

## Chapter 3

## A Narrative Walk through Granville Bantock's *The Pierrot of the Minute Overture* (1908)<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

Granville Bantock's comedy overture *The Pierrot of the Minute* (1908), based on Ernest Dowson's verse drama of 1892, offers an intriguing example of how we might understand narrative in relation to a musical refiguring of a literary text. Although the composer initially claimed that the overture had "no sequence of ideas" and simply created an "atmosphere" for Dowson's work, he went on to identify some connections between the overture and aspects of Dowson's plot; the situation was further complicated by a more detailed overview of Dowson's narrative that was included in the published full score of 1909. After noting how literary scholarship has highlighted core themes in Dowson's poetry and prose, this paper demonstrates how specific elements of Dowson's text correspond to the succession of musical events in the overture. In the wider context of Bantock's response to a wide range of literature in his orchestral works of 1890-1911 (with their distinctive approaches to structure, key relationships, and representation of character), Bantock's *The Pierrot of the Minute* can therefore be identified as a more detailed musical refiguring than might first be imagined.

**Keywords:** Granville Bantock, Ernest Dowson, narrative, music and literature, orchestral music

This keynote paper highlights some of the questions being posed in the "Narrative Walks through Music" conference. These include: What types of narratives do composers feel have potential for musical refiguring?<sup>2</sup> Can music refigure a narrative effectively, i.e., tell a story? What materials might the listener engage with in charting their narrative walks? Can the listener trace a narrative, even if a composer protests that one does not exist? And how might musical structure be manipulated to communicate particular narratives? In addressing these questions, I am going to focus on a composer who may be relatively unfamiliar: the British composer, conductor and educator Granville Bantock (1868–1946), who studied at London's Royal Academy of Music, and later became Head of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, and then Professor of Music at the University of

<sup>1</sup> Original Scientific Article.

<sup>2</sup> The term "refiguring" is one that I have used extensively in discussions of music-literature connections, given that it suggests a "translation" of a narrative into another form (e.g., Allis 2022a; 2022b).

For a more detailed exploration of Bantock's *The Pierrot of the Minute* in the context of his other literary-inspired orchestral works written c.1890–1911, see my forthcoming monograph, *Granville Bantock and the Orchestral Refiguring of Literature* (Allis 2026).

Birmingham. Unfortunately, the majority of his compositions are not regularly performed; one reason for this is that he was not interested in “Englishness” in terms of national identity – he was much more attracted by the East, or the idea of the “other”.<sup>3</sup> However, he did not assert any Western dominance over the East, noting instead the East’s superiority in terms of musical history and its importance as a creative spur: “The Eastern world feeds my imagination as with Flaubert; the West is to me barren & worn out” (Bantock 1896, 157; Allis 2017a, 139). He also learnt Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian.

Bantock is particularly suitable for a case study of music and narrative because of all the British composers working around the turn of the 20th century, he was the most significant in terms of testing music’s ability to refigure a range of literary texts orchestrally. This is evident in his pre-First World War literary-inspired orchestral projects (see Table 1). Although some of these works have not survived, the paratexts include a range of poetic genres (including the dramatic monologue, epic and satire), a novel (Bulwer-Lytton’s *Eugene Aram*), and dramatic works by Sophocles, Dowson and Ibsen. The most striking project relates to Thomas Carlyle’s published lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History* – it is a shame that Bantock’s work is not extant, as a musical representation of that text would have been fascinating. I will focus on just one of these compositions: Bantock’s 1908 comedy overture *The Pierrot of the Minute*, and want to explore how we might negotiate what Umberto Eco would call the potential “paths” through the “woods” of this musical text (1994, 6).

