'robed in pure white I have borne me clean' (Campbell 1976: 183) seems appropriate. A sense of ascetic cleanliness is attached to this whiteness, but the appearance of being a virtuous priest is compromised and undermined. Virtue has drowned in the over-imbibing of vinous liquid and the reader realises that Pierrot has guzzled all Sunday's Eucharist wine. He is nothing more than a Moon-mad priest, sinfully and daemonically drunk on blood wine. The wine of the Eucharist, regarded by Christians as the blood of Christ, is simultaneously blended with the blood wine of Dionysus,

pagan god of sacrifice, drunkenness and madness. The Christian and the pagan ceremonies are drunkenly and transgressively combined. Christ and Dionysus were manifestations of an ancient sacrificial god whose followers ingested his flesh and blood.¹⁷⁹

Dionysus, child of the Moon goddess (Persephone), whose horns he wore, and Pierrot, who wears her colour and whose ruling deity she is, are conflated. Through association, Pierrot assumes the role of Christ-Dionysus in his drunken ecstasy and white raiment. He is both hierophant to the Moon and her sacrificial child-victim. She is the *femme fatale* who entices Pierrot to his end, while showing a frosty indifference. Her coldness is that of death, the colour of her light that of a corpse. Pierrot, ecstatically inebriated and liberated from normal behaviour, ensures that this whole verse boisterously explodes accepted social niceties in carnivalesque madness. What is regarded as sacred is profaned and the semiotic dislodges the order of the symbolic as mad, ecstatic drunkenness is liberated into the verse. Pierrot's aberrant behaviour becomes increasingly bizarre as:

Sur le sol traînaille sa manche;	His sleeve trailing on the ground;
Il plante un clou dans le mur blanc:	He hammers a nail into the white wall:
En sa robe de Lune blanche,	In his Moon white robe,
Pierrot rit son rire sanglant.	Pierrot laughs his bloody laugh.

The imagery in this verse is ridiculously peculiar. Either Pierrot is standing on tiptoe with one arm hanging down whilst driving the nail into the wall single-handedly; or the nail is being driven into the wall at no great height, thus allowing his wide sleeve to trail along the ground. Giraud uses a strange

¹⁷⁹ See Joseph Campbell *The Masks of God*, Camille Paglia *Sexual Personae* and Sir James Frazer *The Golden Bough*.

verb 'traînaille' to describe the movement of the sleeve. The verb 'traînailler' is interchangeable with the verb 'traînasser' meaning 'to dawdle, loiter, to drag or to trail'. Giraud has used the less common form of the verb, as it enhances the rhythm and sound of the verse, where 'traînasse' would make the line too sibilant; it would also flatten the raised lilt given to the line by using 'traînaille'. The sleeve seems to have a swinging life of its own as it trails with a languid indifference, whilst Pierrot affixes the nail into the white wall. In this dangling motion of the sleeve there is an image of the train of a wedding gown as it trails along the ground. A 'hieros gamos' or sacred marriage seems to be in the offing. Pierrot is playing the role of the sacrificial priest-king bridegroom to the Moon goddess.

The white of the wall mirrors the white of Pierrot's garments. The second line of the verse ends with the masculine 'blanc' and the third line with the feminine 'blanche' which retains the rhythmical nature of the rondel and the white on white superimposition of the masculine and feminine is established. Pierrot will become one with the white wall, male white and female white fusing as his body disappears. The white priest will meld with his white deity through the mortal sin of self-sacrificial murder. The only remaining trace of Pierrot will be the stain of his chilling laugh, which re-echoes as he violates the wall by driving the nail into it. The violence of the action is in harmony with the bloodcurdling laughter and the riotous destructive drives of the semiotic crackle and fracture the restraint of the symbolic. This is the eerie and cruel sound of mad Dionysian amusement. It is not pleasure but

pleasure-pain. The sound mocks the reader and the derision it contains is blatantly revealed in Pierrot's final transgressive actions as:

Il frétille comme une tanche,
Se passe au col un nœud coulant,
Repousse l'escabeau branlant,
Tire la langue et se déhanche,
En sa robe de Lune blanche.

He wiggles like a fish,
Places a slipknot round his neck,
Kicks away the rickety stool,
And swaying sticks out his tongue,
In his Moon white robe.

His whole body seems to be fluid and rippling with laughter as he wriggles like a fish and slips his head inside the net of the slipknot. The word 'tanche' means a 'tench', a bottom-dwelling fish which is exceedingly slippery and active mainly at night. The use of the word 'tanche', rather than the generic 'poisson', is integral to the rhyme scheme of the rondel, where all the masculine and feminine rhymes ending the lines have the 'an' sound contained within them. These supply the flowing motion of the verse where, like a river, the movement establishes and builds a tension which finally dissipates into the final pale-white, ghostliness of the Moon. Giraud plays on the word 'tanche' because in French there is an expression 'muet comme une tanche', meaning as mute, or silent, as a tench. The fish and the clown are suitably mute, but simultaneously, the slipperiness and motion of this fish when caught, is a perfect description of Pierrot as he wiggles and wriggles, to and fro, trying to place his head into the confines of the slipknot. The wriggling is almost one of ecstatic delight, as if the rope promises him the hope of amorous, climactic joy. As Jean de Palacio has noted, 'la pendaison est à Pierrot son plus beau rôle!'.¹⁸⁰ It appears to be in anticipation of this amatory annihilation that Pierrot kicks away the rickety stool, which

¹⁸⁰ Being hanged shows Pierrot in the best possible light.

adds to his wriggling and swaying movements, and hangs himself. This hanging is self-murder, the deadly mortal sin of suicide, as he sways with his tongue stuck out. Yet, this suicide is not as it seems because all dangles on the verb 'se déhanche'. Giraud has again chosen to use a very transgressive and semiotic term. It can mean: 'to sway the hips exaggeratedly from side to side' or 'to stand swaying balanced on one leg'. Either Pierrot's body is swaying convulsively and with exaggerated movements from side-to-side, or he is standing on one leg and swaying his body from side to side in a mocking imitation of a suicide by hanging. This convulsive spasming is similar to the Dionysian ecstasy of sexual excitation, a fine dance of death, or an imitation thereof. Pierrot has dissolved the boundaries between reality and fantasy in this simulation. It is as though, like Odin, God of the hanged, or Dionysus, Pierrot has committed suicide as a sacrifice to himself in a solipsistic Moon-inspired act. With this transgressively provocative gesture, he challenges the border between life and death.

The wild ambivalence of Pierrot's actions creates a sense of uncertainty and uneasiness, where life, death and laughter mingle. Pierrot's blood-red tongue is stuck out at the world and the reader in a defiant gesture of ridicule and imitation of the death throes of the hanged man. It is this red tongue, stuck out at the world, which united the poet and Pierrot. In *A mon cousin de Bergame* (13)¹⁸¹ it is in defiance and revolt that the tongue appears:

¹⁸¹ *To my cousin from Bergamo.*

J'ai les vers luisant pour fortune;	Glowing verses are my fortune; ¹⁸²
Je vis en tyran, comme toi,	I live, like you, sticking out
Ma langue saignant à la Loi,	My bloody tongue at the Law,
Et la Parole m'importune:	And words importune me:
Nous sommes parents par la Lune.	We are Moon kinsmen.

This shared bloody tongue flouts all rules of the Law. Giraud plays on the word 'langue' which means both 'tongue' and 'spoken language'. The rebellion of the poet, and by implication Pierrot, is directed against both the use of the tongue to create sounds and the Law that governs the creation of these sounds. Here Giraud emphasizes the power of the structure of language by capitalizing the word 'Loi'. In Dionysian fashion, the poet and Pierrot are destroying the hierarchy of language, words and sounds. The tongue bathed in blood, seems to be wounded or dismembered and is in this dismemberment, rebelling in a semiotic frenzy against both the symbolic as Law and against its greatest structuring and controlling device: words as language. The imagery is of punishment by Inquisitorial torture which excises the offending organ. Silence becomes a violent, bloody transgression of self-sacrifice and the triumph of the semiotic over the symbolic. The theme of the bloody, silent tongue, with its loss of sound, is further explored in the poem *Rouge et blanc* (25).¹⁸³ Here the flesh of the tongue slavers blood in the paleness of the matrix that is Pierrot's face. He is in a state of drunkenness where his body reels like a ship about to sink. His tongue becomes the distress flag. All is a see-sawing frenzy of lunacy that is driven by drunken madness and dominated by the bloodied, flesh of the silent

¹⁸² Giraud also plays on the idea of 'vers luisant' which means glowing verses is also 'a glow worm', which in reality is a beetle. Thus all meaning assigned to language and words is called into question. These strange creatures with their dots and dashes of phosphorescent light are as ephemeral and untrappable as the glowing words of verse.

¹⁸³ *Red and white.*

tongue in its rabid agony. Blood, madness and silence are elements which accompany Pierrot through all his transgressive attempts at defiance and self-destruction. The poems are replete with Dionysian liberation where drunken madness and destruction hold sway and for which the price is the ultimate silence: death. She is the alluringly silent and sinfully enticing mistress, who gazes down upon her silent lover with her pale, spectral light, mutely tempting and aiding him to perform his last and most sinfully transgressive act: sacrificial suicide.

Pierrot is not alone in committing an act of sacrificial self-murder; the fantasy world that he inhabits shares the same melancholic leanings as the clown. In *Coucher de Soleil (20)*¹⁸⁴ the sun is staining the world with his life-blood. In the title the verb 'coucher' means either to 'sleep or put to bed; to lie horizontally' as well as 'to layout a wounded person, or to lay or spread colour on a surface' (*Harrap's standard French English dictionary* 1934: 202). The sense of the sun going down, or setting, is overlaid with the notion of his being layed out as a wounded person spreading the colour of his blood over the skies whilst he dies. In the first verse of the poem, the Sun, like the Moon, is capitalised and made into a physically present and humanised entity, dominating the poem with his self-murder. The first line establishes the self-inflicted nature of this deadly sin. Here the Sun is bleeding himself by cutting his own veins open:

¹⁸⁴ *Sunset*.

Le Soleil s'est ouvert les veines	The Sun has opened his veins
Sur un lit de nuages roux:	On a bed of russet clouds:
Son sang, par la bouche des trous,	His blood, through mouth-like gaps,
S'éjacule en rouges fontaines.	Spews in fountains of red.

His bed of clouds has absorbed his colour and turned the brownish red of blood and the life giving liquid pumps out of the Sun through wounds in the shape of mouth-like gaps. These seem to mirror the wounds of the Madonna's breasts in *Évocation* (28). Yet, Giraud is again playing with words such as to 'boucher des trous' which also means to stopper a gap or hole. A carnivalesque instance of something being one thing and another at the same time is again set up to oscillate within the verse. As mouth-like gaps pouring blood these holes are found in the clouds which allow the blood-light to pour out, but grotesque gargoyle-faced spouts, which gush with this overwhelming flood of red, rise in the imagination. The blood could be wine at some decadent orgy flowing as fountains from the mouths of small, grotesque heads. Blood fills this verse like a slaughterhouse and its overabundance is grotesquely carnivalesque as is spews from both mouth and veins in great gouts; a mad self-inflicted dance of death. The Sun is both committing suicide and a consumptive spitting blood through his mouth. A repulsive uneasiness of something perversely unwholesome arises. The verb 's'éjacule' is strange. It has been made into a reflexive verb ensuring that the blood of the Sun takes on humanised qualities. In regular usage 'éjaculer' means to 'ejaculate, the secretion of a liquid by an organism, to discharge sperm during orgasm, to express an opinion with passion',¹⁸⁵ the synonym for 'éjaculer' is 'vomir' which means 'to vomit, to spew out' (*Harrap's standard French English*

¹⁸⁵ See *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

dictionary 1934: 898). The verb thus combines the ideas of sexual orgasm (*jouissance*) and of spewing or vomiting out a liquid with its basis in illness. The blood-letting appears as both a sexual release and as something that must be ejected from the system because it causes illness. Mary Douglas in her work, *Purity and Danger*, developed the idea that the identity of a subject is integrally tied to the borders of the physical body. The defined borders of the body and the subject's identity are threatened by bodily emissions:

Matter issuing from them [the orifices of the body] is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, feces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body...It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. (Douglas 1969: 113)

For Kristeva all things that threaten the boundaries of our identity, whether social or individual, are abject and must be expelled from these borders and placed outside. This separation or rejection is the 'semiotic mode of perpetual aggressivity' (Kristeva 1984: 150). This semiotic drive causes the subject to experience the rejection not as a lack, but as a pleasurable discharge:

These drives move through the sphincters and arouse pleasure at the very moment substances belonging to the body are separated and rejected from the body. This acute pleasure therefore coincides with a loss, a separation from the body, and the isolating of objects outside it. (Kristeva 1984: 150-51)

The drives subvert and corrupt the repressive symbolic function in a *jouissance* of semiotic destruction. Not only have the symbolic borders delineating the human from the non-human been transgressed, but the humanised non-human object transgresses the social border and taboo against self-murder. The Sun is flooding the world with his blood in an orgasm of

expulsion and death. He is the perpetually dying sky god, who makes way for the reign of the Goddess of the night, the Moon, who devours him into her dark maw only to spit him out regenerated. The Sun's death is a self-sacrifice which purposely destroys and overthrows the border between life and death.

However, his dying is accompanied by turmoil in the world of the poem:

Les rameaux convulsifs des chênes	The flailing boughs of oak trees
Flagellent les horizons fous:	Scourge the frenzied horizons:
Le Soleil s'est ouvert les veines	The Sun has opened his veins
Sur un lit de nuages roux.	On a bed of russet clouds.

The branches of trees become penitential instruments which torture the horizons. What is unusual about this is that the trees are not merely generic trees or 'arbres' but 'chênes' or oak trees. This ensures the rhyme scheme of the poem, which is what would be termed a false rhyme, where Giraud uses a homophonic rhyme based on the pronunciation of 'chênes' and that of 'veines'. However, the rhyme scheme alone is not the reason why oak trees were chosen. The oak was a tree of worship and power, dedicated to the highest gods in the differing pantheons. In Greece, it was Zeus, in Rome Jupiter and in Norse mythology, Thor. It was the tree of thunder, rain and lightning. In certain versions of Christ's story the ilex, or evergreen oak, was the tree used for the cross upon which Christ was crucified. The oak also had ties with the Moon: it was the tree of Diana or Artemis, both faces of the Moon goddess, and was sacred to Hekate, a further, darker aspect of the Moon. In the poem the oak trees are the link between the realm of the sky gods, the everyday world and the underworld. The Sun's self-murder upsets the world and the agitated trees, with their flailing boughs, seem to attack the horizons.

The verb used to describe this attack is ‘flageller’ meaning ‘to flagellate, whip or lash’ (*Collins Robert French dictionary* 1990: 350). Flagellation is the act of scourging and is particularly pertinent in the Christian religion, where it refers to the scourging of Christ. A scourge was an instrument of divine chastisement, a lash of vice and folly or an offshoot of a vine (*Shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1973: 1909). The boughs of the oaks take on a holy role as they scourge the demented horizons as punishment for the transgressive crime and sin of the Sun’s suicide, which has destroyed and inverted the order of things. In Dante’s *Inferno*, the souls of suicides grow for eternity as gnarled, poisonous thorn trees. These are scourged by the Harpies, who pluck off the leaves of the trees making them bleed and wail in an endless infliction of the violence that the souls inflicted upon themselves. Giraud has inverted Dante’s imagery and made the trees of this poem the scourges of the sky and its horizons, reminiscent of the religious flagellants who scourged one another and themselves for their sins. This punishment was aimed to propitiate the wrath of God; and the bloody death of the Sun seems to cry out for penance. The horizons are lashed until they become enflamed, demented and dyed the colour of blood. Madness fills the verse to the sound of the flailing, whipping oak boughs and this semiotic violence flays the symbolic, causing the world of the poem to erupt into revolt and to storm with fury. The Sun’s suicide is portrayed as an act of despair brought about by feelings of revulsion, incipient depravity and melancholic weariness:

Comme, après les hontes romaines,
 Un débauché plein de dégoûts
 Laisant jusqu’aux sales égouts
 Saigner ses artères malsaines,
 Le Soleil s’est ouvert les veines!

As after the Roman shame,
 A libertine filled with loathing
 Allows his tainted blood
 To drain into the foul gutters,
 The sun has opened his veins!

The suicide of the Sun is compared to that of a Roman libertine. Giraud uses a strange expression: 'les hontes romaines', or the 'Roman shame'. This implies a period of excess dominated by debauchery and decadence, but at the same time, this Roman shame formed part of the social manners and etiquette of the elite Roman culture. Roman love of honour and fear of shame resulted in suicide being chosen as the death that ensured a morally elevated exit. The shame is thus ambivalent with its orgiastic and transgressive semiotic characteristics, which attack and try to undermine the social conduct and principles held stringently in place by the symbolic. In Roman times, rational suicide was a dignified manner of rectifying and negating the fearful desuetude of cruelty, corruption and licentiousness in which life, lacking all value, was lived. As Alvarez writes:

The Romans looked on suicide neither with fear nor revulsion, but as a carefully considered and chosen validation of the way they had lived and the principles they had lived by. (Alvarez 1972: 56)

This icy logic was found particularly amongst those of the higher estates, who indulged in the most decadent excesses, but who would take their life through self-murder at the slightest possibility that their honour was besmirched. Giraud used the word 'débauché' which means a 'debauched person, a debauchee, libertine or rake' which is associated with excessive drinking and promiscuity.¹⁸⁶ There is a subtle hint of the Bacchanalian in this choice of word. The wild, licentious orgies and drunken revelry of the Roman decadence were also traits found during the ceremonies associated with Bacchus or Dionysus as worshipped in Rome. The self-sacrificing god of wild

¹⁸⁶ Portrayals of this form of decadence can be found in Petronius's *Satyricon*, Juvenal's *Satires*, and Suetonius and Tacitus's historical writings amongst others.

intemperance lurks ever in the shadows that surround the transgression of self-inflicted death.

Dissoluteness and over-indulgence could lead to 'weariness of life... lunacy, or fear of dishonour' (Alvarez 1972: 56), and a sense of melancholy self-loathing, ending in the opening of the veins. There is something sickly and baneful which oozes out of the shame, the loathing and the foulness of Giraud's verse. The reader is engulfed and sucked into the primeval darkness and sludge of the gutters and the destruction and violence of the semiotic, with its Dionysian desires. The libertine's blood is as tainted and grotesque as the gutters into which he lets his life force ebb. This death is sullied and made risible as the lifeblood flows into the stinking foulness of the gutters where the gesture becomes abject and meaningless. The honour of the suicide is expunged in the realisation that the end is merely the cesspit where all dead matter ends up and that this polite veneer merely cloaks the extreme violence of the action and its sinful and wanton profusion of blood. Death stands and laughs in the midst of the repugnant squalor of this bloody self-murder, as death is as much of the gutters as of the sky. It is not fussy. This wild excess where everything is imbued with a shade of corruption and the stench of spilt blood, the darkness and lunacy of self-extinction is disdainfully presided over by the Moon, goddess of the underworld and death. As the Sun god expires in an excess of warm self-sacrificial blood, she will rise - pale and frostily cold.

This god-like and holy self-sacrifice is even more eerie and creepily evil in *Messe Rouge* (29).¹⁸⁷ The title of this poem alone is a complex play with multiple strands of religious ideology, self-sacrifice and death. The Red Mass is a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church. It was originally called the Mass of the Holy Ghost, but became known as the Red Mass because the vestments worn during this liturgy are red, recalling both blood and fire. This liturgy opened the judicial year of the Sacred Roman Rota, the Tribunal of the Catholic Church, which tried civil and criminal cases involving the clergy. The word Rota means wheel and comes from the Inquisition's method of torture to gain confessions. The victim was tied spread-eagle to the wheel (Rota) and was whipped as the wheel turned. The Tribunal is thus symbolic of the scourge and wheel of Justice from which blood and fiery brimstone descend in a quest to erase all apostasy or heresy of any kind. The Tribunal is previously alluded to in the poem *A mon cousin de Bergame*,¹⁸⁸ where Pierrot stands before it:

Au pied de la rouge tribune, At the foot of the red tribunal,
Il chargeait les gestes du roi[...] He caricatured the gestures of the king[...]

The idea of a law dripping in blood before which one is held accountable is immediately apparent. Why would a king stand before this Tribunal? During the Revolution's reign of terror the king did stand before the Tribunal and was sentenced to death by guillotine. The bloodlust, inculcated by the lawyer Robespierre, ensured that thousands were killed by means of the guillotine. This was known as the Red Mass and crowds gathered to celebrate the rolling of heads into the basket, amongst which was that of the king. Pierrot

¹⁸⁷ *Red Mass*

¹⁸⁸ *To my cousin from Bergamo.*

has assumed the attributes of a king, even in caricature, and these attributes will come to include those of self-sacrifice. Christ was considered a king who sacrificed himself and the continuation into perpetuity of this sacrifice is found in the Eucharistic Mass. It is a propitiatory rite where Christ is the priest and the offerer of the sacrifice, but also the victim and object of the sacrifice. This relates very well to the pagan idea that a God was sacrificed to himself on the grounds that he was his own enemy and that therefore the God ate his own flesh because the victim offered to him, was himself (Frazer 1992: 391-392). Both the body and the blood of the God were to be eaten and drunk in a celebration, a 'eucharist', which pre-dates the Eucharist of the Christian tradition. Pierrot, in the same manner, appears to assume the role of kingly priest for the celebration of the Eucharist in the Red Mass of the poem:

Pour la cruelle Eucharistie,	For the cruel Eucharist,
Sous l'éclair des ors aveuglants	Beneath flashes of dazzling gold
Et des cierges aux feux troublants,	And candles with perturbing flames,
Pierrot sort de la sacristie.	Pierrot slips from the sacristy.

What is immediately apparent, is that the adjective used to describe the Eucharist is not one that Christians would normally associate with the sacrament. In the Christian tradition the Eucharist is the offering of bread and wine as representative of the body and blood of Christ. This is a ceremony based on forgiveness, atonement and redemption and which, for Christians, has little to do with the idea of cruelty. In the Catholic Mass the bread, or Host, is physically altered into the flesh of Christ and the wine into his blood by the priest who utters the words of consecration over them. Giraud's chosen title, *The Red Mass*, heightens the impact of the flesh and

blood, as well as that of Christ's continuous self-sacrifice, in a revelation of the gory anthropophagy and suicide which resides at the centre of this religious ceremony. Dionysus, like Christ, was the son of a god and both Dionysus and Christ were made kings and sacrificed in place of the godhead. The followers, as an expiation of this blood-guilt, ate the body and drank the blood of Dionysus and Christ. The use of the word 'cruel' to describe the sacrament of the Christian tradition is thus a heretical transgression because it defames the nature of the Eucharist, revealing it as an exceedingly violent, and cannibalistic symbolic practice with pagan roots. The suppressed semiotic ruptures the instilled rituals of the symbolic and releases the forces of violence, bloodlust cannibalism and self-murder into the poem.

Giraud increases the sense of incipient unease and potential evil by ensuring that the atmosphere in the place of celebration is mystically eerie. Here even the candles and their flames celebrate disquiet rather than tranquillity. They flicker and pick out the gold illumination that fills the place of worship. There is a fluid feeling of mesmeric power. The word 'troublant', though it can mean 'perturbing and disquieting', also has the added notion of altering the serenity of the spirit by arousing carnal desires.¹⁸⁹ There is a sense of hidden ecstasy and rapture. An ambiguity is held in the quivering flames, which seems to betoken both trepidation and an occultic infusion of ecstasy into the spirit. The word 'éclair' means 'lightning' and is associated with sudden phosphorescent brightness. This light is regarded as the symbol of Lucifer, bringer of light or illumination, as it is also the light associated with the Moon as Luna, which

¹⁸⁹ See *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

comes from 'lecerer' (to shine). The Goddess of the Moon manifested herself as Lucifera (the light bringer). Giraud further plays on the word 'éclair' because it has the added connotations of the fulguration, or brightening of gold in the crucible, as the last traces of dross leave the surface (*Cassell's giant paperback dictionary* 1994: 540). Pagan enlightenment, alchemy and the propitiatory cleansing away of the dross of sin all intermingle in the prelude to the rite of the Eucharist. Lucifer, the Moon and Pierrot have been conflated in the metaphoric imagery of the verse. Heresy, paganism and the occult dazzle in the setting and the tongues of fire flicker uneasily. Pierrot has slipped out of the sacristy, like a thief or a wraith, and there is a touch of impiety in this stealth and a sense of foreboding of something broodingly baleful and repulsive. In a mass where the red of blood and self-sacrifice play the predominant role, Pierrot is sneakily and illegally officiating as priest:

Sa main, de la Grâce investie,	His hand, invested with divine Grace,
Déchire ses ornements blancs,	Rends his white vestments,
Pour la cruelle Eucharistie,	For the cruel Eucharist,
Sous l'éclair des ors aveuglants.	Beneath flashes of dazzling gold.

For the Eucharist to become real flesh and blood the consecrating words need to be uttered by the officiating priest. All words are denied Pierrot and in his silence, it is his gesturing, speaking and mimetic hand that becomes the consecrated and consecrating object. The semiotic gestures and flourishes of the hand along with Pierrot's silence have triumphed over the symbolic with its need for words to ensure the ritual transformation. The mystical and alchemical nature of the consecration of the Eucharist is up-ended by the investiture of Pierrot's hand with Divine Grace like a magician's wand. Divine Grace is associated with benevolent acts of

goodwill and is a route to eternal salvation through these acts or through a state of holiness. It is a supernatural gift granted by god. There is, however, a play on the word ‘Grâce’ because it is a state implied in the expression ‘la main de Dieu’, which intervenes to grant favours or benediction. Kings used the idea of Divine Grace to assert their divine right to rule. Pierrot assumes the attributes not only of the priest, but also of the self-sacrificial God-king. However, Pierrot’s vestments are not red as they should be for this mass, but the limpid milk-white of the Moon’s light. This is an honouring of Pierrot’s allegiance to her and a homage to her presence which is concealed in the dazzling flashes of light which illuminate this place of worship. There is a growing sense of a pagan ceremony with its suggestions of Luciferian light - a disjointedness with a whiff of cordite.

Pierrot proceeds to raise his blessed and divine hand in pardon and benediction in a manner reminiscent of Christ Pantocrator.¹⁹⁰ As Pantocrator, Christ is presented as looking directly at the worshipper and holding the Sacred Word in his left hand and his right hand raised in blessing.¹⁹¹

Et d’un grand geste d’amnistie	And with a grand gesture of pardon
Il montre aux fidèles tremblants	He shows to the trembling devout
Son cœur entre ses doigts sanglants	His heart between bloody fingers
- Comme une horrible et rouge hostie-	- As a horrible red host -
Pour la cruelle Eucharistie.	For the cruel Eucharist.

There is something theatrical and intensely odd about Pierrot’s own gesture of blessing that is made even more palpable by the reaction of the worshippers who are ‘tremblant’. Either they are deeply fearful and agitated,

¹⁹⁰ See Figure 23 on page 5.

¹⁹¹ Christ’s tunic is normally crimson red to signify both the blood that he shed on the Cross and to recall the soldier’s cloak that was put over Christ’s shoulders during the Crucifixion.

or they are shaking with anticipatory excitement. The trembling of the worshippers is normally associated with the passion to become one with the God through the celebration of the sacrament. But in this instance there is a slippage and ambiguity at play as the semiotic peeps through the scene and a sense of intense and awkward fear infiltrates the passion.

Pierrot has used his hand to rend his white vestments with violent force and torn out his own heart in a violent sacrificial act. Pierrot's butchery of himself resembles the Aztec rite where the God-King had his heart wrenched from his chest by the priests and held up as a sacrifice to the sun. Pierrot, as priest and God-king, chooses to hold his heart up in sacrifice to the ever present Moon who is his ruling deity. Pierrot's identification with the Moon is Dionysian, but this Moon is the goddess of the realm of death and Pierrot's transgressive violence and madness ensures his own suffering and self-destruction. Pierrot raises his heart in his bloody fingers for the worshippers to reverence. He has mimicked Christ's blessing and has held up his heart in place of the Sacred Word. His heart has become the consecrated Host. The word 'hostie' in French, though meaning the Christian 'Host' (the body of Christ), has the added meanings of a sacrificial victim, or a victim of atonement. The pagan eucharistic ceremony melds fluidly with the Christian practice in the single word 'hostie', as they do in Pierrot's person and actions, where he is both the 'Host' and the 'sacrifice'. Pierrot has presented the worshippers with real flesh and blood and not mere bread and wine for this Eucharist. Christian and pagan rituals are braided together in a wild, bloody and sinfully transgressive religious ceremony of

self-murder. The Red Mass of the title is now fulfilled in the bloody fingers of Pierrot's sanctified hand and the grisly red host of his extracted heart.

This cruel Eucharist violates and shatters accepted perceptions and rituals. This is the frenzy of the Dionysian semiotic which demolishes symbolic tradition in a mocking caricature, which is both nauseating and thrillingly liberating. Pierrot's suicide parodies the self-sacrifice of the gods both pagan and Christian. It is as disturbing as it is individualistic; a suicide tainted by violently spilt blood and violation of the self. This burlesque of the most sacred happening in the Christian tradition is heretical, playful, eerie and cruel. It destroys religious hierarchy and dogma and satirically exposes the violence of the sacrificial rites. The 'Host' or wafer that is eaten in the Christian ceremony is round, flat and white and has the appearance of a small Moon. This Moon is Pierrot's constant companion. Here she becomes the unacknowledged representative of sacrifice, death and resurrection. For Pierrot like Dionysus and Christ will rise again.

The plight of self-sacrifice, blood and the physical agony of being crucified on the cross are evoked in *Les Croix* (30).¹⁹² The suffering on this cross is revealed as intrinsic to the craft of the poet, the torturous affliction of fluid and unruly words nailed into the structure of 'fine' or 'beautiful' verses, which are borne as a heavy and large cross. It is upon these verses and their words that poets are crucified and made to bleed.

¹⁹² *Crosses*.

Les beaux vers sont de larges croix
Où saignent les rouges Poètes,
Aveuglés par les gypaètes
Qui volent comme des effrois.

Fine verses are large crosses
Where red Poets bleed,
Blinded by griffons
Who swoop like terrors.

There is a generalisation in the plural noun 'Poètes' which encompasses the elite humanity who write sublime verses. Yet, Giraud has capitalised the noun, making it a proper noun and giving it individuality. The poet has again returned and assumed the role of Pierrot. The fact that 'Poètes' and 'Pierrot' begin with the same letter and that Giraud has chosen to capitalise the word 'Poètes' is indicative of the clown as hidden within the guise of the word in a carnivalesque doubling. The plural noun that has created this sense of doubleness is a Kristevan split-speech act where the Poet and Pierrot are simultaneously subject and object of the poem in a continual oscillating interpenetration. Like Siamese twins, the Poet and Pierrot are one, yet remain separate entities. For Jean de Palacio, Pierrot is:

A la fois célébrant et victime, sujet et objet du sacrifice, Pierrot jouerait donc simultanément tous les rôles du grand drame sacré, mais surtout celui du Poète cloué au pilori de ces affres d'un style nouveau. (Palacio 1990: 205)¹⁹³

The colour red is again the predominant thread that has been filigreed through the poems. The trace is the blood-colour of Pierrot's silent mouth. The Poets are described as 'red' but this is not from blood alone. Red is the colour closely associated with revolution, provocation and subversion. It is also the colour of the body's life sustaining fluid: the blood. It has close ties

¹⁹³ At the same time celebrant and victim, subject and object of the sacrifice, Pierrot simultaneously plays all the roles of the great sacred drama, but especially that of the Poet nailed to the pillory of anguish of a new style.

to death and for those condemned to die for certain crimes the colour red was chosen for the shirts that they wore on the way to the gallows.

In the same way as Christ, Poets bleed upon the cross in a self-sacrifice for their promulgation of revolutionary ideas. The notion of the sacrifice of the artist, or poet, is most clearly rendered in James Ensor's work, *Calvary or Ensor on the Cross*.¹⁹⁴ In this work Ensor identifies himself with Christ and the persecution and public humiliation that Christ suffered on the Cross. Ensor places himself upon the cross and beneath him are the faces of the populace which are distorted with huge rubbery lips, hooked-noses and jawlines and with giant posteriors. Hypocrisy fills their smug gazes and attitudes. This is most noticeable in the figure directly under the cross on the right side of the painting whose hands are folded as in prayer he appears a caricature of the hypocritical priest or monk. The body and face above him are distorted beyond recognition, a cadaver with popped, glaring eyes and open screaming mouth. The head appears almost like a rubberized mask. The monk type stares upward with seeming deep-seated satisfaction and content. The figures directly under Ensor's cross seem to be *Commedia dell'arte* or carnival characters. The one sobbing, hand over eyes and all in white might be a Pierrot in the role of Mary Magdalene. Though appearing to sob, yet its left arm is slyly placed upon the leg of another figure sitting on the other side of the cross, whose face, hidden beneath a blue cowl like the Virgin, is equally ugly in its distortions. The white sobbing figure is surrounded by masks with protuberant noses wearing tawdry carnival finery.

¹⁹⁴ James Ensor 1860 – 1949, Belgian painter and engraver.

They seem to have been heading to attend a carnival, but have found that the suffering of a crucifixion holds more carnivalesque enjoyment. To the front left of the picture is a strange figure wearing a top hat and with a straggly beard and prominent nose. He seems to be with the group, denoted by the XX on the head of one of the figures, the insignia of the artistic group “Les Vingts, or XX”, of which Ensor was a founding member. This figure in the top hat appears to be Ensor himself, as though he is doubled in true carnivalesque fashion. He seems to be mockingly observing himself on the cross. He is both a part of the crowd who persecute and the object of persecution. This top hatted figure is dark where the figure of Ensor on the cross is bathed in unearthly light. Here the artist, as both subject and object of the painting, oscillates fluidly between states with a touch of manic, edgy laughter. The artist has sacrificed himself in an anarchistic rebellion against the animalistic and repulsive nature of the crowd and of the critics who persecute him. In this representation he implies that he is following the example of Christ as self-sacrifice. The Venerable Bede, like Tertullian and St. Augustine, affirmed the self-inflicted nature of Christ’s death upon the cross (Fedden 1938: 143). Christ, like the Poets, was a willing sacrifice to his poetic teachings, ideas and beliefs. He voluntarily climbed onto the cross. This willingness to sacrifice himself is most beautifully extolled by the tree of the cross in the old Anglo-Saxon work *The Dream of the Rood*.

Here the tree, or Rood, says:

I saw the Lord of mankind hasten with much fortitude, for he
Meant to climb upon me.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Bradley 1982: 161 Lines 33-34

The tree calls itself the ‘despised gallows’ and like the Poets the seeping red trickle appears and the Rood piteously narrates:

They pierced me with dark nails:
The wounds are visible upon me,
Gaping malicious gashes.....
I was all soaked with blood issuing from the man’s side
after he sent forth his spirit.¹⁹⁶

Self-sacrifice, blood and death all merge one into the other in the torment of the cross. Grünewald’s central panel of the Isenheim Altarpiece is a study in the stark cruelty of the crucifixion. Christ’s body on the cross is twisted by the torture he is enduring, the thorns of the scourges stick in the wounds that cover the entire body. The crimson flow of the blood from the wound in the side is in stark contrast to the greenish tinge of the flesh (Gombrich 1995: 351-352). It is a painting which is revelatory of the unmitigated horror and anguish of the self-sacrifice on the gallows of the cross.¹⁹⁷

This gallows is not as it seems and Giraud subverts the Christian connotations of the cross by intertwining them with pagan themes. Odin, the Norse god, was a self-sacrificial victim who hung upon the gallows of a tree.

As he says:

Wounded I hung on a wind-swept gallows
For nine long nights
Pierced by a spear, pledged to Odin,
Offered, myself to myself
The wisest know not from whence spring
The roots of that ancient rood.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid* Lines 45-49

¹⁹⁷ See Figure 25 on page 5.

¹⁹⁸ *Norse Poems* 1983. (tr. W. H. Auden and P. B. Taylor) London: Faber and Faber.

The cross was a Roman form of punishment and instrument of death. Poets not only bleed upon the Cross, but are also blinded on it. The creatures doing the blinding are not those generally associated with this act, such as crows, but rather pagan, mythological beings. The word used by Giraud, 'gypaètes', means 'Lammergeier' or 'bearded vulture', which closely resembles the creature that the Ancient Greeks associated with the griffon. The vulture is a descendent of the griffon, the creature sacred to Zeus, which pulled his chariot. Aeschylus in his play *Prometheus bound* has Prometheus say 'Beware of the sharp-beaked hounds of Zeus that do not bark, the gryphons'.¹⁹⁹ These silent creatures sweep down on the Poets and inspire the utmost dread, like the hounds of hell. Giraud uses the plural noun 'effrois' (frights, fears, terrors) to describe the movement of the griffons. This enhances the impression of swift, impending and painful punishment and vengeance. The word seems to oscillate between the suggestion of dread and the plural's personification of fiends and demons which descend bearing the seeds of spite, horror and the wreaking of retribution. The Furies spring to mind, but the implacable nature of the punishment points to Nemesis, who as avenger of hubris had a chariot drawn by griffons. The word 'effrois' is remarkable for its evocation of diabolic banefulness and grotesque nightmare. Here pagan punishment is revealed at its most pitiless. The Poets' self-murder is an act of wanton defiance and mutiny against the gods of the old order and therefore a deadly sin against which they exact the severest reprisal.

