

## **THE MOTHER GOOSE PIANO SUITE - AN AESTHETIC PARADIGM OF RAVEL'S MUSIC**

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**SUMMARY.** The *Mother Goose* suite is not only one of Ravel's most beloved works, but also a paradigmatic manifestation of his artistic thought. Composed in his impressionistic period, these musical tales reflect the composer's dialog with several contemporary trends, like symbolism, neoclassicism or futurism, trends manifested as distinct periods of his output. In this sense, the suite form and genre appear as an optimal medium in expressing the variety in the limits of coherence. By evocating the fantastic universe of tales, Ravel reveals his childish, sensitive personality and aesthetic credo focused on the permanent aspiration to Beauty, and melancholy, as well as the fear of losing it. These principles adopted from the views of his mentor, E. A. Poe, appear in his art through a continuous pursuit of perfection, balance, compositional sophistication and refinement, elegance, playfulness and illusionism. Ravel's motto – *complexe mais pas compliqué* – perfectly fits this suite, demonstrating once more, as a creative challenge, that the simplicity and richness of expression are not opposite concepts. Our study is focused on revealing the message and value configuration of the *Mother Goose* suite, analyzing both in a stylistic and aesthetic sense its expression devices.

**Keywords:** *Mother Goose*, fairy tales, suite, ballet, aesthetic values, Beauty, melancholy

The *Mother Goose* (*Ma mère l'Oye*) suite for piano four hands (later transcribed to the orchestra, and also adapted as ballet music) takes a unique place in Maurice Ravel's oeuvre. Composed between 1908-1910, this childhood evocating work of a great simplicity and transparency shows certain style elements of his impressionistic period (1905-1918), also forerunning his later neo-classical achievements. The piano as a musical medium, occupies in this respect a major significance, as well as its subsequent orchestration procedure.

As a great story-teller and with a child-like personality, Ravel was instinctually attracted by fairy-tales, being often seen retiring in the playroom of his friend's house, the Godebski's, in order to entertain their children, Mimi and Jean with stories. In his Autobiographic Sketch he exposed the motivational background of this work: "*My intention in these pieces was to evoke the poetry of childhood, and this naturally led me to simplify my style and restrain my writing.*"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *A Ravel Reader* (ed. Arbie Orenstein), Columbia University Press, New York Oxford, 1990, p. 31

It is known, that Ravel never got married, remaining in many aspects a child, since his house at Montfort was full of toys, puppets, bibelots. Several other musical works testify his lifelong interest in the universe of the fantastic: *Ouverture* and three orchestral melodies *Shéhérazade*, *Noël des jouets* for voice and piano (also adapted to voice and orchestra), *Histoires naturelles* for voice and piano, *Gaspard de la nuit*, *L'enfant et les sortilèges* lyric fantasy.

Scholars often remark this reign of his creative output as a part of his masks, though his controversial personality appears frequent through an interplay of apparently innocence and caustic irony. Thus, some of his characters serve as a pretext of auto-identification: the naughty boy of *L'enfant et les sortilèges* or the miniature *Tom Thumb* (*Petit Poucet*) are such possible self-portraits.

In terms of style, the *Mother Goose* suite reflects another paradoxical aspect of Ravel's creative personality. Composed in the same year with the piano triptych *Gaspard de la nuit*, the two works are difficult to be considered as belonging to a single composer. Their message (childhood innocence v. hallucinating visions) are as contrasting, as their writing style (fascinating simplicity v. extreme complexity).

*Mother Goose* was intended to be performed at the concerts of the newly founded Société Musical Indépendante by the children of the Godebski family, to whom Ravel dedicated this suite.

In arranging this work, he turned to the fairy-tales of Charles Perrault (1628-1703), Marie-Catherine, Comtesse d'Aulnoy (ca. 1650-1705) and Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780). The title of the suite was inspired by the stories of the latter, called *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye*.

The suite version consists of five distinct movements as it follows:

- I. *Pavane of Sleeping Beauty* (*Pavane de la Belle au bois dormants*) - Charles Perrault
- II. *Tom Thumb* (*Petit Poucet*) - Charles Perrault
- III. *Laideronnette. Empress of the Pagodas* (*Laideronnette. Impératrice des pagodes*) - Marie-Catherine, Comtesse d'Aulnoy
- IV. *Conversations of the Beauty and the Beast* (*Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête*) - Marie Leprince de Beaumont
- V. *The Fairy Garden* (*Le Jardin féerique*) - source unknown

Later, Ravel made an orchestral version without modifying the original extension of the work, and finally adapted it as ballet music. The latter is much more extensive and complex, though Ravel composed a *Prélude*, which essentially is a synthetic introduction based on the main leitmotifs of the movements, a *Spinning Wheel* (*Dance du Rouet*) as a distinct part, and some interludes to link the scenes, also using leitmotifs in various contexts. Furthermore, he changed the order of suite movements in order to improve the dramaturgical structure.