Our starting point is obviously Bantock’s title. As James Hepokoski has suggested, invoking Gérard Genette, titles “set up the framing conditions of a [musical] text’s reception” (Hepokoski 1992, 136). In this case, Bantock is suggesting a connection between his music and a verse drama by the decadent writer Ernest Dowson (1867–1900). Dowson’s one-act “dramatic phantasy” *The Pierrot of the Minute* was written in 1892 for the American actor and poet William Theodore Peters (1862–1905). Dowson found the creative process difficult: he described this as “a period of severe mental agony” (Plarr 1914, 67). However, the work was premiered at Chelsea Town Hall on 22 November 1892 under the auspices of the Primrose League, an organisation dedicated to the memory of the former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. Peters played the part of Pierrot, with Ida North as the Moon Maiden – a role subsequently taken by Aubrey Beardsley’s sister Mabel at the Albert Hall Theatre in 1893.

It was Beardsley who provided the illustrations for the publication of Dowson’s verse drama in 1897 – a cover image, the frontispiece, a picture on the first page of the text, and an image in the end pages (Dowson 1897); this last image was reproduced in Bantock’s orchestral score (1909, preliminary page).

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<sup>3</sup> This can be seen in works such as his ballet *Egypt*, the cantata *Omar Khayyám, Songs of the East*, the song cycle *Sappho*, and his refigurings of Thomas Moore’s “oriental romance” *Lalla Rookh* and Robert Southey’s poetry in his orchestral poems (Richards 2007, 129–146; Allis 2016, 143–174). See also the discussion of Bantock’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* and *Lalla Rookh* projects in my forthcoming *Granville Bantock and the Orchestral Refiguring of Literature* (Allis 2026).

**Table 1.** Bantock's literary-inspired orchestral works, 1890–1911

<b>Work</b>	<b>Paratext type</b>
<i>Satan in Hell</i> Overture (1890)	Milton, poetry; Doré illustration
<i>The Curse of Kehama</i> (1894–1901) [unfinished]	Southey, poetry
<i>Eugene Aram</i> Overture (1896)	Bulwer-Lytton, novel
<i>Thalaba the Destroyer</i> (1899)	Southey, poetry
<i>El Islam</i> (c.1901) [lost]	?
<i>King Lear</i> (c.1901) [lost]	Shakespeare, drama
<i>Comedy and Tragedy</i> (c.1901) [lost]	?
<i>Emperor and Galilean</i> (c.1901) [lost]	Ibsen, drama
<i>Heroes and Hero-Worship</i> (c.1901) [lost]	Carlyle, published lectures
<i>Hudibras</i> (1901)	Samuel Butler, poetry
<i>Dante and Beatrice</i> (1901, rev. 1911)	Dante, poetry/biography
<i>Fifine at the Fair</i> (1901, rev. 1911)	Browning, poetry
<i>The Witch of Atlas</i> (1902)	Shelley, poetry
<i>Lalla Rookh</i> (1901–3)	Thomas Moore, romance
<i>The Pierrot of the Minute</i> (1908)	Dowson, verse drama
<i>Overture to a Greek Tragedy</i> (1911)	Sophocles, drama

In terms of the plot, this concerns Pierrot who is led by a scroll to a sacred temple in a French park, where he wishes to experience an idealised love – “one hour of joy” (l. 192). After consulting parts of the scroll and commenting on it, he drinks a glass of wine to calm his nerves, and is then sent to sleep by soft lute music. The Moon Maiden appears, and although she warns Pierrot not to continue in his quest, he demands that her beauty be unveiled. A love scene follows; the Moon Maiden dances to help Pierrot “forget all weary things of earth” (l. 154), and after some discussion of the nature of Love, the two describe their respective worlds; whilst the immortal world is “too refined and rare” for mortals, Pierrot expands upon the “rout and festival” of his worldly experiences (ll. 365, 410). Birdsong heralds daybreak, and after music imitating the birds once again transports Pierrot into “soft troubled and oblivious sleep” (l. 470), the Moon Maiden decrees his fate: he will be forever haunted by her memory (“Go forth and seek in each fair face in vain, / To find the image of thy love again”, ll. 485–6). As she sings her final song confirming her influence over the still sleeping Pierrot, the curtain falls.