¹⁹⁹ Aeschylus 1970. *Prometheus bound*. London: Penguin Books.

The verb 'aveugler' is ambivalent, meaning not only 'to blind' but 'to lose clarity of vision or to be fascinated or seduced'.²⁰⁰ Yet, the verb 'aveugler' also brings to mind the 'aveuglant' of the poem *Messe Rouge* with its dazzling overtones of blinding enlightenment mixed with the satanic's dark, deadly damnation. It seems that the Poets have been punished with blindness for their imaginative vision, which threatens to seduce and subvert the ruling hierarchy. The immortal Prometheus, in Greek legend, brought man the gift of fire and imaginative vision; for this he was crucified, like the Poets. Prometheus protected mankind from the wrath of Zeus and, like Christ, came to earth to suffer and intercede for them. He rebelled against Zeus's plans to exterminate mankind and for this subversion he was nailed by the hands and feet, arms outstretched and a stake through his side, to some rocks in the Caucasus. Zeus sent his griffon (vulture) to feast on Prometheus's liver, which renewed itself overnight. Prometheus's permanent suffering mirrors the permanent suffering of Christ's crucifixion, which is continually re-enacted in the Christian Mass. Gustave Moreau's painting of *Prometheus*²⁰¹ bases the facial features of Prometheus on the style used to depict Christ in the artwork of the Renaissance. Above Prometheus's head appears a small flickering flame of enlightenment that mirrors the flames placed above the heads of the apostles. It alludes to the fire that Prometheus brought to man; both the flames and the imagination. The self-sacrifice of Prometheus was, however, a defiance of unjust tyranny. He rebelled against the power of the ruling hierarchy and refused to enchain his imagination and knowledge. His suffering stemmed from his subversiveness and his

²⁰⁰ See *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

²⁰¹ See Figure 26 on page 5.

dismantling of the ruling order of things. Poetry also aspires to this semiotic dismantling of the governing order and structure of grammar and of accepted forms and practices. The Poets, Christ and Prometheus have all consciously chosen a form of suicide. However, the Poets and Prometheus purposely defy the will of sovereignty, whether that be in the holy structure of grammar and verses, or Zeus, and for this they are prepared to suffer the anguish and torture of self sacrifice. Prometheus as bearer of light is associated with the Christian Lucifer. Thus, the subversive poetic vision has the taint of enlightened evil and rebellion that leads to voluntary suicide on the large cross of their own contempt for societal laws and hierarchies. This insult is individualistic and as such is condemned as wicked and immoral, a deadly sin which deserves horrific punishment.

Slaughter, blood, death and self-sacrifice are vividly depicted in the second verse:

Aux glaives les cadavres froids	To the swords the cold cadavers
Ont offert d'écarlates fêtes:	Have offered their scarlet feast:
Les beaux vers sont de larges croix	Fine verses are large crosses
Où saignent les rouges Poètes.	Where red Poets bleed.

The bodies are already cold. Death has been their companion for a while and life has long since fled bearing its warm, streaming banner of red. The word 'glaive' has subtle differences of meaning, as previously discussed. It can mean either spear or sword. The word 'cadavre' means 'fallen thing' this stemming from the Latin 'cadere - to fall' it also means a corpse or a skeleton' (*Shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1973: 264). For Kristeva this word is a revelation of the transgression of the limits of the body where the

expulsions of fluid and other waste are finally jettisoned, as life falls over the fragile physical border into death:

There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit - *cadere* - cadaver. (Kristeva 1982: 3)

The cadavers in the poem have expelled their bodily fluids in a waste of self-sacrifice and they lie cold and rigid. The painting of Holbein's Christ²⁰² with his side pierced by the spear and lain out as a corpse on a slab, dead, with no apparent hope of resurrection, is the subjective cultural representation that this image brings to mind. This painting is of the grotesqueness of death in all its physical solitariness and harrowing forsaken reality, a macabre image. Here is the self-sacrificial victim devoid of pathos in melancholy isolation where his individualistic act can be viewed with disapprobation and contempt inspired by deep horror and fear.

However, in the verse there is a sense of purposeful slaughter. These cadavers have either been killed in battle, or have killed themselves by going into battle. The horror of combat and the butchery inflicted by conquerors on the defeated seems to dance out of the verse on a scarlet surge of carnage and malevolence. War as the ultimate self-sacrifice and suicide in all its evil cruelty is present. The image of swords replete on a blood feast humanises the killing instrument and its lust for slaughter. This shudders through the verse and down the reader's spine. The semiotic violence gorily slices

²⁰² Figure 27 on page 5.

through the restraint of the symbolic as social restraints are lifted in the 'glory' of battle. The glorification of a violent death flies in the face of the denunciatory Christian command 'Thou shalt not kill' used to condemn and criminalise suicides as murderers of themselves. These corpses are the sinful suicides of the reigning ideology. It is this ideology that the Poets are trying to overthrow by means of their self-sacrifice on the crosses of their verses.

This strange image of the scarlet feast also infuses the verse with pagan elements. In certain warrior cults, bravery and suicide were considered the goals to strive towards. Only those who died by violent means or suicide were admitted to Odin's Valhalla. Here they partook of the banquet because suicide and self-sacrifice in battle were the scarlet tribute of death and were vaunted attributes, allowing free passage to the feast.

The overlay of violence, blood, self-sacrifice and the scarlet feast with its pagan nuances combine in a macabre dance of death which transgresses the accepted values prized by society and which has been inculcated by the power of the governing hierarchy of beliefs. Suicide stalks through the verse, a skeletal presence at the scarlet feast that is a celebration of the anarchy that creates 'martyrs for Satan' (Alvarez 1972: 62). The damnation of these cadavers as 'satanic' suicides would have justified the savagery of the death inflicted upon them in the verse. The Poets on the self-sacrificial crosses of their 'fine' verses collude with these 'satanic' martyrs in trying to transgress and defy the ruling hierarchy.

Yet, these cadavers stepped into death with horror and fear, hair standing on end that recalls the hair of the thieves in *Pierrot voleur*:

Ils ont trépassé, cheveux droits,	They died, hair standing on end,
Loin de la foule aux clameurs bêtes,	Far from the crowd's beastly clamouring
Les soleils couchants sur leurs têtes	The setting sun's rays upon their heads
Comme des couronnes de rois!	Like the crowns of kings!
Les beaux vers sont de larges croix!	Fine verses are large crosses!

The shiver of terror that flows from the raised hair is indicative of the dread inspired by death. This hair on end of the corpses is macabrely funny and reminiscent of some of the depictions of skeletons in the Danse Macabre. Their hair is standing up as they hop up and down with crazy abandon in a manic, disjointed dance of death accompanied by music and shrill laughter.²⁰³ Here, the terror of death is turned into something grotesquely comic: Bakhtin notes that it is a 'funny monstrosity' (Bakhtin 1984: 57).

This is a solitary death occurring far from society with its gossip and noisy vulgarity. Giraud's use of the word 'bêtes' as an adjective to describe the crowd reveals its bestial nature, its lack of intelligence and its unquestioning acceptance of the flow of the given social order. The word is carnivalesque in its ascribing of animal traits to humans. In the word 'clameur' Giraud again sets up an oscillation between the semiotic and the symbolic. This polyvalent word contains the meanings of 'expression of discontent', 'confused cries', 'insults or expressions of bad feelings' and in judicial terms, 'a summons, or legal order'. The marketplace with its noise and ribaldry is conjured with its cacophony of beasts. The reader can hear the

²⁰³ See Figure 28 on page 5.

racket as it tumbles out of the words, 'la foule aux clameurs bêtes', which shatter the silence and structure of the verse. As the *glossolalia* of intermingled screams, oaths and nasty expressions of ill-will become mere raucous sound containing no discernible meaning, the semiotic explodes and splinters the control of the symbolic. However, subtly contained within the wild, noisy disordered nonsense of the word is its own boundary and constraint, the social control of the law. It is this law which has the ability to channel the noisy oaths, gossip and ill-will into a social process which can govern and focus the crowd's animal-like responses. The re-imposition of the symbolic ensures that the social structure remains in force.

It is the setting sun which crowns the corpses like kings. The image of Christ with his crown of thorns on the cross is vividly present. The corpses are crowned as kings and blessed by the dying rays of the sun god. A last gift before darkness falls and the cold goddess Moon rises and accepts them into her realm of shades. Their coronation with these rays is as pagan as their death is transgressive. This elevation to a position of prestige, a raising of the dead to a new life, is implicit in the myths associated with the crucifixion, both pagan and Christian. The large crosses that verses impose on the Poets are a torment, a suffering and a wildly grotesque rebellion against societal order with its structuring devices, as Bakhtin writes, 'the grotesque liberates man from all the forms of inhuman necessity that direct the prevailing concept of the world' (Bakhtin 1984: 49). These crosses made from verses are a form of suicide, or self-sacrifice, and as the Jewish saying goes 'cursed is he who hangs upon a tree' which is perhaps why Dante

placed the souls of suicides in trees, or why they hanged suicide victims from a gibbet. The suicide victim is cursed and tainted by the deadly sin of self-murder. As John Wesley declared, they should be ‘gibbeted and left to rot’ (Jamison 2000: 16).

This re-invokes the image of Callot’s tree of death, with which the discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins commenced. It is upon this tree that the deadly sin of suicide finally closes the circle of the sins with a subversive ‘Mori licet cui vivere non placet’.²⁰⁴ In like manner to the gods, who voluntarily chose to hang and die upon a tree only to be resurrected, the Poets hope that their ‘fine’ verses will provide them with continual resurrection and immortality. Pierrot too will rise again under a new guise, so that he may continue his adoring worship of his ever waxing and waning celestial being.

It is Pierrot’s resurrection as a mysterious, transgressive and melancholy figure, as found in the works of the Belgian painter James Ensor, which will be explored in the following chapter. Ensor’s fantastical use of brilliant colour along with his depiction of hybrid masked creatures, amongst which Pierrot is always present, challenged and transgressed established artistic traditions, as well as being decidedly different from the Impressionist and Pointillist techniques that were the predominant avant-garde schools of Ensor’s time. The manic mayhem of the colour and the manner in which Ensor uses light to distort masks and figures defy the accepted appearances

²⁰⁴ He is at liberty to die who does not wish to live.

of everyday reality. His figures seem to spill over the confines of the paintings and take on a physical presence surrounding the viewer with their comical and mad presence. Contained in the delicate shades and electrifying brilliance of Ensor's vivid palette resides all the transgressive power of his work. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his evocation and focus on the mask of the pale, deadly white Pierrot. It is this lustrous white that creates the sparkling light that floods Ensor's paintings.

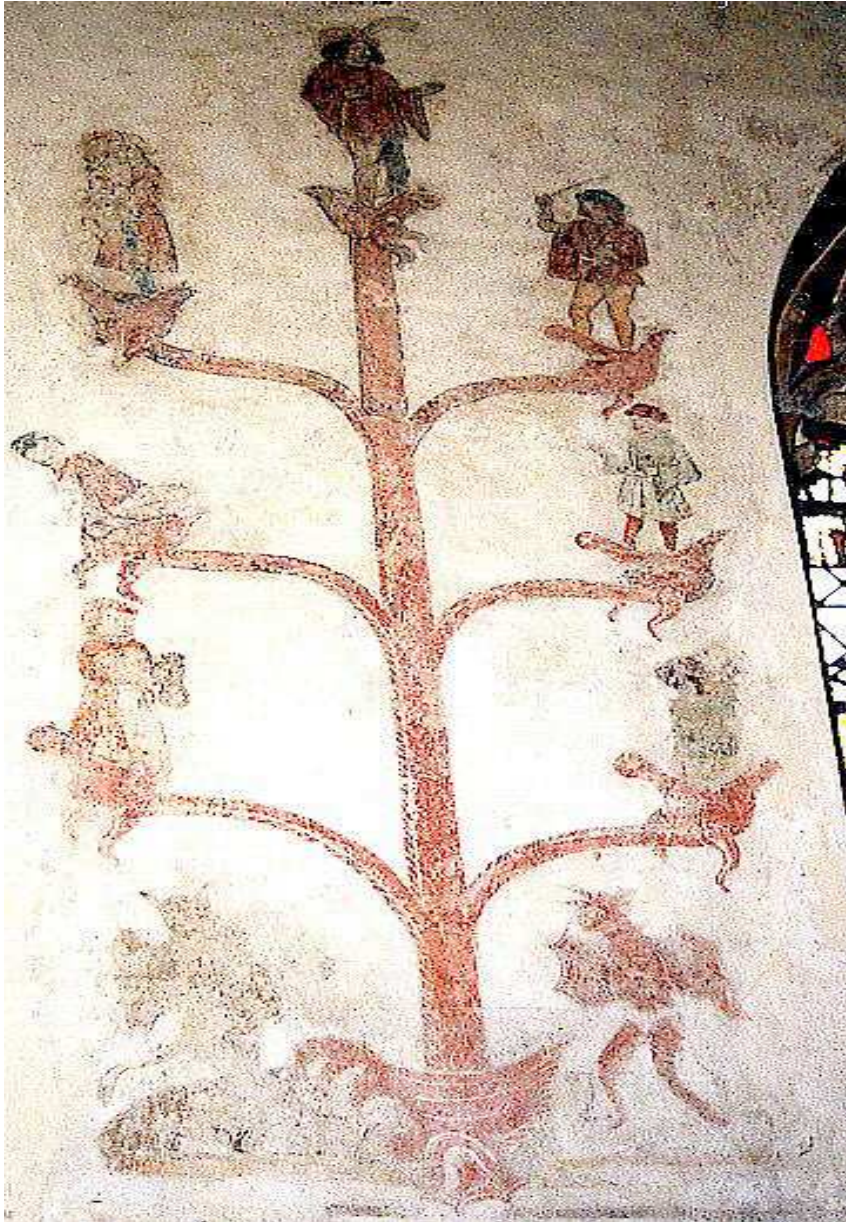


Figure 6

Figure 6 *The Seven Deadly Sins*

c. 1500

Wall painting

Hessett Church in Suffolk

[Online Image]

Available at www.paintedchurch.org/hessds.htm

Accessed on 19/08/2004

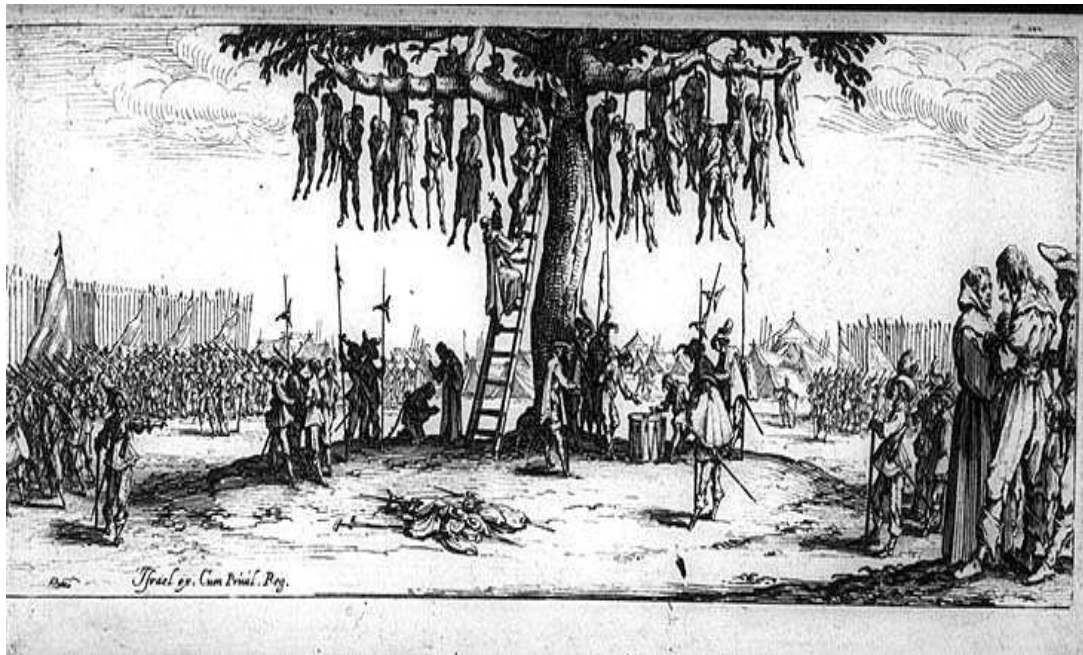


Figure 7
Figure 7 Hanging tree from miseries of war.
Jacques Callot
1633
Engraving
University of Michigan Museum of Art, Michigan



Figure 8

Figure 8 *The swing of Pulcinella.*
Giovanni Domenico (Giancomo) Tiepolo
1791 - 93
Detached fresco
Ca' Rezzonico, Venice



Figure 9
Figure 9 *Le miroir du diable II*
Antoine Wiertz
1856
Oil on canvas
Musée Antoine Wiertz, Brussels



Figure 10

Figure 10 *The cure for folly: The stone operation*

Hieronymus Bosch

1475 - 1480

Oil on panel

Museo del Prado, Madrid



Figure 11
Figure 11 *The temptation of St Anthony*
Felicien Rops
1878
Oil on panel
Bibliotheque Royale, Brussels



Figure 12
Figure 12 *The Great Red Dragon*
William Blake
1806 - 1809
Watercolour
Brooklyn museum, New York



Figure 13

Figure 13 *The mirror of life and death*

c. 15th Century

[Online image]

Available at <http://bloomingmind.org/dualisme/XVIIeme.htm>

Accessed on the 09/12/2004



Figure 14

Figure 14 *The Beethoven frieze « The hostile forces »*

Gustav Klimt,
1902

The Österreichische Galerie Belvedere,
Vienna



Figure 15
Figure 15 *La femme et la folie dominant le monde*
Félicien Rops
1886
Héliogravure
Musée provincial Félicien Rops, Namur



Figure 16

Figure 16 *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*

Gianlorenzo Bernini

1647 - 52

Marble

Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome



Figure 17
Figure 17 *Röttgen Pietà*
14th Century
Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn



Figure 18:

Figure 18 Bat-woman

Albert Penot

c. 1890

[Online image]

Available at <http://www.illusionsgallery.com/batwoman.html>

Accessed on 27/09/2005



Figure 19

Figure 19 *La buveuse d'absinthe* (*The absinthe drinker*)

Félicien Rops

1877

Water colour, gouache and black crayon

Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels



Figure 20

Figure 20 *L'Absinthère*

Joseph Apoux

c. 1900

[Online Image]

Available from <http://drugs.uta.edu/absinthe.html>

Accessed: 11/09/2007



Figure 21
Figure 21 *Lady Lilith*
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
1867
Oil on canvas
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware



Figure 22

Figure 22 *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*

John William Waterhouse

1893

Oil on canvas

Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt



Figure 23
Figure 23 *Pantocrator*
1148
Mosaic
Cathedral of Cefalu



Figure 24

Figure 24 *Calvary*
James Ensor
1886
Coloured pencils on wood
Galerie Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp.

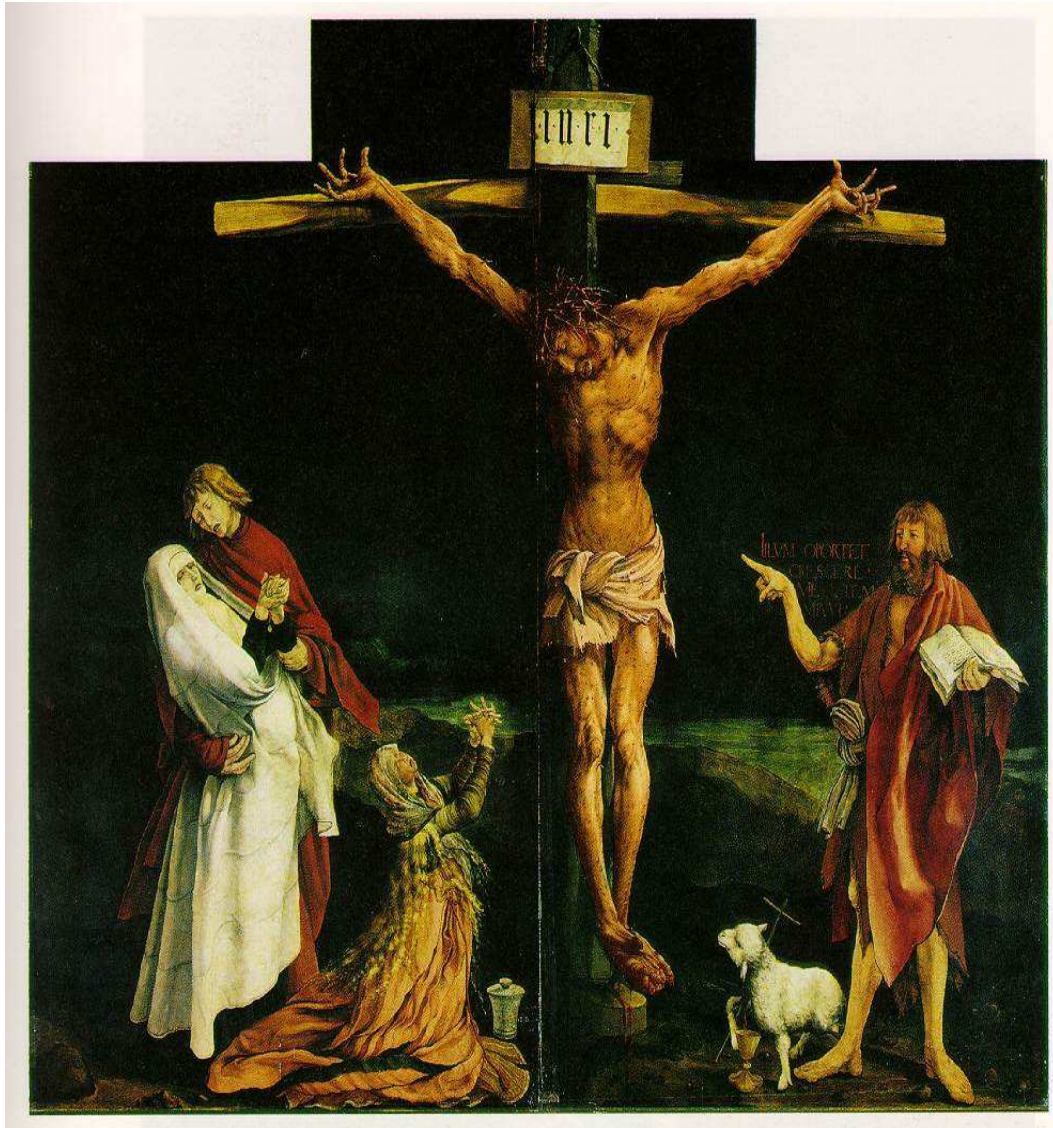


Figure 25
Figure 25 *Crucifixion*
Matthias Grünewald
1515
Tempera on panel
Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel

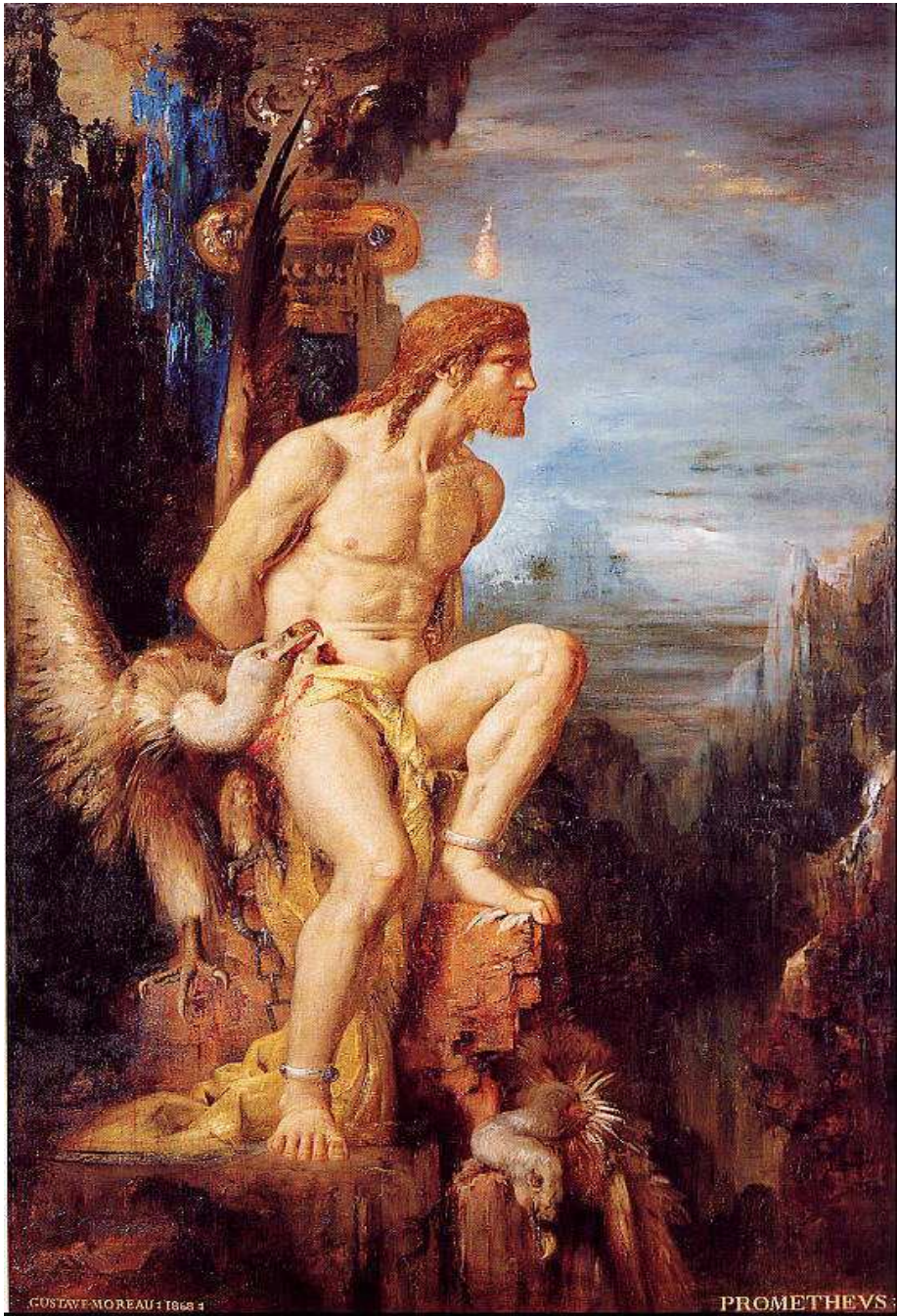


Figure 26
Figure 26 *Prometheus*
Gustave Moreau
1868
Oil on canvas
Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris



Figure 27

Figure 27 *Dead Christ in the Tomb*

Hans Holbein the Younger

1521/22

Oil on wood

Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel



Figure 28

Figure 28 *The Dance of Death*
Michael Wolgemut
c. 1493
Nuremberg Chronicle

CHAPTER THREE: PHANTASMAGORIC LIGHT: JAMES ENSOR'S MASKS, SKELETONS AND HYBRID BEINGS

Pearly opalescent and luminous white light with vibrant nuances of colour are what saturate the work of James Ensor both as painter and writer. His choice of words exhibits the same bizarre, transgressive power and astonishing use of light as do his eerie, phantasmagoric limnings²⁰⁵ of masks and skeletons. Thus he writes:

I love to draw beautiful words, like trumpets of light ... I adore you, words who are sensitive to our sufferings, words in red and lemon yellow, words in steel-blue colour of certain insects, words with the scent of vibrant silks, subtle words of fragrant roses and seaweed, prickly words of sky-blue wasps, words with powerful snouts, words of spotless ermine, words spat out by the sands of the sea, words greener than the Cyrene fleece, discreet words whispered by fishes in the pink ears of shells, bitter words, words of fleur-de-lis and Flemish cornflowers, sweet words with a pictorial ring, plaintive words of horses being beaten, evil words, festive words, tornado and storm tossed words, windy words, reedy words, the wise words of children, rainy, tearful words, words without rhythm or reason, I love you! I love you! (Ensor in Haesaerts 1957: 194)²⁰⁶

Words become colours, become creatures, become freedom from constraint. They are the light and the storm and transgress boundaries in the same fluid and violent manner as Ensor's paintings and drawings. Words possess the ability to be macabre, scatological and freakish. They can be melded²⁰⁷ to

²⁰⁵ This means to paint or draw, but also to depict by means of words. (*Cassell's giant paperback dictionary* 1994: 789).

²⁰⁶ Oyez mes mots cinquantenaires parfumés de sensibilité. Ah! on les a rudement camouflés, maculés, émasculés, subtilisés, chipés depuis, mes mots jolis, aimés, fruits mûrs de mes verdeurs et de mes prédilections : mots discrets de poissons soupirés dans les conques, mots plaintifs des chevaux battus, mots bleu d'acier des mouches élégantes, mots sages des enfants, mots crachés des sables et de la mer, mots des gueules puissantes, mots des lys de France et des bluets flamands, mots chevrotants des vieux maris cornus, mots des cloches et des cristaux, mots cinglants, mots glacés, mots froids de marbre blanc, mots très doux sonnants picturalement, mots sans rime ni raison. Je vous aime. Je vous aime. (Ensor, 1999: 78)

²⁰⁷ This means to blend or merge.

create fantastic and discordant images and metaphors. Ensor used them as an alternate means of transgressive representation, an odd mirror world to that of his paintings, particularly those filled with vibrant deforming light and colour; of masks, skeletons and whimsical, lurking creatures.

It is these eccentric, bizarre and stridently strange paintings and etchings, filled with masks and skeletons with their capricious and ambiguous attributes, which will form the focus of my analysis in this chapter. I have chosen not to discuss the political aspects of *The Entry of Christ into Brussels*, as I feel that these have received more than sufficient critical attention.²⁰⁸ Rather, as my exploration of Ensor's works is necessarily limited, I have chosen aspects from Ensor's works that I considered suitably 'illuminated' the transgressive, shape-shifting madness and ambiguity of my chosen themes. Where possible, I have tried to explore works in which the figure of Pierrot appears, or is suggested.

James Ensor was born on April 13th 1860 in Ostend (Oostende), a town on the northern coast of Belgium. He spent nearly his entire life in this town except for some years spent at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and a few brief trips outside Belgium. He was a founding member of the artistic group, the XX (Les Vingts), in 1883. This group survived for

²⁰⁸ See the following Paul Haesarts *James Ensor* Thames and Hudson, 1957; Ulrike Becks-Malorny *Ensor* Taschen, 2000; Diane Lesko *James Ensor, the creative years* Princeton University Press, 1985; Stefan Jonsson Society degree zero: Christ, communism, and madness of crowds in the art of James Ensor, *Representations* 75 summer 2001; Xavier Tricot *Metaphore et metamorphose de James Ensor Artstudio* 18 Autumn 1990; Stephen C. McGough *James Ensor's "The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889"*. Garland Press, 1985; Susan M. Canning the ordure of anarchy: Scatological signs of self and society in the art of James Ensor. *Art Journal* Autumn 52 (3) 1993.

10 years before being dissolved in 1893. Ensor's 'bizarre' works of art, as they were considered at the time, combined with his own prickly nature, ensured his alienation from this group. The derision that he experienced stemmed not only from amongst the critics and his peers, but also from society and, more crushingly, from within his own family circle. This led him to withdraw entirely into his own world. This solitary world was populated with masks, skeletons and the bric-a-brac from his family's shop which sold motley and masks, Chinese goods, shells and other oddities. Ensor grew up amongst its treasures, which later became his companions in solitude. As he noted with undisguised delight:

I have joyously shut myself up in the solitary domain where the mask holds sway, wholly made up of violence, light and brilliance. (Ensor in Haesaerts 1957: 163)²⁰⁹

The interesting word in this piece of writing is 'violence'. The notion of masks being violent is disturbing unless viewed within the context of the carnival. The donning of masks during carnival became the turning of the face 'inside out' in a grotesque, monstrous and violent subversion of the self (Hyman 1997: 78). The masks mock reality and image and simultaneously reveal the interrelation of both. The brutal, sensuous and gross violence of the masks exposes the hidden face of humankind. Ensor used the masks and 'light and brilliance' to shatter unity and pulverize representation and multiply it into myriad meanings. Ensor's use of colour and light becomes a pure rhythm of intensities in a semiotised expenditure of energy (Lechte 1990: 140). For Kristeva it is the use of colour and light that releases the

²⁰⁹ Je me suis confiné joyeusement dans le milieu solitaire où trône le masque tout de violence, de lumière et d'éclat. (Ensor 1999: 37)

semiotic into the symbolic nature of representation. Thus for Kristeva the chromatic apparatus is like ‘rhythm for language, [which] thus involves a shattering of meaning and its subject into a scale of differences’ (Kristeva 1980: 221). She goes on to say that:

Colour does not suppress light but segments it by breaking its undifferentiated unicity into spectral multiplicity. It provokes surface clashes of varying intensity. (Kristeva 1980: 222)

This pulverization, or shattering, releases the semiotic drives into visual representation in an expression of excessive and violent joy that mirrors the life of carnival and its translation into words and visual imagery. It was this carnivalesque grotesque tradition that Ensor expressed throughout his work. He was told by a friend that his caricatures were not at all appreciated. Instead they were regarded as puerile and commonplace (Haesaerts 1957: 189). The caricatures were regarded in this manner because the insurrectionist nature of the work was neither understood nor valued. Some of the more explicit caricatures are *The pisser (Le pisseur)* (1887) and *Doctrinal nourishment (Alimentation doctrinaire)* (1889).²¹⁰

Ensor’s mordant *The pisser* (1887) mockingly exhibits his feelings for both his critics and society. In this etching the viewer sees the rear of a man, who is facing a wall. He is wearing a tatty top hat and jacket and tightly-legged striped trousers, a bourgeois gentleman of curtailed means, it appears. His flowing, walrus-like whiskers are very evident and this depiction is typical of the caricatural drawings that Ensor made of himself. So the viewer is able

²¹⁰ See Figure 29 en page 5.

to identify the figure as being Ensor. His splayed legs, the manner in which he faces the wall combined with the two lines flowing downwards between his legs make it obvious that this figure is peeing against the wall.

The author of this thesis has chosen to make use of the words ‘shit’, ‘piss’, or ‘pee’, when describing the more scatological of Ensor’s works, because these terms are as transgressive as the etchings themselves. Words like these are rarely, if ever, used in academic discourse, which tends to distance itself from crude or coarse slang, preferring to use clinical and politely elevated terminology. However, I felt that using these vernacular words was necessary to enforce the notion of transgression, challenge to authority and wild, mad laughter that fill Ensor’s works. They are perfect indicators of the Kristevan semiotic with its power to disturb, challenge and pulverize the symbolic. They are also revelatory of the carnivalesque grotesque and its inversion of accepted social niceties found throughout Ensor’s oeuvre.

Pissing in the open against a wall blatantly transgresses societal bodily taboos. Ensor satirically confronts the viewer with the levelling function of the human anatomy where excretion, like death, is seen as belonging to everyone no matter what their position or role in society. This transgression of a bodily taboo both shocks and arouses laughter. The viewer realises that this depiction of pissing in public is an overt mockery of normative attitudes to bodily functions as well as a sign of Ensor’s gleeful contempt for society. By this act Ensor has established himself as an outsider, different and someone who does not adhere to societal rules (Canning 1993: 48). Rather,

in a truly overt and burlesque gesture of debasement and besmirching, he is urinating on the opinions of both critics and public concerning his art. The sentence on the wall above him reads 'Ensor est un fou' (Ensor is a madman or fool) and is a comment that the critics made about his art. For this drawing of himself, Ensor has taken on the attributes of a madman, where madness is seen as being inherent in all grotesque forms and allows a view of the world that is different and does not conform to the commonplace or its ideas and judgments (Bakhtin 1984: 39). In the carnival tradition, the fool or madman was a representative of both the real and the ideal, both stood on the borderline between art and life (Bakhtin 1984: 8). Ensor, in this portrayal of himself as madman, or fool, has assumed the aberrant attributes that transgress the norm and embody freedom from convention and established truths (Bakhtin 1984: 34). Drawn on the wall next to his figure are funny infantile graffiti depicting two little stick men with pipes and a dog. Below the dog is a little pile of shit, almost as though this caricatural dog stepped out of the picture and defecated. The faeces and urine along with the childish drawings are a mocking deflation of critical pomposity and the governing classical aesthetic tradition. Ensor's jet of urine is a symbol of the death of the old and the birth of the new (Bakhtin 1984: 149). The ambivalence of debasement via urine and faeces was its production from the lower bodily organs, which are at the same instant the organs of renewal through creation and generation. The humiliating use of urine and faeces during carnival was always accompanied by laughter and the viewer can feel Ensor's merriment ringing out in derisive ridicule. But this mirth is also ambivalent, as it is not only aimed at Ensor's critics and society, but at himself as well. The lines

upon the wall in front of Ensor's figure seem to shudder and flicker like the heat and smell that rises from warm piss on a cold day, as they waver and wriggle the viewer senses that they are shaking with amusement. This laughter derides and mocks, but is also triumphant in its vitality. His debasing of the classical aesthetic and those who support it is a vivid, gleeful vindication of inventive freedom and an overturning of all that has rigidified with age and is in the process of dying.

