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# Čiurlionis's Musical and Pictorial Harmony: A Complex Approach

*Kompleksinis požiūris į harmonijos aspektą*

*M. K. Čiurlionio muzikoje ir tapyboje*

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## Abstract

The universal talent of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis encourages us to examine his works in the context of his different types of artistic activities. There was a mutual influence of musical and pictorial principles in the works of this Lithuanian composer and painter. This article attempts to draw parallels between Čiurlionis's harmonic style in his music and the characteristic features of his paintings. For this purpose, the author has analyzed the harmonic language of the composer's symphonic poems *In the Forest* and *The Sea* and discovered similar patterns within various different paintings by Čiurlionis.

**Keywords:** Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, symphonic poems *In the Forest* and *The Sea*, harmonic analysis, Art Nouveau, synthesis of the arts.

## Anotacija

Universalus Mikalojaus Konstantino Čiurlionio talentas skatina nagrinėti jo kūrybą įvairių meninių veiklų kontekste. Šio lietuvių kompozitoriaus ir tapytojo kūriniuose ryškus muzikinių ir vaizdinių principų tarpusavio ryšys. Straipsnyje brėžiamos paralelės tarp Čiurlionio muzikos harmonijų ir būdingų jo paveikslų bruožų. Autorius išnagrinėjo harmoninę kompozitoriaus simfoninių poemų „Miške“ ir „Jūra“ kalbą ir rado panašias struktūras Čiurlionio paveiksluose.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, simfoninės poemos „Miške“ ir „Jūra“, harmoninė analizė, *Art Nouveau*, menų sintezė.

## Introduction

Research into the versatile creative activities of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis inevitably immerses us in different fields of art and science. In his works, the characteristic features of Art Nouveau, with its ideas of synthesis of the arts, are revealed authentically. The reason for comparing paintings with musical works has been provided, to a certain extent, by the artist himself, who as early as in 1903 began to synthesize pictorial and musical forms. While analyzing the harmonic style of Čiurlionis's music, we shall appeal to contextual analysis and a suggestive approach to interpreting various artistic texts. In this article, we shall turn to a number of musical and pictorial analogies which arose in the process of immersion in the artist's diverse trends of work.

The subject of our attention is two symphonic poems by Čiurlionis: *In the Forest* (1901) and *The Sea* (1907), as well as several paintings by the artist.

### 1. The Symphonic Poem *In the Forest*

In this poem, a free or hybrid form is developed, which integrates features of the Rondo form, the Sonata form and the so-called concentric form<sup>1</sup> The simplified form scheme of this composition can be represented as follows:



**Example 1.** The scheme of the form in the symphonic poem *In the Forest*

Upon closer consideration, the following perspective is received: **principal theme (A)** in C major — transition — **contrasting theme (B)** in A minor — transition — **episode (C)** in G major / B minor — transition — **trio** ≈ **principal theme (A<sup>1</sup>)** in D major — **episode (C<sup>1</sup>)** in B-flat major / D minor — long transition (or **development section**) — “**mirror**” **recapitulation-coda: contrasting theme (B)** in A minor — transition — **principal theme (A)** in C major. Thereby, this arrangement of themes and keys results in a rather harmonious tonal plan for the entire poem: C major — A minor — G major — D major — B-flat major — A minor — C major.

The harmony of the principal theme (the theme is written in the form of a parallel period) is resolved in a classic and simple way. Upon closer look, we can see that it contains two expositions of a “classical” harmonic progression (TSDT), represented by the following chords:

$$T - T^{5<} - S^6 - D^9 - T$$

**Example 2.** *In the Forest*, the principal theme, mm. 1–8 (harmonic scheme)<sup>2</sup>

The visual effect of this “circular” harmonic progression is obvious: entering the forest, we look around, and accustom ourselves to the new place. Čiurlionis turns the *harmonic monotony* of the principal theme (the chord repetitions, the pedal tone on the tonic scale degree, the hardly changing functions) into his main artistic technique. In addition, he prolongates some of the harmonic functions (especially the tonic and, less frequently, the subdominant scale degree) from 2 to 12 (!) measures.<sup>3</sup> From the very beginning, Čiurlionis incorporates *the technique of chord development*<sup>4</sup> (in this case, the tonic). He seems to disclose it slowly, by “trying out” different chord arrangements, timbres, alterations and suspensions. Combined with the slow tempo of *Lento assai* it gives the music the character of an epic narrative. Time in the forest flows differently!