One area that we might explore further to understand the themes of Dowson's narrative is literary scholarship. Writers have identified a common trope in much of Dowson's poetry and prose: what the literary scholar Chris Snodgrass has highlighted as the contrast “between the chaotic clamor of the vulgar, timebound world” and the “aesthetic purity” of a “timeless, alternative world” (1992, 32). We can see this most clearly perhaps in Dowson's poem “Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration”, where the convent is a site of seclusion that contrasts with the “wild and passionate nature” of the world outside:

Calm, sad, secure; behind convent walls,  
 These watch the sacred lamp, these watch and pray:

And it is one with them when evening falls,  
 And one with them the cold return of day.  
 [...]

Outside, the world is wild and passionate;  
 Man's weary laughter and his sick despair  
 Entreat at their impenetrable gate:  
 They heed no voices in their dream of prayer.  
 [ll. 1–4, 13–16]

More striking is where Dowson's characters (or the poet-narrator) try to access, retain or recapture such timeless worlds: what Jan Gordon has described as a search for a central "paradise of art removed from the destructive ebb and flow of the world which rotates about it in a wheel-like pattern" (1967, 3). Hence attempts to recapture the bliss of springtime, to stop time by extending childhood, or as Snodgrass suggests, using "dream and revisionist memory" to create an "ideali[sed] 'remembrance' of a magical time that need not pass away" (1992, 35–36). For the central character Michael Garth in Dowson's short story "The Statute of Limitations", for example, the memory of his beloved's "eyes and her hair" was "a perceptual presence with him", rather than the reality of a recent photograph (Dowson 1895, 130). As Snodgrass notes, these quests to retain such moments ultimately fail, representing "the empty mirror" of the protagonists' "own futile, self-indulgent dreams" (1992, 41). Dowson's verse drama therefore fits this template perfectly. We have Pierrot attempting to escape the "chaotic clamor of the vulgar, timebound world" by entering the "timeless" and pure world of the Moon Maiden. Despite experiencing "one hour of love", he is not able to remain in this "other" world; we are left with the sleeping Pierrot, but once he wakes, he will return to a frustrated life in the real world, searching for a vision that he cannot recapture.

The central issue, then, is how we might create a meaningful narrative walk through Bantock's overture. First, it is useful to remind ourselves of James Hepokoski's much-cited definition of programme music:

The essence of a [symphonic poem] is situated in the listener's act (anticipated by the composer's) of connecting text and paratext, music and nonmusical image, and grappling with the implications of the connection. The genre exists [. . .] solely within the receiver, who agrees to create it reciprocally by indicating his or her willingness to play the game proposed by the composer; it does not exist abstractly in the acoustical surface of the music (Hepokoski 1992, 136).

As part of this compositional "game", then, the key phrase here is "grappling with the implications of the connection". So what might we use to help us with this "grappling"? The first area to explore is Bantock's correspondence. On 15 November 1909, Bantock wrote to the music critic Ernest Newman, and suggested: "The Overture does not attempt to represent the story, which is to follow, but only to create an atmosphere for the play, consequently there is no regular development or sequence of ideas" (letter dated 15 November 1909, in Allis 2017a, 238). So one approach might be to simply hear the overture as an "atmosphere" that parallels the general mood of Dowson's verse drama – nothing more. However, Bantock went on to say this:

Pierrot is chiefly concerned in it. His various moods, & superficial gaiety, & the pathetic little soul within him, seemed to me to require more emphasis at the beginning, or in the Prelude – in order to give the audience the key of his character.

He practically occupies the stage of the Comedy Overture until 2 bars before 38, when the action of the play is foreshadowed by his falling asleep. The birds twitter their evening song during the *Lento Sostenuto*, & the Moon Maiden appears to him in his Dream at 42. His arrival of love is in the 1<sup>st</sup> Horn & Violas as a counterpoint to the Moon Maiden. At 48 he sinks into forgetfulness, and at 50 wakes up to find it all only a Dream. [...] He slinks away abashed, & the final chord in the flutes is intended to convey the hollowness of it all. The Play now should follow, and by this means, any anti-climax is avoided. The Overture should only suggest & not attempt to describe the action of the play (letter dated 15 November 1909, in Allis 2017a, 238).