Both Susan M. Canning²¹¹ and Diane Lesko²¹² mention the engraving by Callot of the same subject (*The pissier*) as well as Charles de Coster's hero *Tyl Uylenspiegel* who urinates on his enemies and *Au pays de Manneken Pis* by Theo Hannon with an illustration by Amadee Lynen,²¹³ as the basis for this etching by Ensor. However, neither of these critics refers to Rabelais' work, in particular *Gargantua*, who in a spirit of pure fun drowned his enemies and the irritating crowd with urine. Rabelais' work was well known to Ensor,²¹⁴ but these critics, in true modernistic fashion, seem to be reviled by the scatological imagery that is prevalent in Ensor's work. Canning uses the words 'vulgar and raunchy', 'ordure of anarchy' and 'sexual repression' in her article (Canning 1993: 2). All the words describing bodily functions are carefully phrased in rational, distancing terms. Lesko devotes a paragraph which, though describing the Pisser, ignores the transgressive and grotesque nature of the etching. These critics seem to exhibit what Kristeva

²¹¹ Canning, S.M. (Autumn 1993). The ordure of anarchy: Scatological signs of self and society in the art of James Ensor. *Art Journal*, 52(3): 47-53.

²¹² Lesko, D. 1985. *James Ensor: The creative years*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²¹³ Canning, S.M. (Autumn 1993). The ordure of anarchy: Scatological signs of self and society in the art of James Ensor. *Art Journal*, 52(3): 47-53.

²¹⁴ Ensor's macabre humour might also have found a work by Max Klinger called *Pissing death* dated 1880 inspirational. (Tricot 2006 : 90).

terms the 'abject': a loathing for filth, waste, dung and a fear of impurity caused by that which departs from the symbolic order (Kristeva 1982: 91). It is Ensor's disobeying of the rules of the symbolic in this semiotic transgression of bodily taboos which causes the the negation and repulsion found in the critics' response. His rupturing of borders, rules and order in this portrayal of the defilement of bodily secretions and his mocking use of them to debase and destroy is also an acknowledgement of the fact that life is continually threatened by death, whether in the form of bodily secretions or in the passing of the old and birth of the new. Canning thrusts all the transgression aside as she attempts to make Ensor's work fit into the 'social moralism' of northern satire, a given symbolic system or form that can be analysed, controlled and historically explained. Using this symbolic system with its historical tradition means the shit and piss can be excused and made to serve a pure objective - that of morally satirising and criticising the political and social repressions of his time. Ensor is thus made to fit within containing symbolic parameters. The grotesque and unconventional nature of *The pisser* seems to have been unappreciated by these critics, in the same manner that it was considered puerile and childish by his peers. As Ensor remarked on the labels invented by critics:

O the villains who catalogue artists! If these launchers of Mayflies had their way, adorable fantasy, the heavenly flower of dew which inspires the creative artist would be rigorously excluded from the program of art. (Haesaerts 1957: 226)²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Oh! les mesquineries odieuses avantageant les routiniers de l'art! Encore devant ces pauvres, l'adorable fantaisie, fleur céleste de rosée, inspiratrice du peintre créateur, doit être bannie sévèrement du programme artistique. (Ensor 1999: 41)

Ensor understood carnival and its life implicitly and though he is satirising the reaction of the critics and the public to his art, yet the debasing image is filled with laughter and the inside-out mayhem of the carnival spirit. This etching is entirely Rabelaisian in conception and though it might appear as scatological and puerile, it is one of the most amusing and pointedly rude and abusive responses to the ignorance of society and those whom they elect as 'critics'. It mocks a public who are unable to think for themselves or appreciate the new and different and who are reliant upon others to shepherd and feed them their beliefs and culture. This ignorance and reliance on the guidance of others is nowhere more apparent than in Ensor's work *Alimentation doctrinaire/ Doctrinal nourishment* (1889).²¹⁶

This work is a biting and excoriating exposé of Ensor's response to both the established authorities as well as the bovine brutishness of the masses who support them. It was purposely created to shock. Ensor with anarchistic irreverence attacked and castigated the political, social and religious system, as he saw it in the Belgium of 1889. At this time Belgium was going through a severe economic depression and many members of the working class were unemployed and poverty stricken. The workers saw those in power as mere instruments of oppression and those with the vote, the well to do property owners saw the workers as a mass army with anarchic and chaotic propensities. The monarchy was an authoritarian one, termed constitutional, the Liberal party was made up of the industrial monied bourgeoisie and the Catholic Party controlled the education system. The Liberal and Catholic

²¹⁶ See Figure 30 en page 5.

party were both supporters of the practice of the wealthy paying the lower classes to do their military service for them. The liberals supported this system in order to retain the vote of the propertied classes, who were the only people allowed to vote in Belgium. The Catholic party used the system as a means to subsidize the poor. Universal suffrage was the rallying call of the Belgian Worker's Party which had links with the anarchists. The Catholic party opposed extending the criteria that would allow people to vote because it felt that this would give the Socialists more power and reduce support for the church. For the Liberals, extending the vote would give economic and ruling power to the lower classes and they feared mass rule. Compulsory education was controlled by the Catholic Party and represented the biggest point of contention between this party and that of the Liberals, as these parties fought to retain control of the funding and orientation of the voting public. However, this work is not solely a commentary on the abuses of those in power but concomitantly reveals Ensor's disdain for the people as well. The power of this image lies in this two-way movement. To simplistically read this as a one-way indictment of those in power is to avoid acknowledging Ensor's dislike and contempt for the mindless crowd: 'the spirit of the population is an abominable prurigo of idiocy' (Ensor in Haesaerts 1957: 65). Thus the authorities and the crowd are seen as inextricably locked in a play of power and knowledge, as masters and slaves. For Ensor this situation represents all that his anarchistic nature rebelled against; the regimenting of the individual to the mindlessness of the collectivity and the subservient adherence to any rules propounded by those in power or by society.

In this etching the viewer sees five large figures crouched on what appears to be the rim of a toilet bowl. In the centre is King Leopold II, who is flanked on his left by a soldier and a politician and on his right by a bishop and a nun and they are proceeding to defecate on the crowd beneath them. Ensor has made these figures very large; they take up two thirds of the etching's spatial arrangement. The viewer is witness to the faces of these large figures, except for that of the politician, who is only seen from the rear. The crowd beneath is placed in such a manner that all that would be visible would be the large, white moons of the buttocks and the nourishment they are dropping. The mass of tiny human figures fills the bowl beneath these buttocks in a seething, grotesque swarm. They are being fed a load of shit and piss that they are avidly swallowing up. No one is protesting and they look upwards and like little birds open their mouths to receive this sustenance. Ensor has etched individual faces on the crowd but each is slightly distorted and grotesque. Though the crowd is individualised it still forms a homogenous whole in its mindless, pullulating acceptance of the doctrines that are being imposed upon it. For Ensor they represent the ultimate 'Feast of Fools'. In the carnival of the 'Feast of Fools' defecation played a central role and the clergy used to fling dung at the crowd (Bakhtin 1984: 147). Ensor has taken this role of defecation to a rather more transgressive level in this representation of the relationship between the State and the masses. Ensor purposely violates the classical ideals of separation between image and text as he intertwines them in this etching. He inserts the title and date in the top right-hand corner and provides it with its own frame, very like a large poster of the kind used to garner votes in an election. The odd thing in the title is

that the 'N' in the word 'doctrinaire' is reversed as if it were dyslexic. This makes the word appear topsy-turvy and Ensor undermines the sententiousness of the word in true carnival fashion. This glitch allows the semiotic to poke through the pompousness of the symbolic in a subtle gleam of merriment which makes fun of the authority of the title by throwing it into disorder. The nun, politician and soldier each hold worded boards, like storyboards or flashcards that emphasise their respective, politically repressive positions that they are imposing on the masses beneath them. Two of these boards are held so that the crowd can see them. The third, held by the nun, is only visible to the viewer. As she pees on the people below the nun seems to be ecstatically chanting and her mouth, which is almost orgasmically wide-open, seems to leer over her board as though it were a catechism. The bishop sitting beside her has a tight-lipped, smug smile. The King looks regally vacant and the soldier seen in profile arrogantly macho with his broad buttocks squatted over his spurred boots. But it is the politician, whose face only the sun can see, upon whom this celestial body is proceeding to vomit its yellow bile. Ensor has, in true carnival fashion, made the sun ill, showing that this heavenly body is expressing disapproval - the sun is out of joint. Ensor implicates, in a decidedly Renaissance manner, the natural environment in his macabre farce or *sotie*.

Ensor has aroused the laughter of the carnival, as the figures of authority are made vulnerable and ridiculous with their huge, swaying arses eliminating waste. The crowd waiting so patiently for the alimentation being exuded from these figures evokes a sense of disgust and repulsion in the viewer, as

well as macabre amusement. It is the ambivalent and contradictory nature of this grotesque scene that destroys the aesthetics of classical conceptions of art and beauty. For Ensor the excrement debases the crowd and the authorities in equal measure. The ignominy of the positions occupied by the authorities, backsides exposed, deflates the hypocrisy and seriousness they represent. The crowd with open mouth is revealed in all its asininity. Ensor meant to shock with this sharp, abusive work, which debases the pomposity, hypocrisy and smugness of the authorities as well as the mindless stupidity and nastiness of the masses. He accomplishes this jarring blow through extreme exaggeration that inspires both laughter and revulsion. Yet, Ensor aimed the laughter at himself, as he inserted his signature inside the rim of the seat, an intermediary between the authorities and the crowd. He thereby inserts his presence into this outlandish etching with its debasing excrementitious laughter which brings the ruling authorities and the people of Belgium in 1889 down to earth with its coprolitic transgression of the accepted norms.

This lubricious laughter is further to be found in *Sorciers dans la bourrasque* (*Sorcerers in a squall*) (1888), where witches and demons are seen, one of them farting ducks. In the *Les bains à Ostende* (*Baths of Ostend*) (1890), humanity is seen in all its perverse vibrancy, stinking feet, huge protruding bellies and bums all gloriously farting and fondling. In *Peste Dessous, Peste Dessus, Peste Partout* (*Plague above, plague below, plague all around*) (1904) the noxious stench of excrement fills the etching as it does in *Iston, Pouffamatus, Cracozie et Transmouffe, célèbres médecins persans, examinant*

les selles du roi Darius après la bataille d'Arbelles (Iston, Pouffamatus, Cracozie and Transmouff, celebrated Persian physicians examining the stools of King Darius after the Battle of Arbela (1886). This unorthodox exhibition of the human body with its naturally grotesque attributes is found throughout Ensor's work, but the laughter associated with it became more macabre as Ensor withdrew into a fantastical world where the scatological made way for the metamorphosis of the carnival mask and skeleton.

The first eerie replacement of the human face with the mask is found in Ensor's *Les masques scandalisés (The scandalised masks)* (1883).²¹⁷ Here a masked figure, seated at a table, is confronted by another masked figure standing in the doorway. The seated figure, with a mask resembling the snout of a pig and with its hands on the table before it and a half-empty bottle to its left, is hunched forward. It seems to cower and be almost fearful of the figure in the doorway. In this work the masks are still separate entities from the faces underneath. The huge noses and exaggerated chins and mouths have a fixity that increases the unease felt by the viewer and this sense of dread is heightened by the dark spectacles worn by the standing mask. Its eyes become fathomless holes that glare with pitiless indifference at the seated figure. This spectacled figure stands in a dominating position and holds a rather phallic horn in its hand which is aimed towards the seated figure, as though it has come to round up a stray animal. Standing half in and half out of the room, its other hand resting lightly on the door handle, its head and shoulders are outlined against a background of the most beautiful

²¹⁷ See Figure 31 on page 5.

blue. It is as though the figure has stepped into the room directly out of the evening sky. The room itself is filled with the strange muted glow from a wall lamp and the light it gives to the room adds to the sense of tension and the aura of phantasmagoria that pervades the picture. The standing figure with its horn seems to be confronting the seated male form, but there is an element of dread or shock about the scene with a feeling of creeping horror. Diana Lesko notes that 'in the poetry of Jules Laforgue that horn announces death' (Lesko 1985: 103). It seems that death has entered the room in carnival disguise, wearing a strange, floppy, pointed white Pierrot-hat; the gender of the standing figure becomes ambivalent and questionable. The liminal position that this body occupies by standing in the door's threshold is also one of ambivalence and is often associated with the figure of death. The viewer can see that the seated masked figure is male, but the standing figure, though dressed as an elderly woman, has no determinable gender and seems androgynous. The ambivalence of carnival and its masks is revealed in this work as appearance, gender and age become indefinable and unpredictable. As Ensor dismantles the accepted notions of gender, dress and face, the semiotic is released and smashes the structuring devices of the symbolic. What is behind the masks and the clothes? Are the creatures human, or are they merely empty husks? A pervasive sense of mayhem and alienation, combined with a disquieting anguish, radiate from this work. This is extended by the title that Ensor chose for the painting. The word *scandalisé* in French can mean to frighten or shock, but it also has puritanical overtones of a shock to propriety through sin, and with this goes a sense of reprobation and blame. Thus, the confrontation between the masks

could be one of an unexpected and scary nature, or one that evokes retribution for sin, where the seated mask through his alcohol consumption is faced with the inescapability of his death for the sin of gluttonous, alcoholic excess. However, these masks remain realistic depictions that still reveal a separation between mask and the subject hidden beneath it. In his later works Ensor melded mask and face in a disturbingly macabre creation of humanised marionettes. There are still works where the separation between mask and face is realistically depicted as in *Pierrot jaloux (The despair of Pierrot)*.

In *Pierrot jaloux, (The despair of Pierrot)* (1892),²¹⁸ the figure of the white clown makes its first prominent appearance in Ensor's work. In this painting, Ensor combines faces and masks. Dominating the work is the figure of a friend of Ensor's, Ernest Rousseau Jnr, as Pierrot.²¹⁹ He stands without skullcap or white-floured face and with drooping head. He is shame-faced and being scolded by the male figure to the right, which is a portrayal of his father. Behind Pierrot stands the figure of his mother, her mouth open, seeming to scold. A silent, nun-like figure stands to the rear of the parents and looks on inscrutably. Her face is that of a white doll-mask with almost oriental eyes. To the left of Pierrot stand carnival characters. The masked figure closest to Pierrot has a white hook-nosed mask and wears a cape and funny, floppy hat and is reminiscent of the *Commedia dell'arte* character

²¹⁸ See Figure 32 on page 5.

²¹⁹ This friend was the son of Mariette Rousseau and her husband Ernest, a professor and the rector of the Université Libre in Brussels. This couple were the warmest supporters of Ensor when he was in Brussels; he was often at their house where he met and befriended Ernest Rousseau Jnr who appears as Pierrot in this painting.

Brighella. This character was an avaricious money grabber and it seems this friend of Pierrot's has led him and his money astray. Behind Brighella is a circus clown mask with huge, blubbery red lips and colourful flame blue-red tattoos on his forehead and cheeks. In the lower left corner is the crude dew-lapped face of a procuress and behind her is another fat-faced mask that could be one of her fleshy objects of sale. Pierrot stands disconsolately between the two opposing groups, as Harlequin and Columbine, arm in arm, dance a mad jig in the distance. Pierrot has lost Columbine and he is losing his freedom to indulge in carnival play as his parents enforce their authority. The freedom of the carnival and its madness are in conflict with the restraints of societal law. Both parents are dressed in carnival attire and though they participate in the carnival, they do not belong to it. Instead, they represent the symbolic laws of society and conduct. The face of Rousseau senior is a naturalistic portrait, like that of his son. The mother's face has already started to morph into a mask. In fact, she appears rather like a ventriloquist's dummy; wooden and with a wide-open mouth full of large, white teeth. Ensor seems to be representing the symbolic 'law of the Father'. In this, the child has to renounce the mother and submit itself to an authority greater than itself, the symbolic father, the law-giver (Grosz 1989: 46). Pierrot's carnival and childlike behaviour, Ensor seems to be showing, is being confronted by the rational laws and adult reality of the symbolic. The ambivalence of Pierrot is seen in his half carnival dress but naked, realistic head and his central position between the forces of the symbolic and those of the semiotic. The mother is revealed as ambiguous, as though she belongs on the side of the law, yet she is also a semiotic force as her face has started to

resemble the group of masks to the left of Pierrot in their grotesque distortion.

It is above this group of masked figures that Ensor has placed a smaller tableau. Here Pierrot is to be seen with skullcap, practising his non-existent medical skills on the painter. Pierrot is extracting the 'stone of madness' from Ensor's skull and Ensor's face is distorted in anguish. Pierrot, it is obvious, is no doctor and this operation is merely a mad carnival prank.²²⁰ Ensor is mocking the medieval medical procedure that was used as a treatment for madness and in a polyvalent artistic interweaving he is acknowledging the paintings of his predecessors, Hieronymous Bosch and Pieter Brueghel the Elder, on the same subject. He is also deriding the critics of his work who think that he is mad and all those who abide by the laws and regimentation of society and who censure him and his art. This is notably revealed in the head that is above the tableau of the operation, which resembles Ensor's sister dressed in a Salvation Army hat. Her face is pulled into a malicious, jeering attitude and is extremely distorted and ugly: a grotesque mask. The contorted, nasty nature of this face, like a bitter gargoyle, belies the veneer of societal values it should uphold. In this it stands in direct opposition to the bland, festive masks of the carnival characters. Ensor, by revealing his sister in this guise, has undermined all the holier-than-thou moralistic bourgeois values that she would epitomise, as well as revenging himself on her for her condemnation and criticism of his art. In this painting the figure of Pierrot represents all the semiotic forces and

²²⁰ In reality Ernest Rousseau Jnr studied to be a medical doctor. The humour is thus ironic and aimed more at the artist than Pierrot.

mad mayhem of the carnival seen in opposition to the symbolic societal laws of the bourgeois society.

The figure of the father is ambivalent because though in carnival dress he is not wearing a mask and seems split between his position as 'realistic' law bringer and yet belonging to the spirit of the carnival. The symbolic and the semiotic oscillate in this ambiguous irresolution where appearances are in flux. A solid bulk of figures dominates the front and most of the space of the picture. Yet, the viewer is pulled away from these large figures towards the dancing figures of Harlequin and Columbine, who move towards the horizon up a hill to where a quixotic windmill pokes its sails above the incline. A sense of wild commotion and laughter fills the left side of the painting. Ensor has in fact skewed the balance of the work to this side and the brush strokes and cross-hatching all flow in this direction and upwards, following the dancing couple towards the windmill and away from the central figure of Pierrot. The title of the painting, *Pierrot jaloux* or in English *The despair of Pierrot*, seems to play on the loss of both Columbine and Pierrot's apparent loss of freedom, his exclusion from this world of the madly semiotic by the restraints of the symbolic law. But the sense of despair is overturned by the laughter that is transported on the rhythm of the colours and texture of the brushstrokes. The light whites and blues dance rhythmically alongside the greens, oranges, yellows and reds, creating a sense of movement and of depth as well as a sense of explosive and uncontained *jouissance*. The semiotic movements released by the colours breaks apart the symbolic seriousness of despair, which evanesces in this flow of light and vibrant,

mad pleasure of Ensor's palette. Pierrot, the viewer realises, will rejoin the carnival, and despair and contrition will be forgotten. The whole painting is a revelation of the opposition between the semiotic and the symbolic, the law and its transgression - a flamboyant disorder of laughter, madness, rhythm and brightly lit colours. However, the symbolic father, the giver of order, must at least be minimally present in a work of art to prevent it from being a mere descent into the chaos of psychosis (Lechte 1990: 127). In *The despair of Pierrot* masks and faces collide but it is the madness, laughter and transgression of the carnival masks that dominate this work. The 'realistic' human face appears in fewer and fewer of Ensor's works, as the mask subsumes and replaces the human and the laughter and tone become hollower, darker and more maliciously eldritch.²²¹

The alteration from human face to rubberized, humanoid mask, where the difference between face and mask is elided, is most prominently found in Ensor's famous *L'entrée du Christ à Bruxelles en 1889 (The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889)* (1888).²²² Here the masks literally parade out of the painting en masse and the viewer is confronted with the craziness of carnival where travesty and transgression hold sway. Octavio Paz's description of Fiesta seems to be the perfect description for Ensor's painting:

In certain fiestas the very notion of order disappears. Chaos comes back and license rules. Anything is permitted: the customary hierarchies vanish, along with all social, sex, cast and trade distinctions. Men disguise themselves as women, gentlemen as slaves, the poor as rich. The army, the clergy and the law are ridiculed. Obligatory sacrilege, ritual profanation is committed. Love becomes

²²¹ In the sense of strange, unearthly or eerie.

²²² See Figure 33 on page 5.

promiscuity. Sometimes the fiesta becomes a Black Mass. Regulations, habits and customs are violated. Respectable people put away the dignified expressions and conservative clothes that isolated them, dress up in gaudy colors, hide behind a mask, and escape from themselves. (Paz 1985: 51)

Ensor's masked crowd, in all its garishness, is a combination of the bourgeoisie, military, clergy and the law as well as of the phantasmagorical and imaginary in an ambiguous fusion that creates a sense of spite-filled unease. The bourgeoisie, clergy and law dominate the front of the painting and are followed by a military band of grotesquely-faced musicians. Behind the band is a group of oddly snouted, daemonic and pallid ghostly creatures that surround and cavort before the small, central figure of Christ-Ensor, haloed in glorious yellow light with his arm raised in benediction and seated on an ass. Behind Christ-Ensor is an open space, which separates him from wave upon wave of figures in carnival outfits. This space divides Christ-Ensor from a bewildered and desperate-seeming Pierrot, who stands out from a line of figures which were to be included in Ensor's later paintings. The other white clown masks found in *The Entry* appear as alternate masked variations of Pierrot and are tragically melancholy and mysterious. For Ensor the bizarre masquerade of *The Entry* is a revelation of the nature of humanity *en masse*. The grotesque masks of the crowd in the front express hypocrisy, deceit, superficiality and human folly and are ridiculous monstrosities. Ensor has made these creatures neither masks nor humans but has blurred them together in a loss of identity. All truth now lies on the masks and nothing lies behind them (Schlesier 1993: 95). These grotesque masked creatures are in keeping with the transgression of carnival and its laughter. The large bodies, backsides and protruding noses along with the vomiting on the crowd from the gallery is

an up-ending of the authority of social laws and everyday behaviour. The jostling, pushing crowd, packed tightly against one another, exudes a lewd ribaldry and libidinousness embodied in the coloured folds and fat creases of the masks. Accompanying Eros is the figure of Thanatos as death lurks amongst the revelers, wearing the white mask of the skull. In this carnival world the human masks are seen as permanently accompanied by the figure of death. In his poem *Danse macabre* Baudelaire revealed death's permanent presence throughout life's mayhem:

En tout climat, sous tout soleil, la Mort t'admire
En tes contorsions, risible humanité,
Et souvent, comme toi, se parfumant de myrrhe,
Mêle son ironie à ton insanité.

In every clime, in all sunshine, death admires you
Ridiculous humanity in your frivolous contortions
Often, like you, perfuming herself with myrrh
Mingling her irony with your insanity.²²³

Ensor manages to combine the macabre and the grotesque, the mask and skeleton, life and death in this carnival parade (Tricot 2005: 90). This is all accompanied by the raucous laughter of the masks and of Ensor to the unsettled and dubious bemusement of the viewer.

These hideous, masked figures would seem, like a whale, about to swallow the viewer. There is a horrid, stifling sensation of nightmare as the myriad bodies with their leering and jeering ugliness throng forward in what appears to be an unstoppable flood. This madding, pulsing crowd with its directionless movement is composed of beings that could have disembarked

²²³ Translation by author of the thesis.

from Bosch's *Ship of Fools*. Stefan Jonsson (Jonsson 2001: 3) writes that the red flag of the *Ship of Fools* seems to re-appear in the huge red banner of *The Entry*, but simultaneously the madness flows from the vibrantly coloured grotesque masks themselves. As Bakhtin observes, madness is always present in grotesque forms as their ambiguity challenges all commonplace ideas and judgements and threatens to destabilise all accepted systems (Bakhtin 1984: 39). The thread of madness and the anarchism of the mask are not limited to the colour red, but found in Ensor's use of vibrant blue, yellow, green, black and the predominating swirls of impasto white.

Writing on the colours of *The Entry*, Emile Verhaeren indicated that:

les bleus, les rouges, les verts, soit juxtaposés, soit divisés entre eux par des blancs larges, sonnent comme une charge de tons purs et leur bariolage audacieux, parfois brutal, impressionne la rétine lyriquement. (Verhaeren 1980: 39-40)²²⁴

It is through Ensor's use of these 'musical' and 'violent' colours in a cacophony of wild sound, that the shivering of the symbolic by the motile and discordant semiotic is accomplished. As Kristeva pointed out in her exploration of colour as a semiotic device in art, 'the chromatic apparatus, like rhythm for language, thus involves a shattering of meaning' (Kristeva 1980: 221). Ensor's sensuous and brutal colours overturned the accepted chromatic palette and trumpeted the colours of carnival and of the masks. The confrontations between the colours and the extensive use of white create an effect of brilliance, volume, depth and movement that allows the masks to leap out from the painting in all their mad hybridity. Ensor's use of heavy,

²²⁴ [...] blue, red, green tones, either juxtaposed or set off from one another by broad white areas, have the effect of a fanfare of pure notes, and their daring, occasionally brutal mixture exerts a lyrical effect on the eye. (cited in Becks-Malorny 2000: 49)

swirling white for masks and costumes adds light and blurs the edges within the work, thus evoking the semiotic tactility of the other colours. As noted by Matisse, ‘retinal sensation [that] destroys the calm of the surface and the contour’ is like the rhythm and tone of a voice where ‘ultimately, there is only a tactile vitality comparable to the ‘vibrato’ of the violin or voices’ (Kristeva 1980: 219).

The colours not only have a musical rhythm, but they also enhance the transgressive nature of the figures that Ensor paints. These freakish, masked creatures are hybrids participating in a mad, Dionysian dissolution of social hierarchies, gender and individuality. The colours that animate Ensor’s masked creatures seem to threaten the social order, sanity and individuality. The predominant use of white is associated with lightness of tone, with mystery, melancholy, Pierrot and death. Skull and masks appear together as reflections of one another. The rhythm of the colours and the masks creates a ferment of the fantastical, scatological, caricatural, and satirically humorous. All becomes an absurd masquerade where reality is overthrown and the malicious and nightmarish mask and skull hold sway.

The nightmare qualities of the mask are very prevalent in *L'intrigue* (*The Intrigue*) (1890)²²⁵. Here the masked bodies seem posed on a stage-like setting as they all crowd the front of the painting, as if about to take a bow. These pressing bodies create a claustrophobic atmosphere, which is aided by the brutally vivid slashes of colour that are impastoed and crosshatched. The

²²⁵ See Figure 34 on page 5.

rough texturing lends a savage movement and semiotic rhythm to the painting, whilst simultaneously coarsening and highlighting the brutishness of the masks.

The gargoyle-type mask to the left of the painting, with its bulbous nose and huge open mouth which seems to disembogue the colours in streams of material that form the garments of the puppet-like body of the central female figure. This figure has her hand possessively clutching the arm of the male figure standing to her left and slightly ahead and sidewise to her. Their stiff and static poses resemble the postures adopted for photographic portraits. The couple's masked faces appear empty of any passion. The female face with its fixed smirk and piggy features is vacuous and undefined appearing to deliquesce and dissolve like wax. The eyes are otherworldly and daemonic. Framed by the curling black eyebrows, they appear to roll upwards. The viewer is made uneasy by these abnormal eyes, which seem to exude madness into the painting. The male figure she grasps and seems to be propelling is sunken in upon himself. He uses the shell of his coat and scarf to retract into as though he is cowed by the situation. His mask is inscrutable and fixed, but the hidden eyes gleam a feral red. These glinting rat-like orbs are also daemonic and mad like a furious animal or devil at bay. They peer at the female figure standing to his left. She is a stout, red-cloaked and round-faced creature who holds an oriental porcelain doll on her shoulder. She seems to remonstrate with the male figure and bares her prominent sharp teeth, with her index finger raised. An aggressive and overbearing dominance seems to exude from her and all the other masks gathered around

the couple seem to be avidly listening to her sermonising. Above her appears the planar half-moon and grotesquely misshapen jaw of death. This mask appears to stare cross-eyed at the scene and is accompanied by a jester's bauble, which grins over the other masks with a toothed and insane look. This sceptre is a bizarre mask, yet simultaneously it is an evocative symbol of death's supreme rule of life's mayhem. The straw-hatted mask of death is balanced on the left of the painting by an immensely sad Pierrot mask. With its fathomless black eyes and sweeping black hair, heavy, hooked nose and carmine lips, the mask refuses to look at the central couple and seems withdrawn in its melancholic rejection of the scene. Except for Pierrot and death, the other masks possess a deceitful, contemptuous and hypocritical air, as they stealthily encroach on the male figure. The viewer is unsure whether the clutching hand on his arm is protecting or propelling him into trouble. As Haesaerts indicates, the painting is 'bathed in the captivating and poisonous light of Ensorian ambiguity' (Haesaerts 1957: 84). For the viewer the painting is both fascinating and repulsive. The choice of title *The Intrigue* is as ambivalent as the figures depicted in it. An 'intrigue' can mean either: a complicated state of affairs, an underhand scheme or plot, or an illicit or clandestine love affair (*New shorter Oxford English dictionary* 1993: 1405). The use of this ambiguous title makes it odd that the painting would be interpreted so readily as representing the wedding of Ensor's sister Mitche, as David S. Werman does in his article *James Ensor and the mask of reality*.²²⁶ *The Intrigue* is too non-definable for such a simple interpretation of the masked puppet figures displayed. Mitche's illicit liaison with the man

²²⁶ Werman, D.S. 2003. James Ensor and the Mask of Reality. *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 5 (3): 335-348.

who eventually became her husband might form the basis for this painting however, it could also be a projection of the artist's own, darker desires and feelings regarding Mariette Rousseau. Though she firmly grasps his arm, the female mask seems insouciantly oblivious to the male figure next to her. He, it seems, is the target of the mocking, jokey attitudes and malice of the other masks. Does this male mask hide the artist who had been subject to the criticisms and derision of his peers, critics and family? Or is there a doubling and a split subject where the artist also hides behind the Pierrot seen miserably averting his head from the scene? This Pierrot, with his melancholic and silent grimace, seems to censure the scene and this grimace, as Jones notes, can be 'pulled off to reveal Nothing, or its variant, a skull' (Jones 1984: 174-175). The artist seems to multiply himself through the use of the mask in order to pour derision on all those who torment him. This splitting of the artist into multiple masks resembles the Kristevan splitting of the writer into a 'subject of enunciation and subject of utterance' (Kristeva 1984: 74). The artist has thus become an absence, like the masks behind which he hides. However, at the same time, the artist and the masks are doubled as 'the actor and the crowd are each in turn simultaneously subject and addressee of discourse' (Kristeva 1980: 105). As Jonsson writes (2001: 11):

The mask is placed on the same reality level as the face. External appearances no longer manifest any underlying content or inner motivation, and the meaning of the face, mask and gesture consequently depend only on its similarity to and difference from surrounding faces, masks and gestures.

Carnival transgresses the logic of identity and multiple forms are seen to inhabit a single image filled with unbridled bestiality and the demonic,

mocking laughter of the artist. The viewer is aware of a malicious mirth as the 'humanesque' creatures are mocked and caricatured. The artist makes them wear and present their most monstrous attributes to the viewing world. There is madness in the colours and brushstrokes and the rhythms and vibrancy become a *jouissance* of semiotic energy drives that dominate the symbolic forms. This ecstasy disfigures the masks and their marionette bodies, making them freakish, disembodied absurdities. There is no certainty that anything exists behind the masks, or that the garish finery contains any physical body. What is male or female, real or unreal, truth or falsehood is called into question by these bewildering, loathsome entities. The grotesque menace accompanied by the elusive emotions makes this still-life an ambivalent and obscure work that is exceedingly perturbing. The sinister undercurrent of animosity, illicitness and guileful betrayal present in the work is a lure that pulls the viewer into the nightmare of an unstable and incongruous world. *The Intrigue* is a fairly realistic painting, with the masks still possessing human attributes. This realism changes in the mask paintings of the 1890's, which become increasingly phantasmagorical. Masks and skulls are in the ascendancy in these works and seem driven by rancorous sadness and mockery. Identity and gender are transgressed becoming completely indeterminate and the blending of reality and fantasy ensures that no definitive or true interpretation becomes possible.

This enigmatic and perplexing interweaving is to be found in the *Étonnement du masque Wouse* (*Astonishment of the mask Wouse*) (1889).²²⁷ Here a figure, dressed as an old woman, stands in a room where the floor is covered with a heap of discarded masks, musical instruments and limp clothing. From the borders of the picture various masks seem to peer in at the scene and the standing figure. What issues from the work is a disquieting unease and confused disorder. It is as though the entities that were inside the costumes and masks have suddenly decamped, leaving their assumed skins behind. The only living creature seems to be this elderly, erect female figure with the mask-face. On her head is a funny hat with brown bows over a frilly white mobcap. From the elongated, grotesque nose of the mask hangs an intricate, if peculiar, pendant. Huge eyes, a bulging brow and long frog-like mouth with no chin all seem to protrude seamlessly from beneath the containment of the mobcap. Her shawl is patterned with flecks of green, red, yellow and black and in appearance resembles a rug. Underneath dangles a bright-red stole or scarf which is layered over a diaphanous, clear-blue material under which appears a fluted white linen shift. The layers of clothing are delicately painted and the colours chosen provide a light and diffuse glow to the painting thereby creating an otherworldly, fantastical clarity and a floating lack of material being. Even the stance of this masked figure is odd. The protruding shoe seems out of place and skews the figure in a subtle and disorienting manner. More peculiar still is the delicate open parasol that is gingerly and daintily held in the scrawny, gloved left hand. Why would the parasol be open inside a room, unless this is a scene in a bizarre theatrical production? In fact the

²²⁷ See Figure 35 on page 5.

floorboards and the masks and figures that peer in from the wings of the painting serve merely to heighten the sense of a stage with players. The extended, skeletal claw-like right hand seems to express a question, as though querying, in bewilderment, the hodgepodge of lifeless masks and garments piled on the floor. The eeriness of these discarded masks is enhanced by the realisation that amongst them lie the old woman's spectacled mask from *Scandalised masks* and the snout-shaped mask with the top hat and yellow coat from *The Intrigue* with an empty bottle lying near its boot. There is the doll from *The Intrigue* and the wall hanging from *Enfant à la poupée (Child with Doll)* (1884) and the skeleton head and violin, which appear in *Squelettes voulant se chauffer (Skeletons trying to warm themselves)* (1889). It is as though Ensor has collected his masked creatures from past and present paintings and created a parodic morgue of masks. This interweaving generates a disconcerting overlay of masked actors that seem to move freely from one work to another in a very bewildering polyvalent fashion. The masks become both object and subject and function as repetitive semiotic devices that, through their fantastical nature, transgress the symbolic nature of reality and representation. Like a Punch and Judy or a *Commedia dell'arte* stage production the masks seem to appear and disappear at will. This adds to the sense of something being out of kilter in this picture, a mad malaise where nothing is sane or as it seems and an indefinable menace which is yet filled with daemonic laughter. These masks are not physical beings, but rather they are empty signs with no definitive referents. They are nightmarish, grotesque non-beings that through their disturbing semiotic rhythms, repetitions and colours challenge the idea of the symbolic structure of 'reality'. This lack of

any true embodiment and the carnival disguise ensures that they challenge gender and identity. What they really are beneath the mask and the fripperies and materials of carnival dress remains uncertain. They become layered, shapeless and daemonic forms possessing no true essence in their ambivalence and epitomise the Kristevan 'self and Other' whilst semiotically transgressing the symbolic denotations of gender and identity.