The transition following the principal theme (*Poco animato*, rehearsal number 3), brings in a noticeable amount of contrast to the initial tranquility. C major is quickly replaced by the dominant of the relative minor key, A minor. The harmony of E major briefly takes on the function of the tonic: it sounds like a thematic section, rather than a transition. This moment is quite stable harmonically, likewise demonstrating a kind of “classical” harmonic progression, but in this case in E major.

However, at this point, this section comes to a culmination, as the transition actively develops the material of the principal theme. The tonal contrast of the major-third coordination is quite strong in combination with the textural (compaction of chords), rhythmic (triplets, dotted rhythm) dynamic, and timbral changes (*ff*, orchestral *tutti*). In addition, here Čiurlionis uses the *technique of chord sets* — the sliding chromatic motion of chords (triads and incomplete four-two chords) joined with a tonic pedal tone in the bass and a continuous tone in the upper voices (see reh. no. 4). In their function these series of chords are the linear passing variety. These chord rows explicitly present the figurative depiction of slender rows of gigantic pine trees. In all likelihood, such rows of trees were depicted by Čiurlionis in his painting *Music of Forest* (1903–4)<sup>5</sup> and graphic work *Rustle of the forest* (1903).<sup>6</sup>

However, soon the E major again shows itself as the dominant of A minor, where it is resolved, leading to the contrasting theme (reh. no. 5, m. 10). It is characteristic that the key and melodic outlines of the new theme are drawn in advance, a few measures before the beginning of the theme itself. The contrasting theme is starkly different from the principal theme in many aspects. First of all, the scale of the stable presentation of the musical idea changes.

The theme is merely a six-measure sentence: two analogous phrases in A minor and in F major (almost a sequence) with a conclusion on the tonic. Nonetheless, despite this laconism of presentation, the theme is very rich in its harmonic substance: the harmony changes with every beat and sometimes even during the course of every half beat. The effect is also strengthened by the development of the polyphonic texture. Compared to the epic principal theme, the contrasting theme is obviously filled with lyrical expression. It is reached through broad triadic motifs with a further descending leap and suspension, ascending and descending linear motion, as well as passing progressions in a melodic minor key, Neapolitan harmonies, and chromatic motion. Among the contrasting details, the change from the triple to quadruple meter is remarkable, as well as the metrically and harmonically unstable beginning of the theme (the eighth rest on the downbeat and the dominant harmony). The generalized harmonic scheme of the contrasting theme is as follows:

$$D - D - \overset{\circ}{T} - S - S - \underline{D} \rightarrow N$$

*A minor*

$$T - T - S - D^{9-7} - \underline{D} \rightarrow Dp - \overset{\circ}{T}$$

*F major* *A minor*

**Example 3.** *In the Forest*, the contrasting theme reh. no. 5, mm. 10–15 (harmonic scheme)

This is followed by a sequential development based on the material of the contrasting theme in various minor keys related to each other through the coordination of perfect fourths and fifths (see reh. no. 6): E minor, A minor, D minor. The chord sets with descending chromatic motion, which are contrasted with the ascending melodic motion, continue to sound considerably brighter. To increase the effect of the sound instability, the composer brings in a dissonant elliptical progression. From the keys of unresolved dominants, the following line is obtained:

$$E\flat - C - G - B - D.$$

The musical notation shows a sequence of chords in A minor and F major. The top staff is in 4/4 time and the bottom staff is in 4/4 time. The chords are: E-flat major (E-flat, G, B), C major (C, E, G), G major (G, B, D), B major (B, D, F), and D major (D, F, A). The notation includes stems and flags for the notes, and a double bar line at the end.