So we have a tension between Bantock's initial disavowal of a "sequence of ideas" and his subsequent highlighting of selected musical events in the score. Our second approach might therefore be to view the overture as a "suggestion" of some of the events in Dowson's verse drama.

There are two other paratexts that we might consider. First, the programme note at the overture's 1908 premiere at the Worcester Festival, which seems to confirm this "suggestive" path:

the composer has sought to suggest the main features of the poem; the character of Pierrot, his hopes and fancies, his falling asleep while the birds twitter their lullaby, the vision of the moon-maiden, coming to him in his dreams and his awakening as daylight returns.<sup>4</sup>

However, the published score of 1909 includes a more detailed overview of Dowson's plot:

Pierrot enters a glade in the park of the Petit Trianon at twilight, led thither in obedience to a mysterious message, which bids him come to sleep one night within these precincts if he would encounter Love. Half whimsical, half fearful, he wonders why he, so careless, thoughtless, and gay, should now be filled with wistful longing; and in the fast-falling darkness he lies down on a couch of fern, and falls asleep. A Moon-maiden descends the steps of the Temple of Love, and, bending over the sleeper, kisses him. He awakes and throws himself at her feet in rapt devotion, though she warns him that the kisses of the Moon are of a fatal sweetness, and that

"Whoso seeks her she gathers like a flower  
He gives a life, and only gains an hour."

But Pierrot, reckless, demands the pure and perfect bliss, though life be the price to pay. With gay laughter and sprightly jest they learn together the lore of Love; but day-break approaches, the birds awaken, and the Moon-maiden must leave him. Together they gaze at the coming dawn; then Pierrot, sinking back on his couch, falls softly asleep once more, and the Moon-maiden vanishes.

The Prelude ends with the awakening of Pierrot, his love-dream being but the illusion of a minute (Bantock 1909, preliminary page).

<sup>4</sup> Worcester Music Festival, Evening Concerts, 9 September 1908, programme booklet, p. 6. (Anon. 1908, 6).

Although Bantock provides no detailed plan here of which specific aspects of the score might relate to these details of the plot, this encourages the listener to make more overt connections between the musical events of the overture and the narrative events in Dowson's text. It is therefore this third type of approach – viewing the overture as a detailed refiguring of Dowson's narrative – that I want to explore. In fact, we can map the succession of musical events in the overture with specific elements in Dowson's text in an even more detailed way than this prompt in the score might suggest. If we also situate Bantock's overture within the wider frame of his pre-war musical refigurings, hopefully I can convince you what a fascinating composer Bantock is in terms of connections between music and literature, and issues of representation, narrative and structure.

So how might we trace Dowson's drama in our narrative walk through Bantock's overture? Let us start with the opening, and Bantock's representation of the Pierrot figure, which takes the form of a scherzo in E minor. It was Bantock's former composition teacher at the Royal Academy of Music, Frederick Corder, who suggested that the scherzo genre was ripe for development:

The Scherzo of the average German composer makes me want to cry. It is simply like any piece whatever of Schumann's played one in a bar. [. . .] What the would-be writer of Scherzos really needs is to study his Haydn and learn how to make capital out of odd accents and overlappings and omissions of bars [. . .] the best way of ensuring liveliness is to get plenty of sprightly phrases in the bass; where this cannot be done at least break up the bass and let us have as little of it as possible (Corder 1909, 55–56).

Bantock's short introductory section marking Pierrot's arrival in the glade – a dominant pedal in E minor – incorporates the dislocation that Corder suggested. Following a descending whole-tone scale, stuttering rhythmic dislocations on solo bassoon and lower strings establish the character's comedic credentials by varying the length of tied notes, introducing pauses, and offering different gradations of a chromatic ascent (Example 1).