The implication of the craftsmanship principle adopted by Ravel from the aesthetic of E.A. Poe left its mark on the transcription process. Since the composer wasn't limited by the technical level of the interpreters, as in the case of the piano suite, he made sophisticated ballet music of a high orchestral virtuosity. Finally, he also adopted a frame-story which joins the different fairy-tales in a single plot.

In the following, we analyse the suite version from an aesthetic point of view, as Ravel's work seems to reflect his main aesthetic principles, merging into an equilibrate system of values.

Our starting point is represented by the program of the five sections, as a specific mark of the musical impressionism, which resumes in this case to title-suggestions and small programs extracted from the tales. However, the stories of the original fairy-tales are recognizable, not mainly for their actions, but mostly for their atmosphere. In order to identify the symbolic nature of the musical materials, we will make references to the orchestrated version, especially concerning the tone-color symbols. This kind of "dialog" between piano and orchestration is very frequent in the impressionist music.

Following his mentor, the American poet E.A. Poe, Ravel adopted his views concerning the central significance of Beauty in art. As it appears in Poe's essay about poetry entitled *The Poetic Principle*: "That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, of the soul, which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart."<sup>3</sup>

This aspiration to Beauty in Ravel's art appears in a continuous pursuit of perfection, balance, compositional sophistication and refinement, elegance, playfulness and illusionism<sup>4</sup>. These principles connect his music to his great predecessor, Mozart, whom admirer he was. As a follower of the French classicism, Ravel shared the predilection for dance, promoting its grace, aesthetic category defined by Schiller as being "the moving beauty". Similarly to the *Mother Goose* suite, many of his opuses are based on stylized dances belonging to various periods and cultures.

Ravel also agreed with Poe about the accompanying sentiments of Beauty. Thus, as it will appear in the symbolist and partially in impressionist aesthetics, the emotions resulting from the contemplation of beauty are no longer represented by the purity of inner peace, but a disturbed state of it, called melancholy. As the mechanism of beauty has two components, the ephemeral state of equilibrium and peace respectively the aspiration of it, the melancholy represents a refuge in real or imaginary pasts in order to conserve

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<sup>3</sup> *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe* (ed. J. Gerald Kennedy), Penguin Books, 2006, p. 562.

<sup>4</sup> We use this term as a principle of creating the impression of easiness and spontaneity, in works of a high complexity and great degree of technical difficulty.

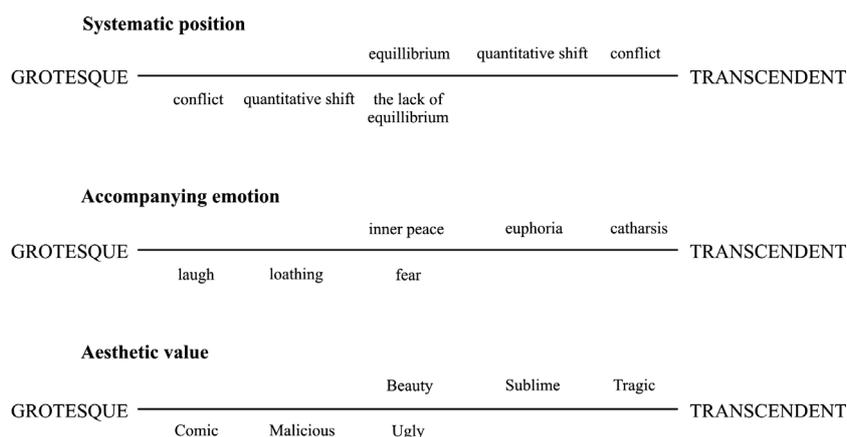
the experimented or imagined harmony, emphasizing the fear of losing it. Monet, for example, painted his wife, Camilla, on her death bed (Monet, *Camille on Her Death Bed*, 1879), confessing later the reason of his apparently macabre action: “Certainly it was natural to wish to record the last image of a woman who was departing forever.”<sup>5</sup> Verlaine’s *Chansonne d’automne*, or Rimbaud’s *Le dormeur du val* are eloquent examples of melancholy in poetry pervaded by the mysterious forces of music.

