

THE HERMENEUTIC STUDY OF THE MUSICAL AND POETIC TEXTS IN THE VOCAL MUSIC BY E. CHAUSSON

NATALIYA GOVORUKHINA¹, TETIANA ZHARKIKH²,
ALONA MILANINA³

SUMMARY. This study proposes an exploration of the symbolism within the works of Ernest Chausson's of the vocal music, as an example we choose cycle "Poem of Love and the Sea", (words by Maurice Bouchor) the application of hermeneutic methodology and analysis of the work's intonational dramaturgy. The uniqueness of the composer's conception, combined with the multi-layered structure of the poetic text, drives researchers to interpret the hidden symbolic levels inherent in this vocal cycle. As a result of the analysis, it is concluded that the meaning of "Poème" is grounded in core principles: the duality of the real and the otherworldly, expressed through the embodiment of hidden meanings via symbols; Romanticism and Symbolism, manifested in the observed unity between nature and human, as well as in the mystical visions of the lyrical protagonist.

An analysis of the poetic text reveals Bouchor's clear inclination toward phonetic play, the understanding of which helps unveil the symbolic essence of the entire work. The interaction of the idealistic with the realistic, the pictorial exterior with the concealed interior, is likewise evident in musical text and is revealed through the dominance of two overarching intonational graphemes. The musical and poetic levels of the vocal cycle are combined thanks to a common symbolic basis, particularly through the use of symbolism of pictorial origin. This symbolism is decoded in the musical text through principles of the painter Gustave Moreau. The fusion of poetic and musical symbolism results in mutual amplification, thereby enriching the symbolic content of the vocal cycle as a synthesis of the arts.

Keywords: vocal cycle, hermeneutics, symbolism, phonetic play, musical and poetic text, artistic interpretation

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- ¹ Honored Art Worker of Ukraine, Ph.D. in Musicology, Professor of Solo singing and Opera Department, Rector of Kharkiv I. P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts, Deputy Head of Kharkiv regional branch of National All-Ukrainian Musical Union. E-mail: govoruhina_n@ukr.net
- ² Ph.D. in Musicology, Associate Professor Ukraine, Associate Professor of Solo singing and Opera Department of Kharkiv I. P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts. E-mail: zhar.09@ukr.net
- ³ Ph.D. in Art Studies, Senior teacher, the Department of Jazz and Variety Music I. P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts. E-mail: alyona.milani@gmail.com



Introduction

The unique personality and creative legacy of Ernest Chausson (1855–1899) have attracted the attention of scholars, performers, and listeners for over a century and a half. However, the work of this French composer has elicited mixed responses, both during his lifetime and posthumously. Some critics viewed E. Chausson's music in a highly negative light. Others, including H. Schneider⁴ and J. Gallois⁵, found it so captivating and original that they considered the composer to be the most distinctive voice of the *fin de siècle* generation, which preceded the emergence of C. Debussy's creative figure on France's musical Olympus. Regrettably, the composer's tragic death at the age of 44 prevented him from fully realizing his artistic potential. The choice of the topic for this study is explained by the fact that "Poem of Love and the Sea" was composed by a French artist during the final mature stage of his career (according to the periodization proposed by A. Milanina⁶), when the composer's philosophical and artistic explorations had already taken shape in both general aesthetic and intonational-stylistic terms. It represents the culmination of the Master's creative method, where symbolic imagery is most fully realized in its ongoing development. The originality of the compositional approach and the meaningful aspect of the poetic text are currently attracting the researchers' attention and desire to reveal the internal symbolic layers inherent in this vocal cycle. Thus, this study is primarily focused on identifying the symbolic principles of E. Chausson's *Poème* by based on the poetic text by M. Bouchor.

In any performed work, in addition to the technical methods, the understanding of the "matter" of the artistic work (what it is made of) is far more important (and from this understanding, everything else follows – phrasing, articulation, cantilena, and so on). The substance is subordinate to the author's soul, but this soul cannot always be felt with a cursory study of the work. Sometimes the symbolism of the text is so complex that understanding of its hidden meaning is only possible if the performer (who is also the interpreter) retraces the path taken by the creator (in this case – the creators of the vocal cycle). Our study offers to undertake such a journey with the authors of "Poem

⁴ Schneider, Herbert. *Ernest Chausson. Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. In MGG Online. Edited by Laurenz Lütteken. Kassel, Stuttgart, New York, 2019. <https://www.mgg-online.com/articles/mgg02744/1.2/id-6905567a-69c0-1528-5fcc-7934b1bce071>

⁵ Gallois, Jean. Chausson E. *L'homme et son oeuvre: Catalogue des oeuvres, discographie, illustrations*. Paris. Seghers, 1967.

⁶ Milanina, Alona. *Symbolism of the vocal cycles of Ernest Chausson. Dissertation for the scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy in specialty. Kharkiv I. P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts*. 2024. p. 47.

of Love and the Sea” – this opens up diverse avenues for interpreting both the verbal and musical texts, highlighting the relevance and originality of the chosen topic.

The purpose of this research is to explore the symbolism embedded in the music of Ernest Chausson's and poetic text of M. Bouchor's, as a basis for interpretative performance. In line with the stated objective, the following methods were chosen: the hermeneutic method introduced to clarify the “obscure areas” of cycle “Poem of Love and the Sea”; the analysis of intonational dramaturgy – to comprehend the processes of cycle formation in the French artist's chamber-vocal composition; the psychoanalytic approach – to identify the relationship between the phenomenon of artistic energy and a specific repertoire⁷.