Example 1. *The Pierrot of the Minute*, Introduction, m. 10–3:3

The musical score for Example 1 is presented in two staves. The first staff contains measures 10, 11, and 12, marked with a circled '1'. The second staff contains measures 13, 14, and 15, marked with a circled '2'. The third staff contains measures 16, 17, and 18, marked with a circled '3'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

This all adds to the listener's disorientation. The rhythmic instability of the introduction is matched by the tonal instability of the scherzo proper. Although this begins in E minor, after five bars the key moves to C minor, then E flat major; and although Pierrot's main theme begins in E flat, its sequential treatment adds to the sense of volatility. Example 2 outlines the tonal fluctuations at the beginning of Pierrot's E flat major theme. There is further sequential writing at the *Allegretto capriccioso* in 2/4 (described in the Worcester

Festival programme note as representing Pierrot's "whimsicality & gaiety" (Anon. 1908, 6), where several five-bar phrases continue to undermine any stability in Pierrot's music (Example 3). This whole first section therefore not only establishes the character of Pierrot, but it underlines the trope highlighted in literary scholarship: the "chaotic clamor" of the "timebound" world. Table 2, which should be referred to throughout the following discussion, places this section in context by outlining the structure of the comedy overture as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

Example 2. Pierrot's theme, 12:3–15:6

Example 3. Pierrot's "whimsicality and gaiety", 26:5–10

**Allegretto capriccioso. [ $\text{♩} = 80$ ]**

muted tpt,  
vln 2 pizz, divi

From the world of Pierrot, Bantock then had to find a way to engage with the timeless world of the Moon Maiden. The composer decided to suggest a gradual transition to this other world. This transitional portal is announced by a muted ascending solo violin scale, and a sudden modulation to G flat major. Two different types of music are juxtaposed, then repeated, both based on Pierrot's chromatic motif. First, we have a descending expressive melody on oboe and muted viola accompanied by harp arpeggios, and muted string trills and tremolos, suggestive of a magical quality; second, a more playful music with subsequent *pizzicato* echoes of the scherzo (Example 4).

<sup>5</sup> In the table, upper case designates a major key, and lower case a minor key.

**Table 2.** Bantock, *The Pierrot of the Minute*, overall structure

Bar	Musical event	Key
TIMEBOUND WORLD (Scherzo complex)		
1 <i>Presto</i> , 3/8	Introduction	e (V)
4:5 <i>Allegro Vivo</i>	Pierrot	e – c – Eb – c – e – c – Eb – g – d – a – seq – a – seq
26:5 <i>Allegretto Capriccioso</i> , 2/4		G <sup>9</sup> – F – Ab – seq
TRANSITION/PORTAL		
29:7 <i>Più moto, con grazia</i> , 3/8	reading of the scroll	Gb
33:5 <i>Allegretto</i>	drunken waltz	Gb – seq
37:9 <i>Poco tranquillo</i>	descent into sleep	C (chrom)
40:4 <i>Lento sostenuto</i> , 3/4	twittering birds/sleep	F (V)
TIMELESS WORLD		
42:3 <i>Molto Lento Cantabile</i>	Moon Maiden/arrival of love	F – seq
45:6 <i>Più lento</i> , 9/8	Moon maiden's dance	seq
TRANSITION/PORTAL		
48:1 <i>a tempo, Poco languido</i> , 3/8	descent into sleep	Ab, D, B, C pedals
RETURN TO TIMEBOUND WORLD		
49:9 <i>Presto</i>	Introduction (truncated)	e (V)
50:7 <i>Allegro vivo</i>	scherzo fragment	e

**Example 4.** The reading of the scroll, 29:7–30:4

**Più moto, con grazia.** [M.M. ♩ = 144] 30

In searching for a parallel in Dowson’s text, where a magical “otherness” is contrasted twice with something more earthbound, one passage seems to fit the bill. Here Pierrot reads from the scroll (a reference to the “other” world – italicised in Dowson’s text) then comments on it:

*Pierrot.*

"He loves to-night who never loved before;  
Who ever loved, to-night shall love once more."

I never loved! I know not what love is.

I am so ignorant – but what is this?

(Reads)

"Who would adventure to encounter Love  
Must rest one night within this hallowed grove.  
Cast down thy lilies, which have led thee on,  
Before the tender feet of Cupidon."