$$T - T - \underline{D}^{(S)} - \underline{D}^{(Sp)} - \underline{D}^{(Tp)} - \underline{D}^{(Mp)} - \underline{D}^{(M)}$$

*B-flat major* *(D major)*

**Example 4.** *In the Forest*, Transition, reh. no. 7, mm. 5–8 (reduction and harmonic scheme)

Thereby, Čiurlionis comes to the retransition before the Episode. This retransition sounds very unusual, since, on the one hand, it contains a dominant harmony in relation to the key of the following Episode (G major) but, on the other hand, it is composed in a mode entirely without semitones (a quasi-pentatonic scale):

C — D — E — F# — A.

The anhemitonic structure is achieved due to the fact that Čiurlionis develops the D<sub>9</sub> harmony for eight measures by means of textural and timbral changes: the continuous tone of the piccolo, the ostinato of the two flutes, the arpeggio of the harp, and the solo melodic lines of the horn and the viola. The same musical fragment can also be heard in the D-Mixolydian mode.

This section can remind us of a wide expanse of forest. At the same time, Čiurlionis depicts here a kind of general, abstract portrayal of nature. For example, Claude Debussy uses the same methods (the pentatonic scale D<sub>b</sub> — E<sub>b</sub> — F — A<sub>b</sub> — B<sub>b</sub>) to represent the landscape of the morning sea — an endless spatial expanse gently swayed by the wind!<sup>7</sup> This analogy is quite appropriate because the forest is, in a sense, also a type of “sea,” a sea of trees.

The Episode (reh. no. 10) is marked by a change of tonality, tempo, and character: G major, *Andante espressivo e cantabile*. In addition, the theme of the Episode is tonally unstable, from the very beginning, and it is not quite clear what key it is in: starting in G major, it quickly transitions into B minor. Further, the key of F-sharp minor confronts B minor, “pretending” to be its natural dominant. This means of instability is, thus, a variable tonality condition. However, here we may also find features of dissonant tonality: there are almost no consonances, and the tonic in the form of a triad sounds only once, on the first beat. The seventh chords of secondary scale degrees, accidentals, and suspensions — all of these distinguishing features provide the harmonious diversity of the Episode. Obviously, a traveler has lost his way in a dense forest...

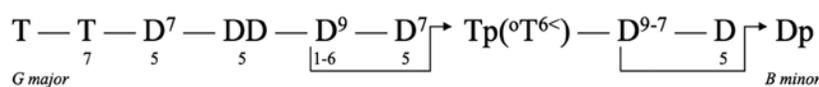
The purpose of these harmonic “wanderings” becomes clear only when, after the sudden sound of an Episode the size of an open sentence and a short transition, a clear D major is heard. At this point, the principal theme appears (see reh. no. 12) as a familiar “forest location.” However, nothing in the forest remains the same: now the music is in common meter, and this time, together with the principal

theme tune, the flute plays a new melody reminiscent of a folk dance tune. Apart from the genre and tonal contrast (D major instead of the original C major), the new melody also brings a degree of harmonic variety. Outlines of dominant and subdominant degree chords now appear against the background of tonic harmonies.

All of a sudden, without being preceded by any transition, the theme of the Episode returns, but now it is stated in B-flat major (see reh. no. 14). After this, the large transition begins (reh. no. 16, m. 3), leading to the recapitulation. Here we can find some features of a Sonata-form development section. For a moment, the theme of the Episode returns again, connecting with chromatic melodic lines. Everything moves to the overall climax of the poem, where Čiurlionis repeats the material from the first transition (to the contrasting theme), and this time dynamizing it. The texture is compacted to a powerful *tutti* in the dynamics of *ff*, and more expressive harmony is present, being a result of the expansion of the diminished seventh chord zone; the chromatic chord sets are now filled with false harmonic relations.

