

# Speaking and Singing Sexual Politics at the French Fin-de-siècle

## Amédée Pigeon and Paul Vidal's *L'amour dans les enfers*

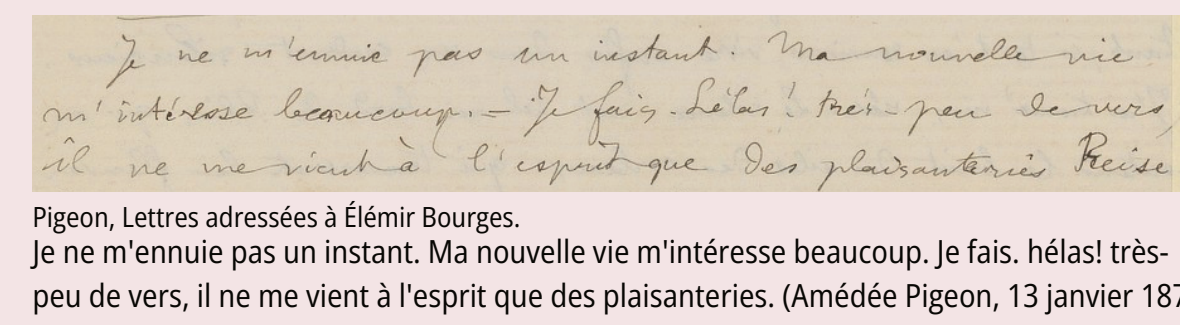
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### *L'amour dans les enfers*: Synopsis

Pierrot is in hell, joined later by Arlequin. They both miss the joys of life and miss their wives, Martine and Colombine. Socrates and Plato, also in hell, serve as a contrast to the two men in that they consider themselves above the troubles of love and lavish living. Eventually, Pierrot and Arlequin ask Pluto for their wives to join them in hell to cure their loneliness. At their arrival in hell, the women are unhappy to have left the world of the living just to see their dead-looking husbands. The women trick Pierrot and Arlequin into thinking that they plan on staying in hell when in reality they quickly escape and abandon the men there. After this event, Diotime comes to lecture the men and sings a female-empowering song about the role of women in romantic relationships.

### Letter to a Friend

15 years prior, Pigeon reveals an inclination towards comedy.



Pigeon, Lettres adressées à Étienne Bourgeois. Je ne m'ennuie pas un instant. Ma nouvelle vie m'intéresse beaucoup. Je fais, hélas! très-peu de vers, il ne me vient à l'esprit que des plaisanteries. (Amédée Pigeon, 13 janvier 1878)

### Objectives

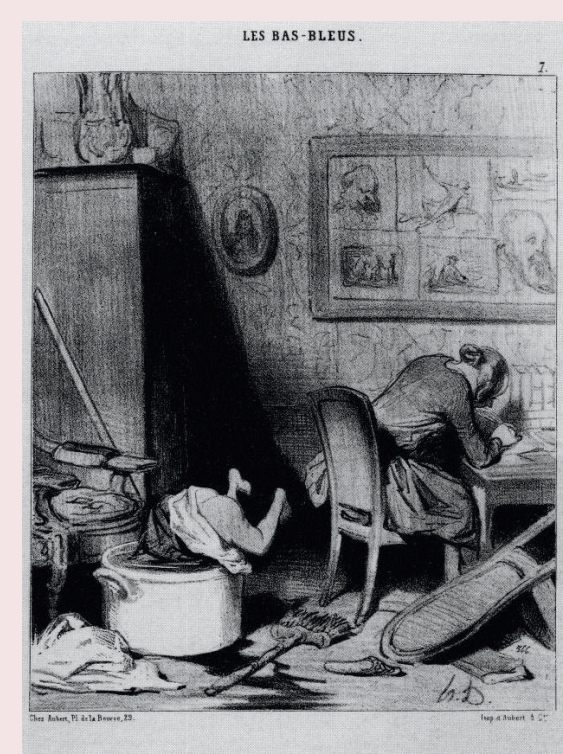
Prove that *L'amour des les enfers* depicts the *femme nouvelle* of the 19th century positively through the script by Amédée Pigeon and the music by Paul Vidal.

### Methodology

- Comparative stylistic analysis
- Analysis of musical and oral phrases and key symbolism (Lavignac)
- Consultation of experts of the *Petit théâtre* and of musical analysis
- Analysis of primary sources

### The *Femme nouvelle*

After Germany's defeat of France in 1870, France was weak, leading to the men attributing the country's issues to the emancipation of women as well as the legalization of divorce and the emasculation of men. The men in France began to spread their fear of women taking over in society under the title of *la femme nouvelle*.