Thus much is done, the night remains to me.

Well, Cupidon, be my security!

Here is more writing, but too faint to read.

(He puzzles for a moment, then casts the scroll down).

Hence, vain old parchment. I have learnt thy rede!

[ll. 28–39]

Bantock then introduces a waltz, also in G flat major. Rather than simply suggesting Pierrot's "various moods", here the music's befuddled chromaticisms and *tempo rubato* suggest Pierrot inebriated by his flask of wine. As Bantock confirmed to Newman, the interruption of the waltz by the return of the muted textures over a C pedal suggests how a "faint" music encourages Pierrot to fall asleep; the sounds of the twittering birds explain the *Waldweben* soundscape at the ensuing *Lento sostenuto*, and the heightened presence of the solo violin confirms that the journey to the "other" world is complete. So the overture's structure so far consists of an unstable scherzo reflecting the timebound world of reality, then a portal to the "other" world that includes a representation of Pierrot reading the scroll, his becoming inebriated, and falling asleep.

For the music of the Moon Maiden, Bantock mirrored the semitonal relationship in the scherzo (E minor to E flat major) by offering a central F major episode that chromatically colours the G flat of the transition. Paced at the slowest tempo in the work (a crotchet speed of 60), her *Molto Lento cantabile* theme in violins and clarinets appears in counterpoint with "the arrival of love" in the horns and violas (Example 5). References to Pierrot's chromatic material on two clarinets then echo the conversational nature of Dowson's text as Pierrot and the Moon Maiden discuss the nature of his plight:

*Pierrot.*

Now I have lost my heart, and gained my goal.

*The Lady.*

Didst thou not read the warning on the scroll?

*Pierrot* (Picking up the parchment).

I read it all, as on this quest I fared,

Save where it was illegible and hard.

*The Lady.*

Alack! Poor scholar, wast thou never taught  
 A little knowledge serveth less than naught?  
 [ll. 130–5]

**Example 5.** The Moon Maiden and arrival of love, 42:2–6**Molto lento cantabile.** [M.M. ♩ = 60]

The ecstatic quality of Bantock's music reflects how Pierrot abandons himself to his fate. This is followed by a more balletic music at the sequential *Più lento* section that surely represents the Moon Maiden's dance designed to seduce the reclining Pierrot:

*The Lady.*

What visitants across his spirit glance,  
 Lying on lilies, while he watch me dance?  
 Watch, and forget all weary things of earth,  
 All memories and cares, all joy and mirth,  
 While my dance woos him, light and rhythmical,  
 And weaves his heart into my coronal.  
 [ll. 152–7]

Having sampled this timeless world, Pierrot then has to return to normality. The obvious way to represent Pierrot's final descent into sleep was to replay some of the textures of the previous transition. There was one remaining problem, however: deciding how the overture should finish. Although Dowson's verse drama ends with the Moon Maiden standing over the sleeping Pierrot, Bantock had to find a better musical solution for the final few bars. He was helped by the fact that Dowson encouraged Theodore Peters to write his own Epilogue, where Pierrot appears in front of the curtain to address the audience directly:

The sun is up, yet ere a body stirs  
 A word with you, sweet ladies and dear sirs [. . .]  
 Then pardon my Moon Maid and me, because  
 We craved the golden shower of your applause!

Pray shrive us both for having tried to win it,  
And cry, "Bravo! The Pierrot of the minute!"

This was incorporated in early performances of the play, and was also published separately in Peters's 1896 volume of poems and translations, *Posies Out of Rings and Other Conceits* (1896, 73–74), before appearing in the 1913 edition of Dowson's play after his death. Bantock's suggestion of a return to the world of reality was therefore in the form of a truncated replaying of the opening music – first the return of the whole-tone scale over the dominant pedal, then (via a clear E minor cadence missing from the introduction) a brief, scurrying reference to the scherzo. This solution echoed the protagonist's physical return in Peters's Epilogue, creating a clear frame for the piece. The final bare fifth in the flutes underlines the futility of Pierrot's quest: what Bantock called "the hollowness of it all".

