

STANISŁAW MONIUSZKO ACADEMY OF MUSIC IN GDAŃSK

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Recording of the artistic work

1-6 Maurice Ravel – *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, M. 68

[1] Prelude	[3:42]
[2] Fugue	[3:03]
[3] Forlane	[6:54]
[4] Rigaudon	[3:21]
[5] Minuet	[5:21]
[6] Toccata	[4:20]

7-9 Maurice Ravel – *Gaspard de la nuit*, M. 55

[7] Ondine	[7:22]
[8] Le Gibet	[7:07]
[9] Scarbo	[9:47]

Total recording time : [50:57]

Performed by: Yuchen Hua, piano

Concert Hall of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk

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Description of the artistic work

The combination of neoclassical style and European cultural influences in Maurice Ravel's piano works, as exemplified by the compositions *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit*

Abstract

French composer and pianist Maurice Ravel is one of the most important composers of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and a master of "harmonic timbre." His piano works not only contain many innovative solutions but also draw on tradition. He drew on the Viennese Classical style and the French Rococo, introducing innovations and shaping a unique musical language. His harmonic and timbre ideas profoundly influenced subsequent generations of composers and opened new directions for the development of piano music.

This dissertation focuses on two representative works by Maurice Ravel from different periods: the suites *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit*. The author will examine the circumstances of the creation of these pieces, the diversity of their artistic expression, formal structure and the piano techniques employed, and will help us to gain a deeper understanding of the ideas that these outstanding compositions bring to our contemporary piano performance.

The work analyzes the features of Ravel's musical language in terms of "style", "national music", "musical image" and "harmonic texture". The work consists of six chapters. The first presents the life and main piano works of Maurice Ravel; the second focuses on the composer's musical style; the third indicates traditional elements in his work (understood as references to the musical heritage of previous eras); the fourth presents neoclassical compositional techniques present in the piano suites *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit*; the fifth contains an analysis of elements of European folk music in both of these suites; the sixth compares the piano techniques and musical expression of both compositions with the author's personal performance experience and focuses on the analysis of technical difficulties, performance problems, and practice methods for each piece.

Keywords: impressionism, neoclassicism, musical aesthetic style, rococo, classicism

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Introduction

Choosing a topic

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) was a distinguished French composer. His musical output encompasses piano works, songs, chamber music, opera, ballet, symphonic music, and other musical genres. He achieved particular success in orchestration, earning a reputation as the "master of orchestral color." He deeply imbued his piano music with the beauty of the timbres of orchestral instruments, thus making a profound contribution to the symphonic understanding of piano works.

As a Chinese student of piano in Europe, I encountered Ravel's music and discovered that its aura and harmonic color were full of oriental shades. Playing his works, I recognized their distinctive oriental style. Studying Ravel's compositions, I became convinced that his exceptional control over musical timbre and structure fit the concept of "using simplicity to control complexity," common in Eastern art. This concept emphasizes capturing the essence of things and assumes that even the most complex situations can be resolved using the simplest methods—the principle of "twice the result with half the effort." The sound of the Chinese *guqin* instrument creates an atmosphere of spaciousness through its specific timbre; similarly, in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Ravel uses transparent textures and precise timbre design, aligning with the modernist "less is more" approach, to achieve a subtle effect similar to oriental aesthetics. This cross-cultural dialogue allowed musical aesthetics from the East and West to rediscover common roots. Ravel's approach to tone color and structure can be read as a dialogue with the "spirit of freedom" in Eastern art. Viewed from a cross-cultural perspective, the fusion of Eastern and Western artistic aesthetics can enrich the interpretation of Ravel's music and help us return to the essence of music as a shared emotion of human beings.

The performance of the melodious and long-lasting main theme in the piece *Ondine* from the *Gaspard de la Nuit* suite is reminiscent of the use of the technique "yin rou" in playing the Chinese *guzheng* instrument, which involves lightly touching the strings with the fingertips, imitating water ripples through subtle *vibrato* and gradual changes in sound intensity. Playing technique *Legato très doux et très expressif* allows the realization of Ravel's desire to

achieve a "fluid timbre" on a modern piano, while at the same time referring to the aesthetic principle of a "live and expressive" sound in oriental music.

The use of the left pedal in *Le Gibet* can be compared to the "apparent sound" technique used in playing the Chinese *xiao* flute, which involves creating an elusive sound through breath control. The hazy piano sounds created using the *una corda* pedal are reminiscent of the artistic concept of "separate sounds but related meanings" in traditional oriental music.

These and other elements mean that when I perform Ravel's music – and I do so with great enthusiasm – I benefit from the additional inspiration that comes from my knowledge of traditional Chinese musical culture.

Ravel is often compared with the second representative of impressionism – Debussy, but when we thoroughly analyze and compare the works of both composers, we will discover that Ravel is in fact, a composer who – unlike Debussy – cannot be assigned to one trend. His understanding of music and individual musical language go far beyond the pattern of impressionism. Ravel's work does not only contains new compositional techniques of impressionistic music with characteristics of the period, but also bears the hallmarks of moderation and rationality classicism and contains strong influences emotional and ideological typical of the period Romanticism. Ravel has the courage to break stereotypes and discover new ways of musical expression, not while losing appreciation for the musical forms of past centuries. At the turn of the century 19th and 20th centuries, when many trends prevailed simultaneously artistic, Ravel created his own musical world.

The importance of research

This work analyzes and examines two representative works by Maurice Ravel: *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit*. The fact that they come from different periods of his work makes it possible to identify changes in style at different stages of the composer's life. Studying these two works can deepen the understanding of the ideas of late romanticism, folklorism, neoclassicism and other creative styles, and consequently should also be of importance to performers, allowing them to build a more conscious interpretation of the works based on knowledge of the ideas that inspired the composer during their creation.

Composed in 1908, the suit *Gaspard de la nuit* is the most mature and representative piano piece of Ravel's style, a piece of high value artistic and aesthetic. The work is not only

presents elements of romantic expression, but also exhibits many features of impressionist music. *Gaspard de la nuit* was named one of the most difficult piano pieces in the world from its inception, and many internationally renowned pianists have it in their concert repertoire.

The piano suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin* was completed in 1917. It falls within the neoclassical trend. The music is exquisite and graceful, and at the same time, the composer does not limit himself to classical harmony, but employs an expanded and impressionistic tonality, undefined timbre, which makes the piece shimmer with misty beauty.

This work takes the above two piano pieces as the object of research and conducts a series of analyses to identify their expression. It demonstrates, that Ravel integrates in his works many traditional compositional techniques, combines diversity European national music and the spirit of classicism, uses contemporary, advanced compositional techniques and concise means of expression, and presents unique aesthetic interests.

Current Status of Chinese and European Research

Research by European scientists on Ravel's work :

- Theodore Baker, *Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* (Literary Licensing, LLC:2014.08); Author short summarizes the history of Ravel's work.
- Friedrich Blume, Ludwig Finscher, *Die Musik in Geschichte and Gegenwart* (*Music in history and present*. Metzler: 1994.10); The book concisely explains Ravel's educational path and tells about the process of creating his works, the features of his style, compositional experience and several important turning points in Ravel's life.
- Helene Jourdan-Morhange, Vlado Perlemuter, *Ravel According to Ravel*; Discussions between the two artists on all of Ravel's piano works – were recorded in 1950 by Radio France and later published in print under the title *Ravel According to Ravel* . Vlado Perlemuter was a Polish-French pianist, professor at the Paris Conservatoire, who studied all Ravel's piano works from composer himself. During a series of radio broadcasts, he describes the necessary skills in playing the piano, necessary for the correct interpretation of Ravel's compositions, including rhythm control, performance expression and shaping techniques sound. Hélène Jourdan-Morhange was a famous French violinist, a friend of the composer, to whom he dedicated his *Sonata* for violin and piano.

- Red. Deborah Mawer, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); The book contains articles by various authors who conduct research on various aspects of Ravel's personality, aesthetics and work.
- Olivier Messiaen, Yvonne Loriod-Messiaen, *Analyzes of the Piano Works of Maurice Ravel* (Éditions Durand, 2005); Olivier Messiaen focuses on the analysis of three important piano works by Ravel: *Ma Mère l'Oye*, *Gaspard de la nuit* and *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, revealing the harmonic richness, rhythmic subtlety, formal inventiveness and instrumental creativity of Ravel's musical thinking.

Research by Chinese scientists on Ravel's works :

The achievements of Chinese researchers currently include over 900 items topics related to Ravel, discussing the composer's work in terms of issues such as style, harmony, musical form, genre and performance problems.

Authorized by Friends of Music in China Society *The New Standard Music Dictionary*, published by Music Publishing House, summarizes the achievements of Maurice Ravel, drawing attention to the chronology of his work while briefly explaining the evolution of the composer's creative style.

There are also European and American items, which have been fully translated into Chinese. These are: *Analyzes of the Piano Works of Maurice Ravel* by Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod-Messiaen, *Some Problems of Music Aesthetics* Ernst Hermann Meyer, *Ravel* by Jean Echenoz and *Ravel Orchestral Music* Laurence Davies.

Most of the literature known in China contains analyses of Maurice Ravel's works only in general terms. A large proportion of Chinese piano students do not understand the cultural foundation of his work, which means they miss the true meaning of musical expression and risk becoming mere "competitive athletes" on the keyboard. This is also important reason for whose author decided to conduct this research.

Research methods

The basic element of research is to learn monographs, scientific journals, articles posted on the Internet and other scholarly sources of information about Ravel. Next comes the

comparative analysis method and the method of summarizing the experience gained:

- Research method literature: familiarization with the relevant literature about Ravel and his piano suites *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit* in order to understand his creative techniques, biography and the circumstances of the creation of his works.
- Comparative analysis method: comparative analysis of Ravel's works from the early, middle and late periods and identification of the features of his musical style, showing his passion for tradition and implementation various elements of European music and compositional techniques.
- Method of summarizing experience: building on existing results research, combined with my previous educational and performance experience, I will conduct a more detailed analysis of the performance techniques and musical expression of both pieces in order to show the diversity of creative concepts and the richness of expression and color of Maurice Ravel's musical works.

Chapter 1. Introduction to Ravel's Life and Work

1.1 Brief biographical sketch

Maurice Ravel, one of France's greatest composers, was born in Ciboure , a small mountain town in the south of France, and grew up in a home steeped in music. His father was a Swiss-born French engineer who loved music and literature. His mother was Spanish of Basque descent, so Ravel was very familiar with Spanish folk music and demonstrated a deep interest and attachment to Spanish national culture.

Maurice Ravel began studying piano at the age of seven and demonstrated incredible musical talent. By the age of twelve, he had mastered many complex piano techniques and began composing. In 1889, he entered the Paris Conservatoire and gave his first piano recital. He studied piano, harmony, counterpoint, composition, and music theory under the tutelage of renowned French musicians Charles -Wilfrid de Beriot, Émile Pessarda, André Gedalge and Gabriel Fauré .

Ravel was strongly influenced by Symbolist poetry, and musically, he drew inspiration from the colorful harmonies of Emmanuel Chabrier and Erik Satie. He adored the works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Camille Saint- Saëns, Claude Debussy, and the Russian Big Five. During his studies, he constantly searched for his own musical language, pursued unconventional creative ideas, and soon developed his unique " Ravel style."¹

Ravel's creative path was marked by ups and downs. He participated in the Prix de Rome competition several times, but without success. After his third failure, when Ravel failed even to make it through the qualifying rounds, a scandal erupted, resulting in a change of management at the Paris Conservatoire. Ravel became a member of the group Les Apaches, founded in 1903 to bring together musicians and writers around the idea of a new art form, and later co-founded the Société Musicale Indépendante , one of whose goals was to promote original and stylistically diverse works. During World War I, he participated in dangerous warfare as a truck driver in the French army. After the war, he struggled with health problems for the rest of his life. In 1932, Ravel was involved in a car accident and suffered a head injury. He soon developed hemiparesis, and Ravel lost his ability to work. In December 1937, while in a coma following brain surgery, Maurice Ravel died at the age of sixty-two.

¹ Ludwig Finscher, Friedrich Blume, *Die Musik in Geschichte and Gegenwart*, Metzler 1994, p. 2-4.

Ravel's creative path throughout his life was full of failures, he endured constant blows and adversities, but he managed to create his own unique musical language, which enriched the music of France at that time and became a treasure in the history of world music.²

Ravel's musical output encompassed, in addition to piano pieces, a wide range of other categories:

Orchestral music:

- *Rapsodie espagnole* (M. 54, 1907–1908) – a suite consisting of four movements: *Prélude à la nuit*, *Malagueña*, *Habanera*, *Feria*,
- *Daphnis et Chloé* (M. 57, 1909–1912) – ballet, later adapted into two orchestral suites,
- *La valse* (M. 72, 1919–1920) – dance poem for orchestra,
- *Boléro* (M.81, 1928) – originally composed for ballet,
- *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in the orchestral version (M. 68a, 1919) – a piece adapted from the piano suite of the same title,
- orchestral arrangements *Tableaux d'une exposition* of Modest Mussorgsky (1922) and *Sarabande* by Debussy.

Chamber music:

- *String Quartet in F major* (M. 35, 1902–1903),
- *Introduction and Allegro* for harp, flute, clarinet and string quartet (M. 46, 1905),
- *Piano Trio in A minor* (M. 67, 1914),
- *Sonata* for violin and cello (unnumbered, 1920–1922),
- *Sonata* for violin and piano (unnumbered, 1923–1927).

Concerts:

- *Piano Concerto in G major* (M. 83, 1929–1931),
- *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in D major* (M. 82, 1929–1930).

Vocal and instrumental pieces:

- *Shéhérazade* (M. 41, 1903),
- *Chansons madécasses* (M. 78 1925–1926).
- *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (M. 71, 1920–1925) – one-act opera.

² Jean Echenoz, transl. Yu Zhongxian: *Ravel* [M]. Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House, Changsha 2017, p. 6.

1.2 Ravel's piano works

Taking into account stylistic changes and historical criteria, Ravel's piano work can be divided into three periods: early (1889–1905), middle (1906–1914) and late (1915–1937).

1.2.1 Early works (1889–1905)

Ravel's early creative style was influenced by the poetic style of the symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898) and other innovative ideas of the time. This interest in new cultural trends was reflected in Ravel's music itself, where unconventional harmonic solutions can be found even at an early stage.

In 1895, Ravel published his first work in print, *Minuet antique*. In 1897, he completed a two-movement composition for two pianos, *Sites auriculaires*, the first movement of which, *Habanera*, referring to Spanish folk music, was later used in *Rapsodie espagnole*. At the age of 24, Ravel composed *Pavane pour une infante défunte* for piano, and two years later he created his first impressionistic masterpiece – *Jeux d'eau*. Composed between 1903 and 1905 (for a composition competition), the *Sonatine* had a harmonious structure, beautiful melody, and the classical grace of French music. Ravel's works from this period were relatively short. The most noticeable feature of these works is that they require the performer to make frequent changes in playing style (in terms of technique and textural changes) within a relatively short period of time.