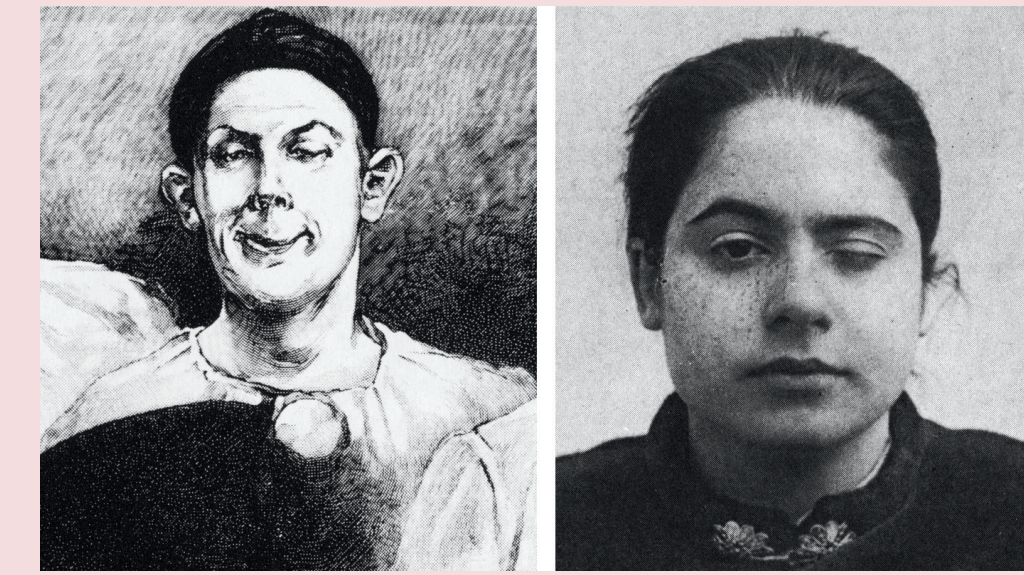
Daumier, La mère est dans le feu de la composition, l'enfant est dans l'eau de la baignoire!



Stanek, Buffalo cycles américains.

### Pierrot: Feminine and Hysterical

Transitions from a lovesick zanni to a jealous, murderous and genderly ambiguous character. Begins to be played by women in plays and operas.



Left: Lanos, Pierrot assassin de sa femme. Right: Londe, Hysterical Wink in Julie Pedneault-Deslauriers, "Pierrot L." Originally published in *Nouvelle iconographie de Salpêtrière 2*.

Physically described as between the two genders. Movements mimicking depictions of mental health patients of the time, making him look hysterical. Hysteria is derived from the Greek word for uterus, intrinsically linking the illness to women in the 19th century.

### Pierrot: The Puppet

The *petit théâtre de Paris* used lever puppets. These were puppets propped up on boxes containing the levers to make them move. The only certainty about Pierrot's physical appearance in this play is that he looked corpse-like.

Inspiration from other 19th century plays such as *Pierrot Posthume* by Théophile Gautier and *Pierrot Fantôme* by E. Dubreuil and L. Stapleaux, with emphasis on Pierrot: assassin de sa femme by Paul Margueritte since it also contained music composed by Paul Vidal.

### *Cœur des ombres heureuses*

- Parody of the men's delusions since they idealize their environment and think their wives will be happy to stay with them in hell.
- Use of the Baroque Pastoral style, associated with beautiful countryside settings, to support parody.
- Use of parallel thirds, compound meter (12/8), drones on the notes of the tonic chord and a distinction between concertino (voices) and ripieno groups (broken chords).
- Overly static harmony (22 measures of tonic) symbolizing the static and passive roles of the men in the play.
- Key of G major symbolizing rustic and jolly feelings that support the pastoral idea.
- All the pieces are sung by women, representing their power and control over the narrative.



Vidal, *Cœur des ombres heureuses*.

### Chanson

- A Sicilienne, which possesses an active rhythm (dance) as part of the style and a moving harmony, sung by the two female characters, symbolizes their motion and agency in the piece.
- Siciliennes are also commonly associated with the pastoral ideal. The women take control of the parody by openly making fun of the men and by using the pastoral-related style to mock the first piece. The key of E minor used here is said to represent sad and agitated feelings.



Vidal, *Chanson*.

### Chant de Diotime

- Sung by Diotime, who is introduced, like in Plato's Symposium, by Socrates, as a figure better-suited than him to discuss the topic of love.
- Closely resembles a short recitative and aria: the first part is a static instrumental accompaniment that supports free singing in an improvisatory style in a slightly lower register than the part that follows, the aria, in a moving compound time, where regular eight bars phrases, divisible into two equal parts, are interspersed with short melodic repetitions in the accompaniment.
- Diotime takes the role of a prima donna in the piece, who, in the 19th century, becomes a diva, a goddess. True figure of female authority, Diotime has the last word in this play dominated by active, powerful, mocking and divine women.

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~1576: Piero/Pagliaccio/Pedrolino begins to appear *Commedia dell'arte* theatres across Italy.



~1820: Jean-Gaspard Deburau popularizes his version of Pierrot



1873: *Pierrot Fantôme* by E. Dubreuil and L. Stapleaux



1891: *L'amour dans les enfers* by Amédée Pigeon and Paul Vidal



~1660: Pierrot is established in France (introduced to the public in 1665 through Molière's *Don Juan: le festin de pierre*)

1847: *Pierrot Posthume* by Théophile Gautier (re-published in 1882)

1888: *Pierrot: assassin de sa femme* by Paul Margueritte