So, despite Bantock's initial claim that *The Pierrot of the Minute* had no "sequence of ideas", and was designed simply to create an "atmosphere" for any performance of the play that might follow, the overture does outline a series of musical events that mirrors details of Dowson's narrative, and which is surely more than a "suggestion": the establishment of Pierrot, his reading the scroll and commenting on it, becoming inebriated, falling asleep, encountering and conversing with the Moon Maiden, experiencing her seductive dance, and descending into sleep once more. The final truncated reference to the scherzo also parallels Theodore Peters's Epilogue, where Pierrot returns to the stage. The music itself – a central stable "otherness" that contrasts with the restless, unstable scherzo surrounding it, is also a direct representation of what literary scholars have identified as a Dowsonian trope: a central "paradise of art [...] removed from the destructive ebb and flow of the world which rotates about it in a wheel-like pattern" (Gordon 1967, 3); and the final hollow fifth highlights the futility of attempting to retain this vision. Our narrative walk through Bantock's overture, with its succession of incidents, therefore creates a clear connection between Dowson's verse drama and Bantock's overture as a musical refiguring of the narrative events.

Let us return to that list of Bantock's early orchestral projects in Table 1. Having established Bantock's ability to create a detailed musical refiguring of Dowson's narrative, it should come as no surprise that he was able to do this elsewhere. I want to touch briefly on the issue of structure in these works. What is striking is how each of these compositions has a different approach to structure as a distinctive response to the literary narrative on which it is based. Bantock was very clear that conventional musical forms were often too restrictive. Under the pseudonym G. Ransome, he wrote an article called "The Idea in Music" in the journal that he created, the *New Quarterly Musical Review*, which outlined his position:

The Sonata, or Symphony, as it stands at present, may be regarded as an arid form of abstract musical thought [. . .]. The composer of modern days who would present his work to the world in an abstract form, conceived upon no definite or titled Idea, is injuring his own position, and seriously handicapping the progress of Art, which must ever advance. [. . .] Cut away the useless encumbrances of classic form, and we find ourselves free to act. The air that we breathe is fresher, and untainted by the musty odour of the midnight lamp (Ransome [Bantock] 1896, 186–188).

There are parallels here with Richard Strauss's suggestion to the conductor Hans von Bülow: "I consider it a legitimate artistic method to create a correspondingly new form for every new subject" (Schuh and Trenner 1955, 82).

We have seen how the modified ternary form of *The Pierrot of the Minute* communicates the idea of a journey to the "other" world and back again. Elsewhere, Bantock manipulates rondo and sonata designs to create deformational structures reflective of his literary paratexts.

In *The Witch of Atlas*, for example, an introductory and closing F major frame that establishes the sense of mythmaking encloses a D flat major rondo structure (see Table 3). However, not only does the A section modulate, and transform thematically (mirroring the metamorphic imagery of Percy Shelley's poem), but its final return in bar 198 (in F major, not D flat) conflates rondo and episode material. In terms of sonata structures, one striking example is what I think is his most successful orchestral poem, *Fifine at the Fair*, written in 1901, revised in 1911 and premiered in 1912. This is based on a poem by Robert Browning that has a very complex narrative. After a Prologue, we have a main section (132 verses) where "Don Juan" walks around a country fair in France with his wife Elvire. As they walk, he offers a defence of inconstancy – being unfaithful – and focuses on the gypsy dancer Fifine, his potential mistress, to advance his argument. After much philosophising, comparing wife and mistress, he eventually decides to remain with his wife. However, Fifine places a letter into his hand; he says he needs "five minutes" to clear the matter up, and does not return. Then, in an Epilogue, "The Householder" (seen as an extension of the Don Juan character), sitting at home alone, looks forward to being reunited with his dead wife in heaven.