Discussion

According to Hans-Georg Gadamer⁸, hermeneutics allows us to “understand and express something incomprehensible”, said in a different language, whether it be “hints at signs in the language of the gods”. Such an area of the “incomprehensible” (i.e., encoded in the artistic text) is represented by both the poetic and musical components of “Poem of Love and the Sea”.

The poetic component in the vocal cycle takes on immense significance, and *“despite the fact that the process of embodying the poetic primary source in vocal music is accompanied by a number of changes justified by the composer's vision of the content of the poem and the musical form, a number of features of the musical text are dictated by the specifics of the verbal one”* (Govorukhina)⁹.

E. Chausson used the poetic source of Bouchor's – confirms that the composer, like his poet friend, gravitated toward mysticism and symbolism in his creative process. M. Bouchor's most exquisite collection of poems, “Poème de l'Amour et de la Mer” (1876), is composed of symbols that elevated his

⁷ This approach is based on the method used in the study: Chernyavska, Marianna; Ivanova, Iryna; Timofeyeva, Kira; Syriatska, Tetiana; Mits, Oksana. Artistic energy of the performers in the mirror of their repertoire preferences. *Studia UBB Musica*. Volume 68 (LXVIII), Special Issue 2. 2023. pp.165-179.

⁸ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*, Second, Revised Edition Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Ma. Great Britain. https://dl1.cuni.cz/pluginfile.php/908863/mod_resource/content/1/truth-and-method-gadamer-2004.pdf

⁹ Govorukhina, Nataliya. *The principles of interpretation of the poetic primary source in ballads by F. Schubert, S. Moniuszhko, H. Wolf on Goethe's text «kennst du das land»* *Studia UBB Musica*, LXVII, Special Issue 1. 2022. p. 104.

poetry to unprecedented heights and sparked significant interest among readers. The symbolism inherent in Bouchor's poetic texts was subsequently preserved by E. Chausson in his vocal cycle of the same name. Out of the collection's three parts – "The Flower of the Waters"; "The Death of Love" and "Divine Love" – only the first two were used, along with selected poetic fragments from the third part of the poem.

The central idea of M. Bouchor is conveyed through the title – *Poème de l'Amour et de la Mer*, which declares the work's primary interconnected symbols – Love and the Sea. Notably, symbols such as love, sea, flower, water, and death are capitalized in the poetic text, hinting at their particular significance. In French, the word *la mer* (sea) and *amer* (bitter) are homophones, identical in sounding but differing in spelling and meaning. The poet encoded the homophone *amer* within the word *mer*, and through this distinctive phonetic play, a hidden meaning of the story of lost love was embedded. Thus, the sea symbolizes both joyful and bitter love. This unique linguistic wordplay results in the emergence of a new image with a different connotation. The disruption and separation of the linguistic form (the word) is coupled with a constant accretion of the form elements, leading to a persistent semiotic densification of the form itself. The violation of the form is compensated by the fusion of elements united by a single thematic and conceptual connection. This meaning unity serves as the foundation for drawing parallels between linguistic concepts.

A similar approach to poetic symbolism is observed not only in the title of the entire work but also in the titles of its parts. It can be said that in the title of the first part, "The Flower of the Waters", the French words *fleur* (flower) and *eaux* (waters) share two vowels and one consonant, indicating an internal rhyme. Moreover, they are semantically close: a flower cannot live without water, and an involuntary parallel arises: just as a person cannot live without love, since the sea (waters) symbolizes love itself.

In the title of M. Bouchor's second poem, "The Death of Love", homophones are also used: *l'amour* (love) and *la mort* (death). The boundaries between love and death are exceedingly thin, and they are inextricably linked. The theme of death, as the poet's balancing on the narrow edge connecting the otherworldly and natural world, is, in fact, a traditional theme in the poetics of symbolism. Thus, the key symbols of the work are paired: Love-Sea, Flower-Waters, Death-Love, and, through the symbolic titles of the 'Poem', Bouchor effectively provides a preliminary outline of the work's overall content, which is later elaborated in the poetic text through a detailed portrayal of the lyrical hero's love story. In *poème* M. Bouchor positions himself both as a creative artist and as a researcher and interpreter, as if engaging in a dialogue with his own texts.

The content of “The Flower of the Waters”: The protagonist reminisces about a time when “the air carried the delicate fragrance of lilacs, “the sea shimmered beneath the radiant sun,” and “the wind sang through the blooming lilacs. And as at the dawn of creation, for the lyrical hero, no one existed except his “one and only Eve” – his beloved. He kissed the sand she walked on with “her dear little feet”; for him, the sky took on the color of her eyes, and everything was imbued with “Love and Youth”¹⁰. His beloved seemed the center around which everything revolved. It was a time when the heaven “showered the young lovers with roses”. However, in the second half of “La Fleur des eaux”, a different scene emerges – a scene of farewell. Following a principle of distorted reflection, nature “does not respond” to the inner state of the lyrical hero: the sea seems to mock, “caring little that the time of parting has come, it sings”; “birds fly by, their wings spread almost joyfully over the abyss”; “the heavens shine”; “the dark noise of the waves drowns out the sound of sobs”; and “the wind mocks the youth’s sorrow”. Content of the second poem “La Mort de l’Amour”: The imagining of a future when “a blue and joyful island will appear again amongst the rocks,” an awareness of “dead love,” profound regret for the intoxicating lilac-scented past, and the love that has vanished¹¹.