The mask Wouse exhibits this extreme ambivalence and there is complete uncertainty as to what is hiding behind the many layers of clothing and the mask-face. Has it caused the dissolution of the other masks and their festivities, and if so, why? Is its mysterious presence a cause for fear and does the scrawny, outstretched and clawed hand betoken death in disguise requesting payment? Even the title chosen for the painting is baffling. The word 'Wouse'²²⁸ does not appear in any dictionary. The creature has thus been provided with as semiotically transgressive and amusing a name as its appearance seems to betoken, as it stands wide-eyed before the dismembered motley on the floor. One can sense that Ensor must have been deliciously and gleefully smiling when he chose the title for this painting, knowing the confusion it would cause. The viewer is as bemused as the grinning masks which appear at the bottom left corner, but can summon up a grin at the fantastical beings and situation, yet, simultaneously feel as disturbed and flurried as the Negro figure, with the white carnival skeleton grin. This figure seems to be hurriedly trying to make either an entrance or an escape from the

²²⁸ The word *Wouse* appears in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* where the innkeeper is called Mr. Tow-Wouse. There is also the word 'wowsers' a late 19th century slang expression for a 'puritanical fanatic'.

stage where the inscrutable *Wouse* stands like a solitary question mark. Staring up at the *Wouse* is the white death's mask that seems to wear Pierrot's pallid neck ruff as a hat. Its blanched visage has assumed the face paint of the Pierrot. Together with the skeleton-head that stares with empty, black sockets in the direction of the *Wouse*, the white death mask with its allusions to the Pierrot seems to meld and morph skeleton, Pierrot and death into one being. Added to this is the single, upright candle that stands burning with a slim flame. In carnival the image of death is symbolized by fire. According to Bakhtin this is particularly apparent in the Fire Festival where each participant carries a lighted candle and the cry is 'Death to anyone who is not carrying a candle' (Bakhtin 1984: 248). This festival of fire is seen as reviving the ambivalence of the death wish, which is also the wish for rebirth (Bakhtin 1984: 249). With its ambivalent connotations of life and death, this burning candle will follow Ensor's white-masked figures into other canvases, such as *Les masques singuliers (The strange masks)* (1892) and *La mort et les masques (Death and the masks)* (1897).

Les masques singuliers (1892) or *The strange masks*²²⁹ is a painting of extensive whiteness. Here, a group of masked creatures is found in a completely white room high above the street that can be seen through the window on the left side of the painting. In the street are small, hurrying carnival figures, one with a flag and the other with a trumpet that seem to indicate that the festivities are almost done. The figures in the room seem to have escaped from the streets and are huddled in a corner and give the

²²⁹ See Figure 36 on page 5.

impression of posing for a final portrait. A motlier crew would be hard to find. Their ill-fitting and slack garments lend the figures an empty appearance, as though there were no bodies holding up the costumes; rather the garments appear to be cloaking air. The figures are arranged in descending height and brilliance of costume colour, except for the empty female garments sprawled supine next to the violin on the floor. The mask on this supine figure has a wildly insane look in its eyes. The rigid face seems less female than male with a sailor's cap propped on its head; a cap that resembles that worn by *Le lampiste* (*The lamp-boy*) (1880) or *Les pochards* (*The drunkards*) (1883). The lack of physicality has defeated the limp figure, even though it still has its head raised. The pale blue and white dress is all furbelowed and ends in an empty boot. This figure seems grotesquely half-alive and half-dead as it stares manically out at the viewer. It evokes an antipathy and repulsion as it exhibits disdain towards everything, including its own physical state of collapse.

The figures which tower above it seem stiff and posed. The tallest figure wears the colours associated with the fool from the Medieval Mystery plays, yellow and green, as well as a tatty Napoleon-style military hat with a vibrant, upright red and orange plume. But his plume is offset by a frayed fringe and down curling feather, which seems to highlight the imminent deliquescence of the masked figure. The mask itself seems to bear a sabre scar to go with its military pretensions and the wavery and distorted face is grotesque, with crazed, rolling eyes. This figure holds up its hands in either a greeting or a farewell, a regal and royal wave of ambiguity. Perhaps he is the

captain of this tatterdemalion group of mad masks. The figure standing next to and slightly in front of the military mask has the blanched white face and floppy hat of the Pierrot, but the hooked nose of Pulcinella or Brighella, and recalls the mask from *The despair of Pierrot*. There is a decided ambiguity to this mask, which combines the features of different clowns, but is the pallid melancholy white of Pierrot. The sad, impenetrable dark eyes and bright red lips of this mask are enhanced by its whiteness and the carmine red of the shawl cloak that is draped over another deep blue garment. Contrasted to this is the central female form, wearing a sheening green dress and with a bright orange bonnet on her head. In her hand is a broken bottle, spilling its contents of colour onto the clown next to her in phantasmagoric fashion. None of the spillage is on the white floor, which adds to the sense of unreality that the painting exudes. This female figure's white mask has a rosy tinge to it and her eyes are out of focus, staring rheumily and blankly out of the painting. A drunken indifference seems to ooze from her awkwardly balanced body and she appears to be in the process of gently unfurling and coming undone, as the ribbons that peek out from her dress above her shoe seem to suggest. The clown next to her is a glory of yellows and orange reds and also seems to have translocated from *The despair of Pierrot*. He, like the white faced Pulcinella-Pierrot next to him, has his hand raised and standing between their mutually raised index fingers is a small red manikin. This small, red man reminds us of Pantagruel, who was originally a little devil who tossed salt down the throats of drunkards in the mystery plays and *diableries*. His name in colloquial terms meant the hoarse throat brought on by excessive drinking (Bakhtin 1984: 325). Pantagruel was

representative of gross over-indulgence and disease, which was associated with the mouth and swallowing. As Bakhtin notes,

This image of Pantagruel as a mystery-play devil is linked on one hand with the cosmic elements water and sea salt and on the other hand with the grotesque image of the body (open mouth, thirst, drunkenness). Finally, he is linked with a purely carnivalesque gesture of throwing salt into an open mouth. (Bakhtin 1984: 326)

It seems that Ensor is making an allusion to the drunkenness of carnival and the grotesque effects that this produced, where the borders between reality and mad states of fantasy become blurred. The fat, yellowy-orange clown seems to make this connection more obvious as his left hand is placed surreptitiously against the bottle that is leaking to form his colour. There seems to be a grounded circuit from the little red homunculus on his finger to his hand on the bottle, a subtle emphasis on the relation between the two. The drunkenness of carnival with its links to the mouth and swallowing are an absurdly incongruous revelation of the death and destruction that the action of swallowing has always symbolized (Bakhtin 1984: 338).

It is finally in the pale figure of Pierrot, kneeling and raising an almost snuffed candle, the candle from the *Wouse*, that death is revealed. The Pierrot seems to have absorbed all the white of the room with the walls and floor all flowing into and out of him. His white is tinged with rosy pink and the floating of his pale smock seems to conceal a weightless emptiness. The rose colour of his whiteness links him to the small red manikin. Pierrot's pallor becomes the encrusted white of the sea salt used by the devil to enhance the thirst for more drink. There is a deep misery and lunacy in the extensive, thickly layered white paint that Ensor has slavered onto the

canvas. It is transgressive and claustrophobic like the walls of a room in a mental hospital. The flour-white mask of Pierrot has started to melt and mutate into a skeleton head. There is a coy, almost smug expression on the melting mask. It is turned towards the viewer who regards its grotesqueness with a growing revulsion. Death is present, but has not entirely usurped the mask; the oscillation between states haunts the gaze of the viewer, a *memento mori* of the desolation that awaits his other masked companions. The candle that the figure holds up is barely alight, with a thin, smokey flame and the merest flicker of life. This wispy thread curls like a tendril and blends into the white of the surroundings. There is a feeling of eccentric decay about this scene, which establishes a creeping unease. The violent colours Ensor uses for the garments are striking and powerful, producing chords and folds of deep and intricate texture. However, it is white that predominates, like heavy curdled milk and as Timothy Hyman says, it is 'transformed, in true carnival reversal, into the excremental' (Hyman 1997: 83). The white provides pure brilliance as well as lending volume to the excessive *jouissance* of the colours. The energy of these colours combines with the swirls of thick paint in a wild gaiety making the surface of the picture appear to move and roil. The masks come alive and they seem to waver, forming and reforming, mobile in their immobility. This movement increases the viewer's disquiet as the deformation and blurring violates the accepted symbolic classicism of forms and allows the teasing, semiotic gaiety and madness to play over these hollow-masked creatures. It is the startling, physically alive blasts of colour and light that draw the viewer, as if spellbound, to the masks. These masks seem to nudge one another

conspiratorially and with delight at their ability to entice the viewer into their electrifyingly colourful world.

These creatures seem non-sexual, amphibious beings, neither male nor female, though clad to resemble both sexes. There is an oddly androgynous air about them that collapses into non-identity as they oscillate between fantasy and reality and the neither / nor of the grotesque. Their gender is as phantasmagorical as their ludicrous appearance. Ensor uses these masked figures to transgress and question gender, accepted social behaviour and human existence. These are 'strange masks' or 'masques singuliers', not only in their bizarreness, but in their distinguished, eccentric individuality which allows them to challenge and deny the commonplace. Their subversive grotesqueness culminates in the transforming of Pierrot into a skull. The wavering between states exhibited by the masked forms, whether this be gender, identity, reality or life, shocks the viewer into a confrontation with human dissolution. Ensor uses the macabre and mirthlessly grinning masks to grotesquely exaggerate the mutability and mortality of humankind. This chimerical world is one where Pierrot dissolves into a skull and is transformed into *Death and the masks* (1897).²³⁰

In this painting, under a bruised violet sky, a group of a carnival masks swarm around a central figure in frothy white raiment. Death has joined the festivities holding a snuffed candle in his left hand. This figure, as noted by Xavier Tricot, is the 'metamorphosed Pierrot figure' from *Strange masks*

²³⁰ See Figure 37 on page 5.

(Tricot 2005: 89). The morphing of Pierrot's mask into the alternate mask of the skull is completed in this painting; however, the figure of death still has Pierrot's human hand. This sets up an ambiguity between life and death, human and skeleton, mask and face. Is it merely a revelation that the skull mask hides a living person impersonating death, as Xavier Tricot assumes? Or is Ensor being macabrely humorous, using the theme of the *memento mori* to remind the viewer of the thin line that exists between life and death; human body and skeleton and the fact that everyone is mortal? This liminal space between states, where things are both one and not one but fluidly move and alter form in an indescribable manner, is where the semiotic overflows in a *jouissance* of wild delight. This overflow erases the concept of identity and unity and liberates a mad, anarchic energy that blends elements that should be kept separate in a carnivalesque grotesque hybridisation. There is a single brown eyeball in the right socket of the skull which compounds this grotesque ambivalence and blending of life and death and the sense that 'something is illegitimately in something else', that things that should be kept separate have 'been fused together' (Harpman 1982: 11). This eyeball seems lost in the cavity and yet waywardly alive and gazing skewly upward into the sky above. The human hand and eye are juxtaposed with the immobility and grin of the skull mask and jolt the viewer with their unsettling queerness. It is the disquieting absurdity of this living death that both entrances and repulses and causes a thrill of disgust, accompanied by a creeping curiosity. The stare of this one bright and animate eye seems to be focused on the tiny, red balloon silhouetted against the swirling, puffy white clouds in the sky. This balloon is jettisoning ballast sand in an effort to speed

an escape from two scythe-bearing grim reapers. It seems that the tiny red manikin from *Strange masks* has also morphed and carnivalesquely split asunder into these two, small pursuing skeletons.

The one flying reaper with his tattered, flowing cloak seems to have re-focused his attention onto the group below. With scythe raised high behind his head he seems ready to fall upon them and reap his reward. This is very similar to the imagery in Ensor's etching *La mort poursuivant le troupeau des humains* (*Death pursuing the human flock*) (1890). This grim reaper with his large and demonically grotesque clawed feet, funny white hat and tufts of hair hovers over the carnival masks and there is a laughing glee that emanates from the tiny, rosy-coloured figure. It mockingly regards the masks, knowing that all ultimately have to dance to its tune. The other tattered, red skeleton is in hot pursuit of the balloon and its occupants. Beneath these vengeful, hunting figures stand the oblivious carnival masks in their finery. Even the figure of death is in fancy dress but the carnival scene has become a macabre carnival of death in which the candle of life has been snuffed.

Yet, the masks appear unconcerned. The large female mask to the right of death has her eyes tightly closed and her mouth is wide open as though singing, pleading or tirading. Her red lips match her red top and her face is a thick swirl of rosy white. Her sharp teeth jut forward and an aura of dominating self-righteousness and hypocrisy ooze from her mien. Leaning against her is the violin from *Strange masks*, *Astonishment of the mask*

Wouse and *Skeletons* trying to warm themselves. Standing just behind death and this fat woman is a very ambiguous white Pierrot-style mask, exuding an androgynous sexuality from its large, sensual, crimson-lipped mouth to its sexy black hat with furry fringe. It leans suggestively on death's shoulder gazing with large, melancholy and beguiling, empty dark eyes. This mask appears to have a red cigarette end hanging from its mouth which spots death's pristine whiteness with a stain of red.

The mask directly to death's left has a large, red-fringed hat with crimson dots, a black carnival mask and a huge, grotesque, down-turned, toad-like mouth. The mask behind Death wears bright yellow and has the most human-like face, one which is furrowed with lines and has eyes resembling half-moons, which stare drunkenly and crazily out at the viewer. Above this mask are two white-floured masks with blank, dark holes for eyes; each wears a black hat associated with characters from the *Commedia dell'arte*. The final mask wears the white pointed cap of Pierrot and its pale face is that of a porcelain doll. It gazes into the sky above at the escaping balloon, the jettisoned sand of which seems to be about to fall into its eye as though in an odd version of the sandman with his sleeping dust. The Sandman was thought to bring dreams and sleep, as well as being a symbol of the passage of time and the passing of life into death. Death and sleep have always shared a close relationship.

Each mask exhibits a different, grotesquely exaggerated expression and through these they reveal the passions which human beings tend to veil.

There is an overblown bestiality to the vices, virtues and passion that are spread over these frozen countenances because they seem to conceal 'unknown, unknowable faces' (Haesaerts 1957: 166).

It is the curious detachment of the masks that seems to emphasise their lifelessness and lack of identity. The dissolution between live body and dead skeleton, mask and emptiness creates a sense of doubleness. Here identity and nothingness, bestial and human traits are simultaneously on view in Ensor's monstrous and absurd hybrid masked forms. These rigid, mocking masks violate the natural boundaries of the symbolic in their suggestion of hidden deceits and inner alienation and hollowness. Their indeterminate, androgynous gender and lack of a given, structured identity confuses and subverts viewers' expectations. This indeterminacy is a semiotic blurring of the physical embodiment associated with the symbolic. The loss of the limitations of true, physical form makes the masks appear to be demonic non-things, which are yet possessed of an inappropriate and repulsive vitality (Harpman 1982: 6). They seem to be freed from any sexual identity and exist outside of space, time and physicality in a strange world of chimerical transformation and metamorphosis where everything is unstable. The lack of substance and constant flux ensures the mixed emotional responses of repulsion and attraction that the work inspires. Ensor's ambivalent blending of reality and unreality exposes the macabre absurdity of the universal carnival of human desires and death in a manner that makes us squirm and laugh simultaneously.

This carnival dance is dominated by the white, furling gown of death, which is accentuated by the bright, primary colours that are worn by the other masks. Ensor balances the painting by diagonal juxtapositioning of blues and reds. The colours are driven by the nervous, crosshatched paint that is thickly applied and which lends plasticity to the work, adding to the undefined mimetic expressions of the masks. This crosshatching also ensures a savage, undulating movement which makes the sky appear a livid threat in which white clouds seem to billow up violently from death's fleecy, white coat. This excessive white creates the coldness associated with dying and with the white of dead bones and the skull. The royal blue seems to evoke the expanse of the sky and of melancholy and the vibrant red is that of desire, rage or jealousy. These undiluted and strong colours express a fury of emotions and sounds.

This vivid movement is strangely alternated with the static nature and posing of the masks, which creates the impression of a still-life painting, where ridiculous and vicious passions are frozen and the hypocrisy, folly and emptiness of the masks exposed. The still-life was formerly known as *vanitas*, or vanity painting, because it included a symbol of mortality such as the skull, or the candle, which marks the passage of time, but burns itself out. The continual symbolic referent of the violin points to the music associated with the dance of death. In medieval works, death was often shown with an instrument, evoking the tempting and enchanting nature of music to seduce humankind into joining the carnival dance. This wild, enticing music resounds with laughter and as Paul Haesaerts (1957: 197) writes:

Ensor's laughter is inseparable from his technique - grim or gay, bright vermilion or electric blue, sly half-smiles in the shadows, recurrent 'yellow' (sickly) laughter, laughter in dotted lines, in flat tints, in delicately graduated washes - his laughter is as varied as the innumerable mixtures that can be made from the colors of his palette.

It is this laughter that Ensor uses to offset the macabre and morbid aspects of death and which allows him to present the masquerade of mortality as an ambiguous carnival where beneath the skin of each human being lurks the mask of the skull. In Ensor's work the explosions of laughter are found in the colours. This explosive energy of vivid, turbulent colours and limp, masked figures that swirl in thick, agitated brushstrokes exceed the 'boundaries of representation and problematise the concept of identity. Th[eir] musical rhythm bursts out in laughter at the meaningful' (Grosz 1989: 56). Ensor's work shatters unity and identity in a semiotic screech and cackle of amusement held in the large, rigid rictus of death's mask. It is the laughter and sonorous sounds of the colours that fill the picture and accompany the deliquescent carnival company in their macabre festivities.

Macabre explorations became even more apparent in Ensor's work from about 1886, such as *Skeletons trying to warm themselves* (1889)²³¹ where, as Verhaeren writes:

Rien de plus pauvre, de plus navrant, de plus lugubre que cette idée de chaleur et de bien-être évoquée devant ces êtres flasques et vides. Ils s'approchent, se pressent, s'inquiètent autour de ce feu inutile, de cette flame sans vertu, de ce foyer qui les raille et qui n'est pas. (Verhaeren 1980: 46)²³²

²³¹ See Figure 38 on page 5.

²³² Nothing more wretched, more heartbreaking, more dismal than this idea of heat and well-being which is conjured before these flaccid, empty beings. They approach, crowding anxiously around this useless fire, this flame which lacks heat, in a hearth which mocks them and that isn't real.

The notion of the dead trying to warm themselves at a glowing but cold fire is grotesquely funny and ambivalent, as are the loose, slack figures which seem to totter and sway unsteadily before the stove in all their finery. Malicious laughter at their own predicament seems to surround them, but this laughter is also directed at the viewer's puzzled disquiet. The top hat on the one skeleton is tilted at a rakish and amusing angle and the blues, reds, yellows, pinks and predominantly white colours ensure a brilliant play of illumination and amusement which add to the gaudy vitality of this carnivalesque and ambivalently comical scene. The gaiety and casual amiability of this gathering of skeletons can be contrasted with the ferocity of the *Duel des masques (Duel of masks)* (1892 - 1896).²³³ Ensor's painting seems to be an allusion to the work of Jean-Léon Gérôme entitled *The duel after the masquerade* (1857 - 1859).²³⁴ This painting was exceedingly popular and famous, depicting, as it does, the results of a duel fought after a masquerade and in which the Pierrot is seen mortally wounded, pierced through the heart and swooning in the arms of three other masked carnival figures. Harlequin and the victor, a Red Indian, are seen from the rear as they depart the scene of the murder. In Ensor's painting, the action has long ceased and the carnival figures stand around a prone, masked body. There is no telling whether the figure is wounded, dead, or merely faking. This body appears to be female and almost resembles the siren from the painting *L'appel de la sirène (The call of the siren)* (c.1891), though it wears a male mask with a long, pointed nose and the red Phrygian hat that is worn by the

²³³ See Figure 39 on page 5.

²³⁴ See Figure 40 on page 5.

figure of Marianne, a constantly recurring motif in Ensor's paintings. The pointed but lowered duelling sword in the hand of the white-clad Pierrot clown with red cap and socks implies that here is the victor surveying his work. Unlike in the *Gérôme* painting, all the figures remain gathered around the masked corpse. The four central figures consist of three white 'type' Pierrots and a leading lady. She seems to stare at the sword-bearing duellist with horror and yet leans into him in a suggestive manner. It is as though her horrified look is merely a disguise for the thrill his display of arrogance and violence has evoked in her. This duellist is gazing at the corpse with arrogant defiance; hand on hip, the image of the swashbuckling conqueror. The Pierrot wearing the large blue-button suit seems to stare out at the viewer with vacant melancholy. He gives the semblance of being completely separated from the others in a self-containment and emptiness that is almost ethereal in its non-presence. This figure is similar to the *Gilles* of Watteau. The white dandified figure next to him is decked out in frills of rose and yellow and is looking into the distance, hands in pockets, with a nonchalant, indifferent languidity, as though what has happened has nothing whatsoever to do with him. He in fact resembles a young nobleman or dandy, all garters and ribbons and refusal to be involved. Balancing these central figures on either side of the painting are two military figures. The one on the left of the canvas seems to be giving a military send-off to the corpse, his sword held high with his Napoleonic hat and its feather all at attention. The other military figure, to the right, is kneeling on the ground, hands clasped in prayer for the departed. He has a battered Napoleonic hat with a white wig in a pigtail and a wobbly, grotesque face and is all in red, like a cardinal.

This painting reflects all the grotesque and hypocritical emotions that violence can arouse in people when faced with a victim. All is caricatured, from the fake honours being bestowed on the dead victim, to melancholy detachment, indifference, arrogant pride, fake piousness and horror cloaking roused desire. There is ferocity in the display of these emotions released by bloodlust. The bizarreness lies in the gendering of the corpse as female with a male mask. Again the notion of gender slides and wavers. A female, even in masquerade, would be unlikely to be involved in a duel, and where is the corpse's weapon?²³⁵ Everything slips and is ambivalent in the mockery of inversion. Even the sky is a wild, grey blue with what appears to be the light of dawn breaking through the clouds, a sliver of silvery gold illumination. The foreground on which the figure is laid out is dark, sparse and bleak. The blue of the sky emphasizes and pushes the characters into prominence at the front of this stage. Blue, white, red, yellow are the predominant colours which seem to ridicule the sombre scene and the incipient mockery of death that lies before the oblivious carnival characters.

The interaction between death and masks haunt Ensor's work and in *Les masques devant la mort (Masks confronting death or Masks mocking death)* (1888)²³⁶ a group of masks, which includes the spectacled mask from *Scandalised masks* and *Astonishment of the mask Wouse*, jeeringly defy death. Death is dressed in female finery and is made to appear ridiculous, but this is merely a disguise hiding death's reality and making it palatable for the

²³⁵ Though there have been female exceptions such as Julie de Maupin upon whom Gautier based his book *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. The historical de Maupin was a skilled duellist.

²³⁶ See Figure 41 on page 5.

living. The pushing, shoving and obscene masks are trying to be fearless in the face of what they most fear. Through carnival indulgence and pleasure they are trying to run away from their mortality and death's triumph. Gender alters and morphs with death being depicted as an old hag wearing a ridiculous hat. The masks and their garments conceal and cloak gender so that it becomes indeterminate, the reality of sex does not count when faced with death. Nothing is as it seems and all is topsy-turvy in this carnivalesque grotesque gathering of sneering, hooting madness.

These taunting, scoffing masks are nowhere more apparent than in *Portrait du peintre entouré de masques (Ensor with masks)* (1899).²³⁷ Here Ensor has painted a self-portrait surrounded by a crowding and suffocating profusion of masks. The artist's head is in the centre and wears a garish hat with plumed feather and flowers and is encircled by masked creatures. Ensor's face is haughty and classical in an impersonation of the refined, reserved and exceedingly melancholy artist who is solitary. Around him pullulate and surge the masks, each of which is a revelation of a human emotion, here rage, pride, sadness, pleasure, there chagrin, fear, arrogance, doubt, slyness, irony, distress and disgust are fixed in vivid, overbearing tones (Verhaeren 1980: 48). It is an amazing bouquet of facial expressions, frozen in their ultimate poisonous vulgarity. The masks seem to surge from every corner of the canvas in a smothering, crushing carnival mass. They oppress and tyrannise the painter in a nightmare vision of hectoring excess. They mock him with the promise of lifelessness, emptiness and death and it seems as though, eventually, Ensor

²³⁷ See Figure 42 on page 5.

‘prendrait place parmi leur multitude comme s’il était lui-même quelqu’un de leur lignée et de leur race’ (Verhaeren 1980: 48)²³⁸. In fact Ensor’s calm face, devoid of passion, except that of lucent sorrow, appears more plastic and mask-like than the whirl of grimacing creatures that flood around him. It is this complete lack of expression and the frozenness of his face that draws the viewer’s gaze immediately to his face. Then the masks in their throbbing mass leap out and yell for attention.

These thronging, jostling masks which mock and laugh are also present in *Le théâtre des masques ou bouquet d’artifice (Old Woman with masks)* (1889) and *Pierrot aux masques (Pierrot with masks)* (1899).²³⁹ *Pierrot with masks* was also painted in 1899 and it is as though Ensor has metamorphosed himself from *Ensor with masks* into the central figure of Pierrot around whom masks seethe. These carnival masks also reveal the gamut of emotions: curiosity, hilarity, horror, evil, impish glee, melancholy, foxiness, hate and lust. Pierrot stands alone, holding a jester’s bauble which has its tongue stuck out and appears malignly alive and about to bite one of the mask’s fingers to the bone. In the background there is a dancing, jiggling skeleton with raised arms and hands, which in its ballet pose, seems to betray its intent to gather the crowd to itself. Pierrot’s face, like Ensor’s, seems reserved, filled with silent melancholy and knowing hauteur as he stares calmly out at the viewer. He is the tranquil centre in a wild carnival storm of emotion and noise, which contains a malignancy and malice that

²³⁸ [...] take his place amongst their multitude as if he were one of their descendants and of their race.

²³⁹ See Figure 43 on page 5.

taints the comedy of the masquerade. Pierrot can be seen in this work, and throughout Ensor's œuvre, as the symbol of melancholy solitude. In this work Pierrot is a direct representation of the artist, who has morphed into this pale, withdrawn and sad clown. Pierrot, or a white-faced clown, is a particularly prevalent figure and is often accompanied by skeletons, as in *Le grand juge (The great judge)* (1898), *Pierrot et squelette (Pierrot and skeleton)* (1905), or *Pierrot et squelette en jaune (Pierrot and skeleton in yellow)* (1893).

Throughout his work Ensor managed to combine the macabre and grotesque, mask and skeleton, real and unreal, with aplomb and skill. *Squelettes se disputant un hareng-saur (Skeletons fighting over a pickled herring)* (1891), with its sour and ambiguous play on words (Hareng Saur or pickled herring is pronounced as Art Ensor in French), is one of Ensor's most unusual self portraits. This is taken further in the self-portrait entitled *Squelette peintre (The skeleton painter)* (1896 - 97) where the painter has metamorphosed into a skeleton. Then in possibly the most amusing and ironic of all Ensor's skeleton portraits, *Mon portrait en 1960 (My portrait in 1960)* (1888), the artist looks into the future and sees himself as a skeleton propped up with wild tufts of hair on his head, a large spider scuttling next to him and snails milling around his feet. There is an ironic acceptance and commentary on death. As Haesaerts (1957: 227) says about Ensor:

His vision of the world as a comedy, a game, a masquerade; and the little importance he attached to his own fate, to the vain agitations and strivings of mankind, to the caprice of passion and to the arbitrariness of death.

All these are reflected throughout Ensor's œuvre. His laughter fills his paintings whether mocking, gleeful, happy, wild, sardonic, ironic or sympathetic. Ensor was a Dionysian painter, an anarchist and 'a partisan of total gratuitousness, instability, unreason and perpetual renewal' (Haesaerts 1957: 227).

His works defy the classical values and canon of the symbolic and are a complete expression of the savage beauty and *jouissance* of the semiotic as it breaches and defies all rules. Whether in his use of vivid primary colours, his style, texture of the work, or in his use of masks and skeletons to shock, Ensor strove to ensure constant change and renewal within his works. In this, he is very much an artist of the carnivalesque ethic, for as Bakhtin (1984: 34) has noted about the carnivalesque grotesque form it is there to

Consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted.

This epitomises Ensor's work, but is most prominent in his use of masks. These masks were used to liberate his use of colour and form, to separate the object from its colour and to lose any clearly defined boundaries. He thus blended gender, reality and fantasy, masks, skeletons, animals and objects into an eerie, mad and exuberantly transgressive carnival, as seen in his *Seven Deadly Sins* engravings, *La vengeance de Hop-Frog (Hop Frog's revenge)* (1898) or *Les musiciens terribles (The tragic musicians)* (1891). This parade of masks and skeletons challenged boundaries and escaped triviality through a subversive portrayal of 'moral wretchedness, social abuses, inner conflict,

frustrated ambitions' (Haesaerts 1957: 166). The carnival and its masks became Ensor's means to reveal and challenge reality. As Goya wrote,

The world is a mummer's parade. Face-dress-voice-everything is pretence. Everyone wants to appear as something they are not. They fool each other, and nobody knows himself. (Goya in Pfeiffer 2005: 35)

Ensor's work reveals his knowledge of the world and others and, finally, his own expression of self-knowledge which is exhibited in the carnival masks and skeletons with their grotesque liberating freedom which allowed him to parade his vision of the absurdness of the 'universal human carnival' (Haesaerts 1957: 166). To this day his bold inventiveness and the disquieting and ambivalent nature of his mysterious grotesques holds the viewer fascinated and in imaginative thrall and nags us to return again and again to gaze at these ever-changing and unknowable works of art. Each new interaction with Ensor's works opens alternate possibilities for interpretation and appreciation, of which this is but one slight exploration.

Across the channel from Ensor and Giraud's Belgium the figure of Pierrot was appearing in the work of two young Englishmen: Ernest Dowson and Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley's work was similar in vein to that of Ensor and not simply because he was an extremely talented illustrator. The affinities between Ensor and Beardsley were also to be found in their macabre humour and bawdy response to life around them. With scathing acuity they exposed the fatuity, egoism and sanctimoniousness of the society that they saw around them. Acute and pitiless observers, they took a biting joy from their sometimes macabre, sometimes astringent, mocking and lewd depictions.

They were each, at one time or another, seen as bearing a resemblance to Pierrot, whose presence was to figure extensively in both their oeuvres.

Dowson, like Giraud, created an ethereal, poetic world in which perfectly structured rhymes, tones, colours and words were paramount. In similar fashion to Giraud, Dowson employed older poetic forms such as the rondel and the villanelle which required intense care and thought to perfect. Here metre, tone and an exacting use of language created images and meanings of intricate fragility and icy, crystalline beauty. The world of Giraud's Pierrot is gently echoed in that of Dowson's *The Pierrot of the Minute*. It is the cold, silver moonlight that lingers and whose soft, icy tones fill the works of both poets and which hold Pierrot spellbound. Where Giraud's Pierrot exhibits more malevolent, violent, sinister responses and actions, Dowson's Pierrot is childlike and his reactions are naïve and gentle. It is this innocence and its loss, resulting in a disconsolate fall into knowledge that will be explored in the next chapter. In Dowson's world Pierrot becomes entranced and forever entrapped by the kisses of frosty moonlight.

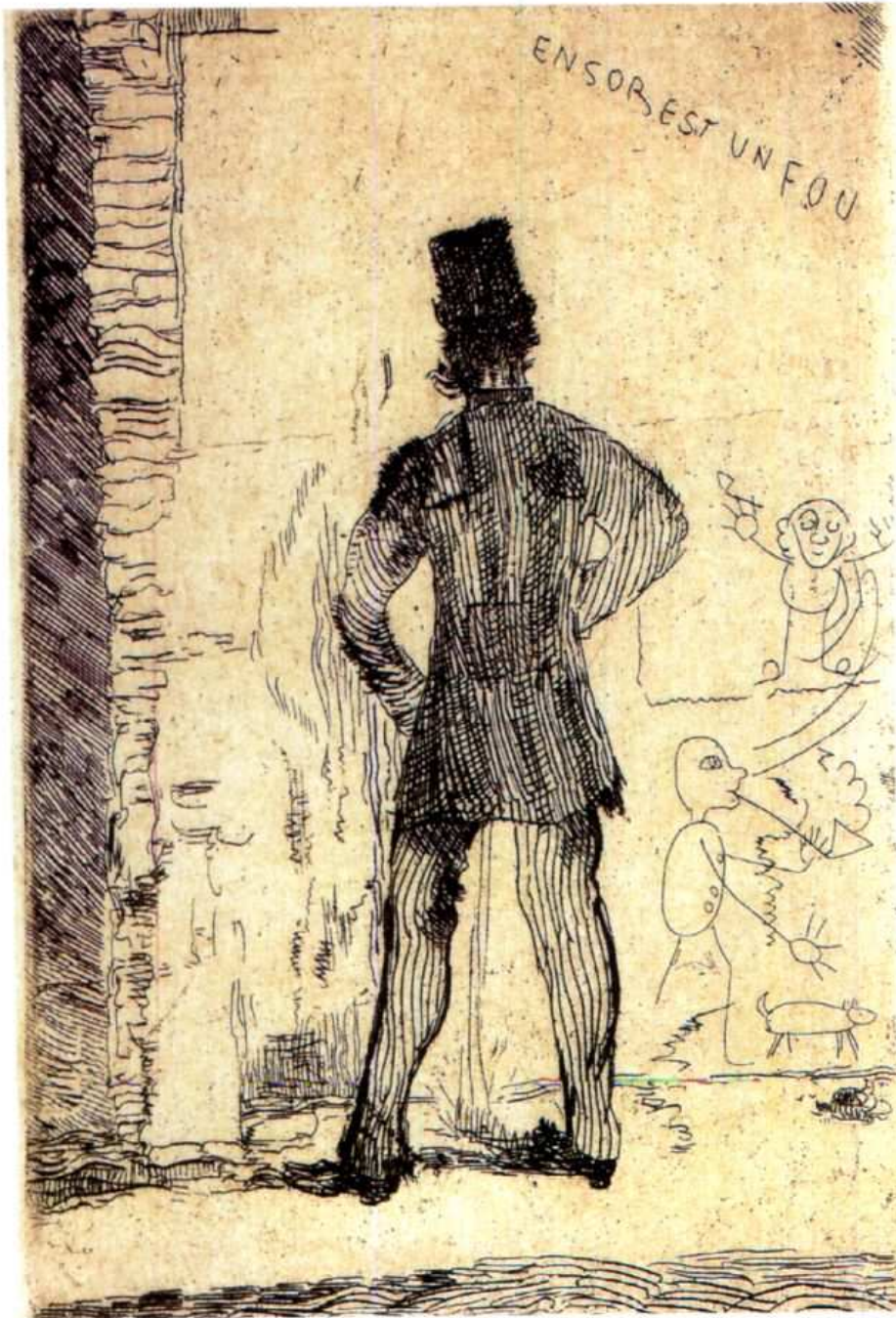


Figure 29
Figure 29 *The Pisser*
1887
Etching
La collection du musée des beaux arts, Ostende.

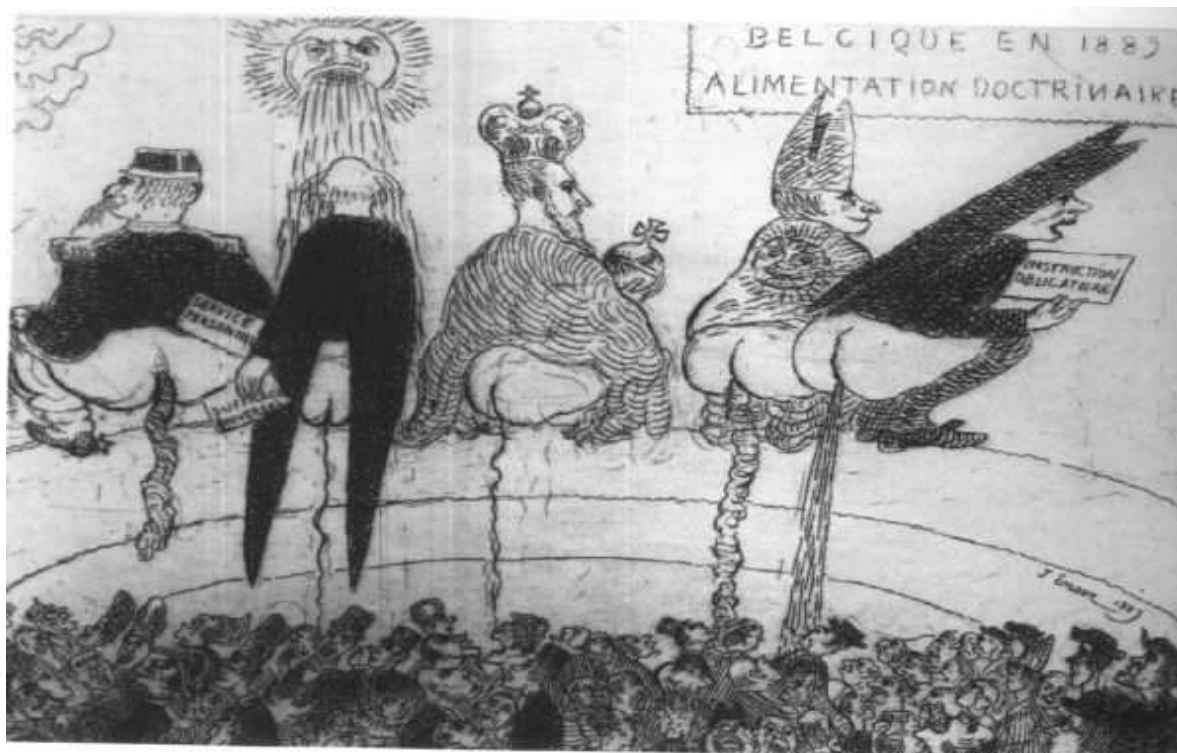


Figure 30

Figure 30 *Doctrinal nourishment*
1889

Etching

Museum voor schone kunsten, Ghent.