1.2.2 Works of the middle period (1905–1914)

As his fully individual style began to develop, Ravel gradually reached the apogee of his creativity. In 1905, he composed the piano suite *Miroirs*. In 1908, he completed *Rapsodie espagnole* for orchestra, which was later adapted for piano and became one of his best-known works. In 1910, he composed the piano four-hand piece *Ma mère l'Oye*, full of fairy-tale colors. Ravel's suite *Gaspard de la nuit*, based on three poems by the French poet Aloysius Bertrand (1807–1841), employs bold harmonic solutions and great timbral contrasts. As a virtuosic work, *Gaspard de la nuit* has been praised by Phil Coulter as the pinnacle of the composer's creativity. In 1911, Ravel composed *Valses noble et sentimentales*.

1.2.3 Late works (1915–1937)

After his mother's death in 1918 and the experience of the First World War, Ravel's perception of life deepened and his compositional style became more restrained. The music of this period is more rigorous, and the style takes on classical characteristics. Ravel inherited

the noble and elegant tradition of French music while introducing new solutions in the use of leitmotifs, rhythm, harmonic texture, ornamentation, and so on. In 1917, Ravel composed *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, his last suite for solo piano, four movements of which were later orchestrated by him.

In 1930–1931, the composer wrote two piano concertos: *the Piano Concerto* in G major and *the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* in D major. The latter was written especially for the pianist Paul Wittgenstein (1887–1961), who had lost his right hand in the war.

A master of orchestration, Ravel adapted some of his piano works for symphony orchestra. He once told the French-Polish pianist Vlado Perlemuter (1904–2002), who specialized in performing Ravel's piano works, "To play my piano works, the first thing you have to think about is the sound of the orchestra."³ This is undoubtedly key information for a performer when exploring tonal color.

³ Hong Shikui, *Selected piano works by Ravel*, [M]. People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 1988, p. 1.

Chapter 2. The Aesthetics of Ravel's Musical Style

2.1 The Combination of Impressionism and Neoclassicism

The late 19th century saw the flourishing of various musical movements. A tendency toward diversification is evident during this period, as exemplified by some composers who simultaneously represented multiple styles. Ravel was one of these, characterized by his adoption and borrowing of various creative elements for his own use. He was not the "inventor" of a completely new musical style, but rather a master at utilizing tradition to create modern works. Ravel's early works largely reflected the harmonic tendencies of Impressionism, but Ravel himself did not consider himself influenced by Debussy. ⁴This harmonic innovation fits well with the transformations taking place in late 19th-century music. On the other hand, Ravel's gaze on the past and stylistic allusions to early music were evident, likely initiated by his mentor, Gabriel Fauré.

Gabriel Fauré was Ravel's teacher when he was studying at the Paris Conservatoire. He strictly adhered to the principles of classical composition, and Ravel was greatly influenced by his professor, shaping his rigorous and meticulous compositional style. Although his mentor himself followed a traditionalist trend in music, he encouraged his students to explore diverse styles, which infused vitality into Ravel's bold creative ideas and was the most direct reason for his development of a stylistically rich musical language.

As the years passed and he gained experience, Ravel attempted to break free from the constraints of Impressionism, drawing on Baroque genres and earlier compositional techniques. In his own words, his musical ideal was a return to the older, purer French tradition.⁵ For this reason, we cannot simply define Ravel's piano works as Impressionist or Neoclassical.

2.2 Unity, symmetry and balance of Ravel's musical aesthetics

2.2.1. Ravel's Views on Art

"Art exists to compensate for nature's shortcomings. Art is a beautiful lie. The world awakened by my music is real, while Debussy evokes memories of dreams," wrote Maurice

⁴ Michael Stegemann, transl. Song Ling, *Maurice Ravel* [M], People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 2014, p. 63.

⁵ Zhang Min, *A Brief History of Piano Art* [M], Henan University Press, Zhengzhou 2008, p. 16.

Ravel.⁶

Ravel's views on the truth and beauty of music were based primarily on his belief that there must be a rational balance between unfettered inspiration and the disciplined art of creation, and that musical sophistication and perfection of form must be achieved through the refinement of craft. Ravel wrote in a letter to Alexis Roland-Manuel (one of his students) that he could not accept works that were considered "true" despite the imperfections of their composition. In his opinion, what is "true" but incapable of achieving technical perfection is not worth boasting about. If we abandon the pursuit of beauty in technique and the work itself, the composition becomes worthless. Ravel described himself as "a craftsman of tone arrangement".⁷ He had an innate affinity for difficult compositional techniques and a sensitivity to the elegant beauty of music, and as a student he often quoted Jules Massenet's dictum: "To master one's own craft, one must study the craft of others".⁸

Emphasizing beauty and authenticity of expression, Ravel focused on technique but avoided rigid academic formulas. Natural harmonies, spontaneous rhythms, and free melodies born of pure will were the result of a sensual pursuit of beauty. Ravel was fully aware that the more brilliant the music, the greater the need for appropriate texture and precise musical language. Therefore, both an external, calm attitude and an inner spirituality must be cultivated to transform the mystery contained in music into something living. He said, "I constantly strive for technical perfection because I am certain I will never achieve it; the important thing is to always approach it gradually".⁹

2.2.2 The union of beauty and simplicity

The thoughtful, deliberate, and refined logic of Ravel's music was also inspired by François Couperin (1668–1733), a composer working at the height of the French Baroque period. The influence of his aesthetic, expressive, sublime style, and calm and objective temperament are elements that continue in Ravel's musical works—beautiful harmonies, elegant melodies, precisely crafted rhythms, and multi-layered textures; all of this gives listeners the pleasure of experiencing beauty.

⁶ Helene Jourdan-Morhange, transl. Zhang Hui, *Ravel et nous* [M], Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, Shanghai 2014, p. 15

⁷ Arbie Orenstein, *Reflections on Maurice Ravel's Creativity* [J], National Central University Journal of Humanities Vol. 61, June 2016, p. 236.

⁸ Arbie Orenstein, transl. Sumei Li. *Ravel's Musical Aesthetics* [J], "Musical Art", magazine of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, 1986 (2), p. 54-60.

⁹ Shen Xuan. *Outstanding Master of Orchestral Color* [M], People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 1983, p. 6.

Ravel's pursuit of the pure beauty of music itself and his sense of belonging to French and European culture are the spiritual roots of his exquisite artistry and elegant style. He admired the clarity and skill of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's creative craft and considered his own music (in a sense) "quite ordinary, nothing but Mozart".¹⁰ He also admired Johannes Brahms for his melodic inventiveness and orderly formal structure. He highly valued the exquisite harmony and elegant lyrical style of Franz Schubert, but could not accept his excessive repetitiveness and consequently excessive length. He loved the spontaneous humor of Alexis-Emmanuel Chabrier and admired the mood of Charles Gounod's vocal works. He praised the innovations of Claude Debussy and Frédéric Chopin in poetic piano playing. Ravel rejected the philosophical concept of music fulfilling a metaphysical role, seeing it rather as a construction, absolute beauty in itself.

The elegance and sophistication of French music in a historical sense, combined with the simplicity, rigor, and logical order of Ravel's personality, constitute the entirety of his work. He is not interested in pompous style; his music is almost always simple, clear, and elegant. Ravel's individual musical style emerged in the late 19th century, during the great popularity of Richard Wagner's art. However, it remained in opposition to the Wagnerian movement and contributed to shaping a new, impressionistic-neoclassical direction in French music at the dawn of the 20th century.

Maintaining balance in the dialectical approach of simplicity and beauty created a "Ravel style" unique in the history of French national music.

2.2.3 Balance between classical symmetry and impressionistic elements

Despite growing up in the atmosphere of emerging Impressionism in France, Ravel was also a keen enthusiast of the music of earlier periods – in his youth, he wrote music that often drew on early patterns. For example, *Minuet antique* features a traditional period structure and neo-Baroque styling, revealing the gentle rhythm of the dance so popular in the Baroque period. Another example is *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*, which is based on the foundation of an old court dance, evoking times gone by with the help of quiet and calm melodic-rhythmic phrases.

The interest in traditional genres and forms is also evident in the final phase of Ravel's work, as exemplified by the suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, which is his largest work in the old

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 6.

style, containing forms such as fugue and toccata. The title works the name of Couperin appears – composer and harpsichordist, one of the main representatives of the French Baroque period.¹¹

The *Gaspard de la nuit* cycle also displays references to classical forms. The final movement, *Scarbo*, is in a free sonata form. Traditional techniques of shaping form are also evident throughout the cycle—sequencing, progression, elements of periodic construction, etc. Ravel intended this piece to be performed strictly at the tempo indicated in the score, without additional tempo changes such as *accelerando*, *ritardando*, or *rubato*, and in such a way that the playing style resembled that of the Baroque-Classical period, not the Romantic period.

Ravel has been hailed as a prophet of neoclassicism, but he disagreed with the neoclassical practice of Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971). Ravel's music inherits the spirit of the tradition while significantly developing the artistic expression of a new genre, juxtaposing classical symmetry with the element of surprise. As Ravel once said, "My music is far from revolution; it is only evolution".¹²

¹¹ Donald Jay Grout, Claude V. Puscas, *History of Western Music* [M], People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 2010. p. 138.

¹² Laurence Davies, transl. Wen Hong, *Ravel Orchestral Music*, BBC Guide 29: [M]. Huashan Literature and Art Publishing House 1999, p. 28.

Chapter 3. Reconstruction of the traditional cultural path in Ravel's musical works – a dialogue between classical form and modern language

3.1 Heritage and Innovation in the Classical Music Tradition

In Ravel's works, elements of 20th-century post-tonal harmony are incorporated into a strictly classical formal structure, creating a unique neoclassical style.

Neoclassicism in music is an important trend that emerged in the first half of the 20th century. It embraces a return to the musical forms and structures of the Baroque and Classical periods, opposing the emotional overload of Romanticism and the grand, late Romantic narrative. It also contrasts with the emerging expressionism and atonal music of the same period.

Neoclassicism reigned from approximately 1910 to 1950, reaching its peak popularity after World War I. It was a response to the turmoil of war and social change, as well as a reflection on Romanticism and Impressionism. Neoclassical composers attempted to restore rationality and order to music by returning to traditional forms and genres: Baroque (such as the fugue, suite, concerto grosso) and Classical (such as the sonata form and rondo). Counterpoint, balanced phrasing, and formal logic naturally became important elements. They avoided excessive expression of personal emotion in their compositions and strived for "absolute music," meaning the beauty of the musical form itself, not its narrative. Their music is characterized by clear instrumentation, transparent texture, and the use of smaller orchestral instruments—in contrast to the large Neo-Romantic orchestras. They place modern musical language, along with 20th-century harmony (with elements such as the emancipation of dissonance, modalism, and polytonality) and rhythmic innovations (such as complex time signatures), within a classical framework. Neoclassicism is not a complete imitation of classical music, but rather a reinterpretation of some of its elements through the lens of contemporary sonic language, paving the way for the return of tonality to 20th-century music.

3.1.1 Contemporary interpretation of sonata form

Sonatine (1903–1905)

This work is a tribute to classical forms of the 18th century, and in particular to the style of Couperin's harpsichord works. In this work, Ravel adheres closely to the three-movement structure of the classical sonata cycle (movements: fast – slow – fast). The first movement of

the work is in sonata form with clearly contrasting themes and a logically developed development section. The second movement is a minuet with a clear division into musical periods and distinct cadenzas, which clearly refers to the compositional tradition of Haydn and Mozart. Despite the use and accumulation of numerous five-note chords, the tonal structure is stable, and the tonic -dominant relationship is clear.

String Quartet in F major (1902–1903)

The piece follows the traditional four-movement structure of a classical string quartet (Allegro – Scherzo – Adagio – Finale) with a finale in the form of a sonata rondo. The musical themes are developed in a classical manner; for example, the main theme of the first movement is developed using techniques such as sequential repetition and inversion, reflecting the logic of motif development in Beethoven's oeuvre.

Although the harmony has an impressionistic tone, the overall structure fully corresponds to the classical paradigm and was described by Debussy as "as rigorous as the works of the classical masters".¹³

3.1.2 Renewal of the Baroque Suite

The Baroque suite is a cyclical form consisting of a series of dances, usually in the same key but contrasting in tempo and character. In addition to dances, suites also included non-dance pieces, such as a prelude, aria, variations, and fugue.

3.1.2.1 Baroque evolutionary forms: prelude, fugue and toccata

A Baroque prelude is typically a short piece that serves as an introduction to a larger work. It is typically improvisational in nature, developed through evolution, and serves as an introduction to the main part of the piece and to establish the key.

The Baroque fugue is the pinnacle of polyphonic music. Its texture is entirely subordinated to a complex polyphonic structure, the result of a strict logic of voice direction and the contrapuntal relationship between them.

The texture of the Baroque fugue is a perfect balance between rationality and sensitivity:

- Rational aspects: strict rules of voice leading, tonal logic and structural framework.

¹³ Runyang Yu , *General History of Western Music* [M], Shanghai Music Press, Shanghai 2003, p. 327.

- Emotional aspect: conveying emotional tension through the interaction of voices and the differentiation of sound timbre.

Such a strictly polyphonic texture reflects not only the scientific character of the Baroque fugue, but also provides a technical model for later polyphonic music, e.g. 20th-century fugue.

The toccata also gained considerable popularity in the Baroque period. Typically improvised in nature and written for keyboard, the fast tempo often showcases a virtuosic element.

3.1.2.2 Dance forms in the Baroque period

Baroque dance music became the basis for the instrumental suite. Dances were typically in two-part form and characterized by distinct rhythmic structure. Although some of the dances were originally of folk origin, they were elevated to a high artistic level, on par with courtly dances.

During the Baroque period, dance music was composed in a way in which polyphony and homophony coexisted. Most dances primarily employ polyphony, such as the allemande and courante, with independent and balanced voices; other dances, such as the sarabande and minuet, tend to homophonize the texture, emphasizing the main melody and harmonic support. The bass voice sometimes uses a pedal note or *ostinato*, as in the passacaglia, to emphasize the content of the higher voices implementing the variations. Each type of dance music has its own distinctive rhythmic model, and the structure of the whole is based on the development of this basic rhythm. Improvised ornaments, such as trills, turns, and other elements, are often added to the melodic lines.

3.1.2.3 Homage to the Baroque – *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1914–1919)

Le Tombeau de Couperin is a 20th-century reconstruction of a Baroque suite, consisting of a prelude, fugue, three dances, and a toccata. The dances *Forlana*, *Rigaudon*, and *Menuet* directly reference the Baroque dance genre, characterized by regular rhythmic shaping and symmetrical sentence structure. Couperin's name in the title is Ravel's homage to the French Baroque era.

The piano version of the suite is divided into six parts:

Prelude: a flowing semiquaver structure using imitation; *Fugue*: a strict three-voice polyphony based on a simple theme, combining 20th-century harmony and baroque counterpoint; *Forlana*: a lively rhythm dotted in $6/8$ meter with alternating polyphonic and

homophonic textures, a tribute to Italian baroque dance music; *Rigaudon*: a lively dance in even meter with a contrasting, lyrical theme in the middle section (*Moins vif*) and colorful timbre; *Minuet*: an elegant courtly dance in triple meter with a three-part ABA' structure, the middle part (*Musette*) uses chordal parallelism and color contrast; *Toccata*: a virtuoso finale using a series of fast sound structures.

Baroque roots of each part:

Prelude: a style of free improvisation, similar to Couperin's keyboard preludes .

Fugue: a direct descendant of the Baroque fugue form, but with post-tonal harmony. It develops according to the Bachian model, strictly adhering to the principles of the presentation of themes and responses, the placement of connectors, the formal division into exposition and transformation sections, and even adopting an overall harmonic plan similar to Bachian fugues.