The climax quickly subsides, and the “mirror” recapitulation begins with the statement of the contrasting theme. This form inversion is quite typical of Romantic and late Romantic music.<sup>8</sup> Here it acquires a special dramaturgical meaning: the wayfarer, having first entered the very depths of the forest, now returns by following a familiar path. The contrasting theme, being in itself harmonically quite rich, has no need of being supplemented with new colors, and the composer literally reproduces it entirely in the key of A minor (see reh. no. 21).

The following transition leads to the tonal recapitulation (C major, reh. no. 24), which may be considered to be an inversely shifted coda, due to its lengthy cadence (25 measures long) and the use of only dominant and tonic harmonies. The thematic recapitulation of the principal theme (reh. no. 27) is also endowed with the attributes of a coda. It is significantly expanded, if compared to its first version (64 measures, as opposed 28 measures). Its harmonic plan has not been seriously changed, but along with the principal theme, the motifs of the contrasting theme (see 2 m. before reh. no. 28) and the Trio of the Episode reappear (see reh. no. 29), adding harmonic color by addition of neighboring notes to the harmonies. A return to the “familiar location” of the forest is filled with memories of a walk in the woods.



Example 5. *In the Forest*, Episode reh. no. 10, mm. 1–7 (harmonic scheme)

## 2. Harmony in Čiurlionis's Music in the Context of Late Romanticism Tendencies

### 2.1. Harmony and Form

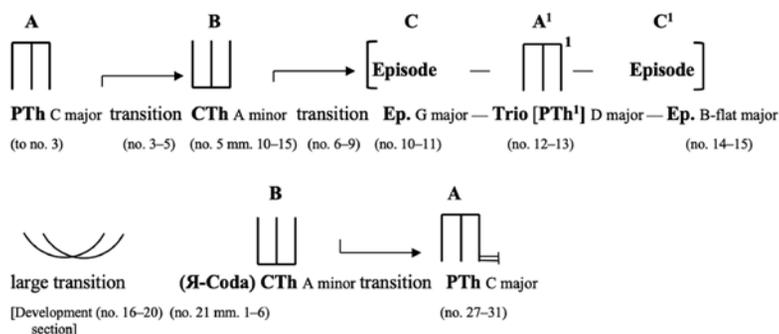
In his chief symphonic compositions *In the Forest* and *The Sea*, Čiurlionis consciously and consistently remains within the framework of the one-movement form characteristic of the symphonic poem genre. Although the composer makes extensive use of the achievements of late Romantic harmony, his relationship with form is founded on the laws of Classical form, which in turn is based on two structural types: theme and transition. From the viewpoint of the forms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Čiurlionis's most important compositions can be classified within the typical forms of Classical and Romantic direction, which, according to Tatiana Kyuregyan, “notwithstanding their apparent continuity, are not identical to the Classic-Romantic forms” (Kyuregyan 2003: 201).

Regardless in which aspect we try to classify the forms of Čiurlionis's musical compositions, from the viewpoint of sonata form, rondo form, or ternary forms, one thing is certain: all of them are interpreted by the composer in his own personal manner. In the context of Art Nouveau, this seems to represent a symptomatic reinterpretation of the traditional musical principles from the past. Čiurlionis drapes his artistic idea each time in a unique form, which in each particular case he creates in a different way. When analyzing his works, we can ascertain that the composer does not seem to think about form consciously, but “sculpts” it intuitively, as an artist in a rush of inspiration. However, two varieties