Figure 31

Figure 31 *Scandalised masks*

1883

Oil on canvas

Musée Royaux des beaux-arts, Brussels



Figure 32
Figure 32 *The despair of Pierrot*
1892
Oil on canvas
Private collection



Figure 33

Figure 33 *The Entry of Christ into Brussels 1889*

1888

Oil on Canvas

J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu



Figure 34

Figure 34 *The Intrigue*

1890

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor schone kunsten, Antwerp



Figure 35

Figure 35 *Astonishment of the mask Wouse*
1889

Oil on canvas

Koninklijk Museum voor schone kunsten, Antwerp



Figure 36

Figure 36 *Strange masks*
1892

Oil on canvas
Musée royal des beaux-arts, Brussels



Figure 37

Figure 37 *Death and masks*

1897

Oil on canvas

Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain de la ville de Liège, Liège



Figure 38

Figure 38 *Skeletons trying to warm themselves*
1889

Oil on canvas

Kimball art museum, Fort Worth



Figure 39
Figure 39 *Duel of the masks*
1892/1896
Oil on canvas
Private collection, Brussels



Figure 40

Figure 40 *Duel after the masquerade*

Jean-Léon Gérôme

1857 - 1859

Oil on fabric

Walters Art Museum, Baltimore



Figure 41
Figure 41 *Masks confronting death*
1888
Oil on Canvas
Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 42

Figure 42 *Ensaio com máscaras*
1889

Oil on canvas
Private collection



[378] PIERROT AUX MASQUES/PIERROT WITH MASKS, 1899

Figure 43

Figure 43 *Pierrot with masks*
1899
Oil on canvas
Private collection

CHAPTER FOUR: LUMINOUS LILIES AND MILK-WHITE BUTTERFLIES

- DOWSON'S *THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE*

A pale, timid figure wafts into a pastoral landscape clasping greenish-white lilies. It is Pierrot, whose entrance marks the opening of Ernest Dowson's one act drama: *The Pierrot of the Minute*.²⁴⁰ The figure of Pierrot was exceedingly prevalent in artistic circles both in England and on the Continent during and before the 1890's. Dowson would have been aware of the works of Verlaine, Laforgue, Gautier, Marguerite, Giraud and others, in which the central figures were Pierrot and the Moon. *The Pierrot of the Minute* is the only drama penned by Dowson and it makes use of 'techniques of allusion and variation [which] are carried to a new complexity and employed with striking purposefulness' (Pursglove 1993: 139). This intertextuality ensures that the drama is filled with ambiguity, plurality and polyvocality which constantly disrupt and intrude and subvert the conventions of symbolic signification (Grosz 1989: 51-52).

Dowson's Pierrot has followed the lilies as markers which lead to the sacred grove where Love is said to preside. The innocence and purity associated with the lilies and that of Pierrot will be the offering made on love's altar. The pastoral nature of the setting is indicated by Dowson's description of the opening scene:

²⁴⁰ Ernest Christopher Dowson 1867 - 1900, poet of the late Victorian era whose work was symbolic of the ethos associated with what critics have called the Yellow 90's (1890's), or the decadent period in English art and literature. He wrote the one-act play called *The Pierrot of the Minute* in 1892. It was published in 1897 with drawings by Aubrey Beardsley.

A glade in the Parc du Petit Trianon. In the centre a Doric temple with steps coming down the stage. On the left a little Cupid on a pedestal. (Pierrot of the Minute 1967: 194)²⁴¹

This depiction mirrors some of the pastoral paintings by Claude Lorrain²⁴² or the *fête galante* by Watteau.²⁴³ For Pierrot, this glade is where he hopes to learn the meaning of love. The ‘garden of love’ theme in painting portrays an idealized pastoral setting where figures enjoy flirting, listening to music or dancing. The pastoral setting in both art and poetry is also associated with fleeting, unrequited or unattainable love. This pallid and apprehensive Pierrot has entered a timeless dream-space of idealized placidity in which a darker principle lurks, one that will destroy the self-contained innocence of this knowledge-seeking dreamer. Pierrot has observed some of the liminal hints in the landscape that bode ill, such as ‘the tall oaks darkliest canopy’ and the ‘obscure winding’ of the maze-like alleys leading to the sanctuary, without truly understanding their significance. Dowson uses the word ‘darkliest’ which is a strange choice, a comparative adverb that is derived from ‘darkly’ but could well relate to more archaic words like ‘darkle’ and ‘darkling’. The manner in which it is used gives a very eighteenth-century twist to the verse. At the same time, it leans towards the diminutive, with a touch of the naïve, making darkness appear mannerist, ordered and less scary. Simultaneously, ‘darkliest’ possesses an eerie, threatening quality. It

²⁴¹ Hereafter to be abbreviated to POM with page and line number.

²⁴² Claude Gellée 1600? - 1682. French painter often called Claude Lorrain(e) after his place of birth. His works are celebrated for what is called poetic, picturesque or pastoral landscape: dream landscapes filled with light and classical buildings such as *Landscape with sacrifice to Apollo* (1662 - 63).

²⁴³ Jean Antoine Watteau 1684 - 1721 a painter from Valenciennes who is most associated with the *fête galante* pictorial form. In this work young lovers dally in a dreamy pastoral landscape. The theme of young lovers in a parkland stems from the medieval Garden of Love. There is a sense of time having been arrested in Watteau’s landscapes but there lurks the melancholy realization that love is fleeting and evanescent and all things are transient. Watteau, like Dowson and Beardsley, died from consumption at a young age and it is thought that this disease contributed to the melancholy of his paintings.

is redolent of gothic trceries and creeping evil. Death seems to reside in its sound. It is this word that puzzles the attentive reader, as it is unusual and it seems foreign and jarring. The semiotic seems to pulse and vibrate through this word and rents and undermines the placid idyll of the scene. The verdant foliage of the obscurely meandering alleys contains the same semiotic menace. In this labyrinth the greedy maw of nature seems to hide, waiting to gobble up the unsuspecting dallier. It is a writhing art nouveau image, with its threat of over-abundance in which the self could get hopelessly entwined and lost. There is an obscurity and ambivalent doubleness in all the natural forms in this garden of which Pierrot remains blissfully unaware. Even his saying that ‘moss and violet make the softest bed’ is ambiguous, because the violet is symbolically connected with darkness and death as well as with resurrection. It is the flower that grew from the spilt blood of Attis.²⁴⁴ Persephone, the goddess of death and resurrection, was picking violets and lilies when she was abducted by Hades and taken to be the queen of the underworld. Violets and moss are both shade plants with the concomitant association with shadowy darkness and death. These plants do make a soft bed: that of the grave. But an ambiguity is present, as the violets are also symbolic of resurrection. They thus possess a semiotic and carnivalesque doubling within themselves; a doubling that lies at the heart of Dowson’s play. The tranquillity and brightness of Love’s grove are deceptive and in this idyllic, dreamy pastoral the motto *Et in arcadia ego* (I too am in Arcady) is ever present. This is best seen in Nicolas Poussin’s painting in the Louvre, where shepherds and a young woman gaze at the inscription on a

²⁴⁴ A Phrygian god whose death and resurrection proclaimed the change from winter to spring. He was driven mad and bled to death after having castrated himself.

tomb, trying to understand its meaning.²⁴⁵ Here the enigma of death, even in the bliss of pastoral surroundings, is loftily represented (Heyd 1986: 201). Death and love are companions even in pastoral bliss.

It is this linking of love and death that is to be found in the frosty pale beauty of the lilies. Their snow-white purity recalls the opening verse of Giraud's

*Blancheurs sacrées (40)*²⁴⁶ in *Pierrot Lunaire*:

Blancheurs de la Neige et des Cygnes,	Whiteness of Snow and Swans,
Blancheurs de la Lune et du Lys,	Whiteness of Moon and Lily,
Vous étiez, aux temps abolis,	You were, in times past,
De Pierrot les pâles insignes!	The pale insignia of Pierrot! ²⁴⁷

The emphasis in Giraud's poem is the relation of Pierrot to whiteness, purity, innocence, silence, death and above all, the Moon. There is also the notion of the iciness of purity in the mention of snow. The Moon and snow are closely linked. Chastity and the virginal are cold and ethereal and inhabit the world of the dream and memory. This coldness and glacial purity is found in Mallarmé's lines from *Hérodiade*:

Le froid scintillement de la pâle clarté
Toi qui te meurs, toi qui brûles de chasteté,
Nuit blanche de glaçons et de neige cruelle!
(Mallarmé 1955: 56)

Glimmering radiance of thy frozen fire,
Thou that art chaste and diest of desire,
White night of ice and of the cruel snow!
(trans. Arthur Symons in Beckson 1987: 156)

The relation of lilies, sacred chaste whiteness, snow and the Moon is further to be found in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* where John the Baptist is seen as

²⁴⁵ See Figure 44 on page 5.

²⁴⁶ *Sacred whiteness*. The number in brackets is the sequential number of the poems in *Pierrot Lunaire*.

²⁴⁷ *Pierrot Lunaire* 1991: 86.

‘chaste as the Moon’ and ‘like a moonbeam’. As Brad Bucknell (1993: 517-518) writes, John’s body ‘receives a cluster of images in virgin white: “Thy body is white as lilies of the field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judea”’. Again the relationship of whiteness and chastity to the virginal pallor and purity of snow is emphasized and John could be merely another silent Pierrot figure, doomed to a cold, chaste Moon-invoked death. As Clara van den Broek (1996: 105-106) notes:

Si Pierrot a la face tellement pâle, c’est entre autres parce qu’il a la tête coupée...Son chef livide et grimaçant – apparu à la Décadence comme posée sur sa collerette comme sur un plateau – ressemble bien à la lune, qui, elle aussi, a l’air d’une blanche tête coupée.²⁴⁸

Innocence and the loss of a head to the Moon seem to be Pierrot’s ultimate fate. Dowson’s *Pierrot of the Minute* is fated to experience the same destiny as he loses both his head and his heart to the scintillating cold of the moonlight. For the moment he places the gathered lilies of his virginal innocence at the foot of Cupid’s statue and then hesitates on the stairs of the temple, but is beset by fear. He now alludes to his reason for coming to the grove:

It is so solitary, I grow afraid.
Is there no priest here, no devoted maid?
Is there no oracle, no voice to speak,
Interpreting to me the word I seek?
(POM: 195 lines 13-16)

He is looking for an oracle or Sibyl to interpret a word, the strange meaning of which he has yet to understand. The oracle never revealed, or concealed

²⁴⁸ If Pierrot has a very pale face it is also because his head has been cut off. His grimacing and pallid head-which during the Decadent period appeared to have been set down on his ruff as though on a tray-does indeed resemble the Moon which also looks like a severed, white head.

the truth, but only hinted at it through enigmatic and ambivalent, dark riddles. The Grecian Sibyl was always linked to the world of Apollo and daylight. Retaining his innocence and purity is reliant on his remaining ignorant of meaning, remaining outside the knowledge provided by words. His lily-like innocence will be destroyed and corrupted through exposure to the connotations of the word he quests to understand. He is fearful of the silence and the solitariness of the twilight place. Suddenly the voice of music, associated with pastoral idylls and love, begins to gently sound from within the temple, like an awakened Sibyl:

(a very gentle music of lutes floats out from the temple. Pierrot starts back; he shows extreme surprise; then he returns to the foreground, and crouches down in rapt attention until the music ceases. His face grows puzzled and petulant.)

Too soon! Too soon! In that enchanting strain,
Days yet unlived, I almost lived again:
It almost taught me that I most would know -
Why I am here, and why am I Pierrot?
(POM: 195-196 lines 17-20)

This music enraptures and establishes the dream world of timeless ambiguity. This disjunction of time ‘days yet unlived, I almost lived again’ is pure semiotic dream logic, where past, present and future fluidly move backwards and forwards without restraint, as described by Kristeva (1982: 70): ‘By adopting a dream logic, it [the carnival] transgresses rules of linguistic code and social morality as well’. The phantasmagoric nature of Pierrot’s search becomes apparent and one realises that all that is going to follow will be no more than his own self-indulgent dream (Snodgrass 1992: 41). Pierrot’s search is for the discovery of self, that hidden and badly understood, darker nature that divides his being. The experience of the

dream and the Moon Maiden will help to illuminate and reveal this self to Pierrot (Chardin 1995: 216). Pierrot appears somnambulant as he absently repeats:

Why came I here, and why am I Pierrot?
That music and this silence both affright;
Pierrot can never be a friend of night.
I never felt my solitude before -
Once safe at home, I will return no more
Yet, the commandment of the scroll was plain;
While the light lingers let me read again.
(POM: 196 lines 21-27)

He seems not to understand why he has ventured to this glade and appears confused, edgy and scared. It is as though he has stepped through a mirror, like Alice, into a place that he does not comprehend and has assumed a persona that he cannot recognise. The liminal nature of twilight seems to have evoked his indecision and nebulous lack of self knowledge. The music that enraptured him and the silence that surrounds him now take on threatening aspects, a sense of terror that emanates from an aesthetically still and perfect place where innocence is vividly present and yet direly threatened. The oddity is that both music and silence are equally terrifying to Pierrot. Yet, the strangest sentence is 'Pierrot can never be a friend of night'. A deep fear of the dark and the transgressive nature of night is apparent and timid Pierrot is quick to indicate that on his safe return from this pastoral paradise he will never venture back again. The inherent ambivalence in this is that when he does return safely home he will never be able to return, no matter how he might try. Pierrot has entered this world where time is frozen in 'lily time' (Snodgrass 1992: 33). His own childlike innocence is what he will sacrifice to gain the knowledge promised him in the parchment:

*“He loves to-night who never loved before;
 Who ever loved, to-night shall love once more”.*
 I never loved! I know not what love is.
 I am so ignorant - but what is this?
 (Reads)
*“Who would adventure to encounter Love
 Must rest one night within this hallowed grove.
 Cast down thy lilies, which have led thee on,
 Before the tender feet of Cupidon”.*
 (POM: 196-197 lines 29-32)

Pierrot's quest is the search for the meaning of Love. Here the pale clown admits to his own ignorant folly whilst simultaneously betraying his purity. Purity and folly seem to mingle in a semiotic fusion as integral aspects of the pale clown's own nature. Casting down the lilies that he has brought is a jettisoning of his lily-like chasteness. In fact, it becomes apparent that it is Pierrot's own credulity that has in some manner deceived him, led him on, and brought him into the sacred grove. There is a sense that even at the centre of purity and innocence is something carnivalesquely duplicitous. Lilies are not only the symbol of purity; they are also associated with death and the white shroud. Death and love are the selfsame quest. Cupidon himself is a very fickle and ambivalent being as he is both god of love and of debauchery. Known to the Greeks as Eros, he was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite and during the fin de siècle he was 'bien ce dieu ambigu, hermaphrodite singulier dont le double attrait est promesses d'extases et de souffrances' (Lingua 1995: 23).²⁴⁹ He was, in some myths, regarded as the son of Night and said to have power over the dead. He epitomises the riotously grotesque in his dual nature with its playfulness and perverseness as well as his ability to sow love and suffering equally. Ambiguously

²⁴⁹ [...] indeed that ambiguous god, that strange hermaphrodite whose double allure promises both ecstasy and suffering.

semiotic, his own nature is doubled and he is a riotous, transgressive godhead, even when reduced to his French diminutive name. It is erotic love and desire, as well as the suffering and the sorrow of loss, which will be the enlightenment that Pierrot gains in this glade. For this knowledge he will be punished with a loss of purity and a fall into memory, imperfection and estrangement from the ideal. There is a strange ambivalence at play. Pierrot's quest will result in a loss of chastity but this occurs within an idyllic setting in which time and decay seem not to have a place. The Edenic quality of the grove seems to be ruptured by the figure of Cupidon, who will instil the knowledge of erotic love and desire as well as the sense of loss of completeness. This duality present in the garden is the struggle of the semiotic and the symbolic; where the semiotic is the state of completeness before the law of the symbolic institutes identity, language and sexuality. The symbolic is the 'reality' principle and establishes the rules of desire, memory and a sense of anguished loss and the dualities which the latter bring into existence. Pierrot has already acquiesced in the command to discard the lilies and he now accepts Cupidon as his security, a very dangerous thing to do, knowing the fickleness of this particular god. Pierrot has made his choice and his own febrile, semiotic nature is revealed by his petulant casting aside of the scroll with a

Hence, vain old parchment. I have learnt they rede.
(POM: 197 line 36)

Suddenly, the parchment which encouraged Pierrot's quest is termed 'vain', which in this old courtly form means that it has no value or significance. In his hasty, slipshod manner Pierrot casts it from him without reading it

thoroughly. His behaviour is that of a spoilt and foolish child and makes the reader smile: one can almost imagine the stamping of a tiny foot. Pierrot's own silly vanity is revealed in his actions, as is his laziness and inability to apply himself. He is featherbrained and facile and rather too self-obsessed. He is the vain one who lacks wisdom and sense. The word 'rede' is again marked for its archaic character and Chaucerian overtones which adds to the medieval feel of the garden and Pierrot's knightly search. But the word is ambivalent: it can mean 'to explain', but it can also mean 'counsel or advise'. Pierrot has not learnt anything from it, rather the reverse, and any counsel it offered has been overlooked. In this sentence there is an undercutting sense of laughter that spears Pierrot in all his foolish petulance.

Still ill at ease, Pierrot 'starts at his shadow' as though scared of being surprised by a stranger, or of encountering the most fearful nightmare monster from a dream. When no monster is forthcoming, Pierrot flits happily to where his forgotten basket lies at the base of Cupidon's statue. He discovers the wine it contains and his gleefulness at the prospect of its consumption is exceedingly carnivalesque. His alteration from craven clown to happy carouser is instantaneous, a swing of semiotic moods that mirrors the dream state and unreal world he appears to be caught in. Nothing is stable in this dream world and everything has a dual nature and oscillates from one state to another without assuming any fixed form. The semiotic is at play and it is upending and destabilising the rigid definitions and boundaries of the symbolic. Pierrot hymns the qualities of the wine:

I shall never miss
Society with such a friend as this.

How merrily the rosy bubbles pass
Across the amber crystal of the glass
I had forgotten you. Methinks this quest
Can wake no sweeter echo in my breast.
(POM: 197 lines 40-46)

Suddenly, when confronted by the courage found in the wine, Pierrot is no longer afraid of 'missing society' or of being alone. The joyfulness of wine is seen in the bubbles which merrily whirl in the glass. The amber of the glass and the rosy colour of the wine are some of the few warm and vibrant colours used by Dowson in this play. These festive shades and the amber tones of the glass are reminiscent of the line in *Pierrot Lunaire's* opening poem:

Et Watteau, les fonds couleur d'ambre And Watteau the amber backdrops

The warm amber colour that Watteau was famous for pervaded his pastoral *fête galante* scenes in which dreamy eglantine whites and rosy pinks and reds were used in a hazy, soft-focused illusion of love, *The pilgrimage to the island of Cythera* being the most representative of Watteau's pastoral love scenes.²⁵⁰ The fragrance, colour and bubbly merriness of the wine inspire Pierrot's delight and reveal the bacchanalian and carnivalesque characteristics of this pale clown. He is a fluid, vacuous, semiotic creature who is dictated to solely by the drive and emotion of the moment. The symbolic, with its rules of behaviour and social structures, hardly governs his reactions to anything, or any of his actions.

²⁵⁰ See Figure 45 on page 5.

The god that now prevails in the glade is Dionysus, the god of wine and licentious revels and the sanctity of the scene, devoted apparently to the ideal of 'love', is invaded by a darker force of perverse and rampant, erotic desire. The dark violence associated with Dionysus along with the intoxication of the wine are semiotic drives that can and do lead to the loss of innocence as well as to madness. Pierrot unthinkingly taunts love because in his *naïveté* he has not realised that both Dionysus and Cupid are gods of violent passion. They work in tandem to ensure that love will take possession of the soul of this dreamer, destroying his innocence and making certain that his spirit is broken and his frivolity extinguished. They will not teach him about love, but about the loss associated with desire and the constant pain and pursuit of the unattainable which results from this loss.

In the midst of this praise of wine Pierrot again gives a 'start', like a timid deer, and looks at Cupid's statue. He then profusely apologises, indicating that what he said about wine being a sweeter echo than his quest for love was merely jest. The reader can almost feel the statue of Cupid shaking with laughter at the ingenuousness of this pallid, craven creature who now pours a libation of wine on the statue as a palliative, offering it the lilies at its feet. Unworldly purity is being offered in exchange for knowledge, protection and the god's goodwill in providing 'strange visions and sweet'. The sense of the dream is deepened and the projected wish-desire is that 'only love kiss him awake!' Tired and feeling lonely again, having said his prayers, he gathers his bed together. Lying like the lilies at Cupidon's feet, Pierrot laments his loneliness and lack of completion as a threnody of distant music gently fills

the glade. Pierrot mutters bitterly that the music is ‘an echo of mine heart’s complaint’ as it seems to mirror and echo his own solitude and desires. This subjective twinning of the music to Pierrot’s state of mind is a warning of the projected and echoing dream fantasy that fills the play. Music is the siren song that entraps and seduces, as it lulls and lures Pierrot further into the dream of his own self-deceiving and self-generating desires. Pierrot bemoans his lack of a perfect companion such as known by the other creatures:

In single glee I chased blue butterflies,
Half butterfly myself, but not so wise,
For they were twain, and I was only one.
Ah me! How pitiful to be alone.
(POM: 198 lines 58-61)

The blue butterflies that Pierrot used to chase were paired as are the eglantine and the violet. The colour blue is associated with fidelity and chastity and the goddess of love. The butterflies are symbolically linked with Cupid through the mythical love story of Cupid and Psyche. The word Psyche in Greek means both ‘soul’ and ‘butterfly’ and butterflies are also symbols of immortality, resurrection and the spirit of death. For Pierrot the frivolity of chasing the butterflies is tempered by his sense of being excluded because he does not have a perfect, ‘twained’ companion. These structural dyads of life and death, sexuality and love and the dialogue present between them are indicative of the carnivalesque (Kristeva 1982: 78-79). Everything is doubled but flows from one into the other in a constant shimmering mutability, as the semiotic ruffles the surface of the symbolic. The drive of fantastical desire makes Pierrot dream about what he seems to lack, the

perfect counterpart. This perfection of partnership seems to be echoed throughout the silent seclusion of Love's grove:

The eglantine, in loftier station set,
Stoops down to woo the maidly violet.
In gracile pairs the very lilies grow:
None is companionless except Pierrot.
(POM: 199 lines 68-71)

The eglantine is a rose and roses are closely associated with Cupid, love and lovers. The word 'rose' is a play on Cupid's Greek name Eros. It was this flower that Eros/Cupid gave to the god of silence Harpocrates to ensure that he remained silent about the peccadilloes of the gods. The rose is therefore the symbol of silence and secrecy as well as love and desire. Pierrot's poetic lament is continually doubled in terms of one and other (Kristeva 1982: 69). The 'gracile pairs' of lilies, all in white, seem a presage of Pierrot's own mirrored delight in the Moon Maiden. They will be two slender, white entities generated through a single, narcissistic desire. It is with desirous thoughts of being able to 'prove' Love that Pierrot falls into slumber, little aware that the testing of love is going to prove to be a testing of himself, one that will leave him shattered.

The phantasmagory now deepens as the lutes play and slowly a bright radiance, white and cold, streams from the temple upon the face of Pierrot. Presently, a Moon Maiden steps out of the temple; she descends and stands over the sleeper. (POM: 199)

The presence of the Moon Maiden and the radiance of her cold light are in similar vein to Giraud's *Lune au lavoir*.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ *Moon as washerwoman.*

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

The winds through the glade
Blow their reedless flutes.
Like a pale washerwoman
She washes her heavy white silks.²⁵²

This glade is occupied by the music of the wind in the trees like breath passing over Pan flutes, but these flutes are not made from reeds. The pipes of the flute seem to be shafts of moonlight which vibrate to the whisper of the winds.²⁵³ This cold, pallid beauty washes over the landscape and water. There is an obvious disjunction and play with the idea of reedless flutes and the music of Pan. Semiotic sound and transgression invades the whiteness of the poem and adds to the eeriness of the moon-drenched glade. The word 'lavandière' is also a poetic doubling as it can be the mauve-blue colour of lavender, which is the colour a moonlit landscape assumes, or it can be a washerwoman and the lavender scent that she uses for her linen. The Moon's silken, white light fills this world with its cold and livid colouration which mirrors the icy pale light that Dowson's Moon Maiden throws across the recumbent form of Pierrot.

This Moon Maiden has been invoked by Pierrot's fervent supplications and need. She represents ideal beauty which has been coaxed into existence, but, unlike Pygmalion's statue, she remains inhumanly ethereal, cold, seemingly of chaste alabaster, while her whiteness is a doubling of Pierrot's. She now stands and contemplates the figure of the white clown:

Who is this mortal
Who ventures to-night

²⁵² *Pierrot Lunaire* (1991: 16).

²⁵³ Flutes are reedless instruments, though Pan made his pipes from the reeds into which the nymph Syrinx was changed in her despair to escape his attentions.

To woo an immortal,
Cold, cold the Moon's light,
For sleep at this portal,
Bold lover of night.
Fair is the mortal
In soft, silken white,
Who seeks an immortal.
Ah, lover of night,
Be warned at the portal,
And save thee in flight!
(POM: 199-200 lines 78-89)

There is recognition in the Maiden's words that the mortal shares in certain aspects of herself (his fairness and 'soft, silken white'). An allusion to the myth of Endymion and Selene the Moon goddess is apparent. Selene came upon the sleeping Endymion and fell in love with him. She requested that he be put into an eternal sleep so that he retained his youth and beauty and she would visit him every night. In this case the mortal has come seeking out Love in his quest for self-enlightenment. The oddity is that the Moon twice uses a similar phrase, either 'bold lover of night' or 'lover of night', which is hardly what Pierrot himself indicated with his 'Pierrot can never be a friend of night'. It appears that at this stage Pierrot is still a creature of the sun and scared of the dark. His transformation into a being dedicated to the night and the Moon will only happen once he becomes enthralled and ensnared by the Moon Maiden. His tale will be that of every dreaming Pierrot, he will be incapable of escaping his mortal fate - that of enslavement to night's celestial being. The Moon will weave him into the cobwebs of her light, forever holding him prisoner. The Moon Maiden is attracted by the mirror image before her:

How fair he is, with red lips formed for joy,
As softly curved as those of Venus' boy.
Methinks his eyes, beneath their silver sheaves,

Rest tranquilly like lilies under leaves.
Arrayed in innocence, what touch of grace
Reveals the scion of a courtly race?
Well, I will warn him, though, I fear, too late -
What Pierrot ever has escaped his fate?
But, see, he stirs, new knowledge fires his brain,
And Cupid's vision bids him wake again.
Dione's Daughter! But how fair he is,
Would it be wrong to rouse him with a kiss?
(POM: 200-201 lines 100-111)

There is a narcissistic fascination and identification established between the Moon Maiden and the sleeping figure of Pierrot. They are mere mirror reflections brought into existence by Pierrot's dream projection. Both bodies are equally androgynous and delicate in their paleness, seeming emanations from the same fabric. The sensual, erotic beauty of Pierrot is compared by the Maiden to that of Cupid. In this beauty is a hint of the feminine and the figure of the *Sleeping hermaphrodite* is evoked.²⁵⁴ In the sheaves of silver that gently float over Pierrot's closed lily-like eyes the Maiden sees mirrored her own chastity and cold purity. An otherworldly innocence is present in these two twained beings. For the Maiden, this sleeping, silken white figure possesses an ideal beauty which even leads her to an impetuous cursing with her 'Dione's daughter'. This semiotic transgression indicates the riotous forces that are at play in this identification. The symbolic is all in disarray, as everything is a fluid reflection which is ambiguously double edged as chastity and desire; gender and identity clash and merge. Yet, the Moon Maiden remains without a name throughout the play. She is merely designated as 'The Lady'. This underscores her impersonality, her dream status and her cold intangibility (Chardin 1995: 211). In this she resembles

²⁵⁴ This statue is found in the Louvre Museum and represents dual sexuality, or hermaphroditism. See Figure 46 on page 5.

Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* who also has no name and is merely referred to as *La Belle*. The Moon Maiden is a feminine persona, evoked and moulded from moonlight, one who will remain forever unattainable, locked away in her cold, white chasteness. She is the pale mirror into which Pierrot will gaze and contemplate himself.

The Moon Maiden kisses Pierrot and then draws back into the shadows that so scared him. Pierrot awakens and dreamily requests that the vision that he had return to him. In his trance-like state he is surprised by the light and uncertain as to where he is. He suddenly remembers his quest and what he has come to encounter, at which the Moon Maiden, veiled like Salomé, steps forward. She seems to be hiding herself in a coquettish manner to increase her mystery and allure. There is a sense of play and duplicity in this masking and it furthers the idea of her ability to dissimulate and her charm becomes as cold as her kisses will prove to be (Chardin 1995: 211). This is the marmoreal allure of ideal beauty and perfection.

Pierrot ecstatically wonders whether he has encountered love. This state of ecstasy is a fevered mood that will adhere to no reason or rules. This frenzy is ephemeral and volatile and mirrors the insubstantiality of the dream world into which Pierrot has willed himself. The instability will allow the semiotic to tear and transform the symbolic borders of the realm of reality, but just for a moment. The results of this overturning will result in the agony of Pierrot's destroyed innocence and the searing self-realisation of loss and lack of wholeness. The Moon Maiden warns him of this danger quite clearly, but

Pierrot, as predicted by the Moon Maiden, stubbornly resists. He seals his fate with his demand to see her face:

Unveil thyself, although thy beauty be
Too luminous for my mortality.
(POM: 202 lines 126-127)

Here Pierrot unknowingly reverses the myth of Semele and Zeus, where Semele demanded to see the brilliance of the god and was then killed by his luminous light. She was the mother of Bacchus and again the god of riotous licentiousness, peeps through the veil of Love. There is a terror that seems to lurk in luminous ideal beauty, with the threat of death and destruction.

When the Moon Maiden unveils herself, Pierrot is immediately smitten by his own dream vision of ideal beauty. She is the seductive reflection of himself in which he will contemplate beauty and experience the sad discovery of self and loss. He believes that he has finally attained the impossible and found his other half, like the blue butterflies that he envied. In Pierrot's gaze is the desire to possess the dream and it is so intense that it threatens both the dream and himself; it is as though Pierrot wants to consume and be consumed by the luminosity of the Moon Maiden's light and beauty. The vacant bereftness of his loss will occur only when the dream disappears and Pierrot awakens to find that what he gazed upon has left him with a driving need that can never be fulfilled.

The Maiden is quick to determine that Pierrot has not taken heed of the warning that was placed on the scroll that he so carelessly tossed aside. The impulsive semiotic drives to which this pale clown is subject, his lack of

stable symbolic boundaries, ensures that in his vanity he disdains anything that requires effort, or taxes his lack of concentration. As he says, he read the scroll except 'where it was illegible and hard'. In this admission is a revelation of the infantile nature that is his. He is now instructed in the laws that are the penalty attached to the attainment of his quest:

Au Petit Trianon, at night's full noon,
Mortal, beware the kisses of the Moon!
Whoso seeks her she gathers like a flower -
He gives a life, and only gains an hour.
(POM: 203 lines 138-141)

Pierrot's response is as instantaneous as it is wildly semiotic. It is the first time that there is an indication of laughter in the play. This sound bursts forth from Pierrot, a reckless, transgressive noise that bites into the silence of the cold light. The laughter seems forced from Pierrot in a dark and violent explosion that is almost painful in its tearing precipitateness. It is as though a delicate glass has exploded, scattering shards in every direction. The uncontrolled nature of this madcap mirth fills the scene with a frenzy of semiotic desire, withering any possible symbolic reasoning or fear of the law. The words which accompany this foolhardy and disconcerting mirth are grotesquely impulsive:

Bear me away to thine enchanted bower,
All of my life I venture for an hour.
(POM: 203 lines 142-143)

An allusion to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* lingers in the 'enchanted bower' with its element of fairyland and airy nothingness. However, a 'bower' is also a lady's boudoir or private bedroom and so the erotic and the dream are again intertwined. After all, this is a night for

learning about love, but fairyland is renowned for its tricks and malice, where nothing is as it seems. Pierrot rashly gives away his life for this dream. But 'all my life' is a carnivalesque and semiotic play on meaning. Being a 'Pierrot of the minute' it seems that his 'life' is only of a moment, one which is encapsulated in this brief, evanescent dream world. The semiotic transgression explodes in the disparity between the 'hour' of love promised and the description of Pierrot as 'of the minute'. This time disjunction is disturbing as it makes no sense. A minute is not an hour, unless an hour in this dream world represents only a minute, or moment, in reality. In this enchanted bower symbolic time is thus defied. Dream time exists outside of the known bounds enforced by the symbolic and this ensures an oscillating instability and flux. The whiteness of Pierrot and of the Moon Maiden is innocently virginal, but white is also the colour of the shroud and death stalks the penumbra of this frigid, white dream light. In Pierrot's offering of his life for a brief moment of time there is a misplaced belief in the ability to trap and forever hold onto his vision. His life is being given to a dream, the memory and desire for which will haunt and drive him to death. As Kristeva writes:

This subject's desire is founded on drives that remain unsatisfied, no matter what phantasmatic identifications desire may lead to because, unlike desire, drives 'divide the subject from desire'. (Kristeva 1984: 131)

Pierrot's craving for enchantment will render him incapable of dealing with reality and he will constantly be chasing a memory of perfection and of completeness. This is a vain pursuit for which the only solace is to be found in madness or death.

The Moon Maiden accepts Pierrot's resolve to continue, heedless of the consequences, with her icy comment 'Take up thy destiny of short delight'. This is a serene and chilling statement, completely lost on the infatuated clown. Delight is over as swiftly as destiny and life. The Moon Maiden proceeds to call for more music to deepen the enchantment and to further inflame and mesmerise Pierrot's addle-pate. The music will so transport him that for the briefest moment he will understand and truly know fullness of being and immortality. This is the state of semiotic wholeness before the realisation of symbolic separation, or desire, located in the sign (word) which is always split and ambivalent (Kristeva 1984: 48-49). In Pierrot's intoxicated state, only the silence of the gaze prevails as he is absorbed by the Moon Maiden's dance. She acknowledges that the dance is to woo Pierrot and bind him to her as a conquest,

While my dance woos him light and rhythmic,
And weaves his heart into my coronal.
(POM: 203 lines 157-157)

The word 'coronal' enforces this idea of conquest and triumph as it refers not only to the circle of light, or the halo, that is seen around the Moon but also to a wreath, garland or crown rewarded for victory. Pierrot, it seems, is to become merely another addition to the Moon Maiden's triumphal crown. Hidden in the word 'coronal' is its root word 'corona' which has a further meaning, that of the trumpet-shaped centre of the Narcissus flower. The Moon Maiden as a mere reflection of Pierrot is in turn reflected by Pierrot. In this narcissistic self-containment, the Moon Maiden, cold, chaste and pale as death, dances for Pierrot. Her dance is that of the *femme fatale*, of Salomé. The purpose of the dance is to ensorcel the pale clown adding him

to the many who have previously been doomed by the silver kisses of the Moon. During the dance Pierrot becomes a mere mute, gazing head. The Moon Maiden seduces him through music and her own fascinatingly ambivalent blend of chasteness and eroticism. As a visual object of pleasure she becomes both the dance and the focus of Pierrot's desire-filled gaze. A violent semiotic collision takes place between image, sound and word. This ruptures any defined symbolic boundaries and causes an inversion and destabilizing of the process of signification, which blurs subject and object, creator and creation and male and female. The androgynous relationship between Pierrot and the Moon Maiden is all too apparent. As the object of creation the Moon Maiden is Pierrot's self-projection, his gaze into the mirror of self which is entirely solipsistic and self-reflexive. The narcissism of projected desire and the dance merge into the homogeneous figure of the androgyne, which allows semiotic confusion and ambivalence to transform shapes and shift sexual identifications. Throughout this dance of the chaste, cold light, the Moon Maiden remains aloofly desirable. She is a *Belle Dame Sans Merci*,²⁵⁵ who will exact the price for this transitory moment of frozen pleasure. In her guise as Salomé the price she has exacted is the life of Pierrot. For Catherine Rancy this involvement with the Moon and its dancing light represents

Un refus de la vie dans le monde réel et un refus de la sexualité adulte, alors que la danse représente une aspiration finalement funeste à la vie dans le monde idéal de l'Art, tout en suggérant une auto-satisfaction érotique. (Rancy 1982: 104)²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ From Keats's poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, which means 'The Beautiful Lady without Pity'.

²⁵⁶ It represents a refusal of life in the real world as well as a refusal of adult sexuality, whereas in the ideal world of art, the dance represents a yearning which is ultimately fatal to life, while suggesting erotic self-gratification.