The symbolism embedded in the titles of the poems is further developed in the poetic text of the work, particularly through floral symbolism, which the poet uses to reveal all stages of the lyrical hero’s inner state: love, disappointment, and “The Death of Love”. In the first poem, M. Bouchor specifies the flowers – roses and lilacs, while in the second poem, water lilies are mentioned. According to the interpretations in the French dictionary, “The Language of Flowers”¹², the rose symbolizes love, the lilac represents the first emotions of love and initial romantic feelings. Both the rose and the lilac bloom in spring, while the water lily, a symbol of coldness and solitude, blooms until autumn. Thus, these seasons serve as symbols of human existence.

Regarding the symbol of the “rose”, since the Middle Ages, this flower has been considered a symbol of love for a woman. Over time, in French literature, this floral image acquired new meanings. For instance, in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, particularly in his collection “Les Fleurs du mal”, and specifically in the poems “Spleen” and “L’Idéal”, roses are depicted as sad, faded, and often completely withered flowers, seemingly reflecting the poet’s own state.

¹⁰ Wong Wai Yee, Marina. *Ernest Chausson's poemed'el'amour et dela mer, op 19: an Investigation of the sntegration of musical Parameters and textual content*. Thesis of the Master of philosophy. 1994. p. 34. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48542784.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid, p.35.

¹² Tanase, Nicolae. *Le langage des fleurs: Le dictionnaire des fleurs et leurs significations (fragrance des fleurs)*. Independently published. 2021. p.37.

However, the French symbolist poet also undergoes some changes that return him to traditional romantic notions of the flower, as seen in the poem "Tout entière", where the image of the beloved is envisioned as beautiful and whole, with everything about her imbued with beauty: her breath is music, and her voice is the scent of roses. Thus, even in Baudelaire's melancholic poetry, the rose remains a symbol of love for a woman. In the first half of "The Flower of the Waters", the interpretation of the "rose" symbol is traditional, reinforced by the flower's golden, divine color. However, in the second poem, "La Mort de l'Amour", Bouchor's roses become akin to Baudelaire's:

Notre fleur d'amour est si bien fanée,
Hélas! que ton baiser ne peut l'éveiller!¹³

In the poem "The Death of Love", M. Bouchor returns to floral imagery, which is intertwined with a fatal female character of the decadent movement in French poetry: a flower enchants a person with its beauty and scent, just as a fatal woman seduces with her sensuality. While the first half of "The Flower of the Waters" is crafted by Bouchor in the romantic tradition, depicting nature as a "paradise bush," the second half reveals an obvious yearning for lethargy peculiar to "Feuillage du cœur" (Foliage of the Heart) from Maurice Maeterlinck's collection: "our flower of love has withered," "dead, crumpled leaves," resonating with the melancholy of the lyrical hero. In his turn, the Belgian poet, while creating his "floral images," was influenced by Charles Baudelaire, making it relevant to revisit his work "Les Fleurs du mal", as well as his introduction of the idea that beauty exists within evil. Consequently, the poems of Maeterlinck, the "poet-gardener," take on a metapoetic scope: through floral symbols, poetry itself is depicted as dangerous, associated with evil and death.

Regarding the symbolic meaning of the water lily, in the 20th-century French literature, Boris Vian's well-known novel "L'Écume des jours"¹⁴ (Froth on the Daydream) tells the story of a young woman suffering from a disease that gradually consumes her. This illness is linked to a water lily – a flower that grows within her and destroys any other form of life. As noted earlier, the symbolic meaning of the water lily includes coldness, powerlessness, and solitude. In M. Bouchor's second part, "The Death of Love", the water lily is mentioned as:

Bientôt l'île bleue et joyeuse
Parmi les rocs m'apparaîtra;

¹³ Baudelaire, Charles. *Fleurs du Mal*. Pocket. 2018. p.72.

¹⁴ Vian, Boris. *L'Écume des jours*. Paris. Le Livre de Poche. 2014. p.36.

L'île sur l'eau silencieuse
Comme un nénuphar flottera¹⁵.

Here, the island, like the lily, becomes a symbol of final detachment — a serene, sorrowful drift into emotional isolation.

In this poem, the topos of “morbid” solitude depicted as an island of the flower is used to artistically convey the suffering of the lyrical hero, additionally, it emphasizes the parallel between flower and woman, which is peculiar to the decadent poetry. Théodore de Banville¹⁶, author of *Odes funambulesques*, in the preface to Laurent Tailhade's *Jardin des Rêves* (*Garden of Dreams*), aptly comments on the perception of the female image among French writers of the late 19th century: “Yes, this is an entire generation that, with its voice, laments and admires, gloriously celebrating Woman, who was a slave, a companion, a queen, victorious, triumphant, but whom only our recent sufferings have made ideal and divine.

In “Poem of Love and the Sea” by M. Bouchor, the sea – watery continuum – is portrayed as a powerful symbol that, in “The Flower of the Waters”, unites the hearts of two lovers. The French poet's choice of this symbol is unsurprising, as renowned poets and composers of all times and cultures have assigned the sea a decisive role in the great drama of love and death. An example is Wagner's opera “Tristan und Isolde” with its maritime first act and depiction of the events happening between the wave-beaten Celtic shores of Cornwall and Brittany. This attraction to the sea as a symbol can be explained by its dual interpretation: on one hand, the sea represents a feminine element, a maternal affect; on the other hand, it is far more commonly understood as a symbol of eternity. In the works of poets and artists, turning to water themes often signifies a return to a divine inspiration – an awareness of the unique connection between human being and existence.

M. Bouchor's descriptions of nature feature a rich palette, and his sketches of the sea create an atmosphere of peace and warmth. The lines “Under the scorching sun / The soft sand is kissed / And over which dazzling waves roll” evoke associations with picturesque masterpieces, such as Gustave Courbet's painting “The Wave”. The statement by the famous French painter and landscapist – “painting is a representation of things that the artist can see and touch,” undoubtedly resonates with M. Bouchor's poetic imagery¹⁷.