Ravel naturally adopted these aesthetic views, since his psycho-aesthetic profile of a fragile, irresolute and infantile man, led him to the permanent explorations of the past, imaginary lands and cultures. Thus, the melancholy appears as a central emotional category of his oeuvre, as an expression of his continuous aspirations toward the lost and non-recurring childhood, and also as a refuge from his present. Works like *Pavane pour une infante defunte*, *Miroirs* or *Mother Goose* are a few eloquent examples in this sense.

In order to demonstrate the functioning of Ravel’s aesthetic thinking through the *Mother Goose* suite, we adopt the system of aesthetic values configured by the Romanian aesthetician Angi István,<sup>6</sup> called grotesque-transcendent system. This is an opened and dynamic modelling of aesthetic values, based on the central value of Beauty, as an equilibrate state of the entire system, and the qualitative and quantitative shifts from it, which generate the accumulating state of the Sublime, and the quarreling one of the Tragic. Each of these positive values has a negative counter-part: the Ugly, the Malicious, and the Comic. The Grotesque and Transcendent poles are functioning as magnets, mobilizing the entire system, defining also the limits of the aesthetic experience between *in nascendi* and *in morendi* states:

**Ex. 1**

**Angi István’s system of aesthetic values**



<sup>5</sup> Cited by Bronfen, Elisabeth in: *Death, femininity and the aesthetic*, Manchester University Press, 1992, note 7 to chapter 7, p. 139

<sup>6</sup> Angi, István, *Lectures on Musical Aesthetics*, vol. I, University of Oradea Press, 2004

According to this system, a musical work, dynamic by its nature, configures a central value (in our case the Beauty) according to its message and expressive devices, sensitizing it not only through itself, but also through traversing the other values as several qualitative or quantitative "mirrors". In modeling the Beauty, for example, the Ugly may have certain importance in experiencing the loss of equilibrium, arousing simultaneously the aspiration toward it, and so on.

Before we apply this model to the *Mother Goose* suite, we have to make some considerations regarding the particularity of ravelian expression devices (melody-harmony, rhythm, dynamic and tone-color), as they play a key role in the configuration and transmission of the aesthetic values.

As a whole, the musical language of this suite follows the desideratum of simplicity and transparency, according to Ravel's intentions to be played by children.

Concerning the melodic structures, they are generally diatonic. Chromatic elements occur mostly with function of emphasizing the lack of equilibrium. Such a contrasting moment appears in the fourth movement (*The Beauty and the Beast*), where the leitmotif of the Beast is based on a descendant chromatic structure.

Within diatony, Ravel uses frequently modal inflections, both to color and emphasize the expressiveness of the melody, like: Aeolian, Dorian, Phrygian, Mixolydian modes, even the Lydian, respectively their transitions.

We must also mention the presence of two harmonic-melodic structures largely employed in the impressionism: pentatonic (*Laideronette*) and hexatonic scales (*Tom Thumb*). They are frequently combined with the traditional modes both in a harmonic and melodic sense.

The rhythm structures are – as the melodic ones – simple, based on the pulsation of dances employed in this suite (pavane, marche, valse, sarabande), probably to enhance the coordination of the two pianists. However, they are far to be schematic. The slow movements, even with a rigorous rhythmic plan permit fine fluctuations, as well as the tempo (*The Beauty and the Beast*), or measure changes (*Tom Thumb*). Moreover, the single fast movement (*Laideronette*) employs complex polyrhythm and polymetry superpositions, generating sonority surfaces with a quasi dissolution of time perception.

The average tempo of the suite is moderate to slow, facilitating the peaceful, dreamy atmosphere. As a whole, it configures an arch, with the culmination on the central, fastest movement (*Laideronette*).