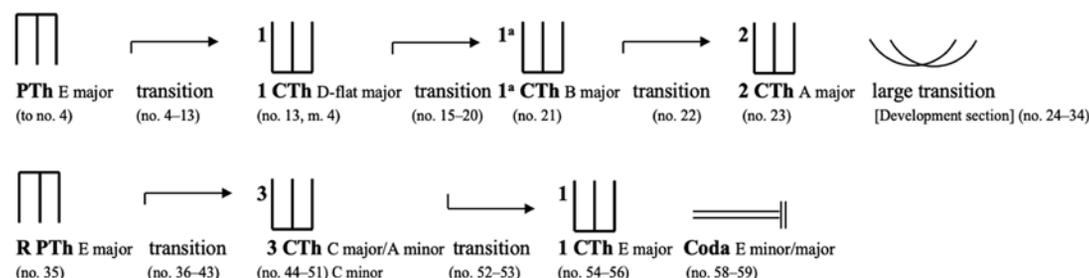
of Čiurlionis's forms become visible to us. In the small-scale compositions, the predominant form is the simple ternary form, manifesting itself in different interpretations. In the large compositions, particularly in symphonic poems, most discernible are multi-theme rondos, likewise with various modifications and deviations from the “norm.” Here are the schemes of the forms of the symphonic poems *In the Forest* and *The Sea* (see Examples 6 and 7).<sup>9</sup>

A specific role is played in late Romantic harmony and form by inversional reflection. The most obvious expression of this is perceptible in the increased importance of secondary (contrasting) themes. They surpass the principal themes in their harmonic diversity and intensity of thematic development. Because of this change of thematic disposition, the contrasting themes assume a more dramaturgic and spectacular position in the form. In the poem *In the Forest*, this is provided by the mirror recapitulation: the contrasting theme is transferred to the climax zone — the point of the Golden Mean. As a result, the principal theme appears in the coda; it is not subjected to serious changes and retains its tranquil character. In the symphonic poem *The Sea*, the main theme in the recapitulation, although dynamized (reh. no. 35, *Maestoso*), still retains the character of a certain “introduction”<sup>10</sup>. Here the role of the contrasting theme is definitely more dramatic.

The other side of inversional reflection is manifested in the prevalence of the transitional sections over the thematic sections. This affects both the harmonies (the clarity and stability of the themes vs. the harmonic intensity and instability of the transitions) and the lengths of the sections:



Example 6. The form scheme of *In the Forest*



Example 7. The form scheme of *The Sea*

all the themes of Čiurlionis's symphonic compositions are written in small forms. Often, it is a parallel period or even a sentence, the largest form being a simple ternary form (the principal theme of the poem *The Sea*). Compared to the scope of the transitions, the themes truly present minuscule "islands of stability."

## 2.2. Type of Pitch Organization

In his symphonic poems, Čiurlionis makes use of a tonal type of pitch organization. His themes are tonally established and concise. Nevertheless, it is all the more curious to consider cases when the harmony in his music passes beyond the major-minor system or uses elements of other systems simultaneously with the tonal principles. This most frequently occurs in the transitional sections of the form. The main antipode of tonality in this case is modality. Čiurlionis uses modality cautiously, introducing it periodically throughout his main works. In the symphonic poem *In the Forest*, a striking example of such modal coloring of the material is the aforementioned retransition before the Episode (see reh. no. 8, m. 7 ff.). It is particularly noteworthy in the multi-semantic characteristic feature of modality when the same sounding material may be heard from different perspectives. At the same time, by combining these different facets of the sound into a single whole, the composer presents all the "patches of mode" simultaneously.

In the symphonic poem *The Sea*, Čiurlionis incorporates elements of modal harmonies in a slightly different way, combining them with an overall tonal-harmonic structure. These include scale-wise runs written in the Aeolian mode, centered around "F" against the background of a repeated

perfect fifth, Čiurlionis's favorite descending chromatic lines, and parallel diminished seventh chords (see Example 8). Thus, there exists a piling of multiple heterogeneous strata which sound simultaneously.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the modal nature of the ascending bass line is hardly audible separately from the overall sound. Rather, this merely provides an element of color in the rich sound palette and endows Čiurlionis's music with a subtle national flavor.