Forlana and *Rigaudon*: a revival of French and Italian folk dance forms of the 17th century. From bar 57 of the *Forlana*, the theme is presented in two-voice imitation, defying the hierarchical relationship between melody and accompaniment. The use of this polyphonic technique clearly deepens the multi-voice, Baroque nature of the piece. The left hand frequently employs *staccato* articulation and repetitive rhythmic patterns to enhance the sense of danceability, imitating the stability of the Baroque *basso continuo*. This contrasts with the dotted rhythm in the right hand part. Numerous ornaments, including mordents and trills, also echo Couperin's style. Interestingly, Ravel writes most of the ornaments as grace notes, rather than using their *de facto* corresponding symbols. This is due to the frequent occurrence (within groups of these grace notes) of polyphonic stops and ligatures. The effect of such non-obvious ornaments is a sound reminiscent of a harpsichord.

Forlana's harmonic plan revolves around the tonal center, the note *e*. Indeed, the key of e-minor is felt, but in a completely different way than in the Baroque. The prevailing tonality here is expanded by secondary harmonic functions, with numerous chord alternations and an accumulation of dissonances. The standard dominant-tonic combinations familiar from tonal music are also avoided.

Menuet: Maintaining the strictly defined structure and character of a courtly dance. A homophonic texture predominates, with a clear division between the dominant melody and the

accompaniment. The accompaniment often features spaced chords, imitating the texture of a Baroque lute or harpsichord. A periodic structure with a symmetrical arrangement of sentences is clearly evident throughout the piece, instilling a sense of stability and calm. A three-part ABA' structure is present: section A is in the key of G major, section B changes to the minor mode, g minor, and the reprise section A' returns to the key of G major, in accordance with the principle of harmonic contrast of the classical minuet. The tonal center of the *menuet*, over a larger space, is the note g. The functional relationships of harmony are much more strongly felt here than in *Forlane*. Ravel frequently uses parallel fifths in the accompaniment, contrary to the principles of traditional harmony. The accumulation of this interval produces a characteristic, antique sound.

Toccata: continuation of the tradition of baroque virtuosity in keyboard playing.

3.1.2.4 Inheriting the Classical Minuet Tradition

Minuet sur le nom d'Haydn (1909)

Ravel was one of six French composers who paid tribute to Haydn in 1909 on the 100th anniversary of his death by encrypting the classical master's name in their musical works. The method of translating the letters of the alphabet into musical sounds (H= h , a= a , y= d , d= d , n= g) corresponded to the practice of musical encryption that originated in France in the late 19th century.

The work has a miniature three-part form, corresponding to the form of a classical minuet without the trio section, with regular rhythmic shaping and symmetrical sentences, maintaining an antecedent-consequent relationship. The unusual accents on the third beat and delicate ornamentation throughout the piece reflect the coexistence of elegance and wit characteristic of Haydn's music. The prominent role of the perfect cadence in the piece also draws on the music of the Classical period.

Ravel's style is revealed primarily in harmony, through the combination of clear and legible functional relationships (especially in the main theme) with the use of saturated, third chords with many components and in many different configurations.

3.1.3 Classical concerto form

Piano Concerto in G major (1929–1931)

This piece is characterized by Mozartian lightness combined with rhythms derived from jazz

music.

The first movement is in sonata form with a single exposition. The theme is characterized by liveliness and clarity, and the dialogue between the (rather small for Ravel) orchestra and the piano is clear, making the work closer to the elegance of Mozart's concertos than the passion of the great Romantic concertos. Ravel focused on vivid contrasts and tonal development. The second movement, *Adagio assai*, consists of free variations on a single theme, with a simple structure and restrained emotion, close to the tradition of classical slow movements.

Ravel said that he drew inspiration (apart from Mozart) from the music of Saint-Saëns, as evidenced, for example, by the virtuosic texture of the outer movements. In his work, he consciously avoided the complex, experimental aesthetics of modernism, and his works returned to classical, melody-dominated patterns.

Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in D major (1929–1930)

This single-movement work draws on the tradition of Romantic concertos and is divided into three internal sections: slow, fast, and slow. It departs from the neoclassical aesthetic.

3.2 The contemporary face of traditional European dance genres

The general outline of Ravel's work testifies to his fascination with dance. Alongside early Italian and French dances, he also composed waltzes and references to Spanish folk dances, and also composed ballet music. Ravel gave new artistic vitality to traditional dance forms through their reconstruction.

3.2.1 Rhythmic reconstruction of Spanish dance

Boléro (1928)

The piece, inspired by a Spanish dance in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, is an unprecedented example of formal minimalism. The unchanging musical content, composed of a single, constantly repeated theme, is developed almost exclusively through dynamics, color, and instrumentation. Ravel showcased the distinctive rhythm and passion of the Spanish dance through a gradually expanding ensemble.

Ravel's interest in Spanish culture stems from his Basque heritage. His mother was Spanish, and he repeatedly drew on Spanish dance elements in his works, such as *Rhapsodie espagnole* and *L'heure espagnole*.

Rhapsodie espagnole (1907)

The work consists of four movements: *Prélude à la nuit*, *Malagueña*, *Habanera*, and *Feria*. In them, Ravel combines the rhythms of folk dances with the harmonic color of Spanish music. The masterful instrumentation has contributed to the composition's recognition as one of Ravel's most impressive compositions.

3.2.2 Different interpretations of the waltz

La valse (1919–1920)

This work was commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev, the creator of *Ballets Russes* i was intended to be based on the Viennese waltz. The work was originally titled *Vienna*, but Ravel later changed it to *Waltz*, which he described as "a symphonic poem representing the birth, glory, and decline of the Viennese waltz". Ravel attempted to represent, through music, the decline of European culture, and in particular the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, after World War I. It shows the splendor of Vienna's musical tradition and its postwar decline and reconstruction.

The composition utilizes the rhythm of a traditional waltz. It gradually develops from a hazy introduction, through melodic passages in the style of Johann Strauss, to a distorted, caricatured image of the waltz, showing its evolution from elegance to madness.

Ravel gave the classical waltz a new color through instrumental effects such as *the glissando* of the strings and the *tremolo* of the woodwinds, as well as through his own unique harmonic language. He combined his fascination with the Viennese waltz (using its characteristic melodic-rhythmic twists) with an exploration of modernist musical language, creating a masterpiece that is both traditional and innovative.

Valses nobles et sentimentales (1911)

The piece was originally composed for solo piano, but Ravel later adapted it for orchestra as the ballet *Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs*. The title refers to Schubert's *Valses nobles* and *Valses sentimentales* and reflects Ravel's love for the art of traditional European culture.

The piece consists of eight short waltzes, each with a unique character: from elegance to passion, from melancholy to ecstasy. The music thus encompasses a variety of idioms within the waltz genre, combining the styles of Schubert and Strauss with 20th-century harmonic

experiments. Ravel remains in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter, but employs syncopations and hemiolas, which significantly enrich the dynamics of the musical action.

Ravel attempted to reinterpret the traditional waltz genre using a contemporary musical language and present its diverse representations. This is another work that reflects Ravel's respect for classical forms and his constant desire for a modernist reinterpretation.

3.2.3 Dance narrative in ballet music

Daphnis et Chloé (1909–1912)

Based on the pastoral poem of the same name by the ancient Greek writer Longos, the piece tells the love story of the shepherds Daphnis and Chloe. Ravel recreated the pastoral setting and romantic emotions of ancient Greek literature with delicate orchestration and melodic elements, reflecting his deep understanding of ancient literature.

Ma Mère l'Oye (1908–1910)

This work draws on the fairy tales of the French author Charles Perrault and folk tales. The suite was originally composed as a piano piece for children and later orchestrated and transformed into a ballet. The composition demonstrates Ravel's keen understanding of child psychology and his remarkable talent for creating audiovisual narratives. Ravel recreated the fantastic scenes and emotions of Baroque fairy tales through music, reflecting his love of the French folk culture of earlier eras.

3.3 Musical representation of folk literature and culture

Ravel's works are deeply rooted in European literature and folk culture, constituting a dialogue between various fields of art.

3.3.1 The Soundscape of Poetry

Gaspard de la nuit (1908)

The work is inspired by the collection of poems of the same name by the French poet Aloysius Bertrand and presents three supernatural fantasy scenes (*Ondine*, *Le Gibet*, and *Scarbo*). Ravel recreated the imagery and emotional atmosphere of the poetic works through the language of music.

L'heure espagnole (1907–1911)

This one-act opera, based on a comedy by French writer Franc-Nohain, is set in the Spanish city of Toledo. It intertwines humorous scenes from Spanish comedic literature with the rhythms of the habanera, jota, and even the waltz. Throughout the opera, Ravel repeatedly employed the waltz to express the emotions of the characters and the atmosphere of the scenes, enhancing the drama and humor of the opera. He combined the waltz with elements of Spanish folk music, demonstrating his comprehensive love of European culture.

3.3.2 Musical reconstruction of folk narratives

Five Greek Folk Songs (*Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*) (1904–1906)

Ravel's interest in folk music extended beyond Western Europe, reaching even as far as Greece. Ravel imbued the original melodies of Greek folk songs with a new artistic value in their harmonic dimension. He also achieved a distinctive folk color by employing Greek scales, including the Dorian scale in the first song. The piano part is typically sparse yet expressive. The piece reveals the unique charm of Mediterranean culture and represents a contemporary reimagining of Greek folklore through the lens of Ravel's harmonics.

3.4 Summary: Ravel's musical language created on the basis of traditional culture

To sum up the above observations, it can be stated that Ravel's creative legacy is characterized by:

1. A return to traditional forms: strict adherence to classical structure, e.g., sonata form, suite, evolutionary forms, concerto. Often, musical content is expressed in a periodic or evolutionary structure.
2. Linguistic innovation: giving new meaning to traditional forms by filling them with innovative harmonics and increasing the role of polyphony.
3. Intercultural dialogue: integration of Spanish dances, Austrian waltz, French literature, Greek folk songs and other multicultural elements.
4. Aesthetic balance: maintaining a dynamic balance between classical rigor and innovation in terms of harmony and color, without falling into extreme modernism.

Ravel reinterpreted traditional elements of European culture through a modern musical language, not only preserving the essence of the tradition but also imbuing it with new artistic value. He sought to continue tradition, not break with it. His works embody the perfect blend of diversity and unity of European culture.

The classical features of Ravel's music prevent the composer from being unequivocally assigned to the Impressionist. He adheres to traditional structures, such as periodic miniature forms, sonata form, concerto, and suite, emphasizing the logic of voice-leading, the development and transformation of themes, motivic work, and the crucial role of counterpoint, rather than merely the Impressionistic primacy of timbre over other musical elements. Harmonic-wise, Ravel remains an innovator, expanding the tonality of his compositions and employing chords with a high concentration of dissonances, while maintaining a discernible tonal center. He also most often limits himself to chord construction in thirds and avoids atonal tendencies.

It is thus clear that Ravel's neoclassicism is not an uninventive imitation of the past, but a reconstruction of the spirit of classical aesthetics using contemporary musical language and traditional forms. Ravel demonstrated that tradition can be continued through reconstruction, not imitation, and his works became a model for French neoclassicism in the 20th century and a vehicle for European cultural diversity.

Chapter 4. Neoclassical compositional techniques in the piano suites of *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit*

4.1 Background to the creation of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

The title *Le Tombeau de Couperin* translates as *Couperin's Tombstone*. Beyond the obvious reference to the outstanding composer, it has a much deeper and more symbolic meaning, referring to the memory of all 18th-century French music. The reason for this suite was named *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is the fact that François Couperin was the most iconic French composer of keyboard music in the Baroque period, and his musical style constituted the essence of the entire French musical aesthetic. The word "tombstone" encourages retrospection, a look at things past, including the great musical tradition of the French nation. However, Ravel's main and most personal intention was neither to commemorate Couperin nor French music – he wanted to pay tribute to his comrades-in-arms who died in World War I. In 1914, Ravel began work on *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. After the outbreak of World War I, he volunteered for the French military and became a truck driver. During the war, he experienced the deaths of his comrades and his mother, which plunged him into despair. Work on *Le Tombeau de Couperin* was then put on hold. The suite was finally completed three years later, in 1917, and the motivation to resume work on the piece was a desire to commemorate the seven comrades he had lost in the war.

4.2 Neoclassical techniques in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

As a French composer, Ravel inherited the noble and elegant temperament of traditional French music, whose main characteristics are refinement, delicacy, and atmospherics. The best embodiment of this aesthetic is the French Rococo harpsichord suite. Rococo emerged in the early 18th century, during the transitional period between the Baroque and Classical periods. Its name comes from the French *rocaille*, "denoting artificial rockeries and crafts made of perforated shellfish", indicating that the style was used primarily for decoration."¹⁴

4.2.1 Formal analysis *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

The most basic French suite of the Baroque period consisted of dances such as the allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue. Composers sometimes altered the arrangement of the suite,

¹⁴ Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* [M], Guizhou People's Publishing House, Guiyang 2001, p. 327.

for example, adding an overture, prelude, fantasia, toccata, minuet, bourrée, gavotte, or passacaglia. These suites were therefore very diverse and rich.¹⁵

French harpsichord music of the Baroque period, particularly the late Rococo period, is characterized by a predominance of concise musical themes, and the style is light, delicate, and richly ornamented. Rococo advocates a return to nature. Stylistically and formally, the piano suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin* undoubtedly inherits the creative tradition of the French Rococo and reflects Ravel's love of French music as represented by Couperin. With *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Ravel was the first to revive the ancient genre of the French harpsichord suite. Ravel's suite comprises six movements of varied formal structure, representing both evolutionary and dance forms.

The first movement, *Prelude*, adopts the two-part reprise form popular in the Baroque period. Its content encompasses a total of four figurative musical ideas (*a*, *b*, *c*, *d*), presented in sections of varying lengths. This lack of regularity is an element that makes the piece similar to Baroque figurative preludes, which developed evolutionarily. Despite this, the melodic element still plays a significant role in the piece. Another similarity to Baroque two-part forms is the overall tonal outline – the first movement of the prelude modulates from a minor main key to its parallel major key.

Table 1. *Prelude* – two-part form reprise

Section	A						B									
Episode	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>a3</i>	<i>d1</i>	<i>a4</i>	<i>d2</i>	<i>c1</i> + <i>b1</i>	<i>c2</i> + <i>b2</i>	<i>d3</i>	<i>b3</i>	<i>a5</i>	Coda
Bars	1	5	10	1	22	30	34	38	4	50	58	63	68	79	83	90
	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4	9	13	-	29	33	37	44	-	57	62	67	78	82	89	94
				21					49							
Tonality	e	e	H	-	C-G	G	C	-	G	-	gis-D	d-As	fis-h-e	e	e	e

The second movement, the *Fugue*, is constructed according to the model of one of the most important polyphonic forms of the Baroque. The fugue, as the most perfect embodiment of polyphonic technique, was more popular in German-speaking countries than in France. The

¹⁵ Zhou Wei, *History of Western Piano Art* [M], Shanghai Music Publishing House, Shanghai 2003, p. 283.

best formal model for the fugue can be found in the work of J.S. Bach, and it was to him that Ravel drew. Consequently, this movement fits into the French idiom primarily through its character and musical temperament, rather than its formal structure and polyphonic devices.