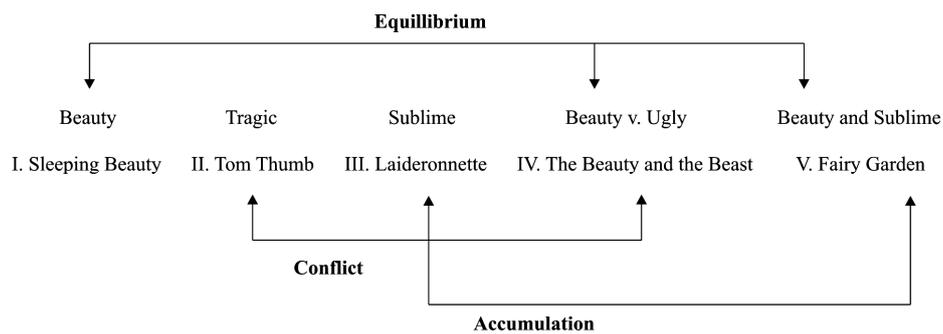
In the spirit of impressionist aesthetic, the dynamic range is situated between pianissimo and piano, which increases the attention of the listener, directing it towards harmony and tone-color nuances, and paradoxically blending the entire sonority. However, dynamic intensifications are characteristic of movements, which suggest actions (like *Laideronette*, *The Beauty and the Beast*). As an exception, the last of the atmosphere-pieces, *Fairy Garden* brings an apotheosis.

Concerning the tone-color, even the piano four hand version offers a refined spectrum, employing mostly the upper registers of the instrument. It is widely known the rare capacity of Ravel as an orchestrator (as the impressionist composers' generally). In this sense, his piano works reflect an orchestral thinking, where the harmony, rhythm, dynamic and registration parameters are employed to obtain refined individual and surface sonorities. The character, articulation, registration of musical materials often suggests the latency of orchestral instruments or groups. In this sense, the melodic elements appear in the orchestrated version mostly at woodwinds, the harmonic blocks at chords and muted brasses, arpeggios and glissandos at harp, xylophone and celesta. As a piano four hands writing, the *Mother Goose* suite facilitates the presence of several sonority plans, especially in the third (*Laideronnette*) and fifth movements (*Fairy Garden*), which appears as some orchestral reductions, with a great and rich sonority even on the piano.

In the following, we try to sketch the aesthetic value configuration of the suite. As we already mentioned, the central category of this work, the Beauty appears here in a nostalgic sense, as the source of an ephemeral harmony relived from the memory of a real or an imaginary past. Thus, it appears mostly as a central reference point, the object of desire, organizing the entire value system. The first and fourth movements are configured on the parameters of Beauty in a dream-like (*Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty*) and conflictual states (*The Beauty and the Beast*). *Tom Thumb's* touching story (second movement) introduces the tragic value, in a fairy-tale context, based on one of its accompanying sentiment, the compassion. The other two movements (*Laideronnette*, *Fairy Garden*) bring the accumulative value of the Sublime:

**Ex. 2**

**The value-configuration of the *Mother Goose* suite**



Let's take a look at the distribution of these values related to the dramaturgy of the suite, as the initial order of these movements may suggest further significance of Ravel's intentions. An ethereal, dreamlike beauty (*Pavane*) opens the suite, establishing the general fairy atmosphere of the work. This

lightness and simplicity, with necessary variations pervades all the movements. The following *Tom Thumb* story sensitizes with a lot nostalgia and compassion the rambling of this little hero. As the suite's central moment, *Laideronnette* brings a significant amount of novelty, both in evoking the gamelan sonorities of the Far East, and in introducing a new aesthetic value: the Sublime. The dialog of *The Beauty and the Beast* recalls, in a contrasting sense, the central value of Beauty, by confronting it with the Ugly. Finally, the last movement (*The Fairy Garden*) as an accomplishment of Beauty realizes its apotheosis in a sublime ending.

Looking over the five movements, it is observable the aesthetic motivation of balance between these values. Similarly to the principle of the suite form, which is based on the variety of dances and characters, Ravel's work, motivated in addition by the dramaturgy of the tales, realizes a perfect equilibrium between variety and unity both in character and value configuration. The unity is provided by the central value of Beauty, completed by the Ugly, and varied through qualitative (Tragic) and quantitative (Sublime) deviations. Aesthetically speaking, this suite indicates a bridge structure. In this sense, the extreme movements present two aspects of the Beauty (the inherent and the accomplished one), while the middle ones diversify it. Thus, the second and fourth movements resemble in their conflictual character (qualitative moments), as the sublime accumulation of the central part prefigures the final apotheosis (quantitative moments). In this sense, the first and last two movements resemble too. While the slow and peaceful melancholy of the second movement is a natural continuation of the airy opening, the conflictual fourth movement prepares the final accumulation of the apotheosis.

Naturally, these considerations about the value configuration of each movement are justified only in a systemic view. The Sublime is as far as conditioned by the equilibrium moment of Beauty and vice versa, like the Tragic or the Ugly. Thus, every movement adds a qualitative or quantitative surplus to the others, enriching their structural and emotional impact on the listener.