The multivalent quality of present modality also finds reflection in Čiurlionis's paintings.<sup>12</sup> Many of Čiurlionis's visual art works bear an association with the polysemous perception of the aforementioned musical examples from the symphonic poems. These tendencies are present in such pictures as *Composition: Flowers* (1907–8), the triptych *Fantasy* (1908),<sup>13</sup> and many others. We have in mind here the particular way of viewing the respective picture, whereby it becomes possible to distinguish parts of the whole, consider and interpret each of them separately (and differently!) or, on the contrary, by combining all the elements into a single color-graphic whole, whereby the viewer can perceive the picture as an abstract combination of color, lines, and figures.

## 2.3. The Functional Content of the Tonality

In most cases, Čiurlionis's music remains within the tonal system and maintains the thinking in terms of tonal functionality. This is especially evident in the thematic sections of the form, for example the principal theme of the symphonic poem *In the Forest* and the principal and first contrasting themes of *The Sea*, among others. The tonal functionality is highlighted by its main harmonic formula

Example 8. *The Sea*, Transition (Development Section), reh. no. 30, mm. 4–8 (the main orchestral voices)

(T — D — S — T). In the principal theme of *The Sea*, this progression is further complicated by the introduction into the tonic complex of chords of the third coordination:

$$T - Dp(III_{53}) - Tp(VI_{53}) - D - T$$

The first three chords in the theme can be perceived as one large part of a tonic complex. Under the diatonic conditions, these chords can also be interpreted from the position of the dominant scale—in B major (see Example 9). Here again, the inversional principle is observed with its direction not towards the tonic, but towards the dominant. In addition, this phenomenon can be conditionally called tonal bivalence or multi-valued tonality:

$$E \text{ major: } T - T_4^7 - T - D$$

$$B \text{ major: } S - T - S - T$$

**Example 9.** *The Sea*, Principal theme, mm. 1–5 (harmonic scheme)

However, in the sections of the development plan, transitions, and retransitions, the harmony passes beyond classical tonal functionality. The advancement to the foreground of non-tonic functions,—first of all the chords bearing dominant functions (especially those presented in the form of seventh and ninth chords), including the chromatic scalar degrees,—allow us to speak about the functional content of extended tonality. In the brightest moments of the climaxes, the tension and condensation of colors, Čiurlionis comes close to polytonality, specifically to the polychord technique and polyfunctionality. The composer uses the pedal tone technique, which can be considered the primary form of polytonality. For example, in the lengthy retransition to the second contrasting theme of *The Sea* for 19 measures there is a continuing pedal tone *E*. In relation to the A major key of the forthcoming theme, this pedal tone obviously provides the dominant function, but during the entire retransition, a variety of chords occur against its background, including non-triadic and suspended chords, which enter into sonant and functional contradictions with the bass tone.<sup>14</sup>

A vivid use of polyfunctionality can also be seen in the retransition before the principal theme in the recapitulation of *The Sea* (4 mm. to reh. no. 34), where parallel augmented triads are presented against the background of the dominant pedal tone to E major. Such a concentration of structures favored by Čiurlionis (especially the augmented triads) can be considered as dissonant monostructural chord sets or as additional constructive elements that displace the basic functional relations. Perhaps this is where Čiurlionis approaches the sonoristic technique. Of course, this demonstrates only the beginnings of the system which will develop later, so in this case we should talk about the coloristic function



**Figure 1.** Čiurlionis's *Faces* (1904–5, from the cycle of 10 paintings *Fantasies*, pastel on pasteboard, 73.0 × 47.0)<sup>15</sup>

of harmonies, which will become sonoristic harmonic and textural blocks in just half a century.