**Table 3.** Rondo deformation in Bantock's *The Witch of Atlas*

Bar	Section	Key
1	Introductory frame	F – D $\flat$ (V)
64	A: The witch I	D $\flat$ – D – E $\flat$
99	B (episode I: creatures; witch reference)	seq – D $\flat$ (V)
138	A': The witch II	D $\flat$
152	link	seq – f (V)
165	C (episode II: "mighty legions")	f – c
194	Harp cadenza	F (V)
198	A": The witch III/"mighty legions" conflation	F – f
217	Coda: introductory frame replayed	F

Table 4 outlines the musical structure of Bantock's orchestral poem. After a Prologue, we have an expository space with music for the fair, Fifine and Elvire – essentially a three-key exposition. The tonality is symbolic, as both wife and mistress share a key signature of four sharps: Fifine's music is in C# minor; Elvire's is in E major. There is no developmental space. Instead, to represent Don Juan's vacillating decisions, we have a recapitulatory space with multiple replaying of material. After the return of the fair, Elvire's music is revisited

in the tonic to represent the Don's decision to remain with his wife; however, this is a brief reference on a dominant pedal – not a convincing decision – and is followed by a full return of Fifine's music in the tonic, to reflect the Don's assignation with her. The Epilogue then begins with a fugato to represent the Householder's brooding. The fair music returns once more, leading to what we have been expecting all along – a full, extended replaying of Elvire's music in the tonic, suggestive of the final reunion of husband and wife.

**Table 4.** Bantock, *Fifine at the Fair*, simplified structure

Bar	Section	Key
1–10:13	Prologue	D
EXPOSITORY SPACE		
1	The Fair	D – c# (V)
20:10	Fifine	c# – D (V)
34:11	link	→ E (V)
35:1	Elvire	E – (c#) – E
RECAPITULATORY SPACE		
38:5	The Fair I	seq
42:9	Elvire I	D (V)
43:7	Fifine	D – c# (V)
55:1 (Epilogue)	Householder fugato	d
59:7	The Fair II	D (V)
63:1	Elvire II	D

Browning's poem is a dramatic monologue – the story is told by just one speaker, the Don Juan figure. How does Bantock suggest this? By using the solo cello to represent Don Juan; this instrument introduces the other characters as a dialogue with their instruments – whether Fifine on the clarinet, or Elvire on the solo violin. And just in case we underestimate what a close reading of Browning's poem Bantock's refiguring is, two poetic lines are highlighted in particular. In verse 32, Fifine declares: "I'm just my instrument". As she is associated with the clarinet, Bantock takes this line literally by representing her as a solo clarinet cadenza. The second striking poetic line is one of many references by Browning to music theory: "The augmented 6<sup>th</sup> resolved [. . .] Into [. . .] D major natural" (verse 42); Bantock's last two chords (Example 6) outline that exact progression.<sup>6</sup>

Bantock's *The Pierrot of the Minute* is therefore just one example of the composer's ability to create detailed musical refigurings of literary narratives. Not only was he keen to create distinctive musical structures to reflect the specific nature of his paratexts, but he thought carefully about symbolic key relationships, instrumentation to reflect characters,

<sup>6</sup> For discussions of Bantock's *The Witch of Atlas* and *Fifine at the Fair*, see Allis (2017b, 6–28; 2012, 133–188). Revised and refocused versions of these discussions can be found in my forthcoming *Granville Bantock and the Orchestral Refiguring of Literature* (Allis 2026).

and how a series of musical events might mirror a range of narrative plots. Of course, just as Umberto Eco suggests that readers can “make their own choices in the narrative wood” relating to a literary text (1994, 8), so the listener has options in terms of paratexts that might be accessed in charting a narrative walk through Bantock’s musical scores. However, we can appreciate these musical refigurings best – and admire Bantock’s skill in the process – by treating them as close readings of their literary sources.

**Example 6.** *Fifine at the Fair*, final chordal progression

The musical score for 'Fifine at the Fair' is presented in a 'Grave' tempo. It features a piano (pp) and a full orchestra (ffz dim.). The piano part includes a double bass (vc, db) and a double bassoon (pizz sfz). The full orchestra part includes flutes, clarinets, horns, violins, violas, and a double bassoon. The score shows a final chordal progression with a dynamic marking of pp.

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