Table 2. *Fugue* – a three-voice fugue

Part of the form	Overcomplete exhibition						
Bars	1	3	5	7	9	11	13
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2	4	6	8	10	12	14
Factor	T	Or	T	Łw	T	Or	Łz
Tonality	e	h	e	h-e	e	h	h-g
Fixed counterpoint	-	K	K	K	K	K	-

Phase I of harmonic transformations - polyph .					
15	17	19	22	24	26
-	-	-	-	-	-
16	18	21	23	25	34
T	Or	Łw	Ti	Ti	Łz
G	D	-	G	C	-
K	K	-	-	-	K

Phase II of harmonic transformations - polyph .														
35	35	37	39	39	41	44	44	46	48	48	50	58	58	60
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
36	37	38	40	41	43	45	46	47	49	50	57	59	59	61
T	T	Łw	Ti	Ti	Łw	T	Ti	Łw	T	Ti	Łw	T	T	Coda
e	e	h-e	a	C	e-D	E9 ^{>}	E9 ^{>}	a-C	H9 ^{>}	H9 ^{>}	G-e	e	e	e
stretto		-	stretto		-	stretto		-	stretto		-	stretto		-
-		K (stretto)	-		K (stretto)	-		K (stretto)	-		K (stretto)	-		K (stretto)

The third movement, *Forlana*, is a dance in the style of the old Venetian court.¹⁶ It takes the form of a pre-classical rondo with three couplets. The tonal center throughout the piece is centered on the note *E* —it is significantly more tonally stable than the other movements of the suite, although it also contains the greatest concentration of dissonances and altered chordal elements.

Table 3. *Forlana* – pre-classical rondo

Section	A			B			A'	C			A			D				Coda
Episode	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>c1</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>e1</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>g1</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>h1</i>	<i>a2</i>
Bars	1	9	19	29	37	45	53	61	69	85	93	101	111	121	129	137	145	153
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	9	18	29	37	45	53	61	69	85	93	101	110	121	129	137	145	153	159
Tonality	e			e			e	e			e			E				e

The fourth part, *Rigaudon*, It refers to a folk dance from southern France, popular during the Baroque period.¹⁷ It is a classic three-part form, maintained at a slightly faster tempo and with a joyful character, which creates a marked contrast in mood with the preceding movements. Unlike *Forlana*, the material of *Rigaudon* is full of constant modulatory deviations, which makes it less stable tonally.

¹⁶ Editorial Committee of the Encyclopedia of China, *Encyclopedia of China – Music and Dance* [M], China Publishing House, Beijing 1992, p. 488.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

Table 4. *Rigaudon* – three-part form

Section	A				B				A'			
Episode	<i>a</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>a3</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b1</i>	<i>b2</i>	<i>b3</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>a3</i>
Bars	1	9	16	23	37	53	69	81	93	101	108	115
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	8	15	22	36	53	68	81	92	100	107	114	128
Tonality	C-G	-	-	Fis-C	c	c	-	Fis-D	C-G	-	-	Fis-C

The fifth movement, *Minuet*, represents a dance that was a staple of traditional Baroque suites and a true icon of the era. It has a three-part form with a coda, a leisurely tempo, and a graceful and elegant musical content. As in *Rigaudon*, the middle movement is in the same key as the main key.

Table 5. *Minuet* – three-part form

Section	A			B					A'			Coda	
Episode	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>d1</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>b1</i>	<i>a3</i>	<i>a4</i>	<i>a5</i>
Bars	1	9	25	33	41	49	57	65	73	81	97	104	121
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	8	24	32	40	48	56	64	72	80	96	104	120	128
Tonality	G-H	h-D	a-G	g		c		g	G-H	dis-Fis	a-G	G	

The sixth movement, *the Toccata*, together with *the Prelude*, forms the framework that begins and ends the entire work. There are many similarities between them: they are the most formally free and centered around a constant, motoric progression of semiquavers. However, *the Toccata's character* is more agitated, ultimately leading to a major climax, which the drama of the entire suite demands in its final moment. The movement element is very important in this movement and often has thematic significance, although in theme d, for example, it serves only as a backdrop, and therefore is related to the color scheme—arguably one of the more impressionistic aspects of the suite.

Table 6. *Toccata* – free evolutionary form

Section	A					B			
Episode	<i>f</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>f1</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>f2</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>f3</i>
Bars	1	5	11	23	42	57	70	74	81
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4	10	22	42	56	69	73	80	85
Tonality	e			G-Fis		h	C	F	H

C												D			E			
<i>a3</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>a4</i>	<i>d1</i>	<i>f4</i>	<i>a5</i>	<i>d2</i>	<i>f5</i>	<i>a6</i>	<i>d3</i>	<i>b1</i>	<i>a7</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f6</i>	<i>a8</i>	<i>c1</i>	<i>f7</i>	<i>a9</i>	Coda
86	96	122	132	145	151	155	160	164	168	173	181	191	206	213	221	234	238	244
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
95	121	131	144	150	154	159	163	167	172	180	190	205	213	220	233	237	244	251
h-g	dis	cis	gis	D9			Fis9 ^{>}		C6 ^{<}	E7	a-G	-	H		E	F	B	E

4.2.2 Traditional Musical Forms and Tonality

The suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin* features three evolutionary forms and three periodic dance forms. The composer thus utilized equally both fundamental methods of shaping musical form known in European musical tradition. The *Prelude* is a two-part reprise form, while the *Fugue* draws on the Baroque fugue in its structure. The *Forlana* has the form of a pre-Classical rondo, while the *Rigaudon* and *Minuet* are dances in three-part form. A detailed formal analysis of each movement revealed that their structures are relatively symmetrical and balanced. Ravel also draws on historical patterns in tonality, for example, by changing the main key mode in the middle section of the *Rigaudon* (a common compositional technique in Classicism), modulating to a parallel key in the first movement of the *Prelude* (a constant element of Baroque reprise forms in minor keys), and arranging the overall harmonic plan of the *Fugue* according to the Bach canon.

4.2.3 Ornamentation

Ravel, by design, abandoned long, expansive melodic lines and grand, romantic narratives in

favor of exquisite musical themes adorned with delicate ornamentation, creating an atmosphere of elegance, essentially evocative of the courtly music of the Classical period. The free-flowing and lively *Prelude* is characterized by a large number of grace notes, which, in addition to their ornamental function, also fulfill a metrorhythmic function—they appear in places that emphasize the pulse and natural accentuation of the musical progression. Similarly, the elegant *Forlana* also features numerous short grace notes, illustrating the noble and elegant temperament of classical dance music. It is precisely this danceability that is emphasized here by the ornaments. The final section of the *Minuet* features grace notes, arpeggios, and trills, which, combined with the low dynamics and steady rhythm, create a soothing atmosphere. Overall, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* rejected the development of extreme emotions, instead adopting restrained calm, moderation and pure beauty of form as the ideal, thus reviving the aesthetic style of French Rococo music.

4.3 The background and content of *Gaspard de la nuit*

4.3.1 The background to the creation of *Gaspard de la Nuit*

Gaspard de la nuit is a prose poem written in 1827 by the French poet Aloysius Bertrand (1807–1841). The author draws on the directness and freedom that characterize prose and uses it to write poetic verses, breaking accepted rules and creating a new literary form—prose poetry. At the same time, the author creatively weaves elements of magic, enchanted lands, and fantasy into his literary worlds. These elements were, for the time, undoubtedly groundbreaking in content and subject matter. Bertrand expressed his view of art in the prologue to *Gaspard de la nuit*: "The essence and source of art are oppositions, even contradictions".¹⁸

Ravel wrote *Gaspard de la nuit* in 1908, when his father's death from illness left him deeply grief-stricken and unable to cope with harsh realities. He chose *Ondine*, *Le Gibet*, and *Scarbo*, three artistic representations from Bertrand's collection of poems, to portray complex inner emotions from three different perspectives. To allow listeners and performers a deeper understanding of the work's emotional content and artistic style, Ravel included corresponding poetic texts at the beginning of each of the three pieces, organically blending music and literature.

¹⁸ Aloysius Bertrand, transl. Huang Jianhua, *Gaspard of the Night*, [M], East China Normal University Press, Shanghai 2017, p. 23.

4.3.2 Introduction to the content

Ondine describes the ever-changing, complex psychology of a water nymph, passing through states such as admiration, rejection, anger, and despair, which are linked to her secret love. *Le Gibet* relies on the imitation of bells and the depiction of various imaginary sounds around the gallows, allowing real sounds to mingle with illusory ones. *Scarbo*, in turn, depicts the dual nature of the shadow—sometimes evil, sometimes docile.

4.4 Classical compositional solutions in *Gaspard de la nuit*

4.4.1 Formal structure

Formal solutions, especially at the level of microform in *Gaspard de la nuit*, demonstrate Ravel's attachment to traditional models. *Ondine* is shaped like a periodic form, though in a rather free manner – it features five melodic-harmonic ideas that are transformed and smoothly juxtaposed, creating a single coherent musical image. *Le Gibet*, on the other hand, utilizes a three-part ABA structure (although devoid of the neoclassical, ideal proportions found in *Le Tombeau de Couperin*), while *Scarbo* is maintained in sonata form. Classical compositional techniques frequently appear throughout the cycle – sequential repetition, motif development, progression, variation technique, etc. Of course, the structure of sentences in the periodic sections is not entirely free of irregularities – their extensions occur, which diversify the musical flow. The most complex form of the cycle is the sonata form in *Scarbo* – in it, the thematic material undergoes a very lengthy and multi-threaded development. Despite the lack of direct associations with neoclassical aesthetics, the very fact of presenting such non-standard and impressionist musical material within the framework of sonata form demonstrates Ravel's mastery of the principles of shaping traditional forms.

Another important element of Ravel's style — consistent with the spirit of classicism, and somewhat contrary to the Romantic spirit — is the very limited use of *rubato*. Whether it's the slow main theme of *Ondine* or the rapid semiquaver progressions in *Scarbo*, the composer demands strict and rhythmic adherence from the performer to the tempo and rhythmic values indicated in the score and does not permit arbitrary use of *accelerando* or *ritardando* — it is not without reason that Ravel is sometimes called the "Swiss watchmaker".¹⁹

¹⁹ Michael Stegemann, op. cit, p.162.

Table 7. *Ondine* – free periodic form

Section	A						
Episode	-	<i>a</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>c1</i>
Bars	1	2	8	14	16	22	26
		-	-	-	-	-	-
		7	13	15	21	25	29
Tonality	Cis9		dis9	Cis9	Fis9	Dis11	-

B											C				
<i>d</i>	<i>d1</i>	<i>a3</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>a4</i>	<i>e1</i>	<i>d2</i>	<i>e2</i>	<i>e3</i>	<i>d3</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>c2</i>	<i>a5</i>	<i>a6</i>	(<i>b1</i>)	-
30	37	42	45	47	50	52	57	60	66	68	72	80	84	88	89
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
36	41	44	46	49	51	56	59	65	67	71	79	83	87		91
Gis9	Dis9	C9	A9 ^{>}		Cis7	B9	-	h6	C	gis9	d6	fis6	Cis		
-						-			-	-					
dis						Cis9			Fis	d6					

4.4.2 Application and embodiment of polyphonic thinking

Le Gibet is based on a steady, measured pulse and a rhythmic *ostinato* centered on the note *b flat*. Against this *ostinato*, the thematic material proper develops. This arrangement possesses polyphonic qualities — a multi-layered texture in which individual layers possess melodic and coloristic autonomy. The result is a unique setting, reminiscent of choral music and possessing a medieval, modal resonance.

Table 8. *Le Gibet* – three-part form

Section	A								B				A'					
Episode	-	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>bl</i>	<i>al</i>	-	<i>a2</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>cl</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>dl</i>	<i>a3</i>	<i>c2</i>	<i>b2</i>	<i>c3</i>	-	<i>a</i>
Bars	1	3	6	8	10	12	15	17	20	23	26	31	35	40	41	43	45	48
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2	5	7	9	11	14	16	19	22	25	30	34	39	41	43	44	47	52
Tonality	es		-	es	-	es		as	Fes7	-	Cis9 ^{>}	G-Es9	b	Ges7			-	es

In this piece, color plays a primary role, and texture (e.g., the use of extreme registers) and harmony are subordinated to it. In section *A*, Ravel employs a fifth chord structure, yet the tonal center is still easily felt. The composer creatively places the constant note *B flat* (or its enharmonic equivalent, *A sharp*) in various harmonic contexts—both as a chordal component and as an extraneous sound.

4.4.3 Sonata form

Scarbo is a sonata form consisting of introduction, exposition, development, and recapitulation. Four sections can be distinguished in the first theme group. The second theme group begins immediately afterward, without the aid of a bridge. In classical sonata form, the bridge served primarily as a modulation to the key of the second theme – in the case of *Scarbo*, this is no longer necessary, as the second theme is tonally unspecified. Three sections can be distinguished in the second theme group, and there is no epilogue (for similar reasons as those for which there was no bridge). The form of the exposition is therefore very clear and entirely based on the ordering of thematic sections.

Table 9. *Scarbo* – sonata form

Section	Exposition									
	Introduction	Group I b.						Group II b.		
Episode	(a)	a	b	b1	c	d	a1	e	e1	e2
Bars	1-31	32-50	51-72	73-79	80-94	94-109	110-120	121-155	156-189	190-213
Tonality	gis	Gis-Cis7	-	-	(octatonic scale)	Dis		-		

Development										
Phase I						Phase II				
b2	b3	d1	b4	(e) / d2	(e) / d3	(b) / a2	a3	-	e3	a4
214-234	235-255	256-267	268-275	276-288	289-313	314-344	345-352	353-365	366-381	382-394
(whole tone scale)		Gis	h	G	E-B7	dis-B7	f6		C	b7

Recapitulation												
Introduction	Group I b.			Group II b.				Coda / Epilogue				
(a)	<i>b5</i>	<i>b6</i>	(c)	<i>e4</i>	<i>e5</i>	<i>e6</i>	<i>e7</i>	<i>a5</i>	<i>e8</i>	<i>d4b</i> <i>7</i>	<i>e9</i>	<i>a6</i>
395-429	430-440	441-447	448-476	477-520	521-542	543-562	563-579	580-583	584-591	592-601	602-615	616-627
gis	Dis7		(Fis-Cis)	-			H-E	Cis9	Gis9 ^{>}	-	C6 ^{<}	H

It's undeniable that *Scarbo* departs from typical sonata form in terms of its structural principles – the exposition lacks an epilogue, and instead of a clearly defined first theme,

there are four equal thematic sections. At the level of microform, there are also features of an evolutionary shaping of the material, less common in sonata form. Some scholars consider this unconventional form to be "Ravel's autobiographical sketch".²⁰ Nevertheless, overall, the structural characteristics of sonata form and its formal shape are relatively clear and easily discernible in the work.