Pierrot's projected desire in its narcissistic similitude is merely an indulgence in erotic self-pleasure. The gazed-upon image is his Echo and not a valid object of desire. The dance and the Moon Maiden merely reflect back upon him his own chastity and desires. Never during Dowson's play are true sensuality, eroticism or sexuality exhibited. All remains frozen in childlike thrall to the ideal and the dream. It is a fairy tale bathed in virginal, opalescent light and filled with games, masks and masquerade, where sex and passionate desire are confined to fleeting innuendoes and brief contact.

The dance at an end, the Moon Maiden summons a somnabulistic and hypnotised Pierrot to her side. He demands to know about the music and the Maiden indicates that Pan wrote it of old in Arcady. Again the figure of a disruptive and transgressive force is found under the surface of innocence and dreamy, ideal beauty. Pan was the god of unbridled carnality and sexuality and was part of Dionysus' retinue. His music aroused inspiration, sexuality and panic. Innocence and carnality are set against one another in an oscillating pluralisation of meaning. *Jouissance* keeps infiltrating Pierrot's innocence as well as the situation itself, working its way through the polyvalence of the words. In the Moon Maiden's case, this *jouissance* is glacial and limited by her non-human nature. She is the ethereal substance of a dream and no matter how he desires her, Pierrot will never be able to retain or hold her (Chardin 1995: 214). She represents the Moon as the ultimate shape-shifting *femme fatale* and as the iridescent dream reflection of Pierrot's beguiled imagination she can revealingly say: 'I am to each the face of his desire'.

She is the Echo described by Bachelard in his work *Water and Dreams*: ‘Echo is always Narcissus. She is he. She has his voice. She has his face’ (Bachelard 1983: 22).²⁵⁷ This elision of difference and the assuming and portrayal of what is desired evokes the ambiguity of the androgyne. The androgyne has always belonged to the domain of the imaginary and the dream, where the difference that constructs the subject is erased. The narcissistic identification that is occurring between the Moon Maiden and Pierrot annihilates difference and transgresses the normal rigid gender divide. The ambiguous figure of the androgyne, besides being a narcissistic impulse, is also indicative of the psychotic who

remains rooted in the imaginary, material space, a space based on the confusion of self and other, bound to the suffocating dialectic of identification with the (phallic) mother who is his imaginary double. The psychotic has no stable boundaries or borders, and finds his identity confused with that of the m(other). The psychotic strives to be the mother to experience no heterogeneity or alterity, and thus to be unlocated as a subject. (Grosz 1989: 58)

Pierrot’s lack of stable boundaries and his attempt to find his identity through his narcissistic dream projection ensures that subject/object differentiation ceases to exist. As the dichotomy between the Moon Maiden and Pierrot vanishes they become the perfect representative of the androgynous being. This merging of Pierrot and the Moon is perfectly revealed in the lines from Giraud’s poem *Pierrot dandy*.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Echo est sans cesse avec Narcisse. Elle est lui. Elle a sa voix. Elle a son visage.

²⁵⁸ *Pierrot the dandy*

Mais le seigneur à blanche basque,
Laisant le rouge végétal
Et le fard vert oriental
Maquille étrangement son masque
D'un rayon de Lune fantasque.

But the Lord in white peplum,
Leaves off the vegetal red
And the oriental green paint
Strangely powdering his mask
With a whimsical moonbeam.²⁵⁹

In this poem, Pierrot literally paints himself with moonlight so that, in a complete identification, his face becomes one with the Moon. Pierrot has forsaken any external colours except that of whiteness: he is no Harlequin, but entirely the colour of the Moon - icy, wan and deathlike. Pierrot and the Moon form 'une sorte particulière de Dandysme appelé précisément «dandysme lunaire»' (Palacio 1990: 62).²⁶⁰ The glacial paleness of the Moon and Pierrot is revelatory of their shared dandiacal elegance. Pierrot's depiction as a dandy ensures his identification with the feminine. He does his make-up surrounded by very feminine accoutrements such as cosmetics, potions and bottles. Even his clothes, described as a peplum or basque jacket, are items of female attire popular in the 1780 - 1790's and again from 1835.²⁶¹ This ambiguous plasticity is a form of androgyny where the male and female roles become confused. The mirroring and narcissism that occur between Pierrot and the Moon, along with Pierrot's feminisation, leave the clown bloodless and asexual, the epitome of the dreamy ideal of the androgyne. For Jean de Palacio, Pierrot is a combination of 'l'homme blanc, l'androgyne et le célibataire [qui] composent un Dandysme tragique' (Palacio 1990: 53).²⁶²

²⁵⁹ *Pierrot Lunaire* (1991: 12).

²⁶⁰ A particular type of dandyism precisely termed 'lunar dandyism'.

²⁶¹ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisée* <http://atilf.atilf.fr> and see *The Metropolitan museum of art* <http://209.85.129.104>.

²⁶² The white man, the androgyne and the celibate, who combine to create a tragic dandyism.

The figure of the androgyne can only be founded outside of the real in the realm of the imaginary or the boundariless world of madness. The two bodies are joined in a creation that eliminates sexual identity and ensures the elimination of gender in its creation of a singularly pure and idealised asexual form. Barbey d'Aurevilly described the melding together of the ideal androgynous figure:

Leurs visages tournés l'un vers l'autre, se serrant flanc contre flanc, comme s'ils avaient voulu se pénétrer, entrer, lui dans elle, elle dans lui, et ne faire qu'un seul corps à eux deux, en ne regardant rien qu'eux-mêmes. (Barbey in *Lingua* 1995: 55)²⁶³

This androgynous figure reveals the desire to become one with the object of love and to destroy bodily limitations, thus trying to create absolute self-identification and a perfect narcissistic being. It is a body that is 'situated at the locus of desire, but never itself desires' (Pacteau 1986: 70). This fusional love contains no prospect of procreation but is entirely sterile and pure.

Pierrot's desire for the Moon Maiden is merely an elusive search for the seductive sterility of the completeness of being. This quest for oneness with the perfect other is nowhere better shown than in Pierrot's mention of the 'team of milk-white butterflies' he sees as drawing the magic car, which will transport himself and the Moon Maiden to the paradise of her home. The chastity of this union of the butterflies is a reflection of the union he craves between himself and the Moon Maiden; who are white butterflies themselves. Here psyche and image are joined as one, in a pale white perfection of mirrored androgynous completeness. A pallid sense of an

²⁶³ Their faces turned to one another, bodies flank to flank, as if they wanted to penetrate and enter, he into her and she into him and thus to form a single body, only having eyes for one another.

anaemic Moon-being seems to arise from this androgynous body. It is a sterile and frozen creature, which possesses no substance in its completeness.

Pierrot's sense of ultimate union and self completion comes when his impudent request for a kiss is granted:

Cold are thy lips, more cold than I can tell;
Yet would I hang on them, thine icicle!
Cold is thy kiss, more cold than I could dream
Arctus sits, watching the Boreal stream:
But with its frost such sweetness did conspire
That all my veins are filled with running fire;
Never I knew that life contained such bliss
As the divine completeness of a kiss.
(POM: 207 lines 210-217)

Pierrot's innocence has now been compromised, as with this kiss he has sealed his fate and is now the servant of the Moon. He will spend the rest of his life searching for re-union with this divine sense of completeness. The kiss initially causes Pierrot to withdraw with a 'petulant shiver' at which the Moon Maiden 'utters a peal of clear laughter'. Once more the 'childish' nature of Pierrot's response is revealed. The word 'petulant' shows his capricious irritation and peevishness when the kiss is not warm, but sends a *frisson* of terror into his perception. It is a rather outrageous response to something that he has desired. The ambivalence of the reaction is caused by an explosion of semiotic *jouissance* in a thrill that is simultaneously alluring and repulsive. The kiss has been icily cold, a touch of frost that burns. The Moon Maiden's kiss, like her being, is a creation of frigid marble and ice. This ice sears Pierrot like fire feeding his self-engendered desire which cannot ever be reciprocated or consummated. The chilling nature of the kiss has made Pierrot the mere

icicle clinging to the lips of the Moon Maiden. Pierrot finds narcissistic and androgynous completion, as he says, in ‘the divine completeness of a kiss’. He has been briefly joined to his mirrored and projected reflection in the solipsistic perfection of immortal fire and ice. A similar narcissistically cold and mirrored experience awaits Giraud’s *Pierrot polaire*²⁶⁴ who encounters an ice block which he hopes to use to save himself from sinking:

Et le mime patibulaire	And the sinister mime
Croit voir un Pierrot déguisé,	Believes he sees a disguised Pierrot,
Et d’un blanc geste éternisé	And with an endless white gesture
Interpelle dans la nuit claire	Challenges in the luminous night
Un miroitant glaçon polaire.	A mirroring polar ice block. ²⁶⁵

The coldness of the reflection and the light creates a mirage and the ice becomes a mirror in which Pierrot sees another Pierrot. That his image is not the same as himself resembles Dowson’s Pierrot with his projected Moon Maiden. *Pierrot polaire* plays on the notion of Arctus’ boreal coldness as well as on the notion of doubling and mirror reflections, the words ‘glaçon’ and ‘miroitant’ having roots in the word ‘mirror’. The word ‘patibulaire’ is one that has both overtones of death as well as a sense of uneasiness and of squinting, where things are not seen as they are, but altered and doubled. For both Giraud’s Pierrot and *The Pierrot of the Minute* the cold is the febrile touch of death. But it is also a reflection of themselves and their narcissistic desires, as they demand and evoke their doubles into existence. Both Pierrots wish to unify themselves with their reflection, one by melding with the kiss of the Moon and the other by melding into the ice. For both this is an escape into another world, a dream world where they are free from social and other

²⁶⁴ *Polar Pierrot*.

²⁶⁵ *Pierrot Lunaire* (1991: 24).

constraints imposed by reality (De Laet 2000: 79). Dowson's Pierrot is thoroughly immersed in his own world of reflected dreams and solipsistic completion. The semiotic is at play in this white iciness as it luminously doubles and reflects back the narcissistic desires of Pierrot, who has become merely another wan and pale 'Moon kissed rose', like the knight in Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* who is seen as having:

A lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever dew;
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too. (lines 9-12)

Here the whiteness of the lily and the fading rose are indications of the approach of death. Keats's knight, like Dowson's Pierrot, is enthralled with a dream of quest and love. Both have created an ideal beauty, the *femme fatale* powers of which guilefully ensnare them. The consequences for both the knight and Pierrot are dire.

The Moon Maiden's response to Pierrot's shuddering petulance at the frozen nature of the kiss is an explosion of bell clear laughter. This sound shivers open the symbolic and in its mockery erases the seriousness of her demeanour and the prohibitions of the laws imposed, introducing an aggressive and violently liberating drive (Kristeva 1984: 224). In the musicality of this laugh the silence of the ice is splintered and tragedy and comedy are both emitted in a clear, chilly sound, which is that of the terror and sorrow of ideal beauty and completion. This is the sound that seems most appropriately described by the words of Rilke's first *Duino elegy*:

Denn das Schöne ist nichts als des Schrecklichen Anfang,
denn wir noch grade ertragen, und wir bewundern es so,

weil es gelassen verschmählt, uns zu zerstören.

For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror,
which we are just able to endure,
And we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate
us. (lines 4-5).²⁶⁶

Ideal beauty and love, it seems, are entirely indifferent to the person who experiences and is beguiled by them. Deigning neither truly to love nor to destroy, *La Belle* and the Moon Maiden enthrall and wreak havoc with the minds and souls of those who are infatuated with ideal beauty and the need to attain love's completeness. The Moon Maiden's mocking and glacial laugh bites at Pierrot's naïve and callow response to the glacial nature of her touch. Simultaneously this sharp, clear peal is an expression of the Moon Maiden's triumph as she succeeds in enslaving him. She will not laugh again. In this singular mirth Pierrot's frozen death knell is sounded. He is now merely another 'Moon-kissed mortal' and Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* is again evoked where his knight dreams of others such as he will become:

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;
They cried - 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!' (lines 38-41)

This too shall be the fate of the ingenuous Pierrot as he learns during the instructions on love that the Moon Maiden now conducts. The whole question and answer sequence that is undertaken on love's meaning is very Elizabethan in nature. As Jean-Jacques Chardin has noted, the lines from

²⁶⁶ Edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell (1982: 151).

255-278 resemble a technique that was adroitly used in the pastorales and masques of the Elizabethan époque. He goes on further to note that:

Le texte fonctionne sur de constants effets de miroir que sous-tendent par exemple les réduplications prosodiques et les parallélismes syntaxiques du duo lyrique des vers 255-278. (Chardin 1995: 215)²⁶⁷

Again it is the idea of mirroring that seems to dominate the play, a musical game between Echo and Narcissus. Pierrot quickly tires of being instructed in love, particularly as the realisation sets in that the answers to his questions are not the ones that he wishes to hear. Rather, he is made vaguely aware that he shall forever be pursuing a love that he cannot capture, a love that is filled with 'malice'. The darker aspected Cupid is suddenly very present and a sense of terror and sorrow being to invade the innocence of Pierrot. He is told that no matter how he tries to recapture the completeness of love that he has felt in that brief, icy kiss, he is doomed to failure and regret. Like a child, who cannot get its own way, he petulently and sadly calls an end to the lessons. Realising his state of sadness, the Moon Maiden becomes deceptively charming and caressing, as though humouring a spoilt brat. They then pass the time playing an infantile game of hand-over-hand, resulting in Pierrot finally catching her hand and being reanimated by childish laughter at his seeming victory. Pierrot's unstable and volatile shifts of mood are extremely carnivalesque in their duality. He possesses a simplistic shallowness and lability and nothing appears to make any true or lasting impression on him. He is an entirely semiotic creature who flows between states and moods absorbing and being altered by none. The symbolic laws of

²⁶⁷ The text functions by using constant mirroring effects that underscore the prosodic reduplications and syntactic parallelisms of the lyrical duet of verses 255-278.

social behaviour seem to have no purchase on this slippery and mercurial clown.

In this elusiveness he is matched by the reflected figure of his desire. The Moon Maiden continually escapes his attempts at intimacy and containment. She mocks him whilst slipping out of reach:

Who hopes to catch
A Moon-beam, must use twice as much despatch.
(POM: 214 lines 341-342)

The evanescent nature of the dream is perfectly exhibited by Pierrot's inability to grasp or hold onto the Moon Maiden. As a moonbeam she is formed from the same pale substance from which dreams are made (Chardin 1995: 214). She cannot be caught or held and she will escape, never to return, once the dream is at an end. Not being able to catch her and explore his desires in a tactile manner, Pierrot again devolves into a sulky and petulant child. He craves the affection and human contact that her dreamy insubstantiality denies him. The grotesque nature of the situation is both funny and sad. Desire and chaste innocence are at war in the childishness of Pierrot's pouting misery. To persuade him to her will, the Moon Maiden tells Pierrot, 'I love thee well'. This is the same sentence that the knight in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* seems to believe he hears *La Belle* saying to him. For both Pierrot and the knight it is a matter of wish fulfilment. They project what they wish to hear and to believe. Pierrot's reflection is merely echoing his own thoughts and needs. She will not be held by any human oath and slips away as unbound as she was, when evoked by Pierrot's desires. The Moon Maiden will not follow the course that Pierrot wants and the

dissonance between his desirous craving and the Moon Maiden's ethereal dream substance will ultimately prove to be destructive.

The Moon Maiden easily diverts the fickle clown's needy passion by telling him a bedtime story. His childish temperament and querulousness have again been swiftly manipulated and rechannelled. The beautiful fairy tale of the Moon Maiden's home is such as told by Hans Christian Andersen in his *The Ice Queen*.²⁶⁸ Everything in the description is serene, cold, chaste and of a pale nacreous hue, the colour of mist and reveries. Nothing is substantial in this intangible world of Moon calm and bejewelled splendour. However, for Pierrot, there is a sense of darker forces, of gloom and of death:

Methought grim Clotho and her sisters twain
With shrivelled fingers spun this web of bane!
(POM: 216 lines 378-379)

This mention of the goddess of destiny reveals the dark opacity and tragedy of what lies in store for Pierrot. Clotho is a personification of the spectre of death that has haunted the play from the beginning²⁶⁹. Clothed in white garments she spins the thread of life, but in Pierrot's words her fingers are shrivelled, like those of an old hag or skeleton. This mirrors Camille Claudel's portrayal of Clotho in her plaster work of a skeletal hag with long rope-like hair, ancient and withered dug and a face that shows the skull beneath. This sculpture reveals fate as a menacing and repulsive ancient hag. Clotho is spinning a web of 'bane' and this word contains all the misery and distress that are to be Pierrot's lot with its connotations of death, destruction

²⁶⁸ Andersen Hans Christian 1805 - 1875 Danish writer of fairy tales which have an icy sense of wonder and the fantastical about them: *The Snow Queen* in particular.

²⁶⁹ See Figure 47 on page 5

and poisonousness. Pierrot has been tainted by the kiss of the Moon creature and his destiny is one of pale wasting like a consumptive. The Moon Maiden is the incarnation of the lunar triple goddess in its aspects of love and death. The malefic nature of the Moon combines aspects of maiden, mother and crone and in this play the Moon Maiden is the symbolic face of all three. She is the innocent enchantress, tender nurturer and death bringer. In this last grim aspect she and Clotho are sisters. Pierrot is doomed and will be stalked by the ghost of death for the remainder of his days and nights. A kiss has removed all happiness from his grasp and his destiny has become that of 'the lunatic, the lover and the poet' (Pursglove 1993: 151).

The Moon Maiden too easily denies the relation between herself and Clotho, preferring to emphasise her realm as that of love and the dream. But this world has a darker side, as the person kissed by moonlight is no longer a lover of the day and neither do they experience laughter or tears. The bliss of Moon dreams and kisses freezes human feelings. These transgressive and carnivalesque aspects of human nature are impossible for those enslaved to the Moon. These Moon prisoners become dreamers and live in luminous reveries where all is unstable, evanescent and semiotic and where the transgressive flow of music predominates. It is a crystalline world of icy ideality and it is to this world that Pierrot has been admitted. The 'stairway of clustered stars' which the Moon Maidens use to reach their mortal victims mirrors Giraud's poem *L'Escalier*:²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ *The staircase.*

La Lune, d'un pas familier,
Fait, dans sa ronde coutumière,
Sur le marbre de l'escalier,
Un léger froufrou de lumière.

With a familiar step the Moon,
In her accustomed round creates,
On the marble of the staircase,
A gentle swish of light.²⁷¹

Here, the Moon uses a marble staircase to descend into the human world. The chiselled whiteness of her light becomes fused with the marmoreal nature of the marble and she seems to become the staircase. Yet, she is not merely the light or the staircase but is personified as a human female. The word 'froufrou' is an onomatopoeic word that indicates the gentle, seductive, swishing sounds that were made by the silken gowns that women wore. It is this sound that 'laissant deviner, en le cachant, un corps blanc et désirable' (van den Broek 1996: 74).²⁷² The word froufrou is an echo word in French. With its onomatopoeic sound and its mirrored form, where the same word is joined together, makes it a transgressive and semiotic word providing the light with a voice and dressing the Moon in a pure, white silk dress. Along with the swish of the word froufrou is the sound of the Moon's small and light feminine foot on the staircase. The light of the Moon on the staircase is mysteriously morphed into the figure of a woman making her accustomed round. Here the poet plays with the relationship between the full Moon and its association with the female cycle. This staircase of moonlight in its milky beauty enslaves Giraud's Pierrot who falls prostrate before her:

Et Pierrot, pour s'humilier
Devant sa pâle Emperière,
Prosterne sa blanche prière
De son grand corps en espalier
Sur le marbre de l'escalier.

And Pierrot, humbling himself
Before his pale Empress,
Prostrates the white prayer
Of his long espaliered body
On the marble of the staircase.

²⁷¹ *Pierrot Lunaire* (1991: 104).

²⁷² Allows one to imagine a white, desirable body, while concealing it at the same time.

Like a white prayer which is pale as a Moonbeam, Pierrot prostrates himself on the marble of the staircase, his milky body seeming to flow into the luminous white of the marble. The words *escalier* and *espalier* seem to metonymically intertwine and become one. An *espalier* is a framework, trellis or lattice used to train plants. Pierrot is attempting to become the framework of the staircase. The word *Emperière* is a variante of the original old French *empereriz* (wife of the emperor or empress)²⁷³. The word *emperière* was used by Villon in his work *Ballade que Villon fait à la requeste de sa mère pour prier Nostre-Dame* (Ballade for Our Lady written for his mother).²⁷⁴ Giraud has again used a rather old and transgressive feminine form to exult the Moon. The Moon as Empress demands to be worshipped and Pierrot readily and willingly supplicates his being to her and worships this architecture of marble, which is a rather odd commentary on the legend of Pygmalion.²⁷⁵ For Pierrot the statue of Pygmalion is replaced by the marble staircase of moonlight. In his obeisance Pierrot wishes to meld with the marble staircase, to transform himself into marble and to be one with this materialised and sculptured light. This wish represents a need to annihilate desire by being incorporated into the ideality of the white stone and light. This incorporation would mean death. But marble, like light, represents a completely inaccessible ideal of beauty and union.

²⁷³ *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* <http://atilf.atilf.fr>

²⁷⁴ François Villon 1431 - 1463. French poet and adventurer who was almost hanged on a number of occasions. One of the first great lyrical poets who used slang and wrote *Le Grand Testament and Le Petit Testament*. (*The Great and The Small Testament*).

²⁷⁵ King of Cyprus who fell in love with a statue he had carved. Aphrodite brought it to life and Pygmalion was so delighted that he married the now living statue whose name was Galatea.

Dowson's Pierrot is also enslaved by an inaccessible ideal and he too falls in prayer and obeisance before his reflected pearly ideal, pleading:

Instruct me still, while time remains to us,
Be what thou wist, Goddess, Moon-maid, *Marquise*,
So that I gather from thy lips heart's ease.
(POM : 222 lines 461-463)

Dowson's Pierrot, like that of Giraud, wishes to meld with the moonlight and thereby reattain a sense of completeness and a loss of self. The desire for another kiss drives this Pierrot's despair. He now knows the beauty of fusion and totality of being and wishes to lose himself therein one last time. It is the wish to return to the semiotic state of union with the mother, but this androgynous fusion is no longer a possibility for either Giraud's or Dowson's Pierrot. True peace and union only awaits them in the white arms of death.

No matter how *The Pierrot of the Minute* pleads and supplicates with the Moon Maiden, he will be denied what he most craves and, like a child, hushed into silence. He sinks into resigned sorrow and loss, face covered by his hands, as morning breaks and the Moon Maiden takes her leave. The exchange between the Moon Maiden and Pierrot concerning the arrival of the day resembles that of Romeo and Juliet, where Pierrot's is the role of Juliet. His pain is obliterated by the syrup of easeful sleep aided by the music that previously lulled his senses. At the command of the Moon Maiden her handmaidens play a fairy lullaby, the music of Lethe that will ensure amnesia and sleep:

With mandragore anoint his tired eyes,
That they may open on mere memories,

Then shall a vision seem his lost delight,
With love, his lady for a summer's night.
Dream thou hast dreamt all this, when thou awake,
Yet still be sorrowful for a dream's sake.
(POM : 223 lines 471-476)

The word mandragore is an overtly poetic choice, as this is the French spelling of the word mandrake. Throughout the play reliance has been made, by Dowson, on older English spellings and words. This ensures that the play has an eighteenth-century atmosphere, as well as being distinctly Elizabethan in tone. Dowson has created a vocabulary which, as Caroline Dowson says, is similar to how a 'sculptor would chisel his marble, into something unique to himself which will aid the presentation of his own sense of fact' (Dowson 1998: 50). This vocabulary within the play not only gives a sense of time period, but is also doubled. The result is that the words are used by Dowson and though they retain their original meaning they are also given a new meaning. 'This results in a word with two significations: it has become ambivalent' (Kristeva 1980: 73). The semiotic and carnivalesque are heavily prevalent in this doubled poetic language.

Mandrake is a plant that is considered as having aphrodisiacal properties as well as possessing soporific, anaesthetic and hallucinogenic traits which inspire reveries, amnesia, sleep and death. Mandrake and belladonna are of the same family: belladonna was used as part of the make-up routine of women, either to lighten their skin, or to dilate their pupils as a sign of arousal. The word is polyvalent and multi-determined and the semiotic drives are released in a *jouissance* of play and mutability. Pierrot is to be made-up or 'anointed' with this mandrake potion and his role is again

feminised. However, the word 'anoint' also has religious or ceremonial connotations, mandrake being used in magical rituals. It seems that Pierrot is being prepared as a sacrificial victim. The darker religious connotations fuse in a semiotic and poetic overflow and a duality of dark gothic overtones dominates this anointing, which involves a poisonous unguent that leads to sleep, dreams, dissociation from reality and madness. Pierrot will float in a mist of delusive memories which will be as evanescent as moonbeams. Shakespeare's lines:

Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owedst yesterday.
(Othello act III scene iii)

seem most fittingly to describe Pierrot's own plight. He is to be left only with memories of perfection and of the bliss of something that belongs to yesterday. His innocent self-containment has been destroyed with the granting of the kiss of immortal knowledge and wholeness of being. From this moment forth he will know that there is a part of himself that is permanently missing or hidden. The disappearance of the Moon Maiden after this night of love will ensure that Pierrot never has such sweet sleep again, but that he will be condemned to spend the rest of his life seeking after the other self that can make him whole again. The illusion of the androgyne and its perfect nature and fusion cannot be taken out of the dream world and into existence. The transgression of gender in this form is only possible in the world of the unreal, the imagination and the dream. The world of ideal beauty that Pierrot has experienced has been a narcissistic projection of his own needs and desperation for the enchantment of

perfection. But it is this narcissistic memory that will accompany and drive him forever. The Moon Maiden pronounces his bitter fate with a serene, but imposing seriousness:

Yet all thy days are mine, dreamer of dreams,
All silvered over with the Moon's pale beams:
Go forth and seek in each fair face in vain,
To find the image of thy love again.
All maids are kind to thee, yet never one
Shall hold thy truant heart till day be done.
Whom once the Moon has kissed, loves long and late,
Yet never finds the maid to be his mate.
Farewell, dear sleeper, follow out thy fate.
(POM: 223 lines 483-491)

Pierrot belongs to the Moon and to the race of those kissed by this goddess. Like all the knights, princes and kings of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, Pierrot has become a wraith, whose dreaming hours are to be devoted to the night and the light of the Moon. In this he resembles the lunatic of Dowson's poem *To One in Bedlam*:

Better than mortal flowers,
Thy Moon-kissed roses seem: better than love or sleep,
The star-crowned solitude of thine oblivious hours.
(Dowson 1967: 40)

For Pierrot the sordidness of reality will be spent in oblivious dreams of an idealised memory. Like the madman, he will move outside of time and outside of reality, his place will be forever in the liminal reaches beyond humanity. The surrogates that he encounters will never satisfy his craving for his dream memory. Pierrot has been punished for his impudent desire for a kiss and the retribution is the permanent chasing of a Moon shadow. The luminous lilies have morphed into wan and pale Moon-kissed roses. Desire has become deathly and innocence has fled.

For Dowson, Pierrot was a symbolic figure who echoed his own personal attributes and strivings as well as general concerns (Pursglove 1993: 141). This drama seems to contain a reflection of himself, much as *Pierrot Lunaire* contains a reflection of Giraud. Pierrot's wandering is in search of his other half and mirrors the need of all artists who search for completion in the truth of ideal beauty. It is the terror and indifference that this beauty inspires that leaves them wounded (Reed 1968: 111). This wound drives them to create in an effort to be able to touch perfection and completion; to subsume and lose themselves in this terror which is ultimately the freedom of death. It is the promise of plentifulness in loss and in that brief frozen moment stolen from time, where all stands still and a sense of fullness is granted before one's inevitable destruction (Chardin 1995: 217). It is this liminal, semiotic and carnivalesque space that Dowson has explored in his *The Pierrot of the Minute*.

This carnivalesque, semiotic and liminal space was captured in the curves, filigrees, curlicues and threads of Aubrey Beardsley's lines. His illustrations for Dowson's *The Pierrot of the Minute* exquisitely depict the themes of Dowson's play and betray Beardsley's own delight and reverence for Pierrot. It is Beardsley's intricate, yet strikingly geometrical and innovative use of line that caused Alfred Jarry²⁷⁶ to write:

The King of lace drew out the light as a rope-maker plaits his retrograde line, and the threads trembled slightly in the dim light, like cobwebs. They wove themselves into forests, like the leaves which hoarfrost engraves on windowpanes. (Jarry in Stokes 1989: 65)

²⁷⁶ Alfred Jarry 1873 - 1907. A French writer who created the persona *Ubu Roi* as well as the system known as *Pataphysiques*, which would be popular amongst the Surrealists. Jarry could claim to be the ancestor of Surrealism.

It is these cobwebs, hoarfrost and light that mockingly demand yet evade definitive scrutiny and analysis in the following chapter.

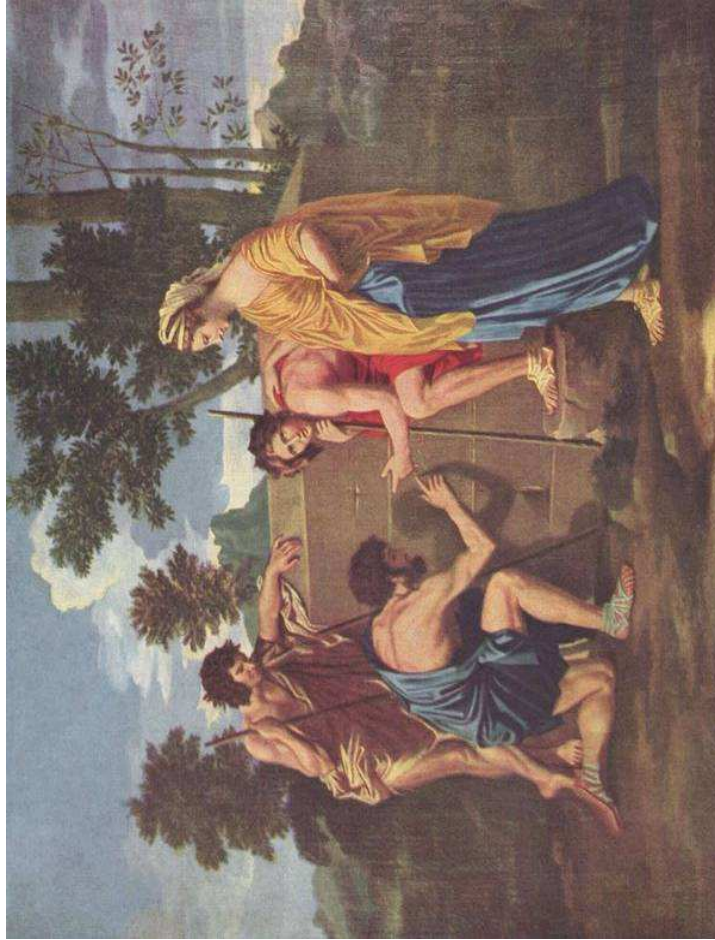


Figure 44
Figure 44 *Et in arcadia ego*
Nicolas Poussin
1637 - 1638
Oil on canvas
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 45
Figure 45 *Pilgrimage to Cythera*
Jean Antoine Watteau
1717
Oil on Canvas
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 46
Figure 46 *Sleeping hermaphrodite*
Roman copy after an original from around the 2nd Century BC.
Marble
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 47
Figure 47 *Clotho*
Camille Claudel
1893
Plaster
Musée Rodin, Paris

CHAPTER FIVE: THE KING OF LACE AND GROTESQUE BEAUTY

The lines are whimsical cobwebs, phosphorescent dots, harsh slashes or interwoven vegetal tendrils. Each is melded to the page, black on white, in perfect spatial composition. Yet, the creatures that appear from these lines and spaces are subtly twisted and lubriciously perverse. In their ugliness, artificiality and sneaking eroticism they compel attention. It is these qualities that shocked his contemporaries and ensured Aubrey Beardsley's reputation as the representative 'evil' genius of the 'Yellow Nineties' (Snodgrass 1995: 4) or 'Naughty-Nineties' (Sweet 2001: 191), or as Max Beerbohm termed it 'The Beardsley Period' (Raby 1998: 7).

Aubrey Vincent Beardsley was born in August 1872 and died in March 1898 from tuberculosis - he was a mere 25 years old. His was a brief but incandescent career, with his works creating an outcry due to their carnal candour. An illustrator of literary texts, his work decorated covers of journals such as *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*, bringing his unusual style to public attention. He was also one of the first in England to make use of the poster; in this he followed the example of the French poster artists Toulouse Lautrec, Jules Cheret and Willette. Using the poster as a publicity vehicle ensured that his work received more than adequate public exposure. The fact that in the late Victorian period easy print reproduction had become a possibility aided Beardsley to disseminate his work. As Holbrook Jackson writes:

Beardsley was born into an age of easy publicity; and that circumstance, combined with the fact that he was so peculiarly of his period, instantly made him a centre of discussion, a subject for regard and reprehension. (Jackson 1976: 91)

Beardsley outraged and assaulted the edifice of Victorian middle-class moral and cultural values. In horror they assailed him and his work with accusations of moral turpitude, evilness, depravity and vulgar and intolerable hideousness. The modernity of Beardsley's work with its open revelation of male and female sexual desire and sexuality embarrassed and enraged both public and critics alike. He was delighted by the vitriolic response, as it meant that he had managed to shock and outrage middle class morality by exposing their hypocrisy, vices and 'darling sins' (Sturgis 1998: 220).

Harmonious lines of stark black and white, formal unity, repetition and exquisitely balanced spatial arrangement which were elegantly classical, ensured that Beardsley's decorative surface conformed to the notions of traditional 'high' art. Contained within this surface adherence to the traditional canon, Beardsley inserted his defamiliarising and shocking elements. An ambivalent dialogue between surface and content is established where the grotesque constantly attempts to violate and exceed the limits imposed by the traditional formal elements. This constant interplay between formal and forbidden is accompanied by laughter. Holbrook Jackson notes that, 'unlike so many decadents he possessed humour. You hear the laugh, often enough satyric, behind his most sinister design' (Jackson 1976: 102). The rhythm of the swooning vegetal lines and sharp, japoneseque stylisation are smoothly combined with an inherent leering, sneering debauchery and domineering,

harsh ugliness which ooze hedonistic depravity and grotesqueness. This challenged the existing Pre-Raphaelite tradition by its parodic inversion and revelation of the darker side to human nature. Beardsley's grotesque bodies 'transgress their own limits and place emphasis on apertures, open mouths, genitals, breasts, phallus, belly and nose' (Bakhtin 1984: 26). In these creatures, dark passions are simultaneously revealed and concealed and the combination of male and female sexual characteristics in the figure of the hermaphrodite makes it the perfect form with which to portray ambivalent, grotesque perversity.

The story of the Hermaphrodite originates from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Hermaphroditus was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite and like Narcissus was renowned for his incredible beauty. On going down to a pool to bathe he was seen by the nymph Salmacis who lived in the pool. She was seized by ungovernable desire for the beautiful epebe and upon his entering the water she launched herself upon him. Twining her body around his, she violated him with kisses and fondlings. Calling upon the gods she asked that she and he never be separated. The gods granting her wish joined the two bodies in one, so that when Hermaphrodite stepped from the pool he had been deprived of his original sexual identity. This hybrid creation, the fruit of the erotic and mad desire of the nymph, combines the *femme fatale* and the epebe (dandy) into an ambiguous creature that oscillates between male and female. The creation is a fatally grotesque beauty that brings with it the malevolence of death and the tragic impossibility of unity. The fundamental ambivalence reveals an obsession with mutability and metamorphosis.

Ambivalence and metamorphosis can be regarded as ruling aspects of Beardsley's work and his conventional structure is seen to contain within itself its own 'Other' that sets up a permanent boiling tension. Though the middle-class critics and public fulminated against what they saw, no one brought a libel action, or any other lawsuit, against the works. Through their outraged discourse they tried instead to discredit, demean and in turn parody the work in an effort to weaken its impact and threatening implications by making it laughable. The blurring between human and vegetal; nature and the artificial show a disregard for distinctive boundaries and the reality principle. Yet, this violent semiotic impulse is tightly contained and bottled inside his brilliant use of conventional artistic form. In the teasing and fanciful lines, which reveal the perversely grotesque desires of Beardsley's creatures, there is a macabre and darkly sardonic laughter. It is this frightening humour that deflates and subverts the ideology of the late Victorian worldview. Beardsley's grotesques are representative of the transgressive and aggressive semiotization of the symbolic which allows the flow of *jouissance* into his art. The results are a plurality and ambiguity that seem to fuse disparate things and create a repulsive sense of unease in the viewer. There is a vague sense of creeping disgust, of things unnatural having been combined whilst their different natures continue to slide and fluctuate between states. This is the Kristevan dream logic of carnival which simultaneously embodies truth and falsity, yes and no and which transgresses the logic of identity (Lechte 1990: 108-109).