¹⁵ Baudelaire, Charles Les. *Fleurs du Mal*. Pocket. 2018. p. 72.

¹⁶ Tailhade, Laurent. De Banville, Theodore. *Le Jardin des Reves*. Paris. Alphonse Lemerre. 1980. p. 49.

¹⁷ Schultze, Jürgen. *Kunst im Bild: Neunzehntes Jahrhundert*. München: Naturalis Verlag. p. 88.

The landscapes of the French poet seem to echo the paintings of the Impressionists: everything that exists in nature – sea, sky, people, plants, is depicted with a perfection, for example, in Claude Monet's *Lilacs in the Sun*, everything is surrounded by air and light. For M. Bouchor, the same as for the Impressionist painters, light plays a crucial role. Thus, the first section of "The Flower of the Waters" takes place in the morning, symbolizing the dawn of love. The poet captures this time of day: "And my heart awoke this summer morning <...> giving vision to my eyes, filled with light." This is just the beginning of the relationship, so there is no need to rush, allowing one to bathe in the sunlight, which fosters an impression of peace and quiet joy. The love of this period is imbued with a divine light, evidenced by the following line in the poetic text of the first section of the work: "Et du ciel entr'ouvert pleuvaient sur nous des roses" (quote by M. Bouchor¹⁸). This seems to be a heavenly likeness, and even love is interpreted as a manifestation of God's essence.

In "The Death of Love", M. Bouchor adheres to traditional contrast: earlier, the sea, sandy shore, and green paths – witnesses to the romantic dates of the lovers – were "embraced" by a gentle breeze, its breath resembles the hugs of a young couple. However, by the time the love ends, "the wind changes, the sky is overcast." In the finale of the second part of the "Poem", the presence of the wind that "rolled dead leaves" is projected onto the protagonist's feelings – "rolled my thoughts like dead leaves in the night." The exact repetition of the text and the use of alliteration with the letter "r" further intensify the evocation of memories through an echo-like effect. In this figurative symbolism, the wind becomes more an allegory of love than a symbol. Typically, in Romanticism, the wind is a tempest, signaling the end of passion, leaving only room for memories tinged with sadness and melancholy.

It seems that each of M. Bouchor's sketches is a poetic impression of a lived moment. The author manages to create poetry that can be not only read but also seen, similar to a painter's canvas or a scene from a film. This is achieved through heightened attention to the facture of the verse and its sound instrumentation. The worldview in "Poem of Love and the Sea" is seemingly created with broad brushstrokes, image by image: the poet shifts his gaze from the sea to the sky, then to the land, into the misty distance of memories. Nature seems to gradually transition from one state to another. Consequently, Bouchor's work is not a static landscape poem where the

¹⁸ Bouchor, Maurice. *Chants Populaires pour les Écoles* (Recueil M. Bouchor et J. Tiersot), Deuxième série. Livre du maître, Paris, Hachette. 1903. p. 14.

lyrical subject merely observes the surrounding world, but rather a poetic “cinematograph,” where one frame swiftly transitions to another. The continuous movement of the gaze from one image to the next one, from top to bottom and then from bottom to top, also resembles the performance of a symphonic piece. This may have inspired E. Chausson to compose such a work based on his friend’s verses.

M. Bouchor’s “Poem of Love and the Sea” was perfectly aligned with the composer’s vision of the divine purpose of love. Just two years after completing the cycle, as if summarizing his own artistic resolution, E. Chausson writes a letter to Raymond Bonheur (dated November 14, 1892), in which he notes that love is a divine creation, the manifestation of which was observed in human creativity. This is what allows one to consider human as a Being created in the image and likeness of God, they are united through the creative process¹⁹. As the composer states, the expression of divine love and the unity of God and humanity lies in the interpretation of the symbolism of the “Poem”²⁰.

E. Chausson’s choice of M. Bouchor’s “Poème” for his vocal cycle is also explained by the inherent musicality of these poems, which perfectly met the requirements for the poetic text in the *mélodie* genre. Referring to the concept of Alain Corbellari, a professor at the University of Lausanne, the main characteristics of the *mélodie* genre include: the use of a poetic text that is initially self-sufficient, meticulous attention to prosody (the correlation between word stresses and strong parts of the melody, where the length of the poetic syllables determines their melodic quality), the omission of melismas and other vocalizations, and adherence to the form of the poem²¹.

The French composer dedicated the “Poem” to his friend, Henri Duparc, who, in his turn, dedicated one of his most famous melodies – “Phidylé”, to E. Chausson. Some letters from both artists have been preserved, including Duparc’s advice regarding this work: “I see almost no mistakes; they relate only to prosody, which can be easily corrected. <...> The work itself is amazing; there is nothing to return to; I believe you will succeed in everything”²². Such

¹⁹ Barricelli, Jean Pierre. Weinstein, Leo. *Ernest Chausson: the Composer’s Life and Works*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press. 1973. p. 25.

²⁰ Gallois, Jean. *Chausson E. L’homme et son oeuvre: Catalogue des oeuvres, discographie, illustrations*. Paris. Seghers. 1967. p. 54.