Scarbo exemplifies the masterful use of thematic transformation. The same melodic and harmonic ideas are not only expressed in a wide variety of textures, but can also have diametrically opposed characters. This phenomenon is evident in the leading motif of material *a*, which is dark and somber in the piece's introduction, but bright and lively at the beginning of the first theme group (see example 1):

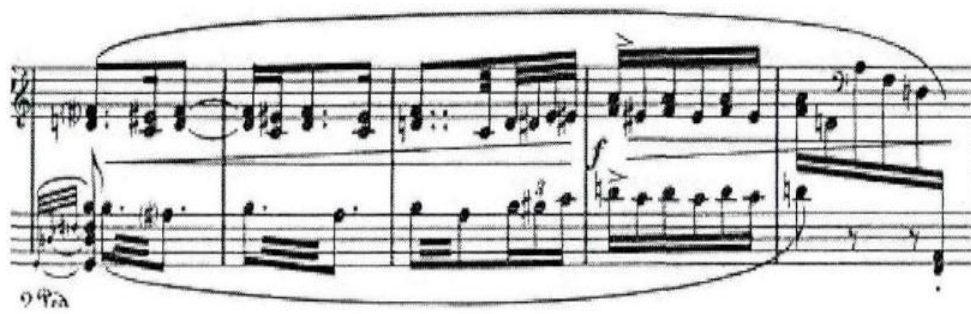
Example 1. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 32–36



The third interval is a fundamental element of harmony in Ravel's piano music. Despite the emergence of innovative and groundbreaking ideas in chord construction at the beginning of the 20th century (e.g., the fourth principle), Ravel remained faithful to the classical third structure, though he developed and saturated it so far that many of the chords he used (containing ninths, elevenths, and even tetrads) have a strongly dissonant quality. Parallel triad- and tetradit progressions also frequently appear, although there are also moments when the composer highlights the beauty of a simple, pure triad, for example in *Scarbo* (see example 2):

²⁰ Deborah Mauer, *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* [M], Cambridge University Press 1999, p. 80

Example 2. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: Scarbo, b. 65–69



Chapter 5. European Dance Music in *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit*

5.1 Forlana – Venetian court dance

The use of folk or courtly dance music in instrumental suites is a very important and ancient tradition, associated primarily with the Baroque period. The forlana is a court dance originating in Venice, frequently appearing in Baroque keyboard suites, especially in French and Italian circles, including of Couperin's. Originally a Venetian gondolier's dance, it later began appearing at court and became popular throughout Western Europe. The idea of placing the dance immediately after the fugue did not originate with Ravel – a similar solution was already used by Jean-Philippe Rameau and George Frideric Handel.

Forlane is in the key of E minor, in $6/8$ meter, in *Allegretto tempo*, and takes the form of a pre-classical rondo (Table 3). It is dedicated to the memory of Lieutenant Deluca. It has an expressive but rather somber character. In writing this piece, Ravel drew inspiration from Couperin's creative ideas from his own forlanas and transformed them, employing, among other things, chromaticism and chord alternations, giving the early music a modern atmosphere. Part A is essentially a combination of chordal texture in the left-hand part and melodic material in the right-hand part. The material, based on dotted rhythm, continues until section C, where new material appears (see Example 3):

Example 3. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. III: *Forlane*, b. 64-68



Although the dotted rhythm is gone, the characteristic rhythmic pattern of the forlana remains: the alternation of long and short rhythmic values. Compared to the previous section, the texture of this section is fuller, and the melody more stable. Although new material always appears in subsequent couplets, it always seems to flow logically from the main refrain theme, thus ensuring the cohesion of the entire composition.

5.2 Rigaudon – a lively folk dance from southern France

Rigaudon It was originally a folk dance from southern France, and it entered the court in the 17th century. Baroque composers of all stripes, such as Rameau, Purcell, and Bach, were equally eager to use it in their suites. Compared to the forlana, the mood of the rigaudon is more enthusiastic and lively. Ravel's placement of the rigaudon after the forlana is consistent with the tradition of the Baroque suite.

Rigaudon is written in the key of C major and in $\frac{2}{4}$ meter; it was composed in memory of the Gaudin twin brothers. This dance has a three-part structure (Table 4). Ravel retains some features of the traditional dance, such as the $\frac{2}{4}$ meter, a joyful and lively rhythm, strongly emphasized cadences, and parallel chord progressions. These progressions certainly enhance the humorous aspect of the composition, as they make the tonal center very shaky and unstable (see Example 4):

Example 4. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. IV: *Rigaudon*, b. 11–15



In Part A, which develops from a single musical idea, the right hand dominates the outer sections (*a* , *a3*), while the left hand leads in the middle sections (*a1* , *a2*). Part B, by contrast, is much more lyrical in nature. Its texture is very clear, with a distinct melody in the right-hand part and a steady, regular dance rhythm in the left-hand part (see Example 5):

Example 5. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. IV: *Rigaudon*, b. 37–43



5.3 Minuet – French court dance

The minuet is one of the most popular dance genres in the history of music. As with many other dance genres, it originated in French folk music and later entered the courts. Baroque

composers often included the minuet in instrumental suites, and in the following era, the dance also functioned as part of sonatas. During this period, the minuet appeared as the third movement of a symphony, thus becoming an important musical genre, later to be replaced by the scherzo.²¹

Ravel often used this dance genre in his work, expressing his enthusiasm for traditional French music.

Ravel's *menuet* is in the key of G major, in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter, with an *Allegro moderato tempo*, and has a three-part form, ABA' (Table 5). It is dedicated to the memory of Dreyfus. Ravel imitates the style of 18th-century French dance music, incorporating his own harmonic and textural ideas. In composing the work, he recreated the elegant character of French courtly music. From the outset, the A section establishes a soothing mood: the right-hand part contains the main theme and several subordinate voices, while the left hand provides a steady, quarter-note pulse. In section B, the part is divided into two layers: chordal and melodic (see Example 6):

Example 6. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. V: *Minuet*, b. 13–18



The middle B section of the piece, marked *Musette*, is music imitating bagpipes, very similar to a section from the composer's *Valses noble et sentimentales*. In this section, Ravel also implemented a delicate *una corda* sound.

5.4 Spanish folk music in *Gaspard de la nuit*

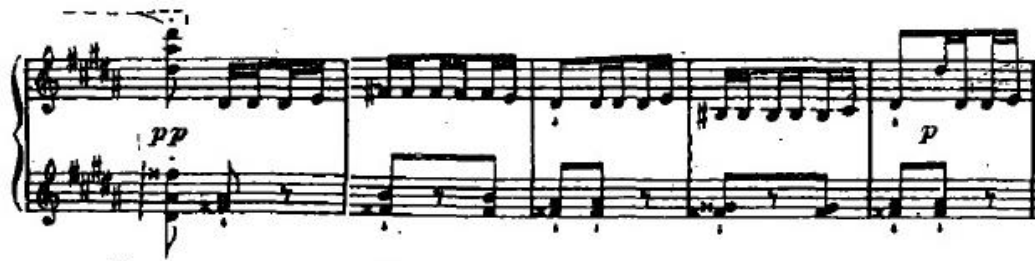
Ravel's music is closely linked to the spirit of three iconic Spanish dances – the sarabande, the habanera, and the jota. Their influence is evident in elements such as melody and rhythm, and the combination of high art artistry with the temperament of folk and national art creates a unique atmosphere.²² The *Scarbo* combines elements of toccata and Spanish dance – the jota

²¹ Ernst Hermann Meyer, transl. Yao Jinxin and Lan Yusheng, *Someone Problems of Music Aesthetics* [M], People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 1984, p. 57.

²² Chen Yuxiu, *A Study of Ravel's Piano Works* [M], Full Tone Music Publishing House, Taipei 1982, p.168.

dance rhythm combined with the repetitions in the right-hand part makes it full of bright, Spanish brilliance (see example 7):

Example 7. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 94–98



The above fragment also has illustrative value, as the figures based on repetition are intended to imitate the rhythmic accompaniment of castanets and depict the scene from the poem in which the dwarf "stands on tiptoe and spins quickly" .

Chapter 6. *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Gaspard de la nuit* from the performer's point of view

6.1 Performance skills and musical expression of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

6.1.1 *Prelude*

When performing the *Prelude*, emphasis should be placed on maintaining a sense of melodic continuity and an unending, fluid progression. Each note should be clearly articulated, successive sections should be linked coherently, and key turning points in the melody should be appropriately marked by increased volume. The rhythmic aspect should convey a sense of stability, and ornamentation should not detract from the temporal value of the main note.

The right-hand part features long sections based on a constant sixteenth-note movement. To ensure the sound effect is clear, caution should be exercised when using the right pedal – the depth of pedal depression should be adjusted continuously, listening carefully to the sound effect, but as a rule, it should not be pressed too deeply. The key to a successful performance of this piece is mastery of style. Its rhythm, texture, and tempo can be linked almost directly to the delicate musical landscapes of Baroque instrumental preludes. Compared to the harpsichord, the modern piano has a more rounded sound, so when playing, one should touch the keys with the fingertips and pay attention to the balance of the left and right hands. Of course, with all this, one must not forget that Ravel was a 20th-century composer, so it would be an exaggeration to treat the piece as an archaic copy of Couperin's style, ripped from the Baroque era. In such a situation, the rich individualism of Ravel and the striking freshness of his compositions would be lost. This is a significant (if not the main) performance challenge – while maintaining the historical style, the modernity of the work must be emphasized. The expression of the modern aspect is based primarily on the sound characteristics of the piano.

Through various methods of touch and force transfer, the timbres of many instruments can be imitated on the piano. Texture itself often provides inspiration for such timbre explorations – for example, massive chords in the lower register can imitate brass instruments, faster progressions in the higher register can imitate woodwind instruments, and wide-ranging melodic lines can imitate string instruments.

Example 8. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. I: *Prélude*, b. 4–7



A similar approach can be applied to the *Prelude*, to enrich the expressive aspect of the music with timbre. For example, the quarter notes in the left-hand part of bars 5 and 6 (see example 8) are divided into two voices – the lower voice could imitate the timbre of a cello, and the higher voice the timbre of a viola (the keys are pressed with the fingertips, not too deeply, with attention to the melodiousness of the sound). The sixteenth-note triplets in the right-hand part could imitate the much more pronounced timbre of an oboe (it was this instrument that Ravel entrusted this part to in the symphonic version of the suite). This timbral contrast between planes can, on the one hand, enrich the expressiveness of the performance, and on the other, contribute to highlighting the style of 20th-century music. Besides timbre, the balance between the dynamics of each plane should also be considered. Because the tempo of the piece is quite fast, it is advisable to first work on the aforementioned sound elements at slow tempos to achieve the desired results.

Most of the piece is based on semiquaver progressions, but in bars 22-28 of the A section and bars 38-44 and 68-77 of the B section, quarter-note melodic lines with ornamentation in the right hand are heard. The longer, ornamented notes, combined with the passages in the left hand (see example 9), create a picturesque musical image, similar to the timbre of a clavichord. This is the most characteristic section of the piece, demonstrating the composer's love of the Rococo style. Grace notes should be articulated lightly and flexibly, with an impulse on the first accented note.

Example 9. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. I: *Prélude*, b. 76–79



6.1.2 Fugue

Awareness of the structure of form is a key element in the successful performance of any

fugue. A good understanding of the relationships between successive themes and responses can make a piece multi-layered and more vibrant. To avoid an unattractive and repetitive sound effect, the fugue material should be viewed primarily from a horizontal perspective, giving each voice an autonomous and long-term perspective of development. Most importantly, it is important to emphasize the evolutionary nature of the piece's form, based on continuous development.

Example 10. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. II: *Fugue*, b. 5–8



In terms of musical expression, the *Fugue* stands in stark contrast to the *Prelude*. If the first movement resembled a flowing stream, the second more closely resembles a wave shimmering on the surface of water. The theme of this three-voice fugue is first presented in the highest voice, then successively in the lower voices. Almost the entire piece develops in the high and middle registers – the low register is almost absent, which gives the piece a very luminous sound. During performance, attention should be paid to controlling the speed and force of the strike, and limiting the *forte* dynamics. Of course, the presentations of the theme and counterpoint should also be differentiated (in terms of timbre). All long rhythmic values (e.g., the whole note *B* in measure 5) require a slightly larger volume to sustain for a sufficiently long time. The Fugue differs from most homophonic music in that it requires greater theoretical preparation from the performer – they must be aware of its ratios, be able to distinguish themes (including those presented in inversion), responses, and constant and variable counterpoints. Ravel facilitates this somewhat by placing accents in each presentation of the theme. They are also guidelines as to how to phrase it.

Example 11. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. II: *Fugue*, b. 22–25



In bar 22, the theme is inverted for the first time (see example 11). Another polyphonic

transformation is the stretto, which largely forms the basis of Phase II. These transformations create new performance challenges, requiring particularly skillful handling of microdynamics and independent control of each voice. Maintaining a low dynamic range and an elegant aesthetic is an additional challenge.

6.1.3 *Forlane*

Almost the entire composition is based on a dotted rhythm, present from the beginning of the first chorus. The playing force should correspond to the light and flowing character introduced by the triple meter, so it shouldn't be excessive, and the finger movements should be light and flexible. The dynamics of the entire piece range from *pp* to *mf*, with a significant predominance of lower dynamics – a fact that speaks volumes about the composition's character. Rhythmically and texturally, the piece is quite uniform throughout. The melody is exceptionally suggestive to the performer – its rise and fall naturally correspond to changes in microdynamics (louder and softer) and expression. The performance should be free of sharp notes that could destroy the delicate aesthetic experience. This composition has a courtly, aristocratic tone, a fact that cannot be missed by the performer. Ravel repeatedly uses articulation markings: tenuto and accent, as two ways of marking more important notes, emphasizing the danceability of the music. Compared to the accent, tenuto should be played more quietly. For example, in the opening section (see example 12), when dealing with the accent in the first bar, the elbow movement should be used to support the fingertips to better control the depth of the key press. The chords in the left-hand part should not be played too deeply, and the right pedal should act as a "breath" in keeping with the melody's phrasing.

Example 12. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. III: *Forlane*, b. 1–4



In part C, the chordal texture begins to dominate in the parts of both hands, and the left-hand part gains greater melodic potential (see example 13):

Example 13. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. III: *Forlane*, b. 64 – 68



Numerous dissonant chords throughout the piece introduce a very striking contrast of colors, and the music exudes a hazy atmosphere of impressionism, reflecting the composer's creative concept of actively integrating contemporary compositional techniques while simultaneously following the broadly understood tradition.

6.1.4 *Rigaudon*

In terms of dynamics, *Rigaudon* requires the performer to make larger and more frequent changes than the other movements. From the very beginning of the piece, the *ff* dynamic should be used very suggestively, expressing the joyful and lively qualities of the dance, only to suddenly descend to the *mp* dynamic and begin building a *crescendo* and climax. The wrists should be relaxed, the fingers positioned almost perpendicular to the keyboard surface, and the force transmitted to the fingertips through the entire arm. Especially when playing accents, care should be taken to ensure the arm is not stiff. Furthermore, the rhythm pedal should be used, not a syncopated one.

Example 14. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. IV: *Forlane*, b. 1–5



Rigaudon is a folk dance with roots in southern France. Ravel retains this ancient, rustic character, and the piece's exuberant main theme immediately evokes a scene of French country dancing. The staccato sixteenth notes should sound grainy, and the eighth-note leaps in the left-hand part should sound as light and energetic as possible (see example 14). During performance, it's best to imagine a dance scene and play as if in tune with that image.