Thereinafter, we look over each movement in order to demonstrate the role of expressive devices in the already sketched value configuration. In certain instances, we'll make some considerations regarding the orchestrated version.

### **I. Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty**

The first movement is based on a very popular and beloved story about a princess, who was cursed by a witch to have a 100 years sleep. Ravel's *Pavane* has a ternary formal structure, with symmetrical periods in the extreme sections, evoking the syntactic characteristics of great classicism, and a central section which weaves further in a transparent quasi-polyphony the musical materials of the former.

Taken individually, the use of expression devices reveals the aspects of tale intended to be emphasized. In order to generate an airy, dream-like state, Ravel employs here a slow and graceful pavane, with quasi-monotone rhythm formulas and a transparent texture, which fluctuates between two and three voices, in the middle-register. The upper voice, a quasi-melody, finely oscillates within an octave. Its pentatonic structure, colored by a-Aeol and Dorian inflexions as the lack of a leading note deepens the impression of an ethereal dissolution in tale's timelessness.

Here is the mentioned frame-period:

Ex. 3

***Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty*, m. 1-8 (Piano two hands version)**

The orchestrated version, instead of pulling back this imponderable discourse, increases its airiness. Ravel employs here the combination of chords, woodwinds and muted horns, with a touch of harp-color.

All these considerations lead to the conclusion, that the composer evokes here not the awakening of the Sleeping Beauty, but her dream. As an opening moment, beyond its role of establishing the general atmosphere, it has also an aesthetic significance: namely, that if all further movements and different tales would be dreamed in her endless-like sleep.

**II. *Tom Thumb*<sup>7</sup>**

The touching story of *Tom Thumb* revives in the second movement as a suggestion of the composer's deep compassion for this lovable personage. As we already have mentioned, Tom is probably one of Ravel's alter egos, not

<sup>7</sup> „He thought he could easily find the way again by means of his bread, which he had scattered all along as he came; but he was very much surprised when he could not find so much as one crumb; the birds had come and had eaten it up, every bit.”

only through his small statue, which was for him the source of a permanent complex, but also due to the difficulties of finding his place in the world.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to the first movement, Ravel evokes here not only the atmosphere of the tale, but also certain elements of the action, and even the birds, who had eaten Tom's crumbs, that he had scattered all along to find his way home. Thus, the proper characterization of this little piece would be the wandering, an action very obvious to a musical elaboration.

Therefore, the main motif of the movement is based on a contiguous note-series exposed in parallel motion up to three and even voice mixtures. The instability of discourse is increased by the permanent modal inflections and frequently changing measures. It is hard to say whether Ravel expresses Tom's wandering or his state of mind: probably both. This continuous weaving lead to a free, fluid formal structure, where the upper melodic line seems to be engaged in the pursuit of the accompanying voices. Its movement, in a permanent process of rejoining and detaching, suggests as if Tom would search his crumb-path.

Contrary to *Pavane*, the registers are more diversified, and due to the weaving motion, is hard to perceive their expansion. The dynamic plan ventures only to forte, announcing the first culmination of the movement:

Ex. 4

**Tom Thumb, m. 27-38 (Piano two hands version)**

The musical score for 'Tom Thumb, m. 27-38' is presented in two systems. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo). The second system features a dynamic marking of *très expressif* (very expressive). The score is written for piano in 3/4 time, with a complex, weaving melodic line in the upper register and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the lower register. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

It is hard to disregard the profound sadness emanating from this mixtural culmination, emphasized by Ravel through the indication: *très expressif*. The same indication will appear at the occurrence of bird-signals, humanizing them, as if they would have similar compassion for Tom as the composer, like their distant presence (*en dehors*) would rather suggest their friendship than being the reason of his lost.

<sup>8</sup> Like a curiosity we mention, that Ravel made his first own home at Montfort when he was 46.

Concerning the rhythm aspect, there is a quasi-monotone flow of eights, having a double role: first, it contributes to the evocation of plastic and expressive aspects of the wavering; second, the resulting monotony of movement emphasizes the modal color of the melody and its mixtural superposition. Moreover, this state of uncertainty is stressed by the frequent measure and note grouping changes, like the introduction of triplet formulas in this context of equal eights as well.