²¹ Corbellari, Alain. *Subjectivité et objectivité dans la mélodie française des XIXe et XXe siècles*. 2011. p. 33. <http://journals.openedition.org/narratologie/6485>;
<https://doi.org/10.4000/narratologie.6485>

²² Barricelli, Jean Pierre. Weinstein, Leo. *Ernest Chausson: the Composer’s Life and Works*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press. 1973. p. 65.

a union of poeticized music and musicalized poetry, serving as an ideal model of the genre, was highly praised by Duparc himself, who is regarded as one of the perfectionist composers of the second half of the 19th century²³.

E. Chausson's vocal cycle exists in several compositional versions: for high voice with a paired symphonic orchestra, for medium voice with a paired symphonic orchestra (the analysis in this study was based on this score), for high voice accompanied by a string quartet and piano, and for medium voice accompanied by a string quartet and piano.

The existence of multiple compositional versions of work proves the significance of this vocal cycle within the context of the French composer's creative legacy. Ten years spent working on "Poem of Love and the Sea" represent a considerable period. E. Chausson tried to fully realize the work's concept, creating authorial editions for various performance ensembles. Such quantity of compositional interpretations serves as evidence of the multifaceted symbolic meaning of the work. Throughout the process, the composer was in search of the ideal version, aiming for the music to captivate the hearts of listeners.

The premiere of "Poème" took place on February 21, 1893, in Brussels, where the composer accompanied tenor Désiré Demest on the piano. The first orchestral version was performed on April 8 of the same year (1893) with soprano Éléonore Blanc and the National Music Orchestra under the direction of Gabriel Marie. The significance of this vocal piece for the composer is evidenced by his personal involvement in the premiere. The initial performance, featuring specific interpreters, a tenor and a soprano, gives the symbolism of this work both a masculine and feminine characteristic.

The designation of the genre itself – poem – that connects both French poetry and music plays a significant role. The verbal poem finds its continuation in music, while music draws inspiration from poetry. They are also united by the shared symbol of the sea, one of the most classic symbols, having its own sound aura. The sea symbolizes the image of love, boundless yet ever-changing. Music and words reveal that the sea and love are symbols of creation. The symbolism of Love and the Sea in the "Poem" is distinguished by its polysemantic nature. Both images symbolize human life, emotions, and existence within the realm of being. Similar to the sea having tides and ebbs, human life experiences rise and falls, but unlike the sea, a human life has a beginning and an end. Thus, the title of the vocal cycle can be interpreted not as a lyrical story of the birth and death of love, but, at the very least, as

²³ Zharkikh, Tetiana. *Henri Duparc in the history of the mélodie genre*. Aspects of Historical Musicology XXVII. Kharkiv I. P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts. 2022. p. 99.

a “matrix” of human destiny. It is possible that while intending to give this eternal theme of art special grandeur, the composer turned to such a performing ensemble that deprives the work of the definition of “chamber”. The use of a symphonic orchestra provides the cycle greater scale and a richer timbral palette: chamber music gives way to concert music, embodying a certain symbolism. Since an orchestral version of the Poem exists, it can be argued that the composer envisioned an orchestral scope for the piano accompaniment as well. Evidently, both the piano and the orchestra can symbolize the elemental force of love/the sea.

This study focuses on the orchestral version of the vocal cycle “Poem of Love and the Sea” by E. Chausson and M. Bouchor, which consists of two vocal parts (“The Flower of the Waters” and “The Death of Love”) and an interlude (an orchestral section). Such analysis is crucial, as in the contemporary performance practice, a correct understanding of the composer’s intent “helps the interpreter to expand their timbral range, connected to an emotional “immersion” in the essence of the work, and enables the music researcher to accurately interpret (often “decode”) and convey the composer’s vision to the listener”²⁴.

Thematically, the “Poem” is based on two main themes, intonations of which permeate the entire musical fabric – both the vocal line and the orchestral score. The intonations of the First Theme appear in the opening bars of the introduction and reach their crystallized form in the vocal line of the first vocal period of the first section. The Second Theme is introduced for the first time in the first section, during the third vocal period, with orchestral accompaniment. The Second Theme of the “Poem” concludes with an oboe solo.

The opening of the first part of “The Flower of the Waters” introduces the core theme, from which the musical dramaturgy of the “Poem of Love and the Sea” unfolds (Example 1). This core theme has a wave-like structure, with clearly traceable ascending and descending movements; the extreme points of the wave converge, and its range spans a sixth. The change in meter and rhythm, as observed in Example 1, reflects the freedom inherent in both love and the sea. Subsequently, the core theme transforms into a melodic theme.

²⁴ Zharkikh, Tetiana. *Musical Stained-glasses by Olivier Messian*. Aspects of Historical Musicology Kharkiv I. P. Kotlyarevsky National University of Arts. 2018. p. 23.

E.g. 1



Ernest Chausson «The Flower of the Waters» bb. 1-3.

The seed theme in the First Theme is based on a derivative contrast (Example 2). A certain mirror-like quality is observed. There is an inversion of the first and second intonational phases, yet all these changes do not lead to a transformation of the main intonational idea – the wave motif, which, in Example 2, becomes more expansive.

E.g. 2



Ernest Chausson «The Flower of the Waters» bb. 19-22.

E. Chausson avoids uniform filling and regular repetition of rhythmic figures within phrases that correspond to poetic footprints. The meter and rhythm of the work reflect not only the composer's style but also the specificity of French intonation, that is, the musical movement of the voice during speech. The melodic of a French sentence is characterized by a gradual rise in the vocal pitch from the initial to the final syllable within a rhythmic group or syntagma. In an affirmative sentence, the intonation typically features a sharp drop in the pitch on the last syllable of the final rhythmic group, with the preceding syllable being the highest in the pitch. As a French-speaking composer, E. Chausson consistently adheres to this principle.