Example 15. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. IV: Rigaudon, b. 37–43



In the B section, the left hand plays distant jumps in *staccato* articulation, while the right hand plays a gentle melody (see Example 15). The left-hand *staccato* should be light and flexible, and, as indicated in the score, performed using the right pedal. The emotional contrast between the middle section and the outer sections of the piece is very obvious. The low dynamics of the B section should be used to emphasize the composition's coloristic qualities, especially in the modulation from bar 85 (see Example 16). This type of passage can create a hazy atmosphere and add a touch of romance to the "country dance." When playing this section, the speed of pressing the keys should be quite slow, which can be aided by the use of the forearms.

Example 16. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. IV: Rigaudon, b. 84–88



6.1.5 Menuet

The *menuet* is emotionally much more restrained and internally less contrasted than the previous movement. A successful performance of the piece depends largely on demonstrating the nuances of phrasing and musical time – this requires a keen sense of the composition's noble character. The first term of the A part consists of two four-bar sentences (2+2 sentences), but the following period begins with a six-bar sentence (3+3 sentence). Therefore, the performer should be aware of whether the phrases consist of an even or odd number of bars, as this determines the distribution of accents within the sentences. In the main theme, Ravel readily employs the consonance of the second within a focused chord pattern, which produces a warm sound (see Example 17):

Example 17. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. V: Minuet, b. 1–6



Ornaments should be executed quickly and lightly. The method of embellishing selected notes in the melody remains consistent with the spirit of keyboard music of Couperin's era. In bar 7, Ravel uses three symbols (dot, dash, slur) to indicate chord articulation (see example 18). This combination of portato and tenuto demonstrates the special importance that must be given to the cadential turn in measures 7-8. The end of the phrase should be reflected in the microdynamics by slightly muting it.

Example 18. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. V: Minuet, b. 7–12



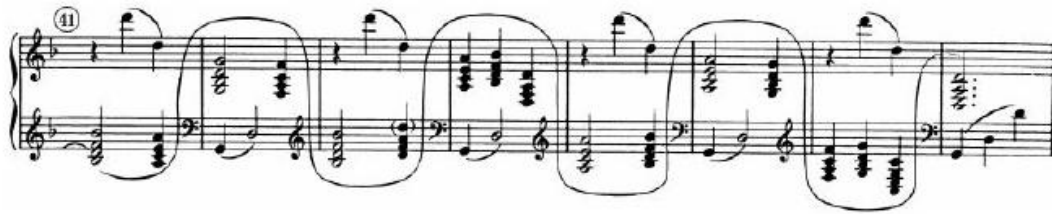
Unlike in *Rigaudon*, in this three-part form, the middle section (*Musette*) is somewhat more animated than the outer sections. It consists entirely of parallel chord movements and a pedal note (see example 19). Ravel often employs chordal parallelism, but rarely makes it the sole structural principle for long stretches, as in this case. This element of compositional technique is definitely closer to Ravel's Impressionist side. He is one of the few composers who was able to effectively combine such disparate trends as Impressionism and Neoclassicism within a single instrumental miniature; without disrupting the framework of Neoclassical style, it adds an Impressionist touch.

Example 19. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. V: Minuet, b. 33–40



From bar 41, the theme is played alternately by the left and right hands (see example 20). This situation should not affect the continuity of the melodic line, its timbral balance, or *legato articulation*, which the composer confirmed by adding a long, sinuous slur.

Example 20. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov.V: Minuet, b. 41–48



6.1.6 *Toccata*

The *Toccata* places high technical demands on the performer. One such challenge is the repetition of notes. During these repetitions, the fingers should "hold" the key, and the entire hand should use a technique similar to tremolando to more easily capture the break between notes and avoid their blending, which would prevent rapid repetition. The performer's priorities should be rhythmic precision and tonal stability. The challenge here is undoubtedly achieving proficiency in technically demanding material while simultaneously maintaining control over the musical quality over longer stretches. This requires carefully planning the perspective within the piece and mentally imprinting it before performance. This is also the only movement in the suite so demanding that consideration must be given to the distribution of physical forces during performance, so as not to lack them, for example, during the climax.

The way the textural structure is arranged in the piece demonstrates Ravel's mastery of the piano's unique characteristics. The melodic material flows seamlessly between the two hands, and the resulting sound possesses many symphonic qualities. The accents on the first beat, starting in the 5th bar, imitate the percussion section and emphasize the piece's dynamics. Small changes in *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, such as those in bars 7-10, should be achieved by regulating the activity of the fingertips (see Example 21).

Example 21. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. VI: *Toccata*, b. 1–10



Part B begins with a new theme in the highest voice (see example 22), which is reinforced by an additional, lower octave in the left-hand part. The composer marks the expressive delay notes with the tenuto symbol.

Example 22. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. VI: *Toccata*, b. 57–60



Harmony is an important form-forming element of Baroque music,²³ and this case is no exception. For example, the section *e* is entirely based on the harmonic, sequential development of a single melodic idea (see example 23). In this type of texture, it's crucial to maintain good sound proportions, with the highest voice is in the foreground. It should be played relatively deeply, while the other notes should be played a bit more shallowly.

Example 23. *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, mov. VI: *Toccata*, b. 201–205



²³ Leonard B. Meyer, transl. He Qiansan, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* [M], Beijing University Press, Beijing 1991, p. 89.

From the above, we can conclude that the constituent elements of Ravel's work—namely, genres and forms, the way he shapes musical material, the type of expression, and even the harmonic language (a logical continuation and development of functional harmony)—are his tribute to a centuries-old tradition. *Le Tombeau de Couperin* consists of six movements with different characteristics, yet they share common cultural roots dating back to the Baroque period or even earlier. The large number of ornaments is a precise imitation of the French Rococo style, reflecting the nobility and elegance of this musical tradition. However, the composer does not limit himself to traditional compositional techniques, boldly combining highly innovative solutions with historical stylization, achieving a unique aesthetic effect.

6.2 Performance techniques and musical expression in *Gaspard de la nuit*

6.2.1 Analysis of key implementation aspects in *Ondine*

Ondine is the most melodic of the three pieces in the cycle. It depicts images ranging from fountains of water splashing on a beautiful lake, through the appearance of a water nymph who woos the prince, to the fury of rejection and the attack on the prince. The entire work is therefore full of illustration and drama. Ravel's creativity lies in presenting vivid images through specific compositional devices. He is able to convey even details such as the delicate ripples of the lake's surface or the roar of the water. Another example is the scene corresponding to bars 52–56, where the nymph is furious after unsuccessful pleas, and in bars 57–69, with her fury, the entire environment becomes extremely menacing, as a storm and surging waves crash against the prince.

This type of detailed and illustrative presentation of the story requires a great and fantastic imagination from the performer, which translates into the suggestiveness of play.

6.2.1.1 First theme Invoice

The most characteristic feature of *Ondine* is its first theme. In it, Ravel combines a fast, dense movement reminiscent of chordal tremolando (though with a specific rhythmic structure) with a melodious theme. The high register and low dynamics create a quiet murmur and a distant melody, evoking the image of a nymph drifting on the calm surface of the water in the moonlight. The difficulty lies primarily in controlling the right-hand part (which is intended to act as a barely audible background) and establishing a good balance between the planes. The hand's center of gravity should remain neutral, not shifted toward a specific note. The fingers of the right hand should always rest on the keys. Although this accompaniment is intended to

resemble only a hazy background, its division into rhythmic groups and internal pulsation should not be ignored. The center of gravity of the left hand, which leads the melodic line, should shift depending on the melody's direction. The process of touching the keys should be done slowly and with prior preparation (see example 24):

Example 24. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 2–3



6.2.1.2 Water representation method

Ondine was not Ravel's first opportunity to illustrate water phenomena with the piano – he had already done it brilliantly in *Jeux d'eau* or in *Une Barque sur l'océan*. This type of imagery requires composing melodic-harmonic material evocative of the fluidity of water and encapsulating it in a texture with illustrative qualities. *Ondine* is full of examples of Ravel's inexhaustible creativity; for example, in bar 14, subtle ripples on the water's surface are presented; it becomes slightly more turbulent than the first presentation of the theme. These fluctuations should also be reflected in the microdynamics. At the same point, the left hand performs the theme in octaves played *arpeggio*, which is intended to represent the graceful figure of a nymph emerging from the water. The *arpeggio* should be broken quite slowly, controlling the softness of the sound and supporting it with the arm (see example 25):

Example 25. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 14–15



6.2.1.3 Technique of performing passages

Arpeggios and passage techniques appear in numerous places in the piece, for example, in bars 16–21, 26–29, 37–50, 55–69, 75–78, and 88–91. They should almost always be played lightly, requiring a high degree of concentrated force and fingertip activation. *Arpeggios*

should be fluid like water, uniform, but also selective. Fingers should not be placed too high above the keyboard (see example 26):

Example 26. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 16–19



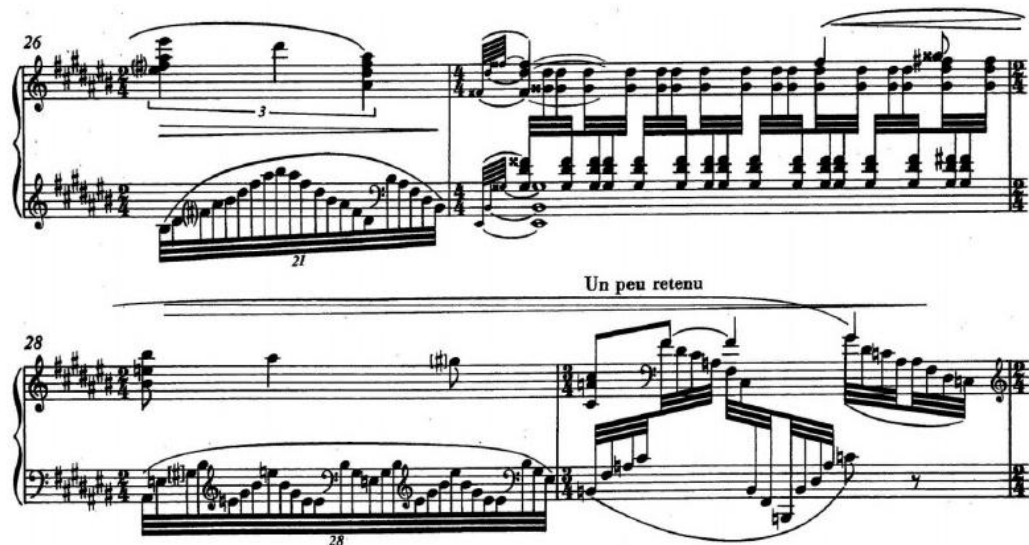
In bars 16–21, the melody's *G-sharp note* weaves into the passage, requiring greater vigilance from the performer. While playing the melody with the right hand, the fingers should be straight and touch the key slowly. When shifting the hand position, the wrist should be slightly raised, and the arm should not be completely relaxed to better control the flow of force. The author believes that the melody's *G-sharp note* is best played with the 5th finger of the right hand. When the *C-sharp note* transitions to *G-sharp*, the forearm should be actively raised, preparing the finger to touch the key in mid-air, and then slowly lowered. Because the right hand performs a rapid passage immediately after the *G-sharp note*, its weight should be shifted to the left side. While maintaining precision, the sound should not become too real, as this would not fit the mood of the musical setting. It is also important to balance the tone when switching from the passage with the left hand to the right (see example 27):

Example 27. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 20–21



When performing ascending and descending passages, the hand's center of gravity should shift between the lowest and highest notes of the current hand position, which also translates into minimal *crescendo* and *decrescendo*. Furthermore, when the left and right hands alternate (bar 27), it's important to ensure that the long melodic note doesn't lose its meaning due to high activity of the background. The author suggests practicing this entire section slowly, but quickly changing the position arrangement and aurally controlling the relationships between the plans (see example 28):

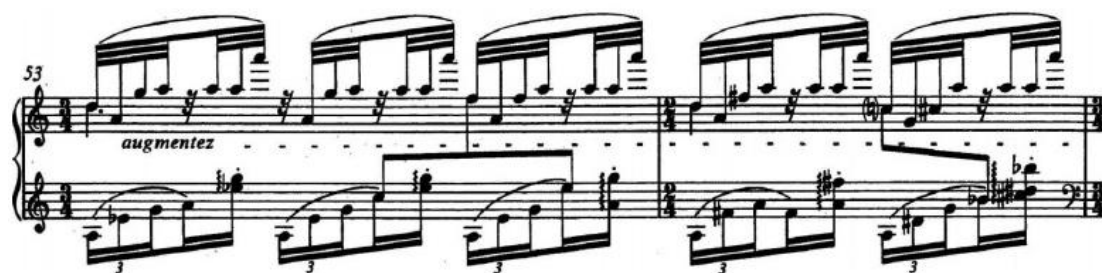
Example 28. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 26–29



In bars 52-54, melodic notes not only interlock with the passages but also alternate between the left and right hand parts. In this situation, each hand simultaneously operates two timbres, intended for the theme and accompaniment (see example 29). In this passage, the composer describes the prince's restless mood, so a relatively fast tempo is required. The author suggests that we should pay particular attention to the coordination between the arm, wrist, and fingers, utilizing the entire apparatus to differentiate timbre. Practicing slowly, one can move the entire hand to ensure a constant state of relaxation. This passage ultimately leads to the

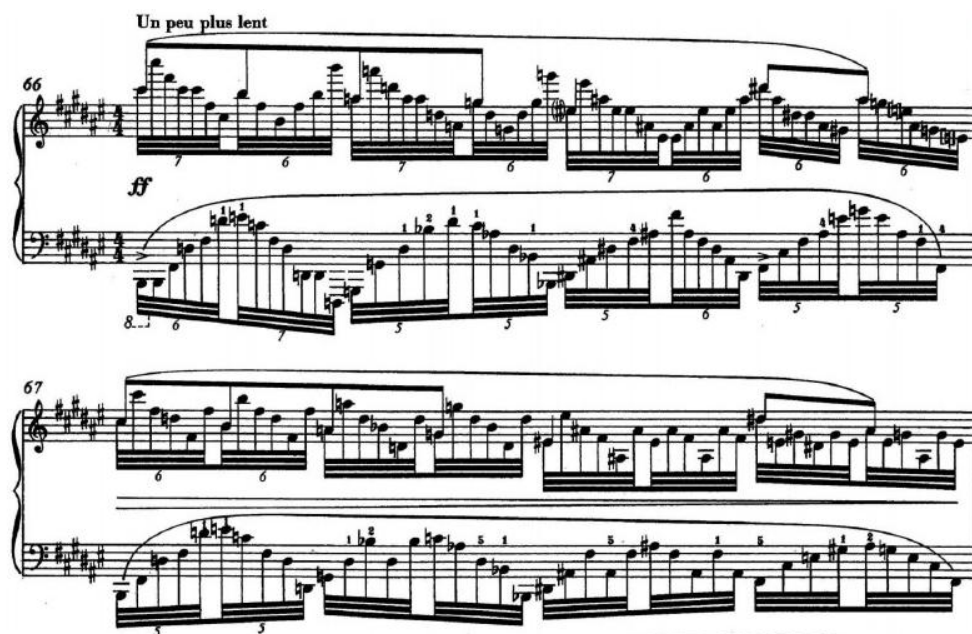
greatest climax in the piece, so it is crucial to manage strength wisely.