There is no more valid persona to represent this indeterminate ambivalently semiotic state than that of the clown, who has always been positioned in the area between life and art and life and death (Bakhtin 1984: 8). For Beardsley, the spectral figure of Pierrot with his black and white raiment perfectly suited the artist's fantastical black and white world. Pierrot was also a mask Beardsley adopted for himself:

the Pierrot in him was an attitude, and even then it was a bigger attitude than that of its namesake. Innocence always frustrated the desires of Pierrot and left him desolate, but Aubrey Beardsley introduced into art the desolation of experience, the ennui of sin. (Jackson 1976: 95)

This figure melded to the page, black on white, mirroring the costume that it wears, is the epitome of ambivalence, instability and contradiction. Pierrot was the representative figure of the decadence because

Il est conforme au travail de la Décadence sur toutes les grandes figures mythiques, travail de fusion et de confusion, d'hybridation et de fracture, préférant le Multiple à l'Un et la dichotomie à l'intégrité. (Palacio 1990: 39)²⁷⁷

As an important contributor and participant in all aspects of what has been called *The Decadence*, Beardsley would have identified with the figure of this pallid-faced, white-clothed and woebegone clown as exhibiting traits he wished to personify and those inherent within his own personality. Beardsley was not alone in his empathetic assumption of the mask and persona of Pierrot. Arthur Symons in his tribute to Beardsley writes that:

Pierrot is one of the types of our century, of the moment in which we live, or of the moment, perhaps, out of which we are just passing. Pierrot is passionate; but he does not believe in great passions. He

²⁷⁷ The figure of Pierrot conforms to the treatment given to all the great, mythical masculine figures, during the Decadent period, a treatment of fusion and confusion, hybridisation and fracture, in which the Multiple was preferred to the Singular and dichotomy to wholeness.

feels himself to be sickening with a fever, or else perilously convalescent; for love is a disease, which he is too weak to resist or endure. He has worn his heart on his sleeve so long, that it has hardened in the cold air. He knows that his face is powdered, and if he sobs, it is without tears; and it is hard to distinguish, under the chalk, if the grimace which twists his mouth awry is more laughter or mockery. He knows that he is condemned to be always in public, that emotion would be supremely out of keeping with his costume, that he must remember to be fantastic if he would not be merely ridiculous. And so he becomes exquisitely false, dreading above all things that "one touch of nature" which would ruffle his disguise, and leave him defenceless. Simplicity, in him being the most laughable thing in the world, he becomes learned, perverse, intellectualising his pleasures, brutalising his intellect; his mournful contemplation of things becoming a kind of grotesque joy, which he expresses in the only symbols at his command, tracing his Giotto's O with the elegance of his pirouette. And Beardsley, with almost more than the Parisian's deference to Paris, and to the moment, was, more than any Parisian, this *Pierrot gamin*. (Symons 1967: ix-x)

It is Beardsley's portrayal of Pierrot that will be explored in this chapter. Particular emphasis will be placed on the designs that Beardsley executed for Ernest Dowson's *The Pierrot of the Minute*. Masks, masquerade and theatre and their associated role-playing were a part of Beardsley's persona from an early age and are present throughout his works. Each illustration is in fact a carefully staged theatre scene, which is reminiscent of Ensor's work which also has the look of staged or posed scenes. Beardsley's masks are used to cloak both his own vulnerabilities and obsessions, as well as mockingly unmasking the illicit, perverse and vulgar desires and needs of 'polite' society. The mask has always been 'related to transition, metamorphosis, violation of natural boundaries and mockery' (Bakhtin 1984: 40). It is used to hide secrets, to deceive and dissemble and, from behind its anonymity, to be whatever, or whomever, one chooses. Pierrot, in Beardsley's world, is either almost entirely white or is given a black cat's-eye mask. The entirely white-costumed Pierrot is after the manner of Watteau's *Gilles*. Both Watteau and Keats were major

influences on Beardsley, who identified with the circumstances which shaped both the life and death of the painter and the poet.²⁷⁸

The black-masked and fiendish Pierrot that Beardsley created has been termed 'anti-Pierrot' by Milly Heyd. Unfortunately, this division by Heyd seems rather too elementary, as it makes Beardsley's Pierrot an either/or, good and evil creature, which is never the case with Beardsley's work. It would be more in keeping with the ambivalent nature of Beardsley's works to see the black in Pierrot as a revelation of the slippery, ambiguous nature of the clown, which combines both good and evil, in a rupturing of personality where the semiotic is allowed to seep through and overrun the moral structure of the symbolic. As Jean de Palacio indicates, the interplay between the black and white of Pierrot is more than mere duplicity, rather 'c'est bien de multiplicité où même d'éclatement qu'il s'agit dans son cas' (Palacio 1990: 165).²⁷⁹ Pierrot's nature and destiny are determined by the constant combat between the white and the black of his attire and nature, where the black is at all times ready to dominate and sweep him away (Palacio 1990: 163). The historically white figure of Pierrot was stained by black accessories such as the skullcap and black pompom buttons of his blouse. In Beardsley's drawings the black accessory of the skull cap has altered into a sharp cat's-eye mask and his Pierrot is left exhibiting a huge, white cranium. The black buttons as well as the skullcap have disappeared

²⁷⁸ Both Watteau and Keats died from tuberculosis at a young age. Watteau was a great individualist, but with a very difficult personality; he identified with Pierrot and considered the clown's whiteness as the symbol of his tuberculosis. These attributes would have attracted and appealed to Beardsley who also came to identify with Pierrot. Keats's sexuality, great poetry, emotional vagaries and early death were what Beardsley foresaw and wanted for himself.

²⁷⁹ In the case of Pierrot it is truly about multiplicity or even fragmentation.

completely. The black becomes entirely concentrated in the deceptive disguise of the devilish mask, however, a few of Beardsley's Pierrots are dressed entirely in black in the manner of Willette's Pierrot.

The black Pierrot that appears in the cul-de-lampe Beardsley did for Oscar Wilde's play,²⁸⁰ *Salomé*, is shown accompanied by a satyr. Together they are carrying the sensually nude but lifeless form of an exceedingly lovely and nubile Salomé. Pierrot is dressed in what appears to be entirely black pyjamas and tiny pointed black slippers. He has wildly floating, wispy black hair, as though his ruff has been displaced to form a dark nimbus around his head, and he wears his cat's-eye mask. His nose and mouth are buried in Salomé's overtly sexualised egg-bubble hair and his cat's eyes possess a secretive and sly grin. Erotic overtones are combined with sly laughter. The figure of this black Pierrot, though revealing perversely dark, erotic tendencies, has had the malignant edge blunted by the humour exhibited in the work. The attire of the Pierrot, the feminine black pyjamas with a very Eastern appearance and a suspicion of the boudoir attached to them along with the really tiny, slippared feet bestow on this figure an exceedingly indeterminate sexuality. This fluidity and the erotically tinged laughter and leering knowingness are disturbing to the viewer. The dark, semiotic drives have been released and they wash away accepted symbolic moral laws revealing the sinister irruptive forces that lie beneath the surface mask or veil of the symbolic. Necrophilia is clearly in the offing.

²⁸⁰ See Figure 48 on page 5.

This menacing and revealing eroticism is also to be found in the black Pierrot in Beardsley's illustration for *Lucian's true history*.²⁸¹ Here the Pierrot seems to pop out of the black background, an ethereal being dominated by a large white ruff and white sleeve frilled at the wrist, out of which extends a large hand. The large, domed white head wears a black cat's-eyed mask that seems to balance itself on pendulous round cheeks dominating a small, pointed and weak chin below an even smaller and warted nose. There is a sense of melting corruption and dissolution about this face. The mouth is curved in a sly smile and the eyes are filled with furtive and prurient hilarity. Pierrot's long hand is paddling in the breasts of the nude figure beneath him. This nude figure appears to be female, but is grotesquely distorted with a tiny head and huge backside and stomach, a carnival creature whose physicality is misshapen and excessive, as it transgresses bodily norms. The breasts are muscular and flattish and the facial features are indeterminate, more masculine than feminine, with a bald head. The hand of the Pierrot has a rather interesting claw on its thumb which adds a hint of devilry to this nefarious erotic encounter. Again the sex of the Pierrot is rather indeterminate, as is that of all the grotesque creatures that surround him. There is something dark and unhealthy that oozes from the picture which at the same time is accompanied by an impish humour. In this picture the white ruff and sleeve of the Pierrot are in direct opposition to his black body which seems to emerge from and be merged with the black background. Pierrot exhibits the combat of white and black as

²⁸¹ Published in *An issue of five drawings illustrative of Juvenal and Lucian* in 1906. See Figure 49 on page 5.

Tour à tour écartelé, par le jeu du blanc et du noir, entre l'endroit et l'envers, l'innocence et l'expérience, la vertu et le vice, le masculin et le féminin, Pierrot, sur la ligne de partage des couleurs, est toujours en passe de perdre son identité, son âme, son corps ou son sexe. (Palacio 1990: 176)²⁸²

This dividing line between the colours is like that which operates between the semiotic and symbolic. This line acts as a tightrope providing a certain balance. Once the limits are pushed too far there is a freefall, such as when the semiotic entirely overwhelms the symbolic resulting in psychosis. Here 'symbolic legality is wiped out in favor of arbitrariness of an instinctual drive without meaning and communication' (Kristeva 1982: 139). Pierrot is always on the verge, almost falling into the abyss, teetering precariously between states. It is this ambivalent oscillation caused by the constant combat between the semiotic drives and the restrictive laws of the symbolic that determines his mercurial nature. The grotesque masked creatures, in all their madness, laugh and jig as they mock and undercut the governing 'niceties' of socially accepted mores. Everything is called into question and becomes paradoxical. The interplay of the carnivalesque grotesque incorporates more than one state absorbing virtue and vice, innocence and experience, body and soul and male and female resulting in a grotesque and repulsive hybridisation. Beardsley's works employ this hybridisation and Pierrot is a central figure in a universe that attacks and attempts to dislodge preconceptions and accepted conventions and beliefs. It is the multiplicity and metamorphosing of this figure, who is never one nor the other, that ensures its central role as bearer of the decadent aesthetic, as Jean de Palacio writes:

²⁸² Torn apart in turn by the play of white and black, between the right and the wrong side, innocence and experience, virtue and vice, masculine and feminine, Pierrot, who finds himself on the dividing line between these colours, is always on the verge of losing his identity, soul, body or sex.

Il ne fait guère de doute qu'une bonne part de la séduction exercée par Pierrot sur la mentalité décadente vient de ce qu'il incarnait à ses yeux le pâle hermaphrodite ou l'homme-femme. Costume, maquillage, mélancolie et impuissance s'unissaient pour représenter l'ambiguïté d'un être au «sexe intellectuel indécis». (Palacio 1990: 66)²⁸³

Everything about Pierrot is vague, irresolute and blurry. These aspects suited Beardsley, as this figure could be morphed to adopt any meaning, sex or state that he wished to portray. Pierrot became the ultimate symbol for this protean artist.

Portraying the darker aspects of sexuality was a fundamental part of Beardsley's artistic aim. He wanted to subvert the accepted bourgeois family structure and moral code, which he despised as hypocritical and restrictive. His grotesque creatures, including Pierrot, exude a depraved aura of sexual knowledge and possess an uncertain gender. The darker pleasures of the flesh, mind and emotions are cunningly displayed in the too opulent flesh, voluptuous smiles, vulpine sideways oglings, hermaphroditism, or indeterminate sexual identity and whiff of overripe desires. Corrupt and dissolute these creatures might appear to be, but their self-possession is purposefully mocking and they are laughing at the society which, in its smug moral rectitude, was quick to condemn them. A mirror does not always show us the face that we expect, or wish to see. There is little to choose between these creatures of Beardsley's and the picture of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's famous exploration of the alliance of beauty, sin, hypocrisy and the face presented to society. Like Wilde,

²⁸³ There is no doubt that the seduction exercised by Pierrot on the decadent mindset was, to a large extent, rooted in the fact that this figure was viewed as the personification of the pale hermaphrodite or man-woman. Clothing, make-up, melancholy and impotence united to reveal the ambiguity of a being whose "mental sex was uncertain".

Beardsley is ripping the masks off society and exposing the ugliness that hides beneath all the pretension. Both Beardsley and Ensor shared a common bawdy, riotous and Rabelaisian humour expressed throughout their art. However, where Beardsley's art is overtly sexual, Ensor's art is entirely lacking in real sexual content and is almost ethereal and without physicality. Beardsley's sharp lines and the exacting ambivalence between black and white were reflections of his own biting wit. The repulsive ugliness of Beardsley's creatures functions as a distancing and alienating technique that allows the artist to control and focus his acidulous mockery.

Pierrot is shown as embodying this disturbing ugliness, as being something more than merely melancholic and passively white. In some of the vignettes that Beardsley drew for the *Bons-Mots* series²⁸⁴ by Samuel Foote and Theodore Hook there is a Pierrot that appeared in 1894 that epitomises this ugly, disturbing quality. This is a white Pierrot who has been touched with black. Wearing the black skull cap and with tiny black feet, it is, however, the black blotches, like pompom buttons that have been displaced, which give the clue to the darker side to this Pierrot's nature. This is further emphasised by the look on the face of this Pierrot. There is nothing melancholy or lovelorn about the sneer and the curled eyebrows that accentuate the scornful malevolence of the sideways glance. Using faint phosphorescent dots on the cheeks, chin and between the smouldering, hostile eyes, Beardsley highlights the malicious twist and depravity that exist in this clown's nature. This Pierrot elegantly holds out its tunic as though

²⁸⁴ See Figure 50 on page 5.

either about to curtsy, or to pirouette in a gesture of haughty disdain. The huge white ruff, tiny feet and the baggy trousers that seem to fall in folds like a peplum make the sex of this creature decidedly indeterminate. Yet, the odd stance of the creature seems as twisted as its face, the lines on the blouse show that it is skew as they go in the opposite direction to the folding line on the trousers. This gives the figure a triangular bend making the upper body and the legs appear to be at odds. The effeminate holding out of the blouse like a skirt is a dandyish affectation. The entire structuring of the figure is macabrely out of kilter. There is also a cynical malignancy and a sense of violence lurking in the grimacing, open mouth and sharply downward pointed nose. The semblance of daintiness is denied by the balefulness of the grotesquely distorted face. The drops of black ink on the blouse are a rather transparent symbolisation of the stains of original sin. This black is the encroachment of the satanic on the spotless whiteness of the Pierrot, who has become an ambivalent, duplicitous being:

Toujours le personnage est double, sous le signe de la dichotomie, de la duplicité. Toujours le personnage se défait, voit une unité en péril, prêt à se fracturer pour laisser la place à l'Autre. Atteint dans son intégrité, dans sa virilité, dans son salut éternel, le Pierrot de la Décadence est toujours différent de lui-même, saisi dans la surprise et l'hétérogène. (Palacio 1990: 223)²⁸⁵

The black blots on the white blouse are evidence of the semiotic as it irrupts into the symbolic, fracturing its purity and unity, setting the perverse drives free and releasing the dark Other. The violence that seems pent up in the face of this Pierrot screws his face into that of a grotesque gargoyle; there is

²⁸⁵ This individual's personality is always a dual one, marked by the dichotomy of duplicity. He always crumples, always sees unity in peril, always accepts a break to make way for the Other. When his integrity, his virility and his eternal salvation are affected, the Pierrot of the Decadence always differs from himself, overcome by surprise and the heterogeneous nature of things.

nothing sympathetic or appealing about the figure. Instead, a malaise of incipient noxiousness radiates from the face and the skewed posture. Simultaneously, a mocking and sardonic laughter seems to curl the Mephistophelian eyebrows and the viewer feels that they are the object of mockery in both the politely impolite curtseying bow and the amusement that the figure seems to be taking in the affront. Virtue and vice lurk in the black overlaid on the white.

Pierrot's shadow or black conscience is further found in another of Beardsley's works, *Pierrot and cat at St Paul's* from 1895.²⁸⁶ Here an entirely white Pierrot (except for his tiny black-shoed feet) is seen accompanied by an overtly large black cat reminiscent of the heraldic shape of a lion. It stares out at the viewer with oddly dissimilar eyes which give it a comic, if bizarre, expression. This black cat recalls the cat used by Willette in his cartoons strips of Pierrot as well as of the black cat cabaret of Rodolphe Salis.²⁸⁷ The black cat was a character that was found in French folktales and simultaneously suggested innocence and sexually provocative undertones. It was also a creature that appeared in the works of Baudelaire and Poe and thus possesses a historical, literary, artistic and sexual overlay of which Beardsley would have been fully cognizant.²⁸⁸ This cat appears to be the demonic side of Pierrot's conscience. As his alter ego and shadow, it is there to taunt, tempt and taint the white clown. The irony is that the two figures are at St. Paul's, one of the most famous cathedrals in London. The

²⁸⁶ See Figure 51 on page 5.

²⁸⁷ Rodolphe Salis 1851 - 1897. He was the creator, director and owner of the celebrated cabaret *Le Chat Noir*.

²⁸⁸ Beardsley drew a very malevolent black cat to illustrate Poe's story *The Black Cat*.

religious irony of black and white; demon and innocent is played out under the auspices of its stately name, because the cathedral is only a presence in the title, but is nowhere physically present in the picture itself.

There is a menace to this awkwardly shaped hybrid cat. Pierrot stares straight ahead as though unaware of the presence at his side. Hands deep in his pockets, Pierrot stands as though posing for a profile view, showing off his beauty spot and his large, floppy, *Gilles*-type hat. Gender is again indeterminate. It appears as though Pierrot is taking the odd cat for a stroll, however, there is a cloying proximity between cat and clown as though one has sprung from, or is part of, the other. In Beardsley's time there was a propensity for numerous artists to establish 'amorous links between women and the animal world' and dogs and cats were 'highly sought after by artists as the not-so-symbolic companions of choice in woman's exploration of the pleasures of bestiality' (Dijkstra 1986: 296). Beardsley seems to be subtly parodying the erotic and sexual associations of the black cat and the strain of bestiality present in contemporary painting. The indeterminate nature of Pierrot's gender permits Beardsley to play on the virtue-vice, black-white, female-male dualities and to make allusion to the perverse desires extant between this Pierrot and the large black feline that clings to his side.

The indifference that Pierrot exhibits towards this huge animal is eerie, as is the stare the cat directs at the viewer. Something feels unbalanced and skew. An apparently ordinary drawing is dominated by a sense of something perverse. A subtle aura of madness and creeping malignancy accompanies

the white figure which is so closely trailed by this misshapen cat form. The dark, filled shadow form of the cat stands in opposition to the silhouette outline of Pierrot, but somehow appears to be a projection stemming from the clown. This shadow seems to reveal the less apparent underside, inside or dark side of Pierrot (Forgione 1999: 493). Beardsley makes use of both silhouette and shadow that harks back to Japanese art techniques with which he was familiar and to decorative art experimentation. As Nancy Forgione writes:

The unmodulated silhouette offered one solution: its capacity to convey three-dimensional content while reading as two-dimensional form coincident with the surface plane made it an effective resource in the effort to reconcile figurative subject matter with an emphasis on surface design. At the same time, it promoted expressive distortion and simplification of form. (Forgione 1999: 496)

Both the shadow and the silhouette capture the inner reality or essence of an object or person. At the same time a shadow or silhouette is ephemeral, fragile, and changeable and like water it can fluidly alter shape. The black shadow cat with its hybrid nature rejects standard appearances, while at the same time it comments on the nature of the figure from which it seems to have sprung. The flowing lines of Pierrot's silhouette and of the ink blot cat provide movement to the picture as well as indicating the semiotic and changing nature of the figures. The dark drives that seem to be expressed in the nature of the shadow cat are equally those of the pallid clown. Black and white merge and flow as the semiotic oscillates and pulses against the containment of the symbolic lines that form both the silhouette and shadow. Pierrot's uncertain sexuality is linked to his close identification and assimilation with the white and black of his costume. Being the colours of his costume, a mere sign, an

ethereal wraith, he has no colour, body or language. This doubling of black and white, shadow and silhouette, silence and asexuality or hermaphroditism create the mercurial and semiotic nature of this grotesque, masked clown. Pierrot is where all contradictions meet, which ensures that the clown is neither one thing nor another and allows for vacillating semiotic fluidity and the ability to undermine and overturn accepted symbolic laws whilst remaining a liminal, shadow creature.

This liminality is clearly expressed in Beardsley's *The Mask of the Red Death*,²⁸⁹ which was used to illustrate *The Works of Edgar Allen Poe*. A central group of three figures with a nonchalant, slightly detached fourth figure are turned to face a marginalised and very tall Pierrot figure, whose skeletal head glowers from the left side of the drawing. The reaction of the group to the intrusion of this pale figure is haughty, confrontational and they seem to smirk at the newcomer from a position of solidarity and exclusiveness. The group is a motley collection of carnival characters, each depicted with a twisted and grotesque aspect. The figure that attracts the eye is the central female figure. She is tall, almost as tall as the elongated figure of the Pierrot, and bears horns. She stands looking directly and challengingly at the pallid figure in the wings, her breasts exposed above a black bodice pulled tightly over the hips by a girdle of dismembered heads on wings. Her sleeves are white, full and flounced at the wrists and she wears white pantaloons similar to those normally worn by Pierrot. She foppishly and powerfully leans on a round-headed cane. The only thing she lacks seems to

²⁸⁹ See Figure 52 on page 5.

be hooves. Horns have always been associated with male virility, strength and protection and this female figure exudes forcefulness. The association with the horned Moon goddess and the huntress is implied with the heads that encircle the creature's waist. This girdle is grotesque and disturbing and invokes an image of the goddess Kali with her waist-encircling adornment of skulls. Death and life are juxtaposed, but the heads on the girdle are extremely peculiar in that they appear to be alive and awake. The viewer is not sure if they are bats, demons, or small harpies which at any moment could fly off the girdle with evil intentions. One of them seems to be carefully assessing the figure of Pierrot. They are baleful, creepy additions to this arrogantly poised figure. Everything about this female reeks of base desires, depravity and the transgressive. The semiotic is powerfully at play as anarchic and dark sexual energies pulse from this form and defy both social propriety and distinctive gender boundaries. This female possesses so many masculine traits that it seems natural to assume that the pantaloons hide male genitalia. The dandiacal stance with the phallic cane only reinforces the idea that this is one of Beardsley's hermaphroditic figures: here is the hermaphroditic *femme fatale* who also possesses the added characteristics of the dandy. Beardsley is playing with appearance and reality and trying to subvert sexual practices. The figure's face is a mirror of the pale mask that frowns at the group from the sidelines. She seems to be Pierrot's double and as death-filled and dangerous, or more dangerous, than the white, delicate opposition. Nothing is as it appears in this grotesque masquerade, where a morbid sensuality challenges the viewer, as gender

slips into indecision and the carnival ambivalence of neither one, nor the other, but both simultaneously is paramount.

The figures that flank this haughty horned apparition are as disquieting as she is. The clown on the side closest to Pierrot's mask is a poncey parody of the English clown with attributes of Pierrot, Pulcinella and Clown. This figure is apparently male, but is decked out with bows and has a funny cranium with either a horn or a breast shape upon it,²⁹⁰ a large nose and a weak, disappearing chin that recedes into a misproportioned neck. It too, with mincing, pointed toe and hand on hip, glares at Pierrot, whilst leaning into the protection of the powerful female's large sleeve. All the elements of the decadent dandy are present in its effete stance, indeterminate gender and its powder and patch. On the other side of the female form, and strategically positioned behind her, a small, entirely black-clad figure seems to titter and smirk in an oily, obnoxious manner, wearing a cat's-eye mask and also appearing to be a type of Pierrot. It leers out at the white stranger from behind its mask and its protected position, emanating a malevolence that is cloying and soiling. The small black-masked figure seems to be amused by the situation, sniggering in his cloak whilst skulking at the protective side of the female form. He beadily eyes out the stranger and the viewer as though unmasking them and their motives. Of indeterminate gender, the whole stance of this creature is loathsome and fiendishly secretive. To the right of this odious creature is another personage in carnival clothing with his back to the viewer and his arm rather obliquely angled, as though he were in the

²⁹⁰ This is very similar to the grotesque caricature of a female Pierrot with breasts on its head that appeared in 1893 as a vignette in the *Bons-Mots* series on page 138.

process of performing a lewd act. His feathered rump and head and flame-leaved legs are evocative of Hermes and Harlequin. There is also a strange touch of the feminine in the shape of the hips and the face that is turned to gaze at the intrusive apparition. This group is ambiguous, strange and transgressive. They are all darkly subversive and perverse and none has a definitive sexuality, but each emits a disturbing vileness. All is turned topsy-turvy as the grotesque and the semiotic percolate the whole scene and symbolic restraint appears to have been thwarted in a *jouissance* of uncontrolled and licentious desire and debauched freedom. These creatures epitomise the carnivalesque grotesque with its madness and aberrant behaviour that corrupts and shatters all socially accepted practices. There is a delicious, venomous charm, thinly veiling their insanity, which has allowed the semiotic drives to overturn the order of the symbolic and expose the dangerous desires that lurk beneath appearances. This macabre and dangerous world unhinges accepted, absolute meaning and reveals the fragility of stable gender definitions and the contradictions that reside in the hierarchical values imposed by the symbolic. In their superciliousness these creatures stand confronting death.

The pallid, wraith-like and fragile figure of Pierrot also exudes hostility and is the Beardsleyan personification of the plague that has slipped silently into the masked ball of Poe's story:

The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat ... His vesture was dabbled in *blood* – and his broad brow, with all the

features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror. (Poe 1966: 259)

As Beardsley's surrogate, Pierrot is fused with death and

the white paper merges with the clothes and the colour of Pierrot, and the white double line of the picture frame fuses with the clown's (or Beardsley's) gaunt, elongated figure. In his concise style he creates the illusion that the double line which serves to frame both the stage and the picture is also part of Pierrot's body. (Heyd 1986: 46)

Pierrot has brought the white death of consumption to the ball, in the feverish emptiness of the virgin page. The blood of Poe's story is nowhere apparent in Beardsley's drawing, but the title of Poe's story would have appealed to Beardsley's ironic and macabre sense of humour. Beardsley retains the pristine whiteness of his Pierrot in a sophisticated allusion to what the white plague of consumption hides beneath its unsullied appearance, that of red explosions of blood. Pierrot's mask is as frigid and frozen as that of the plague's mask in Poe's story. Beardsley has drawn it as cadaverous, skull-like, and infinitely frail. There is no hint of gender; rather the figure appears to possess none or both hidden beneath the flowing white cerement. This waxen Pierrot maliciously sets about sowing death; he has become the ultimate semiotic symbol of the death drive, and even the seeming strength and grotesque invincibility of the group will succumb to his grim whiteness. Pierrot has assumed sinister attributes equal to those possessed by the carnival group he is threatening. This is Beardsley's white Pierrot at his most malign and transgressive and his fragility is belied by the power of his pallid, fixed scowl which is like the stare of the Medusa and freezes those who gaze at him. He is a deeply ambivalent creature who is

simultaneously the innocent white clown and the pale, apocalyptic, death-bringing shade, who is entirely detached from reality.

Nowhere is Pierrot's white ethereality and detachment from reality better portrayed than in the illustrations Beardsley did for Ernest Dowson's *The Pierrot of the Minute*. These represent some of the most delicate and least grotesquely spiteful of all Beardsley's illustrations. He had complained about what he termed the 'playlet', yet he lavished great care on each of the five 'elegant, dotted decorations' (Sturgis 1999: 305). This commission was completed whereas others never were, revealing an interest in the central character of the play and perhaps in the author of the play as well. The play's themes, the loss of love and innocence and encroaching time and death, would have held Beardsley's attention, particularly since he was obsessed by Pierrot.

In the play's headpiece,²⁹¹ Beardsley cunningly parodied Dowson in the same manner as he had parodied Oscar Wilde in his illustrations for *Salomé*, using Oscar's features for the man-woman in the Moon. The Pierrot headpiece features a figure dressed in the white garments and floppy hat of a Watteauesque Pierrot, but wearing a high collar with a small black ribbon tie. This tie is arranged in a neat, black butterfly bow.²⁹² The face under the white, floppy hat, which is pushed back, has dark curly hair and sports a tiny moustache. Dowson had dark, wavy and curly hair, a slight moustache and

²⁹¹ See Figure 53 on page 5.

²⁹² This could also be a play on the fact that Beardsley had used a signature of a 'butterfly', a parody of the painter Whistler's own signature of a butterfly used to sign his paintings. It is a rather subtle mockery, if indeed it is one.

wore stick-up collars and a black butterfly necktie (Adams 2000: 21). He adopted this necktie in the belief that it reflected Bohemian French artistic style. Beardsley has made the Pierrot appear decidedly Gallic. But it is in the eyes of this Pierrot that the Beardsley malice and grotesqueness are to be found. Where Dowson was diffident and in photos had his eyes lowered in shyness and self-effacement, this Pierrot's eyes are slitted and sly and hold a secretive and contemplative look. The raised, misaligned eyebrows and the full, slightly voluptuous mouth under a Roman nose lend this Pierrot an oily furtiveness and an air of dissolute shadiness. He bears an hourglass on his uplifted left hand like a French waiter bearing a tray of drinks; one looks instinctively for the towel over his arm. The peculiar angle of his body and his clenched right fist give the impression that he is marching along at a rapid rate. The sand in the hourglass has almost run out and it seems that Pierrot is hurrying, like the White Rabbit, to keep an appointment. Or perhaps by running away and stealing the hourglass, he hopes to defeat time and death. Beardsley skews the figure from left to right so that it slices the garden neatly in half and becomes the central focus in the foreground, as though it is about to scuttle out of the frame. This adds to the sense of movement in this picture and the sense that the figure is dashing to find its destiny. This Pierrot is not masked; instead, his face is unveiled, the sly eyes have a mocking, impish as well as melancholy look; he seems aware of the fact that he carries his own end in his raised hand.

Around him is an immaculate garden which could be Renaissance or eighteenth century in structure with its belvedere, fountain and small,

concentric circled maze. All is impeccably controlled and rigidly artificial. The secluded belvedere looks onto the fountain and is a perfect lover's bower for this mannered grove. The belvedere is surmounted by an ominous shape that seems to glare after Pierrot's departing form. This shape appears out of place on the spindly, delicate structure of the belvedere. On closer inspection it looks like a death mask, or a skull with an open mouth. The *memento mori* of *Et in arcadia ego* hangs over the pleasures of the Arcadian garden scene and is closely connected to the hourglass that Pierrot is hurriedly bearing away. The skull and the hourglass are the symbols most associated with death and the transitoriness of human existence. This fleeting life and ever present death were things of which Beardsley was only too aware; both he and Dowson were to die within a few years of one another, succumbing to the 'white plague'. The sand in the hourglass is running downwards and represents the attraction of lower nature - of the world and its pleasures, one of which is love. However, the hourglass is also a symbol of inversion and the interplay of opposites, life and death, love and loss, good and evil.

This Arcadian scene is permeated by the presence and presentiment of death and the fleeting moment. The grotesque and leering skull shape is disturbing, as is the enclosing perfection of the stifling and oppressive garden; over which a rank feeling of evil seems to hang. Beardsley's use of the grotesque confuses the boundary lines between what is fake and real; the artificial, the natural and the meaning thereof seem to slide endlessly one into the other. In this, the grotesque and the Kristevan semiotic perform the same function: the

dislocation of symbolic meaning and hierarchies. Beardsley has chosen to portray the author of *The Pierrot of the Minute* as a doomed Pierrot, thus revealing his own identification with the author and the play. Simultaneously, in his subtly grotesque attributes, Beardsley mocks the play and the author, thus revealing his own ambivalence to the content of the play and the threat of time and death it explores. The fact that the grotesque is primarily ambivalent and ambiguous and has no fixed form but can assume and merge multiple meanings, or occupy a position between meanings, ensures that it violates all boundaries and in this it is another form of the semiotic. They both defy and transgress the unifying and rational symbolic with its rigid and controlling meanings and order. They are the Dionysian principle that broods in the immaculate garden and is visible in the bizarre skull and the parody of the unmasked author as Pierrot. There is a mingling of opposites; in order there seems to be disorder; reality and unreality fuse, disrupting the viewer's enjoyment of the illustration.

In the frontispiece²⁹³ to *The Pierrot of the Minute* there is a deeper sense of being trapped and constricted. The Pierrot has arrived to meet his destiny and he seems intimidated and fearful. In this picture Pierrot has morphed and become the pale, flour-masked Pierrot of Watteau with the white hat, loose garments, the same otherworldly expression and ethereal being. However, this Pierrot still has the black ribbon threaded around his neck and his slight wrist, these dandyish attributes lending a touch of Narcissism to this pallid, withdrawn presence. This is the sinuous thread of darkness that stains the

²⁹³ See Figure 54 on page 5.

purity of Pierrot and is symbolic of his driving, grotesque desire which is projected onto his virginal garments. But it is in these garments that the reality of Pierrot's embodied state is revealed:

Il apparaît volontiers voué à une triple fatalité : voué au blanc et au froid ; voué à l'antiphysisme ou à l'incertitude génitale ; voué enfin au célibat. (Palacio 1990: 53)²⁹⁴

Pierrot's white costume hides the contours of the body as well as the hesitant sexuality of the one wearing it. The whiteness gives the wearer an air of purity, which is reinforced by the lilies of Beardsley's drawing, which seem to spring out of the side of the figure and at the same time seem to be watching it. This sense of silent watching and assessing is highly disturbing. Flowers that seem to gaze are monstrous, deviant things as they blend the boundaries of the animate and inanimate worlds. There is something uncanny and repulsive about these lilies. The presence of the lily in art history betokened chastity and symbolic purity as well as the feminine principle (Cooper 1979: 97-98). In Beardsley's illustration these flowers have a threatening, almost lubricious and greedily sexual quality about them. The close link with the body of Pierrot seems to reinforce not only the virginal nature of the figure, but also to comment on the lack of sexuality, or to call this sexuality into question. This sexless being stands with tiny hands and feet posed like a dancer in seemingly remote hopelessness. What is hidden beneath the floating costume is indeterminate. Traditionally male, Pierrot, in his dandyism, has forfeited masculine characteristics and become effeminate; in a semiotic fusing of the two opposing genders. This

²⁹⁴ He appears willingly dedicated to a triple fatality: dedicated to whiteness and cold, to the inversion of human nature or genital uncertainty; dedicated, lastly, to celibacy.

hybridisation calls into question the stability of gender categories, as one and Other are joined in a single body where they oscillate and slide. Pierrot is neither one nor the other but both simultaneously, ‘à l’intérieur du même personnage, une opposition des sexes’ (Palacio: 1990: 173).²⁹⁵ It is this dismaying indeterminacy that entices the viewer in a surge of fascination and aversion.

Seated above Pierrot on a pedestal, which has aspects of a cornucopia, is a small cupid rather reminiscent of one of the borders Beardsley did for *Salomé*.²⁹⁶ There is a Dionysian transformation of the rose foliage into a wild mantle, or bower of hair, which provides a more sinister, chthonian overtone to this little rubicund figure. Luxuriant and fertile nature is redolent of rampant sexual desire which, entwined around this tiny plump and sexless cherub hints at lasciviousness and at something debauched. The unfettered drives of the semiotic are ever present in this Dionysian excess of the artificially natural. All that is left exposed by the rose foliage is a fleshy leg, stomach and buttocks and the arm, which is extended and points directly at the oblivious clown. The profile of the tiny-featured face is feminine and again resembles the face of *Salomé* in the border for that play’s list of pictures.²⁹⁷ Cupid’s face appears stern and harshly adult as though glaring in disdain at the poor creature who has entered his domain, but there is a mockery and a scoffing laughter undulating from the fat thighs and buttocks and the pointed finger. The sex of the Cupid is as indeterminate as that of the

²⁹⁵ Within the same character, an opposition of the sexes.

²⁹⁶ See Figure 55 on page 5.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* This border is the second one created for *Salomé*. It was regarded by Beardsley as sanitised and as irrelevant. The first border was rejected on the grounds that it was indecent and unsuitable.

Pierrot. The foliage that covers the Cupid and the trellis with its dark, enclosing trees is suffocating and incarcerating. This bower of Venus is a static and enclosed pastoral with ominous attributes marked by the irises at the feet of Pierrot. These are the flowers of the underworld and of death and were the flowers associated with the graves of women. The Greek goddess Iris (from which the flower gets its name), was the psychopomp (conductor of souls) of the gods, and she led the souls of women to the Elysian Fields. Beardsley has posed Pierrot exactly between the Iris and the Lily in cold, white chasteness. The presence of these flowers and their relation to the feminine principle and the death of women raise questions about the gender of this delicate clown whose deportment reminds one of a ballet dancer. The foliage crowds in and seems to offer no means of escape, the grove seems to possess malign motivations, and a heavy sense of something darkly threatening prevails. Love does not seem to be in the offing, as cupid points no arrows but rather an accusatory and condemnatory finger. Pierrot appears dazed and lacklustre as though well aware of impending doom. The face of this Pierrot is rounded and bears an expression of innocent dreaminess and the stance and baggy white costume is very suggestive of Watteau's *Gilles*. What lurks in this menacing chthonian grove is the loss of Pierrot's innocence and dreamy self-contained youthfulness. The anarchic drives of dark desire will lead to a *jouissance* of semiotic and Dionysian destructiveness and the triumph of death. Through this illustration runs a sardonic and chilling amusement at the prospect of Pierrot's fall and loss of innocence. This downfall and ruination will be caused through the gaining of the knowledge of death and desire, which are revealed as alternating one

within the other in an endless paradoxical rhythm of inversion within Cupid's bower.