The Second Theme appears in the oboe part, which forms the basis of the vocal line in the third period of "The Flower of the Waters" (Example 3). Based on the core theme, the composer constructs two themes. The First Theme is tender and liquid, while the Second Theme introduces a thematic contrast. In the Second Theme, the wave-like nature of the melodic line is preserved, but the range expands to an octave. Gradually, the core theme evolves into a melodic theme that constantly transforms, much like the ever-changing sea. However, the core theme remains recognizable due to its transformed characteristics, the primary one being the presence of a wave-like structure. The melody, which gradually ascends, suddenly breaks off with

a leap of an octave downward – a feature absents in the liquid structure of the First Theme. This can be interpreted as a wave that unexpectedly crashes. In figurative terms, at the beginning of “The Flower of the Waters”, the wave is calm, like a gentle tide, while in the third section, it becomes a tempestuous wave. From a single intonational unit, two distinct images emerge: a tranquil sea surf and a raging elemental force, presenting an internal thematic contrast, yet both being symbols of the sea. The shift in the depiction of the sea’s elemental force mirrors the transformation in the protagonist’s emotional state.

E.g. 3



Ernest Chausson «The Flower of the Waters» bb. 54-57.

To analyze the musical symbolism of the “Poem of Love and the Sea”, it is important to highlight the compositional stylistic features that E. Chausson employs, basing on principles peculiar to those found in painting. Besides the interaction with the poetic word, particularly that of M. Bouchor, the vocal cycle exhibits a musical adaptation of certain techniques used by symbolist painters – contemporaries of the composer. For instance, the French painter Gustave Moreau (1826–1898) – a proponent of the symbolist movement in art, who, in his paintings, used color as a mean of transfiguring reality, believed not in what he touched but in what he saw and felt. The French symbolist writer Jean Lorrain wrote about Moreau: “This visionary, like no other, transforms the land of his dreams into his own universe, where the madness of dreams gives a rise to feelings of longing and despair. A master-sorcerer, he enchanted his era, captivated his contemporaries, and infused a shade of idealism into the skeptical and pragmatic fin de siècle. Under the influence of his painting, an entire generation of writers, especially poets, emerged”²⁵. The painting “The Apparition” (1876), which astonished viewers with its iconographic innovations, achieved through the depiction of the levitating head of Saint John the Baptist, presents a particular significance in

²⁵ Dava Jean-Luc. *Modern Art, the Decisive Years*. 1884–1914. Skira/Rizzoli International Publishing. New York, N. Y. 1979. p. 59.

this context. Both M. Bouchor and E. Chausson fell under the influence of this “prophetic sorcery,” and parallels can be observed in Chausson’s work due to a sense of kinship with Moreau’s creative style.

The association with E. Chausson’s musical symbolism is evident in the distinctive manifestation of the creative principles derived from Gustave Moreau²⁶. The first of these principles involves adhering to a “beautiful inertia”, for example, “stop, beautiful moment”. This is why Moreau’s paintings feature the effect of motionless, hieratic (sacred) bodies, almost sculptural in appearance. The second method entails pushing the decorative quality of the artist’s creative style to an extreme. A manifestation of the principle of “beautiful inertia”, peculiar to the paintings of G. Moreau, is also observed in the “Poem” – in a certain static quality of the musical material, achieved through techniques such as instrumental pedals, ostinato, and prolonged adherence to a single harmonic vertical, which enhances the sense of silence and immobility. As for the principle of decorativeness, it manifests in the creation of numerous strikingly vivid and captivating variants of the melody derived from an initial melodic invariant. In Chausson’s work, these principles are realized in a distinct musical form. The implementation of these two principles within the musical texture of Chausson’s “Poem of Love and the Sea” allows the composer to portray the states of the sea such as constant movement and an infinite state of hypnotic trance.

Thus, the composer, relying on symbolic techniques, intended to abandon the old Romantic foundation, which he considered unsuitable for himself, while realizing that his anti-Romantic pursuits might be a mistake. This is evidenced by a letter written in February 1882 to Madame de Rayssac: “I do not forget that I have an old Romantic foundation, which is now impossible for me, but perhaps I am mistaken”²⁷. Therefore, E. Chausson is both an innovator and a conservative.

Since, as the French composer himself stated, “an idea can only be mastered when there is a complete control over the form”²⁸, this study examines musical symbolism in the context of Chausson’s vocal cycle structure (however, due to the article’s page limitations, the analysis is partial).

For the first section of “The Flower of the Waters,” the French composer selects a pastoral tonality – F major – which indeed corresponds to the occurrence of idyllic relationship between the main characters. Flutes, oboes, and clarinets, joined by the bassoon, create an impression of sunlit shimmers

²⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁷ Wong Wai Yee, Marina. *Ernest Chausson's poemedell'amour etdela mer, op 19: an Investigation of the sntegration of musical Parameters and textual content*. Thesis of the Master of philosophy. 1994. p. 42. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48542784.pdf>

²⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

similar to those seen in Impressionist paintings. Following M. Bouchor's poetics, the French composer emphasizes each emotional nuance, and the orchestra becomes a passionate witness to the adventures encountered by the narrator.

In the polychromatic orchestral palette, the timbre of the violins conveys a stream of light, the awakening of nature, vivid spring colors, and the sound of sea waves. The sophistication and transparency of the flutes, with their naturally high register, add lightness, elegance, and grace, the timbral qualities of the clarinet enrich the overall sound with nobility and joy, while the horns and trombones blend softly and harmoniously with the timbres of the woodwinds and strings, as if highlighting the contrast between the celestial and the earthly, introducing imitations of phrases and melodies that are sequentially presented in contrasting registers.