Example 29. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 53–54



The climax arrives in bars 55–69. Here, the prince rejects the nymph's courtship calls, causing her to scream in pain. A pattern of rapid passages and double-note progressions repeats here. Melodic notes are once again hidden within the passages, so in practice, attention should be paid to wrist use: after the double-notes and after playing the first melodic note in the passage, the right wrist should make a circular motion from the inside to the outside to aid in the smooth transition between melody and accompaniment. This will also help momentarily relax the wrist. In measures 62–65, the passages transition to the left-hand part, leading to the main climax, which occurs in bars 66–67 (see Example 30):

Example 30. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 66–67



Bars 66–69 are the most technically challenging section of the entire piece. The passages in both hands are very broad, and the number of notes in each rhythmic group per bar varies between hands; there are many configurations – septuplets on sextuplets, quintuples on

septuples , and sextuplets on quintuples. The author recommends focusing on the melodic, accented parts of the groups during practice, dividing them into smaller sections to master the whole piece step by step. This section requires the use of the arms and wrists to emphasize the melodic line and achieve a large volume of sound. At the same time, the author doesn't recommend excessively practicing the parts of each hand separately, but almost always together.

Bars 88–91 conclude the piece and take the form of a cadenza. The constant rise and fall of the rapid passages emphasizes both the illustrative depiction of turbulent water and the characters' inner emotions. In this scene, the nymph overcomes the prince by pushing him ashore with a huge wave, accompanied by ghostly laughter. This laughter can be heard in the procession of descending passages based on parallel chords, outlining the melodic line *c-b-g-f*. When practicing passages in both hands, it is important to pay attention to the evenness of the sound, especially when changing hand position. A natural representation of the sinusoidal shape of the passage is to increase the volume as it approaches the highest point, then release the tension as it descends (see Example 31):

Example 31. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 88–89



6.2.1.4 Technique of making double stops

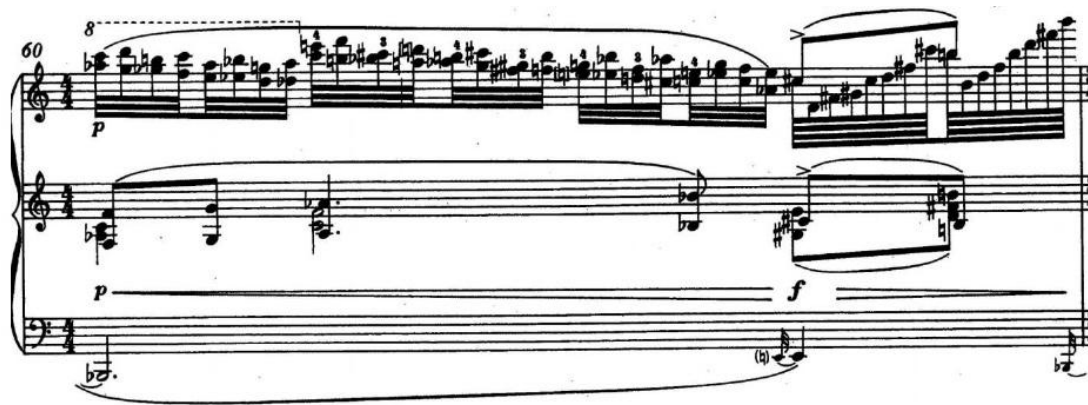
The single-hand double notes in *Ondine* are primarily thirds, but also fourths, fifths, and seconds (see example 32). Performers should pay attention to the following when practicing:

1. The fingers should not be raised too high, and the pressure should not be too strong. Both *legato* and *non-legato* articulation should be practiced .
2. The center of gravity of the hand should always be on its right side.
3. Practice by dividing passages into groups of four double notes. Once you become proficient, you can gradually combine the groups into larger wholes.
4. Your fingers should be firmly placed on the keys before pressing them.
5. The wrist and arms must always be relaxed.

There are several possible fingering methods, depending on the individual performer's predispositions. However, fingering should be arranged so that the strong parts of the bars fall in a comfortable hand position, which will facilitate good pulsation. A slight wrist lift can prevent the potential striking of unwanted adjacent notes. For long periods of practice, the

focus should not be on achieving a fast tempo, but rather on precision and timbre balance.

Example 32. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 60



6.2.2 Analysis of key implementation aspects at *Le Gibet*

6.2.2.1 Penetrating and omnipresent sound *b*

The most characteristic element in *Le Gibet* is the sound *the b flat* (or *a sharp*), which resonates throughout the piece. It appears in a syncopated rhythm, in *portato articulation*, sometimes in an octave, and other times as a single note. Even within groups composed of repetitions of just one note, it is important to remember the phrase's shaping and microdynamics, which the composer emphasizes by adding accents. The first *b flat* in the group is therefore always stronger than the second, based on the principle of echo. This ostinato plan should therefore be characterized by internal variability and development. When the *b flat* notes are repeated in octaves, only the higher note of the octave is repeated on repetition, while the lower one is legated. This clever device naturally facilitates the implementation of a mute on repetition. In octaves, the center of gravity of the hand should therefore lean toward the higher note, while the lower note serves as a coloristic complement. The entry into the keys should be quite slow (see Example 33):

Example 33. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. II: *Le Gibet*, b. 1–7

The image shows the first seven measures of the piece 'Le Gibet' from Gaspard de la nuit, movement II. The score is written for piano in a key with four flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The tempo is marked 'Très lent' with a half note equal to 69 beats. The instruction 'Sans presser ni ralentir jusqu'à la fin' is written above the staff. The first measure has a piano (pp) dynamic. The second measure has a 'Sourdine' (mute) instruction. The third measure has a 'un peu marqué' (slightly accented) instruction. The fourth measure has a 'p expressif' (piano, expressive) instruction. The score features a complex texture with many chords and a prominent B-flat note in the right hand.

6.2.2.2 Color as a foreground element

Implementing the ostinato plan as the piece develops and the texture expands becomes quite demanding, as seen in bars 20-25. Repeated *B-flat* notes appear at rhythmic intervals between extended chords and are played by both the left and right hands. The *B-flat* note sometimes appears between chord plans, other times within one plan, and eventually even above them – the ability to play multiple timbres simultaneously becomes crucial here, so as to make the crossing of texture layers clear to the listener. This section is also very harmonically rich. Since many chords are in a wide pattern, you should spend time practicing how to efficiently transfer your hand position when moving from one chord to another.

When it comes to finding the right tone for this piece, it can be helpful to imagine the setting of a cool, quiet night. Keeping the *B-flat* note at the forefront of the overall musical fabric also creates a very interesting timbral effect. The basic piano technique in this piece is chordal, so you should practice playing chords resonantly, using your whole hand (see example 34):

Example 34. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. II: *Le Gibet*, b. 19–24

The image shows a musical score for the piece 'Le Gibet' from 'Gaspard de la nuit'. It consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 19 to 24, and the second system covers measures 22 to 24. The music is written for piano, with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes lyrics in French: 'un peu en dehors' and 'toujours ppp'. There are also performance instructions like 'ppp très lié' and 'm.d. m.g.'. The score is divided into two systems, each with a boxed-in section. The first system (measures 19-24) includes the lyrics 'un peu en dehors' and 'm.d. m.g.'. The second system (measures 22-24) includes the lyrics 'toujours ppp' and 'm.d. m.g. m.d.'. The score is marked with 'ppp très lié' and 'ppp'.

The harmony in *Le Gibet* takes on an important, form-forming significance. It encompasses both variable and constant elements, making it intriguing. Therefore, the most important characteristic of a pianist performing this piece should be a sensitivity to harmonic shifts and the beauty of dark color. This dark music paints the image of a corpse on a gallows, slowly swaying left and right with the booming sound of a bell. This image is so coherent that at times it's unclear whether the rhythmic *ostinato* represents the swinging motion of the bell or the swaying of the corpse.

6.2.3 Analysis of key implementation aspects in *Scarbo*

6.2.3.1 Long-term sound repetitions

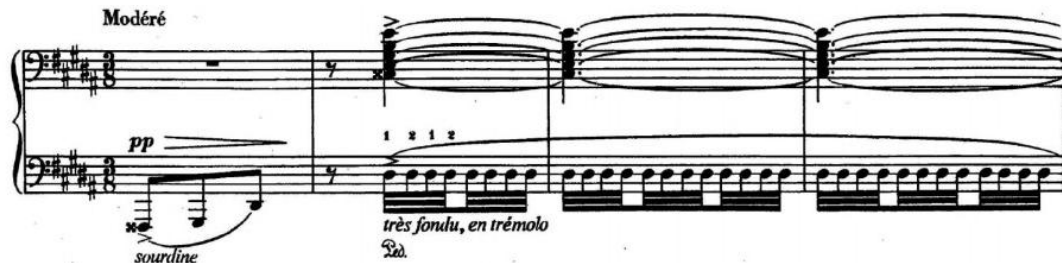
Scarbo is the most technically challenging movement of the *Gaspard de la nuit* cycle. Compared to the two preceding movements, it features greater timbral variation and contrast. The composition also features a significant use of variation techniques – most themes are transformed and approached in a variety of creative ways. This makes the piece very emotionally intense.

In bar 2, the composer introduces a rapid, five-bar repetition of the *d-sharp* note to depict a scene in which the evil dwarf approaches the protagonist with light, quick steps and begins to play tricks on him. The rest of the piece contains many similar illustrative motifs, as well as

dance elements.

Performing repetitions over such a long space, it is important to maintain a uniform and stable color (see example 35):

Example 35. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 1–4



The technique of repeated playing of a single note shares many characteristics with the *tremolando* technique, which relies on the vibratory movement of the wrist. The lightness and selectivity of repetition can be achieved precisely by skillfully utilizing the wrist's potential. Depending on the fingering chosen, the playing method may rely more on a circular motion (fingers 4-3-2-1) or a vibratory motion (fingers 1-2-1-2). In the circular motion, the fingers are held low above the keyboard and released quickly to minimize energy consumption. The vibratory motion relaxes the hand muscles, flexes the wrist, and simultaneously activates the fingertips.

6.2.3.2 A new face of the double-note technique

In *Scarbo*, the double-note technique appears in bars 65–69, 285–288, 299–302, and 448–467. From bars 65 to 69, the double-notes appear in the form of *tremolando* in a *legato* articulation. The hand's center of gravity should be shifted to the right here (see example 36):

Example 36. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 64–69



In bars 285–288 and 299–302, the same technique is used, but with a *staccato* articulation. The intervals are now larger than a third and more dispersed in texture. During practice, you can use various rhythmic transformations (e.g., adding a dotted rhythm) to help you learn how to move your hand quickly. Your fingers should grip and release the keys with a quick

movement to keep the *staccato* energetic (see Example 37):

Example 37. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 282–291 and 298–302

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the piano piece 'Scarbo' from 'Gaspard de la nuit'. The first system, starting at bar 282, shows a right-hand part with intervals of seconds and a left-hand part with triplets. The second system, starting at bar 287, includes a right-hand part with intervals of seconds and a left-hand part with triplets. The third system, starting at bar 298, continues the right-hand part with intervals of seconds. The score is in G major and 3/4 time.

In the longer section from bar 448 to 467, the right-hand part consists primarily of intervals of seconds. This situation is highly unusual for the performer, as in piano literature, double-note progressions are primarily based on thirds, fourths, and sixths, but almost never on seconds—this requires the development of a new fingering method. The first finger is used here in a clever way, often independently playing a double-note on the white keys, which significantly simplifies and smooths the progression. In these situations, the first finger should be straightened and positioned sideways to the keys. The second and third fingers are used alternately with the first finger. In long, uniform progressions of this type, the center of gravity of the right hand should be balanced. At the same time, the wrist should follow the progression (see Example 38):

Example 38. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 454–459



Raising the wrist and moving it to the right can make it easier for the first finger to work and create more space to move between the black and white keys. The *crescendo* should be built slowly and steadily, avoiding excessive dynamic increases. This is advisable both musically and practically, as it helps prevent arm fatigue.

The above section exemplifies Ravel's innovation, not only in the harmonic and textural fields, but also purely pianistic ones. The technique of playing two notes had long been present in piano music, but here it gained a new dimension.

6.2.3.3 "Toccata Techniques"

Toccata as a genre, is essentially a type of improvised and virtuosic music, reflecting a free style, full of passion and fantasy.²⁴ In keyboard music, it is often associated with the method of alternating hands at a rapid tempo. This method works well for single notes, double notes, and entire chords. It was already present in the works of Baroque composers, and its most characteristic implementation can be found in the work of Liszt.

In *Scarbo*, this technique is also widely used, for example in bars 23–29, 55–56, 62–63, 95–101, 256–267, 277–312, 359–365, and 554–577, giving the composition a toccata character. These sections demand considerable energy and passion from the performer.

When beginning to practice toccata-style passages, it's particularly important to begin at a slow tempo, establish the most comfortable fingering, and perform the text in a way that

²⁴ Wu Zuqiang, *Analysis of Form and Musical Work* [M], People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 2017, p. 131.

clearly emphasizes the pulse and division into rhythmic groups. This piece is characterized by the presence of numerous four- and five-note notes played with one hand, which, combined with the fast tempo, makes it very technically demanding. The challenge of performance here is to combine technical precision with conveying the purely musical meaning of this interesting material. The performer's task in toccata sections is to discover the relationship between the mechanics of alternating playing and the coherence of the phrase.

The fragments based on note repetition and rhythmic accompaniment (bars 95–101, 256–267, 277–284, 291–298, and 305–308) also fit into the toccata idiom. They are given additional energy by occasional grace notes in the parts of both hands, which must be played very quickly and selectively (see example 39):

Example 39. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 259–264



Fast and dynamic playing can be very effective, but it can also cause tension in the muscles of the shoulders, forearms, and wrists. During practice, attention should always be paid to the relaxation of these muscles and the balance of the entire performance apparatus, with the waist as the center, the upper body moving left and right in accordance with register changes, the elbow as a lever transferring force to the keyboard, and the hands and fingers as support points for the arms. When moving from one hand position to the next, the fingers should be in a ready position in advance. The way the material is organized in the piece is so complex that, according to the author, practicing it always with both hands can yield much greater benefits in terms of understanding and mastery than practicing with the hands separately.

6.2.3.4 Fast Passages as a sound effect

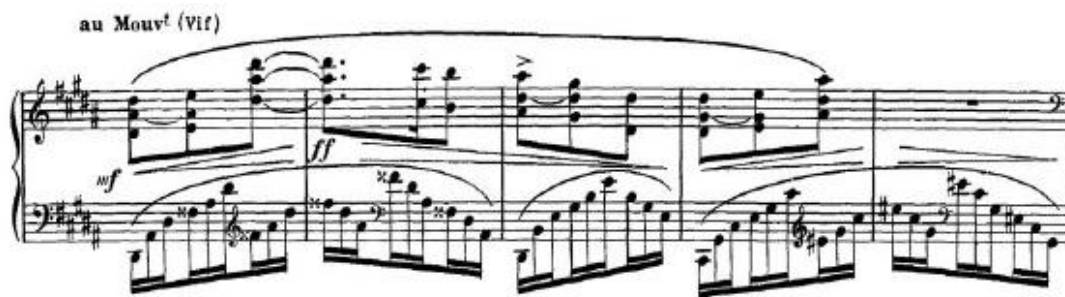
Scarbo features a multitude of fast passages intended to portray the insidious and cunning image of the evil dwarf of the title. Sometimes they are used as accompaniment, while other times they take on a leading role. They appear in bars 32–36, 110–114, 326–342, 422–447 ,

and 580–614.