Death and desire are inscribed on the haunted face of the Pierrot who is seen leaving the garden after his meeting with a Moon Maiden.²⁹⁸ This face has lost its roundness and dreamy, youthful expression and has become cadaverous. It is an ashen, frozen mask which reveals the presence of the skull beneath. The frivolous, black ribbon has gone, replaced by a myriad of small, intricate black buttons. The costume has altered and become less loose and floating. It clings closely to the shrunken, defeated corpse of Pierrot, like a shroud. The cupid has vanished and the vegetation has become rigidly stark and forbidding. There is no way back into the garden which has become entirely indifferent to Pierrot's fate. The viewer seems to peer through a dainty baroque mirror at this scene of bitter loss and banishment. This mirror is the place where the living and the dead, reality and dream, frivolity and seriousness, life and art meet and confusedly blend. What is revealed in this mirror is a universe that seems to double and reflect the real universe, but is also different and strange (Pierrot 1981: 212). Beardsley has parodically reflected back to the viewer a universe that though artificial and grotesque, is a revelation of the terribleness of beauty and the instability of the meanings of love, sexuality and death. The semiotically grotesque nature of this universe and its apparent detachment from reality destabilises the structure of meaning in the picture and causes it to oscillate across traditional artistic boundaries (Snodgrass 1995: 166). This mirror-shape

²⁹⁸ See Figure 56 on page 5.

which is so delicately and beautifully created out of stipple dots and which seems to hang or stand in nothingness, is merely an artistic illusion, created to suggest and mimic the power of reflection and in this mimicry to suggest 'the existence of another world, twin to the real world, but also a world with vague and disturbing depths' (Pierrot 1981: 214). Beardsley turns everything upside down and inside out and he calls into question all accepted beliefs, categories, morals, customs and the way we are taught to look at things.

In the world that surrounds the fleeing Pierrot there lurks a sense of attention, of eyes following and gazing at the retreating figure, who seems to look over his shoulder in fear and desperate misery. The tightly grouped foliage and trees are like a perilous phalanx from the depths of which some evil spirit is gazing at the departing Pierrot with amusement and malevolent glee. Beardsley has recreated an expulsion from the garden scene with Pierrot as Adam but without an Eve. Pierrot's Eve, the Moon Maiden, has, in her airiness, floated away, bearing the sands of time with her.²⁹⁹ On her head is an abundant flowering headdress of roses and around her neck the black ribbon necktie. She drifts in an ethereal dream seeming to rise heavenwards. The beauty of her face is a mirror of Pierrot's before the loss of innocence. There is a very androgynous feel about this maiden's body and the pyjama-like costume adds to the lack of overt sexuality. It is in the over-abundance of the roses that cover her head and in the look on her face that a provocative sexual allure is to be found. Radiating from this face is a sensual self-fulfilment and containment, a triumphant contentment. The Dionysian rose

²⁹⁹ See Figure 57 on page 5.

helmet and the smug repletion, along with the hourglass,³⁰⁰ link the Maiden to the dark forces of desire and death. In her beauty is the terror of the *femme fatale* who has knowingly and delightedly destroyed her prey. For all her delicate lack of sexuality she emits a seductive potency and allure. Her innocent and ethereal exterior masks violent, impure semiotic drives that melt boundaries and are the harbingers of death. The hourglass she holds resembles the body of a woman and unlike the hourglass held by the Pierrot in the headpiece the sand in this glass has more time to run and is pitch black. It is as though this figure is carrying away the darkened essence of Pierrot and the running grains are the brief moments of life that remain for him.

These moments seem to have come to a close in Beardsley's *The death of Pierrot* where Pierrot's frozen skull-mask is seen, eyes closed and head propped against a large pillow.³⁰¹ Lost in the voluminous coverings is Pierrot's body. There is a fragility and tragic withdrawal in the face and the delicate hand that falls limply outside the bedclothes. The bed has been offset and recessed to the left of the picture. From the right hand side, four figures file towards the bed and their presence and the way they are placed draw the eye inexorably to the exsanguinated mask in the bed. They seem to have arrived to spirit this delicate, wan creature away.

³⁰⁰ The hourglass has always been associated with the figure of the grim reaper, or death, as well as with the fleeting nature of time. Time's passing brings with it the decay and disintegration of all living and non-living things. The Maiden's carrying of this emblem links her to closely to death. The Dionysian is both a procreative and destructive force and oscillates between erotic desire and destruction. The Maiden thus represents the ambivalence of desire, creation and death.

³⁰¹ See Figure 58 on page 5.

The figures, led by Columbine, tiptoe towards the bed, seemingly with some nefarious purpose in mind. Columbine is trailed by a Harlequin-Pierrot, followed by a figure whose appearance is a combination of an oriental Mongol warrior, or very like Beardsley's drawing of Ali Baba and appears to be the Doctor in disguise. This character, with its grotesque features and beak-nose, glares evilly in the direction of Pierrot and carries a very threatening scimitar. At the tail end slinks a creature with hunched shoulders, exuding evil intent. Its awkward tiptoe and crouched stance combined with its peculiar oriental dress and slouch hat, like a small sombrero hiding its face, all spell shifty and criminal intent. Each of these characters seems filled with deceitfulness and riotous aims. Their will to cause chaos is abetted by the lack of order in Pierrot's room. Beardsley fills the inanimate objects with desuetude and decay, ensuring their role as accomplices in whatever degenerate mayhem will ensue. The disorder and semiotic disintegration is visible in the broken fringe framing Pierrot's bed, the dangling cord like a cobweb above his head and the negligently draped and lifeless clothes on the chair. Even Pierrot's shoe has a ribbon that is carelessly undone and trails on the floor. This mild chaos seems the mere accompaniment to what the less than morally virtuous four have in mind. An image of the four horsemen of the apocalypse with the sword, white pestilence, death and desolation is evoked. The carnival characters seem to be the bringers of doom and misrule.

Columbine and Harlequin-Pierrot turn to the audience with fingers on lips as though imposing silence and connivance on the viewer. Why do they need

this silence if Pierrot is dead? Or is he merely deeply asleep? Have they come to torment and tease him to death? There seems to be some unkind joke and secret laughter in which they are trying to incriminate the viewer at Pierrot's expense. This shushing motion, a command to silence, is at variance with their playfulness. It is a mockery of Pierrot's own silence that is now being imposed on the viewer. But the semiotic bubbles through in the sly looks, the dramatic tiptoeing and the glee and violence that emanates from the four. A decided unease is produced as the characters' motivations become suspect and the viewer is left questioning what they are planning to do to, or with, the pallid body in the bed. The Lords of Misrule seem to have entered the house of death. In the carnival Pierrot would be resurrected from death's clutches, much like Lazarus, but over this stage scene of the sick bed there seems to reign a doom-laden sadness and finality.

Pierrot's clothing indicates the sad state of affairs. Unlike the clothing of the four, which Beardsley has drawn in strong, black lines; Pierrot's gown and cap have been done in tiny, delicate stipple-dots. This faint, light outline ensures that the clothing gives the impression of disappearance, as though it is becoming transparent and will evanesce with the passing of its owner. As Jean de Palacio writes:

Le trait en pointillé des dessins de Beardsley, comme dans *The Death of Pierrot*, est une autre façon de le dire: la ligne, qui était censée cerner le corps, lui assurer une stabilité compacte et charnelle, s'interrompt, laisse passer des fuites, n'est plus elle-même que *noir et blanc*. C'est tout ce qui reste. (Palacio 1990: 153)³⁰²

³⁰² The dotted outlines of Beardsley's drawings, as in *The Death of Pierrot*, are another means of expression: the line, which was supposed to enclose the body and provide it with compact and carnal stability, is interrupted, allowing for leakages, and is nothing more than black and white itself. That is all that remains.

The pointillist dots no longer provide Pierrot with a compact and physically present body; rather, all that is left is a diaphanous ethereality of spaces between the black on white providing the clown with only a tenuous and fading ghostly presence.

In yet another of Beardsley's many humorous and challengingly lewd images the faint outline of Pierrot's cap on the chair pushed up against the voluminous skirt of Columbine becomes the glans of a huge penis. This huge penis is what Chris Snodgrass refers to as 'the theatre of penis and testicles' (Snodgrass 1990: 195).³⁰³ The lacy Spanish or Italian-style black mantilla that decorously covers most of Columbine from her head over her dress acts as the pubic hair for this large male member. The fact that this huge penis belongs to Columbine indicates that the feminine has assumed the masculine principle. A hermaphroditic embodiment is established with this subtle lascivious touch, which challenges the limits of gender delineation in a festive and comically licentious manner, worthy of Rabelais. The underlying semiotic drives are unfettered and the imposed symbolic morals and rules of representation are triumphantly overturned. It was not deemed correct to reveal the male penis in any artistic form (even today the male anatomy tends not to be as displayed as that of the female), whereas the female nude was permanently on display. Beardsley thus derides the hypocrisy of accepted practice. His droll amusement at his daring can be felt in the slyly inserted detail that would have caused consternation and

³⁰³ Many of Beardsley's illustrations play on the image of the phallus as in *The Peacock Skirt* (1894) in *Salomé* and *How Sir Tristram drank of the love potion* (1893) for *The morte D'Arthur*. These phallic shapes are associated with the potent and strong female figure which makes them entirely ambivalent creatures and at odds with the portrayal of the female figure of Beardsley's time.

acrimonious outcry from the critics and society of his time. Beardsley is also making a mockery of Victorian perceptions of sexuality and the rules governing the nature of the sexes. Columbine is hermaphroditic and as such is one of Beardsley's 'strange hermaphroditic creatures' (Beardsley in Snodgrass 1995: 189). It seems that she is absorbing all the masculine traits left from Pierrot's flimsy remains, as skirt and cap combine to form this giant sex. Simultaneously, this large phallus seems to be a signal of Pierrot's feminization as the masculine characteristic has migrated into the possession of Columbine. There is a blurring of the sexual boundaries and a lack of definite identity that adds another destabilising aspect to the picture. The Harlequin-Pierrot behind Columbine mirrors her lacy, black headdress in his very intricate black stockings. His white, billowing costume is almost a mirror for the delicate clothing draped over the chair. Behind the black mask there is a face that is practically the double of that in the bed, though this one is more rounded, with sly eyes and a very weird black hat, one that resembles a scrunched-up jester's cap. In this figure, sexuality is ambiguous and the figure is feminised. The doubling of the figure in the bed by the figure with its white robe and black mask creates a feeling of something undeniably split. The subject and the object seem to have separated and desire has become located outside of the subject's body at a distance (Pacteau 1986: 70). It is as though this masked figure is the evil shadow that has escaped from the dying figure in the bed and is now planning on doing away with its opposite, or as the title to the picture indicates 'whither we know not where'. This is almost a Shakespearean subtitle to a tragi-comedy. In the whole picture there is the same impression of doubling and ambiguous

duality. A constant sliding of gender, of life and death, of good and evil and sadness and humour in an alternating cyclical rhythm. The linking of the fertility symbol of the phallus to the clothing of the dying Pierrot seems to enhance the idea of death and birth, or rebirth. For Beardsley there is no dualism, rather all is ambiguous and flows one into another.

That Beardsley identified with the figure of the ‘white frocked clown from Bergamo’ ensures that there is a pathos and an understanding for the ghastly end that he has given Pierrot (Sturgis 1998: 292). It is Beardsley envisaging his own approaching death. The position in the four-poster bed, hidden deep in pillows and covers had previously been alluded to in his ‘Portrait of himself’ for *The Yellow Book vol. III* 1894. Pierrot’s bed is not as ornate as in this 1894 drawing; rather it is indicative of the slow decline that has occurred and of the approach of death. This bed forms a stage within a stage within a frame which creates a sense of distance and detachment and levels of depth. The *commedia dell’arte* figures and their playing to the viewer ensure that there is awareness that this is merely an act in a play and that death is not final. Rather, in true carnivalesque manner, death is merely the prelude to rebirth as life and death are intermingled. It is the illness of the clown with which Beardsley identified that is contained in Pierrot’s complete whiteness where:

Pierrot apparaît victime d’une blancheur contagieuse, gagnant de l’intérieur sur l’extérieur, investissant comme une lèpre toutes les surfaces apparentes, faciales ou vestimentaires. (Palacio 1990: 54)³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Pierrot appears to be the victim of a contagious whiteness, spreading to the outside from within, occupying all visible surfaces, whether that of the face or of dress.

Beardsley knew that death from the white plague of consumption was to be his own fate. Through his ironic humour in depicting his surrogate, or double, as dead he was acting out his own approaching death and detaching himself from the reality of its arrival (Heyd 1986: 50).

Beardsley's identification with Pierrot was common amongst *fin de siècle* artists. A similar identification is to be found in the closing rondel of Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire* called *Cristal de Bohème* (50):³⁰⁵

Je suis en Pierrot costumé,	I am costumed as Pierrot,
Pour offrir à celle que j'aime	To offer to the one I love
Un rayon de lune enfermé	A Moonbeam captured in a flacon
Dans un beau flacon de Bohème.	Of beautiful Bohemian crystal.
Par ce symbole est exprimé,	By this symbol is expressed
O ma très chère, tout moi-même.	O my dearest, all of myself.

This Pierrot, it is quickly realised, is simultaneously the white clown, the poetic form and the poet himself. The dandy who painted his mask with the light of the Moon in the third poem of the *Pierrot Lunaire* cycle has become enclosed in a crystal flacon, a mere substanceless moonbeam himself. It becomes apparent that the self that has shadowed *Pierrot Lunaire* throughout the 50 rondels has been none other than the poet himself. Giraud's Pierrot has become entirely assimilated into the structure of the poems. He has been the white thread running throughout and is now seen as the moonbeam trapped in the crystal structure of the rondel, an evanescent perfume of light offered to the beloved. This poetic self now assumes centre-stage and assimilates all the attributes of the clown: costume, mask and the very essence of the poetry he has created. Like Beardsley, Giraud has mirrored and superimposed the

³⁰⁵ *Bohemian Crystal*.

identities of creation and creator and occupied all positions at once, in a perfect carnival spectacle. He has been

A la fois le sujet de l'énonciation (le rêveur ou le metteur en scène, et le rimeur), et le sujet de l'énoncé (le rêve ou l'acteur, à savoir Pierrot), mais il est également l'énonciation même (la rime, à savoir le flacon de Bohème, métaphore in absentia de la forme des poèmes et comparant du masque du poète) et le spectateur des scènes rêvées et rimées (il fait partie du On impersonnel dans le premier rondel). (Van den Broek 1996: 61)³⁰⁶

Beardsley has not caught Pierrot in the poetry of words, but in the poetry of lines and in his total identification with the white clown from Bergamo he too has occupied all positions as subject, object and impersonal viewer of the scenes created. Beardsley, like Giraud, has subsumed and stolen the attributes and essence of Pierrot as representative of himself. Both illustrator and poet share a common doubling of identity where creator and creation are seen to be one and the same thing, in a perfectly ambiguous slippage between all possible positions in an attempt to both 'mean' and 'be' simultaneously.

Beardsley created a world where meaning is constantly altering and where everything slides from one into the other in a perfect example of the carnivalesque grotesque. The universe of his drawings is one where paradox reigns. The fine line between beauty and the grotesque was chosen by Beardsley in order to create something incongruous and disturbing. He blurred all boundaries, whether sexual or those between reality and fantasy,

³⁰⁶ At once the subject of the enunciation (the dreamer or the director, as well as the rhymester) and the subject of the utterance (the dream or the actor, namely Pierrot) he is also the enunciation itself (the rhyme, namely the Bohemian Crystal bottle, the metaphor in absentia for the form in which the poems were written and what the poet's mask is compared to) and the spectator of dream scenes put into verse he forms a part of the impersonal 'One' to be found in the first rondel.

nature and the artificial, black and white, good and evil. His grotesque forms cross-breed and occupy no determined identity or position but violate all accepted rationality. Yet, all this is carefully contained within the beauty and appearance of what is accepted artistic practice of line, space and structure.

Beardsley's is an uncanny world that is filled with bawdiness and raucous laughter along with the transgressive and permissive sensuality of the carnival. All his works struggle against the repressive attitudes of his time, but they are not, like Hogarth's,³⁰⁷ satirical and biting commentaries on society with the aim to alter it. Rather, his work is an entirely personal expression of repugnance against the social mores and hypocrisies within which he found himself constricted. Even today, when looking at Beardsley's works, there is a feeling of repulsion, amusement and confusion followed by careful scrutiny and pondering. His drawings still have a powerful effect on the viewer and continue to evoke hypocritical and conservatively puritanical responses. The sexual transgression that his work embodies still speaks to the 21st century and, for the foreseeable future, it always will. The puckish spirit embedded in all Beardsley's illustrations is enchanting and ensures that he defies any form of categorization. The originality of his vision is in the ambivalent swirls, phosphorescence, and stipples of his black and white grotesques.

³⁰⁷ William Hogarth 1697 - 1764 was an English engraver and painter. He was a satirist who commented upon the abuses and immorality that he saw in the society around him through the medium of this work. His work, like that of Beardsley, had a literary element to it as well as being highly original.



Figure 48

Figure 48 *The burial of Salomé*
1894

Cul de lamp to Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*



Figure 49
Figure 49 *Lucian's true history*
1906



Figure 50
Figure 50 *Vignette (Pierrot)*
1894
Bons-Mots



Figure 51

Figure 51 *Pierrot and cat from St. Paul's*
1895

Victoria and Albert museum, London

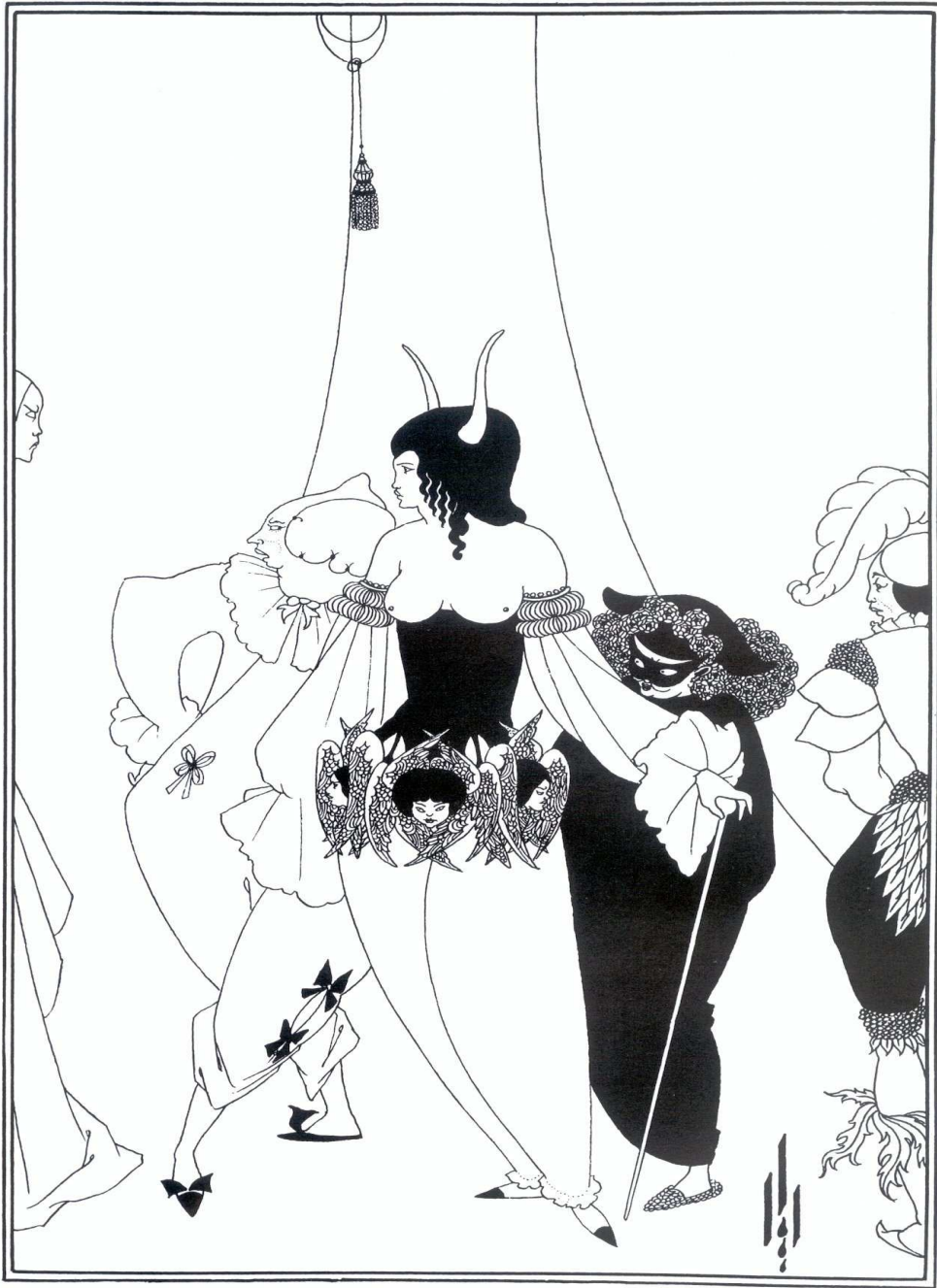


Figure 52

Figure 52 *The masque of the red death*

1894/5

The works of Edgar Allan Poe

Private collection



Figure 53

Figure 53 *Headpiece for The Pierrot of the Minute*
1896



Figure 54

Figure 54 Frontispiece for *The Pierrot of the Minute*
1896



Figure 55

Figure 55 *Border for the list of pictures for Salomé*
The Fogg art Museum (Harvard University art museums), Cambridge
1894



Figure 56

Figure 56 *Cul de lampe for The Pierrot of the Minute*
1896



Figure 57
Figure 57 *Half title for The Pierrot of the Minute*
1896

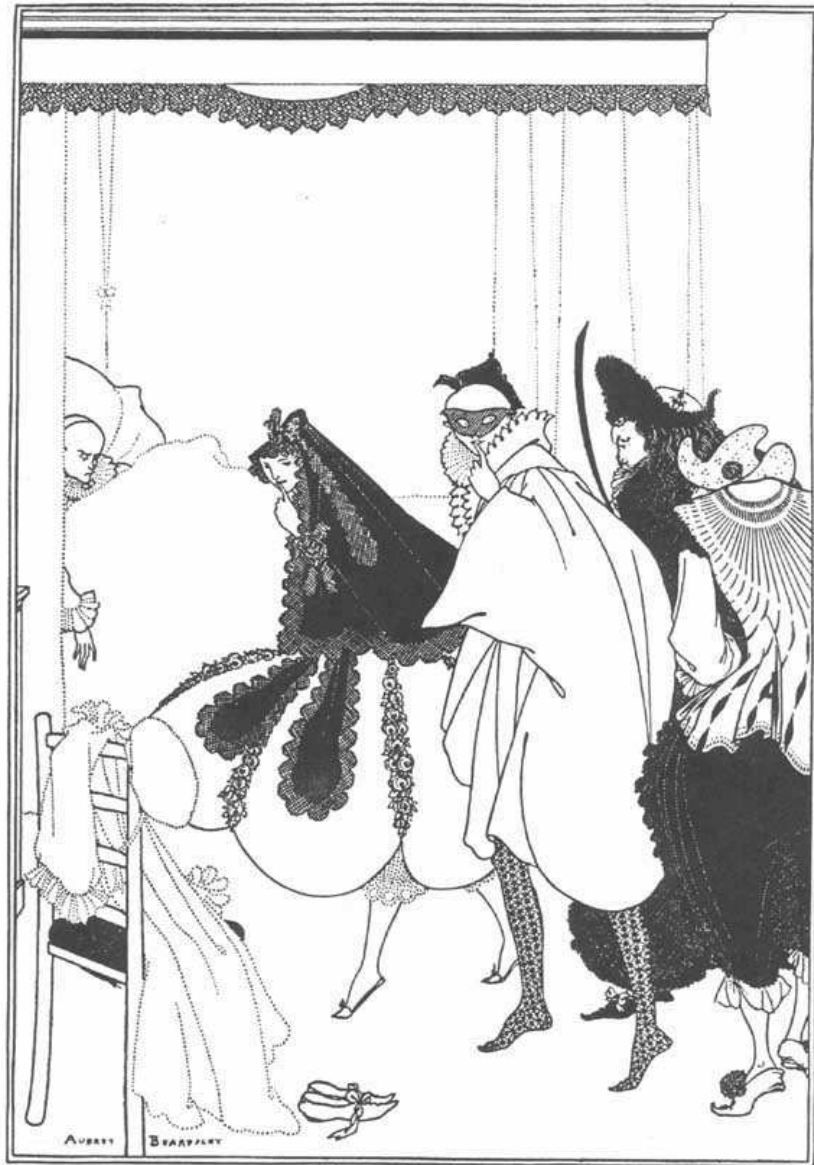


Figure 58

Figure 58 *The Death of Pierrot*
1896

The Savoy No. VI,
Private collection

CONCLUSION

Pierrot's ethereal, melancholy mien and his mask fashioned from moonlight pervaded and dominated the work of the poets and artists examined in the preceding chapters of this thesis. For Giraud, Ensor, Dowson and Beardsley the appeal of the white-faced, white-clad clown lay in his liminal nature with its lack of conformity. Pierrot, whose origins were to be found in the low art of pantomime, was entirely at odds with what was considered to be the defining classical canon or high art. These attributes made him the perfect transgressive symbol to use in exploring and revealing the hidden, darker desires of humankind in an attempt to pull off the mask of pretention and hypocrisy that these poets and artists believed surrounded them. The ambiguous nature of Pierrot's figure and the *mélange* of opposites which seemed to make up his character: black/white; good/evil; masculine/feminine; grotesque/tragic; ferocity/meekness and madness/sanity appeared to mirror the manner in which the artists perceived life and themselves. Pierrot's permanently fractured and split personality, his moon-madness and his instinctive responses were seemingly propelled by darker semiotic drive energies. These ensured that his quicksilver demeanour always veered from one extreme to another. He never expressed any regret or guilt, but appeared an amoral and paradoxical persona. With these traits it was no wonder that he should come to epitomise the spirit of the Decadence. However, to establish the relationship between Pierrot and the world of the Decadence one needs to 'define' the word Decadence and as

Jean de Palacio says '[...] Verlaine disait que c'était chose impossible' (Palacio 1990: 234).³⁰⁸

Any attempt at defining what the word Decadence or Decadent betokens is exceedingly problematic and results in a labyrinth of terminological confusion. Where the difference between Decadence and Aestheticism lies, and where to draw the demarcation between Decadence and Symbolism is an equally impossible task, as they are not open to adequate definition, any more than is the grotesque. They are words that oscillate between meanings, evasive and ungraspable. In his 1893 essay *The Decadent Movement in Literature*, Arthur Symons reveals the slipperiness of the word:

The latest movement in European Literature has been called by many names, none of them quite exact or comprehensive – Decadence, Symbolism, Impressionism, for instance. It is easy to dispute over words, and we shall find that Verlaine objects to being called a Decadent, Maeterlinck to being called a Symbolist, Huysmans to being called an Impressionist ... But, taken frankly as epithets which express their own meaning, both Impressionism and Symbolism convey some notion of that new kind of literature which is perhaps more broadly characterized by the word Decadence After a fashion it is no doubt a decadence; it has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods, the Greek, the Latin, decadence: an intense self consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and a moral perversity. (Rodensky 2006: xxvii-xxviii).

Though Decadence is indicated as the overriding term, it is a combination of all the others, a bleeding together and melding of definitions and a transgression of terminological boundaries. At the heart of this instability is something iniquitous, tinged with perversity and the grotesque that ensures that no definition will ever be able to contain the idea of the Decadence.

³⁰⁸ Verlaine said that it was an impossible thing to do.

Pierrot with his own ambiguity and changeable nature was the natural intermediary for the ideas and forces that drove the Decadence.

The years from around 1870 through to 1900 were marked by a sense of lack of cohesion, indeterminacy and transition. There was an awareness that the patriarchal values, conformity to religious and social norms and domesticity were under serious threat. The 'new woman' was regarded as dangerous with her wish to have equal intellectual status with man and to ignore the hypocritical, double standard that prevailed in sexual morality. All the anxieties caused by the industrial changes, growing nationalism, economic depression and alterations of the status quo were expressed through the symbolism that dominated the arts. Here the figure of the *femme fatale* was in direct opposition to that of the masculine figure of the dandy and the androgyne and hermaphrodite were visibly dominant images.

The opposition of male and female was at the heart of visual and literary works which exposed the power play that was developing between the sexes. Masculine cultural traditions of genealogy, law, rationality and religion were seen as being under attack by disobedient, wild, uncontrollable and voracious female sexuality (Fletcher 1987: 67). This fear of the female, and the disquiet caused by a world that seemed to be disintegrating, led to an attempt to wallpaper over the cracks through an ever more dominant, tyrannical and vigorous imposition of the governing cultural, social, political and moral laws. It was against the imposition of this rigid control that the artists of the Decadence rebelled. They aimed to transgress the social order and break with

the behaviour dictated by the bourgeoisie. To do this they refused to accept the conventional rules that were part of the traditional vocabulary of the arts. Instead they adopted the contrived, the furtive and disconcerting, the morbid, deviant and the perverse. They attacked the distinctions of gender by assuming the ambiguous and contradictory role of the dandy which was a reaction against the perceived virility and strength of the 'new woman'. Barbey D'Aurevilley had established the interest in the dandy with his work on the English dandy Beau Brummell. Baudelaire went further by vaunting the role of the dandy in his essay *Le peintre de la vie moderne*.³⁰⁹ In this work he praised the attractions of the dandy and of the use of cosmetics. Max Beerbohm, a contemporary and friend of Beardsley, caused outrage with an article he submitted to *The Yellow Book* praising the use of cosmetics for use as a masculine beautifying tool. Adopting this pose with its reliance on cosmetics raised questions of what constituted sexual identity and of its ambivalent and indeterminate nature. For the Decadents the figure of Pierrot became intricately coupled to this ambiguous mixture of male and female, of the dandy and the use of make-up. Pierrot and the dandy appeared as inseparably joined, where appearance became indiscernible from being and reality from fantasy. The male was seen to feminise himself in response to the female's assumption of masculine attributes of power and forcefulness. The blurring of gender distinctions undermined the bastion of hereditary male power and control and subverted hierarchical structure and order. Théophile Gautier's work *Mademoiselle de Maupin* blurred these gender distinctions even further and became one of the texts that laid the foundation for the prevalence of the

³⁰⁹ *A painter of modern-day life.*

figures of the androgyne and the hermaphrodite so dominant in the Decadent aesthetic. *Mademoiselle de Maupin* explores abnormal and perverse love relations and the idea of the third sex, or hermaphrodite. The lead character, D'Albert, is in pursuit of his ideal woman and takes Rosette to be his lover. He falls for what he thinks is a handsome young man Théodore, who is really a woman with ambiguous sexual desires. Mademoiselle de Maupin, or Théodore, satisfies her sexual inclinations with both D'Albert and Rosette during the course of one night and then disappears. This treatment of indeterminate gender and perverse, sinister and twisted sexuality became central themes of the Decadence.³¹⁰ To this was also introduced the ugly and grotesque as agents of beauty. This represented a transgression of accepted aesthetics and values as D'Albert remarked, 'le beau et le grotesque, cette autre forme du gracieux' (Stokes 1992: 66).³¹¹ It was shock value thrown in the face of the establishment.

This mercurial, shocking, perverse, sinister, transgressive gender ambivalence was nowhere better seen than in the figure which became representative of all these traits, that of Pierrot. In this androgynously hermaphroditic white figure, who epitomised the tragic and sexless dandy, were exhibited all the deviant propensities, fears and fantasies central to decadent preoccupations. Pierrot was melancholy and Mephistophelean, he was icily detached from reality and from his own body, he brought with him

³¹⁰ Nowhere is this bizarre and perverse sexuality along with the dominant *femme fatale* and effeminate male dandy more compellingly revealed than in Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus* published in 1884. Rachilde was the *nom de plume* of Marguerite Vallette-Eymery (1860 - 1953), a French author who was prosecuted for obscenity for *Monsieur Vénus* in which a sadistic female transvestite destroys her young, effeminate male lover. It is the play of inverted gender, power, sexual desire, fetishism and sexual perversion that ensure that this work is representative of the Decadence.

³¹¹ The beautiful and the grotesque that other form of gracefulness.

the transgression of his *Commedia* past, as well as an indecisive sexual identity. Simultaneously this genderless and bodiless creature possessed all the traits contrary to societal morality. He raped, killed, stole, told lies, committed suicide and went mad. He was the macabre epitome of transgression and the perfect hybrid creature to hold the Decadent imagination in thrall. A creature permanently in a state of metamorphosis Pierrot mirrored the uncertainties and transitions of the time period. His became the figure that the artists used as the symbol of their own violations and rebellion against the confines of the society in which they lived. The pale figure of this whimsical, capricious clown permeated their work and swiftly gained the public's attention.

Ensor wrote that he 'threw aside the rules that are the enemy of convention' (Ensor 1999: 124)³¹² and Beardsley wrote 'if I am not grotesque then I am nothing' (Beardsley in Snodgrass 1989: 19). Both these artists felt stifled by the societal hierarchy that surrounded them and against which they openly rebelled. They employed the symbol of the whey-faced clown with his grotesque, hybrid sexuality, his fraught relationship with the sinister *femme fatale* and his transgression of all accepted social mores, as the representative of their own rebellion and disgust with their social milieu. For Giraud and Dowson this creature of madness and moonlight, of ethereality and fantasy was used to explore the passion and secretive desire that lurk beneath the façade of societal appearances. In both *Pierrot Lunaire* and *The Pierrot of the Minute* the sexual ambivalence of the white clown is prominent in his

³¹² Je délaissai les règles ennemies de l'invention.

relationship with the *femme fatale* epitomised by the Moon. The artists and poets chosen for discussion in this thesis all, in some manner, chose to identify with the figure of Pierrot. He became a part of them as they took on the attributes he represented in a conflation of identity and split subjectivity.

They were not alone in this. Pierrot became the representative of the Decadent artist and his world. Pierrot's marginality and mad vacillating between opposite states seemed to be the embodiment of the malaise that consumed the Decadent artists and their works. Thus it is that Pierrot's 'vague "jumble of fears and regrets" is as amorphous as his protean character, as the undistinguished whiteness of his blouse' (Storey 1978: 135). It is these vague disturbing fears, guilts and regrets that lurk in the dark shadows of the Decadence tainting it with the evanescent mists and equivocal nature of the nightmare. Amongst these pale mists floats the mask of the ashen clown.

The figure of Pierrot was used throughout the period of the Decadence. In the visual arts, as a representative of the melancholy and liminal artist, he is present in the works of Paul Klee, Odilon Redon, Gustav-Adolf Mossa, Kay Nielsen, Felicien Rops and others. In the twentieth century Egon Schiele used the figure to explore hybrid gender. It is also present in works by Picasso and André Derain. In music and dance his figure is present in the ballet *Petrushka* by Stravinsky, in the *Pierrot Lunaire* of Schoenberg³¹³ and

³¹³ Schoenberg's work was done using the translations of Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire* by the German poet Otto Erich Hartleben. Hartleben's translations were free interpretations and recreations rather than actual translations.

Granville Bantock's setting of *The Pierrot of the Minute*. More recently Roger Marsh has composed a *Pierrot Lunaire* based on the original poems by Giraud.

The reasons for the strong presence and representation of Pierrot in the Decadence are as indefinable as the term itself. This pale creature with his inability to integrate himself into society; possessing an ambivalent and indeterminate sexuality; a painted white mask, silent, melancholy, fearful of women, yet exhibiting perverse desires, was the perfect mirror for all the fears, obsessions and anxieties which haunted the Decadents. Pierrot's figure was a blank sign which these artists could use to question the meaning of language, society, culture and artistic creation itself. The whiteness of his garments with their appearance of limp, manipulable emptiness made Pierrot the ultimate morphologically transgressive symbol, one that could be used as the artist pleased and without the fear of it taking on any rigidity of meaning.

Though the Decadents aimed at transgressing the social order, there was within them an ambivalent need to be accepted and acknowledged by this self-same system. Ultimately they supported the tradition which they were attacking. It is through the constant interaction between the violation of the semiotic and the governing strictures of the symbolic that the process of change and alteration of the discourses and processes that govern our lives occurs. Like the carnival with its rampant, bawdy inversion and violation of the order of things, so the artists of the Decadence attempted to invert and alter the accepted societal structure that enclosed them. Though they

attempted to undermine and overthrow this structure they did not aim, nor could they, destroy it entirely, for without the governing structure they feared the dissolution, chaos and nothingness that might result in such a toppling. Pierrot became the transient symbol of their subversive attempt at changing the world around them.

Pierrot's position as a symbol of metamorphosis and transformation faded away after the First World War. Yet his moon shadow is ever present in moments of exuberant madness and mayhem, of pantomime and circus. His mercurial nature and anarchic energy might yet resurrect him from his pallid and airy sleeping place, floating on a moonbeam trapped in a crystal flacon.



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