The orchestrated version surprisingly develops many color latencies than one may expect. Ravel explores mostly the veiled color combinations of middle-register chords and woodwinds (especially the oboe and the English horn), except the evocations of birds, which similarly to his *Daphnis and Chloé* ballet, appear as woodwind signals along with high violin glissandos and harmonics.

### III. *Laideronnette. The Empress of the Pagodas*<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to the former ones, the third movement is a veritable and pleasant surprise. Though the story guides us into an entirely different culture, its curious presence in this suite is far to be unusual, knowing Ravel's preference for exoticism. The tale takes us to the Far East, evoking the world of pagodas, also creating a good pretext for an exhaustive use of pentatony, according to the black keys of the piano.

As an optimal medium of the Sublime value, music can evoke with great effect the sense of accumulation. Ravel employs here the complementary mechanism of hyperbola and litotes, personifying through them the contrasting appearance of Laideronnette and her little dependants. This relationship appears at all levels of the musical structures: melody, rhythm, dynamic and tone color.

Structurally, the movement is articulated in three sections according to the configuration of the Sublime value. The first section presents the toddling dance of the tiny dependants, who entertain their future empress with music and dance, emphasized through the fast tempo, followed by the large, augmented notes of Laideronnette, and finally their simultaneous dance, which accentuates the striking difference between them. Emotionally, this movement traverses the atmosphere from joy to the euphoric common dance, as a typical structure of the Sublime.

Due to the quasi-neutral nature of the pentatony, but also to the poly-rhythmic and poly-metric structures, this movement reaches huge surfaces of melody, harmony and color by melting both vertical and horizontal parameters. Therefore, the symphonic version gives back much properly the composer's intention to evoke the sonority of a Gamelan orchestra. As Ravel told an

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<sup>9</sup> "She undressed and went into the bath immediately the pagodas and pagodinas began to sing and to play on musical instruments. Some had lutes made of a walnut-shell, others violas made of an almond-shell, for it was necessary to suit the instruments to their size."

interviewer: "I consider Javanese music the most sophisticated music of the Far East, and I frequently derive themes from it: «Laideronnette» from *Ma Mère l'Oye*, with the tolling of its temple bells, was derived from Java both harmonically and melodically."<sup>10</sup>

In defining characters, the rhythm seems to be the most important instrument, through the augmentation and diminution of musical materials.

Here is an example for the litotes of the dependants:

Ex. 5

*Laideronnette*, m. 56-65 (Piano two hands version)

The musical score for measures 56-65 of 'Laideronnette' is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 56-60) features a treble clef with a melodic line of eighth notes and a bass clef with a harmonic accompaniment of chords. The second system (measures 61-65) continues the melodic line, which concludes with a fermata, while the bass clef accompaniment remains. Dynamics include *pp* and *ff*.

In the middle section, Ravel uses a polyphonic device, the canon, in order to amplify over any measure the greatness of the empress:

Ex. 6

*Laideronnette*, m. 77-92 (Piano two hands version)

The musical score for measures 77-92 of 'Laideronnette' is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 77-82) shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system (measures 83-92) continues the melodic line, which concludes with a fermata, while the bass clef accompaniment remains. Dynamics include *pp* and *ppp*.

<sup>10</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (ed. Deborah Mawer), Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 29

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Her apparition is also emphasized by the pedal, harmony changes or graded densification of the texture.

Contrary to the muted orchestration manner employed up to this point, the timbre of *Laideronnette* is plenty of plangent instruments, especially percussions, like glockenspiel, celesta, gong, xylophone etc.:

Ex. 7

*Laideronnette*, m. 141-147 (Orchestral version, excerpt)

Musical score for Ex. 7, featuring Xylo, Celesta, and Harpe. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of three staves. The Xylo staff has a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Celesta staff has a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The Harpe staff has a bass clef and a key signature of three sharps. The Xylo part starts with a rest, followed by a series of notes with a *ppp* dynamic. The Celesta part starts with a series of notes with a *ppp* dynamic. The Harpe part starts with a series of notes with a *pp* dynamic.