The vocal phrase "You, who will tremble under his dear little feet" serves as the climax of the third section, the verbal text is emphasized by visual means – icons. The flutes introduce a tremolo on a rising semitone in the second and third octaves; the sound of the main theme against a wavering accompaniment (second ostinato movement) in the flutes, muted violins, and a quintal pedal in the cellos conveys associations of "a floating island, like a water lily, on calm water". Meanwhile, the melodic movement of the "Poem", unpredictable due to the lack of symmetry and specific support points, distracts listeners, who allow themselves to immerse in wave-like musical sounds, in an elusive world close to the land of dreams, created by their imagination. Symbolism, which strives to mask reality, is very well identified with such music.

The large orchestral episode (Section 6) is built on the material of the Second Theme, which is sequentially introduced by various instruments. The timbre of each instrument serves as a kind of symbol for a particular emotion or sensation. The color, full of solar brilliance, is shaped by unique orchestration. The score of this episode, which spans the entire orchestral range, is dynamic due to ascending and descending sextuplets in the flutes and clarinets, wave-like harp passages, ostinato motion outlining triads in the violins, and ascending and descending runs in the flutes, clarinets, and bassoons. The entire orchestral vertical is built on a pedal extended to the double basses and emphasized by the tremolo of the timpani. Nearly the entire episode is performed fortissimo, as it represents a hymn to love and the elemental force of the sea. Thus, in this orchestral episode, the composer employs pictorial techniques of "graceful inertia" and "extreme abundance of decorativeness".

In the finale of the third section of "The Flower of the Waters", Chausson achieves a moment of immense dramatic intensity through wide leaps in the vocal line: it begins in the lower octave and quickly ascends to

the third, while the orchestra emphasizes the peak of emotional tension by doubling the melody in octaves in the woodwinds and violins, spanning a range of three octaves. This sound space, along with the contrasting “treading in place,” opens new directions that will find real use in the music of the next decade.

In the context of the concept of the Symbolist ideal, the quiet cantilena expands the expressive palette of Chausson’s music, since the chromaticisms present in the vocal part and in the accompaniment, as well as the diminished chords that appear in the orchestral texture throughout the first section, render the main key unstable and unrecognizable. Modal intrusion, while remaining tied to the perception of a tonal center, opens new possibilities for musical style that are part of the Symbolist path. In the score, there is a kind of imperceptible “sliding” from one chord to another without clearly defined tonal orientation. Such uncertainty, illusion, and transience reveal the touching universe of the French composer. In Chausson’s work, a different harmonic syntax occurs: the chords are not connected in the usual way but obey other rules in order to realize the overall authorial idea, which is confirmed by the following Chausson’s words: “The most important thing is the order of work, understanding of thematic material, the beauty of melodic phrases. Criticisms of specific harmonies do not count. According to Wagner and all great masters, harmonies are only a means of expression. And this is something else”²⁹.

In the Interlude, a certain mirroring and wave-like structure can be observed, and the same upward motion noted in the third section of “The Flower of the Waters” appears in the Interlude even more prominently, with the melody sounding almost like a call. While the first key intonema within the range of a prime, in the Interlude, its range reaches an octave – that is, in this sea storm, love perishes. It should be noted that, although M. Bouchor does not emphasize the transition from “calm” to “storm,” the composer does, and thus the role of the Interlude is difficult to overestimate.

Moreover, the principle of painting – that is, the “principle of extreme ornamental abundance” – is manifested in the broad emotional instrumental palette: from the bassoon solo with its rich, dark sound, which makes it ideal for expressing depth and complexity, to the soft, pure timbre of the flute. All of this adds a sad and somewhat melancholic character to the Interlude. The same principle of decorativeness appears in the orchestral texture through the use of contrapuntal technique: in the first section, the main theme sounds as a counterpoint in octaves in the tremolo of the violin accompaniment, while elements of the main theme can also be heard in the parts of the woodwinds

²⁹ Grover, Ralph Scott. *Ernest Chausson: the Man and His Music*. London. Athlone Press. 1980. p. 66.

(oboes, clarinets, and bassoons), as a result of which new types of imagery form on the semantic musical plane, and the cumulative effect of sound color increases immeasurably.

In the poetic text of the second part of “The Death of Love” based on the content of the work, three sections should be distinguished: the first – hopes for a bright future; the second – mystical images; the third – regret over the past love. The leading musical theme is once again transformed – the wave acquires new variations based on sigh-like intonations. At the initial point of the descending wave motion and at the point where the wave begins to rise again, a certain mirroring can be observed.

E.g. 4



Ernest Chausson «The Death of Love» bb. 82-89.

Following the poetry of M. Bouchor – “And I shall be happy and sad / Soon to remember!” – E. Chausson introduces a bell-like tremolo in the flutes on short chords in instruments with a soft timbre – oboes and clarinets. The word “triste” (sad) sounds in a minor key in the vocal part, but, by the end of the phrase, E major returns. The first theme is played by clarinets and violins.

Pedal notes permeating the entire texture of “The Death of Love”, appear as one of the components of the author’s idea, since the broad use of registers, constant changes in durations and timbres, as well as in their intensity, which create a special atmosphere, during pedalization, lead, through their immobility, to each instrument losing its distinctive color, and the musical “image becomes blurred” analogically to Impressionist paintings, and, due to the absence of “events,” E. Chausson invites the listener to interpret and decode the author’s symbolism. In this way, the French composer reveals a new musical reality, leaving space for imagination – a fundamental element of the Symbolist doctrine.