In the main theme, in bars 32–36 and 110–114, the right-hand part leads the melodic narrative, while the left-hand part traces a rising-falling passage in sixteenth-note triplets. Despite the eighth-note pulsation shared by both hands, the left hand should not be overly subordinated to the rhythm of the theme, but rather draw a single, broad arc.

At this point, the author suggests treating the left-hand part not as a set of triplets, but, in the longer term, at least as nine-note groups. Using the passage in bars 32–33 as an example, the center of gravity and hand tilt should shift from the bass *d-sharp* to the soprano *f-sharp*, in one fluid movement. The greatest difficulty lies in balancing the rhythm, timbre, and articulation when moving the remaining four fingers over the thumb (see example 40):

Example 40. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 32–36



Passages of this type also appear in a descending direction, in the right-hand part, for example in bars 326–342. The passage is received at a certain point by the left hand – this transition should be as coherent and smooth as possible (see example 41):

Example 41. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: Scarbo, b. 323–331



The unique progression from bars 422–447 utilizes rapid second-third progressions, creating a sonic blur that illustrates a piercing gust of cold wind. While the left hand performs the theme, the right hand focuses on ostinato figures introducing the motive element. The pedaling, however, creates a terrifying sonic effect. Changes in dynamics are not recommended here, the music should remain in a mysterious *pp*, as the composer instructed. The eerie, double trill in bar 435 and the following descending passage represent Scarbo approaching in a haunted setting, continuing to play tricks on the poor prince. The author emphasizes that the performance should be based on one's own imagination of the scene and strive to imitate the image of the evil dwarf as best as possible (see example 42):

Example 42. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: Scarbo, b. 432–437



Bars 580–591 mark another return of the main theme. Additional double notes or chords appear in the passages, which influence their execution and complicate it. Manipulating the center of gravity of both hands is the primary means of effectively executing these passages (see example 43). In the following bars (584–614), microdynamics based on rapid increases and decreases in volume take on a prominent role in the narrative.

Example 43. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: Scarbo, b. 581–585



Rapid passages divided between the two hands appear in bars 228–234 and 249–255. Ravel used very precise rhythmic division into groups of sixteenth-note triplets and thirty-second-note triplets, likely for technical and pianistic reasons. However, the author suggests combining these groups and playing them with equal values, as groups of 10 notes, which will give them a more brilliant character (see example 44):

Example 44. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. III: *Scarbo*, b. 227–236



6.2.3.5 Complex rhythmic procedures

In *Gaspard de la nuit*, the *Ondine* and *Scarbo* movements present numerous performance challenges related to complex rhythm and polyrhythms. The difficulty lies in juxtaposing and controlling two rhythmically asynchronous parts. After interviewing numerous piano students, the author discovered that most of them, when faced with these rhythmic phenomena, rely on the rapid development of a stable muscle memory through repeated practice. Muscle memory is, of course, important, but relying solely on it is highly unreliable and can be unpredictable. To achieve a more stable state, it is necessary to carefully and consciously work through complex polyrhythmic patterns, initially dividing them into segments and then learning them in their entirety.

Such patterns appear in bars 53–55, 66–67, 75–78 of *Ondine*, and bars 454–459 of *Scarbo*. When consciously reading polyrhythmic text, one must utilize mathematics. First, one must find the least common multiple of the numbers corresponding to the number of notes in the groups in the parts of both hands. Next, one must locate the position of a given note in a graph divided into as many parts as this least common multiple (these parts represent divisions of time into equal segments). For example, the least common multiple between groups of triplets and quadruples is 12, and the least common multiple between triplets and quintuplets is 15.

To make this method easier to understand, the author has prepared the following illustration:

Diagram showing the time relationship between groups of triplets and quadruples



6.3 *Gaspard de la nuit* – use of pedals

All three pedals of the piano are used in Ravel's works. The frequency of use of the left pedal (*una chorda*) is unusually high, reflecting the significant role of color in Ravel's music, as well as the wide range of dynamics employed. There are few pedal markings in Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*, so the frequency and intensity of pedaling are usually decided by the performer. Based on his own experience, the author summarized this issue as follows:

The right pedal is used so frequently in piano playing that for many pianists, the action becomes mechanical. The resulting sound is monotonous. Impressionist music fundamentally opposes this and places new demands on the performer. Controlling the depth of both the right and left pedals becomes crucial – this determines the final sound effect. The precise moment of pressing and releasing the pedal is also crucial. The depth of the right pedal press affects the sustain of the notes. As the harmonics become more saturated and complex, a more sparing use of the right pedal is usually recommended. Furthermore, the pedals should not be pressed or released too abruptly.

6.3.1 Pedaling in *Ondine*

The scene depicted at the beginning of *Ondine* takes place at night, with the titular nymph floating above a lake. To convey the subtle ripples on the surface of the calm lake, in addition to controlling the pressure of the fingers on the keys and the center of gravity of the hand, one must creatively and sensitively use the right and left pedals to enrich the sound effect and make the scene more colorful. The right pedal should not be pressed all the way down, but rather halfway or a third of the way down. Pedal changes should be driven by harmonic or phrasal changes, not by bar divisions. This serves to provide continuity and support for long melodic lines (see example 45):

Example 45. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. I: *Ondine*, b. 4–7



6.3.2 Pedaling in *Le Gibet*

In the score for *Le Gibet*, Ravel clearly stated that "the *una corda* pedal should be used throughout the piece." The tempo is extremely slow, and the melody is quite uniform, creating a sense of spaciousness. Operating the left pedal is therefore essential to achieving a certain level of nuance in timbre and dynamics, which is so desirable here (see example 46):

Example 46. *Gaspard de la nuit*, mov. II: *Le Gibet*, b. 40–42

In *Gaspard de la nuit*, the left pedal is used more rigorously than the right pedal, as the composer explicitly stated that it must be present throughout in a significant part of *Ondine* and *Le Gibet*. Its purpose is to help the performer in realizing subtle and delicate sound effects, as well as to further contrast (on a scale of the entire composition) very quiet fragments with climactic ones.

6.3.3 Pedaling in *Scarbo*

It should be noted that the *Scarbo* makes very little use of the right pedal over longer sections, as it is dominated by short phrases and expressive articulation. Instead, this pedal should be used to emphasize the rhythmic character of the composition, for example, by applying it on accented points.

Final note

Finally, the author would like to make a suggestion to pianists studying the *Gaspard de la nuit* suite reading Bertrand's original poem to better understand the literary world that inspired Ravel. It's also worth remembering that simply finding the fingering that suits your individual predispositions is already a big step towards learning the material. The basic rule is: arms and hands must be relaxed, and fingers flexible but also active – this creates favorable conditions for performance.

Conclusions

Maurice Ravel called himself a "master of tonal arrangement"²⁵ and had an innate tendency to express himself through complex compositional techniques and beautiful, elegant form. As a French musician, he inherited a tradition of refinement, but his austere simplicity of character and "a complex yet unchaotic creative spirit" also permeated his work. Later, his work became even more profound, refined, yet somehow simpler. At some point, Ravel's inner neoclassical tendencies increasingly came to the fore, breaking his exclusive affiliation with the Impressionist movement. Ravel's works are always multifaceted, containing not only the rich color of Impressionist music but also reflecting the rigor of purely intellectual music.

The sources of the composer's work are closely linked to his life and reflect his moods and thoughts at different times. In the two works discussed in this work, we can find the passion of Spanish folk music, the gentleness and delicacy of French court music, and the subjective imagination of poetic characters and scenes. Ravel integrated national elements with universal ones, simultaneously infusing his works with innovative compositional solutions that gave them brilliance and opened new paths for the development of music in the 20th century.

In this work, the author discusses Ravel's persona and two selected works in detail, drawing on his performance experience and personal knowledge. He provides a comprehensive formal and harmonic analysis, characterizes his musical characteristics, defines his style, and describes all the technical difficulties and potential performance challenges associated with them. As a composer-pianist, Ravel imbues his piano works with a symphonic character. He respects the multi-generational piano tradition and contributes to its historical development. From a structural perspective, he follows, like most Romantics, the compositional norms established during the Classical period, treating them with admiration and developing them in an individualistic manner. His love of dance music is palpable even in his non-dance works. A performer of Ravel's works should therefore understand and combine Classical, Romantic, Impressionist, and many other elements, appreciating the outstanding skill and artistry of this combination.

The author hopes that this work has organised knowledge about the diverse and defying-simple-definition style of Ravel and has deepened the reader's understanding of the artistic values of this outstanding composer's work.

²⁵ Arbie Orenstein, *Reflections ...*, op. cit., p. 236.

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Appendix I – A. Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit* (fragment) – French original

LA NUIT ET SES PRESTIGE

IX

ONDINE.

(. . . . Je croyais entendre

Une vague harmonie enchanter mon sommeil ,
Et près de moi s'épandre un murmure pareil
Aux chants entrecoupés d'une voix triste et tendre .

—Les *deux Génies* de Ch. brugnot)

Écoute !— Écoute !— C'est moi , c'est Ondine qui frôle de ces gouttes d'eau les losanges sonores de ta fenêtre illuminée par les mornes rayons de la lune; et voici , en robe de moire , la dame châtelaine qui contemple à son balcon la belle nuit étoilée et le beau lac endormi .

Chaque fleet est un ondin qui nage dans le courant, chaque courant est un sentier qui serpente vers mon palais, et mon palais est bâti fluide , au fond du lac, dans le triangle du feu, de la terre et de l'air .

Écoute !— Écoute !— Mon père bat l'eau coassante d'une branches d'aulne verte, et mes soeurs caressent de leurs bras d'écume les fraîches Ile d'herbes , de nénuphars et de glaïeuls , ou se moquent du saule caduc et barbu qui pêche à la ligne .

Sa chanson murmurée , elle me supplia de recevoir son anneau à mon doigt , pour être l'époux d'une Ondine, et de visiter avec elle son palais, pour être le roi des lacs.

Et comme je lui répondais que j'aimais une mortelle , boudeuse et dépitée , elle pleura quelques larmes , poussa un éclat de rire , et s'évanouit en giboulées qui ruisselèrent blanches le long de mes vitraux bleus.



[Henri Fantin-Latour – *La Femme dans la mer*]

PIECES DÉTACHÉES

EXTRAITES DU PORTEFEUILLE DE L'AUTEUR

XI

LE GIBET.

(Que vois -je remuer autour de ce gibet ?

— *Faust* de J. Wolfgang von Goethe)

Ah! ce que j'entends , serait-ce la bise nocturne qui glapit , ou le pendu qui pousse un soupir sur la fourche patibulaire ?

Serait-ce quelque grillon qui chante tapi dans la mousse et le lierre sterile dont par pitié se chausse le bois ?

Serait-ce quelque mouche en chasse sonnante du cor autour de ces oreilles sourdes à la fanfare des hallali ?

Serait-ce quelque escarbot qui cueille en son vol inégal un cheveu sanglant à son crâne chauve ?

Ou bien serait-ce quelque araignée qui brode une demi-aune de mousseline pour cravate à ce col étranglé ?

C'est la cloche qui tinte aux murs d'une ville , sous l'horizon , et la carcasse d'un pendu que rougit le soleil couchant.



[Victor Hugo]

XII

SCARBO.

(Il regarda sous le lit, dans la cheminée, dans le bahut;

— personne. Il ne put comprendre par où il s'était introduit,

par où il s'était évadé.

— *Contes nocturnes* de Hoffmann)

Oh! que de fois je l'ai entendu et vu, Scarbo, lorsqu'à minuit la lune brille dans le ciel comme un écu d'argent sur une bannière d'azur semée d'abeilles d'or!

Que de fois j'ai entendu bourdonner son rire dans l'ombre de mon alcôve, et grincer son once sur la soie des courtines de mon lit!

Que de fois je l'ai vu descendre du plancher, pirouetter sur un pied et rouler par la chambre comme le fuseau tombé de la quenouille d'une sorcière.

Le croyais -je alors évanoui ? le nain grandissait entre la lune et moi , comme le clocher d'une cathedral gothique , un grelot d'or en branle à son bonnet pointu !

Mais bientôt son corps bleissait , diaphane comme la cire d'une bougie, son visage blémissait comme la cire d'un lumignon ,— et soudain il s'éteignait .



[Albrecht Dürer – *The Dwarf with a sword and walking stick*]

Appendix II – A. Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit* (fragment) – English translation

Translator : Gilbert Alter

Source : <https://www.bilibili.com/read/cv18553161>

THE NIGHT AND ITS PRESTIGES (Translated by Gilbert Alter)

IX

UNDINE.

(. . . . I thought I heard a faint harmony that enchants my sleep. And close to me radiates an identical murmur of songs interrupted by a sad and tender voice.

—The *Two Spirits* , by Ch. Brugnot)

- "Listen! - Listen! - It is I, it is Ondine who brushes drops of water on the resonant panes of your windows lit by the gloomy rays of the moon; and here in gown of watered silk, the mistress of the chateau gazes from her balcony on the beautiful starry night and the beautiful sleeping lake.

"Each wave is a water sprite who swims in the stream, each stream is a footpath that winds towards my palace, and my palace is a fluid structure, at the bottom of the lake, in a triangle of fire, of earth and of air.

"Listen! - Listen! - My father whips the croaking water with a branch of a green alder tree, and my sisters caress with their arms of foam the cool islands of herbs, of water lilies, and of corn flowers, or laugh at the decrepit and bearded willow who fishes at the line. »

Her song murmured, she beseeches me to accept her ring on my finger, and be the husband of an Ondine, and to visit with her her palace and be king of the lakes.

And as I was replying to her that I loved a mortal, sullen and spiteful, she wept some tears, uttered a burst of laughter, and vanished in a shower that streamed white down the length of my stained glass windows.

XI

THE GIBBET.

(What do I see stirring around that gibbet?

— *Faust* , by J. Wolfgang von Goethe)

Ah! that which I hear, was it the north wind that screams in the night, or the hung one who utters a sigh on the fork of the gibbet?

Was it some cricket who sings lurking in the moss and the sterile ivy, which out of pity covers the floor of the forest?

Was it some fly in chase sounding the horn around those ears deaf to the fanfare of the halloos?

Was it some scarab beetle who gathers in his uneven flight a bloody hair from his bald skull?

Or then, was it some spider who embroiders a half-measure of muslin for a tie on this strangled neck?

It is the bell that tolls from the walls of a city, under the horizon, and the corpse of the hung one that is reddened by the setting sun.

XII

SCARBO.

(He looked under the bed, up the chimney, in the closets; nothing.

He couldn't understand how it got in, or how it got out.

— *Nocturnal Tales* , by Hoffmann)

How often I have seen and heard you, Scarbo, when at midnight the moon is shining in the sky like a silver shield emblazoned on an azure banner oversprinkled with golden bees!

How often I have heard your laughter ooze from the shadows of my alcove, and the rasp of your fingernail scratching at the silk of my bed curtains.

How often I have watched you drop from the ceiling, pirouette on one foot, and roll across the room, like a bobbin fallen from a sorcerer's loom!

Do I believe he has gone? The dwarf looms between me and the moon, like the spired belfry of a gothic cathedral, a jester's golden bell jangling at the tip of his pointed cap!

But soon his body turns bluish, diaphanous as candle wax; his face becomes bluish as a candle-end—which suddenly blinks out.

After thanking

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