As long as these percussion instruments sensitize the toddling movements of tiny dependants, the empress is symbolized by a large horn-melody (colored by woodwinds and percussion) articulated between gong strokes:

Ex. 8

*Laideronnette*, m. 69-80 (Orchestral version, excerpt)

Musical score for Ex. 8, featuring various orchestral instruments. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of seven staves. The instruments are: G<sup>de</sup> Fl., H<sup>tb</sup>, Cor A., Cl., Bons, Cors, and T. T. The G<sup>de</sup> Fl. staff has a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The H<sup>tb</sup> staff has a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The Cor A. staff has a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The Cl. staff has a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The Bons staff has a bass clef and a key signature of three sharps. The Cors staff has a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The T. T. staff has a bass clef and a key signature of three sharps. The G<sup>de</sup> Fl. part starts with a series of notes with a *f* dynamic, followed by a *pp* dynamic. The H<sup>tb</sup> part starts with a series of notes with a *f* dynamic. The Cor A. part starts with a series of notes with a *f* dynamic. The Cl. part starts with a series of notes with a *f* dynamic. The Bons part starts with a series of notes with a *f* dynamic. The Cors part starts with a series of notes with a *f* dynamic. The T. T. part starts with a series of notes with a *f* dynamic.

#### IV. *The dialog of the Beauty and the Beast*<sup>11</sup>

The following dialog of the *Beauty and the Beast* is conceived as a conflictual modelling of the Beauty, through its negative counterpart, the Ugly. Similarly to the former movement, Ravel presents these contrasting characters in two distinct formal units, followed by their approach in a third one, and finally by their synthesis. Musically speaking, this movement appears as the most elaborated one, since the apparently irreconcilable nature of the contrasting materials necessitates much space and time. However, it follows the dramaturgy of the tale, namely, the triumph of compassion and true love over the impression of apparently ugliness, which led, as a fairy gift, to the magical transformation of the Beast in a handsome prince.

The movement focuses on this process in a very musically way, through an aristocratic pair-dance: the waltz. Since the two personages appear in a same dance context, without a significant break of the discourse, unlike the montage technique largely explored by Stravinsky in order to create contrasts, the basis of their approaching is made.

The musical personification of the Beauty appears as an airy melody accompanied by chords of added seventh and none, in the manner of Satie's *Gymnopédies*, to whom this piece was dedicated:

Ex. 9

#### *The Beauty and the Beast*, m. 1-15 (Piano two hands version)

Mouv<sup>t</sup> de Valse très modéré  $\text{♩} = 50$

The musical score consists of two systems of piano notation. The first system shows the right hand (treble clef) with a melody starting on a whole note G4, followed by quarter notes. The left hand (bass clef) has a bass line of chords. Dynamics include 'pp' and 'doux et expressif'. The second system continues the melody and accompaniment.

It is followed by the apparition of the Beast, with a contrasting motif, consisting of a chromatic melody (a hidden hexatony) in the low-middle register of the left hand:

<sup>11</sup> "I own I am pleased with your kindness, and when I consider that, your deformity scarce appears." – "Yes, yes," said the Beast, "my heart is good, but still I am a monster." – "Among mankind," says Beauty, "there are many that deserve that name more than you, and I prefer you, just as you are, to those, who, under a human form, hide a treacherous, corrupt, and ungrateful heart." – "If I had sense enough," replied the Beast, "I would make a fine compliment to thank you, but I am so dull, that I can only say, I am greatly obliged to you."

Ex. 10

**The Beauty and the Beast, m. 49-60 (Piano two hands version)**

At a closer look, the two musical materials keep their characteristic differences through their relationship to the waltz metre. While the Beauty articulates equilibrate arches consisting of uniform values, suggesting her identity with the dance's nobility and grace, the rhythm profile of Beast hangs out of the dance metre, lending him a little grotesque aspect, as an echo of the touching awkwardness of Tom Thumb.

In releasing of this tension, Ravel uses a spatial oncoming between the two materials exposed in extreme registers, and also their progressive harmonic assimilation. Therefore, the Beauty's accompaniment is being chromatically transformed, as the Beast's motif ascends gradually with his own mirrored formulas. The orchestrated version contributes significantly to their musical characterization. Thus, the Beauty is associated with the clarinet, respectively the Beast is carried by the contrabassoon. Being both woodwind instruments, Ravel suggests that the distance between them is not irreconcilable in spite of the extreme registers of their initial exposition:

Ex. 11

**The Beauty and the Beast, m. 101-112 (Orchestral version, excerpt)**

The approach is realized in two phases. After the first unsuccessful attempt, the Beast falls back, followed by a second, until the chromatic formula reaches the high register of the Beauty. In this metamorphose, the Beast's motif traverses through several instruments from the contrabassoon to bassoon and cello.