Rhythmic ambiguity in performance is notable in certain musical fragments: the rhythm is weakly discernible, which brings E. Chausson's music as close as possible to the Symbolist direction, and, in a way, this is expressed by Symbolist poet Ch. Baudelaire: "Which one of us, during the heights of our ambition, has not dreamed of the miracle: poetic, musical prose, without rhythm

and without rhyme, flexible enough and fragmented enough to adapt to the lyrical movements of the soul, to the waves of reverie”³⁰.

Since the Symbolist poetry of *poème* became a source of inspiration for E. Chausson, a general continuity is indeed felt in his musical text: slow episodes of the sixth section, in both tempo and meter, echo the stylistic features of several Symbolist poets: P. Verlaine disrupts verse regularity, A. Rimbaud practices free verse – *vers libre*, and S. Mallarmé creates his own language devoid of punctuation.

In the musical and poetic coda of “The Death of Love”, the slow fading of tumultuous passions is reflected. The vocal line, in accordance with the “principle of extreme abundance of decorativeness”, loses further melodic development, the wave-like line of the core theme straightens and freezes. The vocal melody turns “into a pedal,” just like in the orchestral part. The ending of the work is perceived as a reminiscence of its beginning: while at first, the wave is born from the silence of the orchestral pedal, in the finale, the wave gradually fades and folds into a point. The suggestiveness of such music supports a sublimated or idealized world characteristic of Symbolist concepts. Decorativeness gives way to beautiful statics.

The French composer avoids overly complex phrases; E. Chausson is inclined toward the search for what allows one to explore the mysteries of M. Bouchor’s poetic symbolism. On this subject, French music critic and impresario Arthur Dandelot wrote: “Once, Ernest Chausson told me that the older he became, the more he tried to simplify his new creations.”³¹. The development of the composer’s style is characterized not so much by the complication of the musical text as by the achievement of noble simplicity.

E. Chausson’s vocal cycle set to the poetry of M. Bouchor reveals a dynamic interplay between idealism and realism, between external imagery and inner depth, which serves as the foundation of the “Poem of Love and the Sea”. This is revealed through the dominance of two overarching intonational graphemes: the core theme arises from statics, which gives a start to the wave-like movement, and then this movement returns to statics – that is, first comes unfolding, then folding; and the principle of growing the core theme into the melody-theme, which has a broken structure presents of the wave intonema.

In the work, the illustrative and pictorial imagery is intensified by the frame-like structure of the musical form’s frame-like composition – that is, the sea’s movement is seemingly framed by the wave intonema. The introduction

³⁰ Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Pocket. 2018. p. 49.

³¹ Dandelot, Arthur. *Petits mémoires musicaux*. Paris. Editions de la Nouvelle Revue. 1936. p. 51.

and the coda function as a frame, symbolizing the birth of the movement of Love and Sea and its cessation. Alongside this, the frame composition also reflects an artistic and constructive idea as the transition from beginning to end and vice versa. Since the movement repeats in a cycle, the “Poem” takes on a cyclical form.

In vocal cycle, a triple code is traceable at the level of word, music, and painting. While the poetic symbolism is mirrored in the musical text, from the visual symbolism, the composer adopts the two above principles from the French painter Gustave Moreau. Poetic symbolism contains four inner symbolic levels: word, philosophy, painting, and music. Thus, the symbolic meanings of “Poem of Love and the Sea” are multiplied.

Conclusions

This study identifies the symbolic principles of the vocal cycle “Poem of Love and the Sea” by E. Chausson and M. Bouchor. The first principle lies in the idea of the duality of the real and the other world, as well as the embodiment of hidden meanings through symbols. The symbolism of the very title of the “Poem” is characterized by polysemy. Both main images – the Love and the Sea – symbolize human life, emotions, and existence within both real and eternal worlds. The second symbolic principle of the ‘Poem’ draws upon elements of Romanticism and Symbolism, reflected in the portrayal of the unity between nature and humanity, as well as in the mystical visions experienced by the lyrical protagonist. The convergence of idealism and realism is also evident in the artistic chronotope of *Poème*, which is structured around two poems that encompass the lyrical subject’s past, present, and future. In the verbal text, M. Bouchor leans toward Romanticism, Symbolism, and Mysticism. A close analysis of the musical and poetic components reveals that even in the symbolic titles of the poems, Bouchor embeds a kind of ‘annotation’ or prelude to the work’s thematic content. The work is rich with symbolism, particularly centered on paired motifs such as Love – the Sea; the Flower-of-Waters; and Death – Love.

The repetition of identical or similar consonants (alliteration) in Bouchor’s “Poem” gives it extraordinary sound expressiveness and musicality. On an associative level, the closeness of the French poet’s poetry to the paintings of Impressionist artists confirms the double encoding of *poème* at the levels of word, painting, and music.

The interplay between the idealistic and the realistic, the outwardly pictorial and the inwardly hidden – foundational elements of the ‘Poem’ – manifests itself in the vocal cycle under study. This interaction is manifested

through the predominance of two key intonational structures: a core theme that emerges from a static state, initiates a wave-like motion, and eventually returns to stasis; and compositional principle in which the core theme evolves into a melody-theme characterized by a fragmented. The entire intonation fabric grows from a single source – the intonation wave.

Shared Symbolist principles unify the musical and poetic layers of the vocal cycle, as exemplified by the use of imagery rooted in visual symbolism. In this study, such symbolism is decoded: in the musical text, through principles of the French painter Gustave Moreau. The mutual complementarity of poetic and musical symbolism determines the multi-layered artistic interpretation of the vocal cycle.

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