The miracle of metamorphosis is emphasized by Ravel through a glissando (corresponding to the harp in orchestral version), followed by the apparition of the prince in high register (violin) on the sustained chords built from the Beauty-motif notes:

Ex. 12

***The Beauty and the Beast*, m. 147-150 (Piano two hands version)**



The conclusive section of this movement maintains the airy atmosphere on sustained chords, topped up by the final embracing of the two personages (flute piccolo and cello) amid of a rarifying discourse which dies away on two broken chords.

**V. *The Fairy Garden***

The last movement somehow alloys the central value of Beauty and its accompanying emotion, the nostalgic peacefulness, with the sublimeness of *Laidronnette*. In this respect, *Fairy Garden* is a worthy ending of a multicolor but homogenous masterpiece.

Similarly to *Boléro*, the apotheosis of this suite is conceived as an increasing arch, based on a single melodic-rhythmic cell (quarter, dotted quarter and quaver):

Ex. 13

***The Fairy Garden*, m. 1-18 (Piano two hands version)**



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Unlike the opening movement, Ravel employs here several devices in order to obtain dense sonorities, such as single and quint-doubled pedals, mixtures and the superposition of different musical plans. In this sense, the piano score resembles to an orchestral reduction.

The movement is conceived in three sections, each of them introducing new levels of a growing sublime sonority. In a first phase (see the last example), the composer recalls the fairy and peaceful atmosphere of *Pavane*, through a four voice quasi-polyphonic writing full of septime and none suspensions, respectively added notes. The imponderable melody placed in the soprano, evolves in a second phase both melodically and rhythmically, accompanied by modal harmonies exposed in mixture formulas, while all the discourse rises to the high register.

Through its transcription to the first violin in the orchestral version, doubled by celesta, the composer obtains a celestial atmosphere full of light, which fills up, retroactively, the listener's impression about the entire work. As a final reaffirmation of his faith in the universe of tales, and also in the supremacy of Beauty, Ravel raises the discourse to the sublimity of expression, through a simultaneous exposition of four distinct musical plans in complementary rhythm: a continuous glissando, mixture harmonies based on the initial rhythmic cell, a bell evoking formula and a pedal:

Ex. 14

**The Fairy Garden, m. 51-55 (Piano two hands version)**



Several motifs and atmospheres returns as far musical echoes of the tales: the melodic structure of *Pavane*, the glissando of the Beast's metamorphosis, the bell-sound derived from *Laideronnette's* theme, as the peacefulness of *Pavane* and Beauty's grace, or *Tom Thumb's* melancholic atmosphere and *Laideronnette's* sublimity.

As a tale ends, another begins. The final bars of this suite contain the germs of his masterful *Prélude* which opens the ballet version:

**Ex. 15**

The image displays two musical excerpts. On the left, titled 'The end of the Suite', is a short melodic fragment in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature, featuring a sequence of chords and notes. On the right, titled 'The beginning of the Ballet', is a more complex passage in 3/4 time, consisting of three staves. The top two staves are in treble clef and show a melodic line with a long glissando-like passage. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains a rhythmic accompaniment with a 'Sourdine' marking and triplet figures.

The *Mother Goose* suite remains in many aspects a pearl of Ravel's oeuvre and also one of the most popular compositions destined for children. Despite its apparent simplicity, or just because of it, these musical tales reflect at a high level of transparency some of the essential characteristics of his compositional thought: the central role of Beauty and its following emotion, the melancholy reflected in dances, fairy and exotic sujets, the impressionistic piano and orchestral writing, the paradoxical relationship of simplicity and complexity, inspiration and craftsmanship, sincerity and ironical masks. In stylistic terms, we recognize through these five movements the main orientations of Ravel's music: the melancholy of his symbolist works (*Tom Thumb*), impressionistic sonority surfaces (*Laideronnette*) and neoclassical influences (*Pavane, The Beauty and the Beast*), but also the huge accumulations of the late futurist opuses (*Fairy Garden*).

This masterpiece ultimately reveals the candid heart of a composer who rather believed in tales. As his pupil and first biographer, Roland-Manuel wrote: "...the Ravel of Ma Mère l'Oye reveals to us the secret of his profound nature, and shows us the soul of a child who was never left the kingdom of Fairyland, who make no distinction between nature and artifice, and who seems to believe that everything can be imagined and carried out on the material plane provided everything is strictly controlled and regulated on the mental or spiritual plane."<sup>12</sup>

(Translated into English by Fodor Attila)

<sup>12</sup> Myers, Rollo, *Ravel. Life and Works*, G. Duckworth, London, 1960, p. 161.

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