Once again, we note the example of layering of textural elements, as well as various polyphonic lines, chords, and, accordingly, their functional meanings, given above (see Example 8). The pedal tone, chromatic unisons, and parallel diminished seventh chords finally diminish the role of traditional functional connections. For Čiurlionis, the sound as such becomes significant. This is *harmony-color*, in the context of which the whole is more important than the details. This provides a reminiscence of the paintings of the Impressionist artists, which are perceived entirely as a whole and only from afar as a single bright impression. The music of Impressionist composers who actively use coloristic harmony speaks for itself.

Speaking of Čiurlionis's paintings, we can compare the bright spots of color and light—the “color chords,” which accumulate intense energy in the paintings—to the dissonant coloristic functions of the harmonic chords in his music. For example, in Čiurlionis's painting *Faces* (1904–5), the barely discernible outlines of human faces are drowned in a deep mass of color. The principal technical and artistic means are provided by color itself. Like a thunderous chord cutting through the orchestral texture in the music, a bright spot of purple breaks out in the middle of the painting. This provides a type of color dissonance which “sounds” as paradoxically stable and independent (see Figure 1).

## 2.4. Techniques of Romantic Harmony

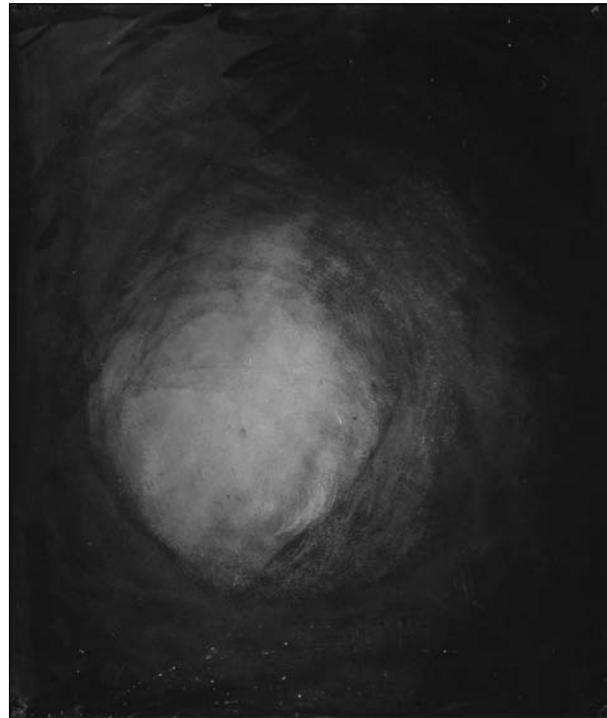
Using the terminology of Yuri Kholopov (Kholopov 2003: 453), we shall identify the main tendencies and techniques of Romantic and late Romantic harmony intrinsic to Čiurlionis's style. These include the chromatic extension of the diatonic system, the use of linear and coloristic functions, inversional reflection, techniques of chord development and chord sets, additional structural elements, modality as a principle of harmony, and a variable condition of tonality. Obviously, musical technique, even if it provides the conspicuous features of the composer's personal style in the Romantic era, would still be not a purpose in itself but merely the means for manifesting an artistic vision. Therefore, Čiurlionis uses these techniques moderately, even cautiously, and often remains faithful to the simple—but by no means trivial—methods available to his predecessors.

Most often Čiurlionis makes use the technique of chord development. In the poem *The Sea*, we can indicate the development of entire complexes of chords—leitharmony. The first time it appears is in the principal theme at the very beginning of the symphonic poem. In the first contrasting theme, the modified leitharmony appears with a descending melodic line that forms different chords on the tonic pedal tone. In the second contrasting theme (see reh. no. 23), linearity is present in the bass, as the result of which the tonic ends up being positioned on different scale degrees each time: on the root, seventh, sixth, fourth, second, and finally the root again. This means that the leitharmony itself is not only based on the technique of chord development but also, in its turn, is developed as an integral harmonic complex throughout the entire composition, and this may be conditionally labeled as harmonic development of the highest order. Provided below is a harmonic scheme with variants of the leitharmony in the three themes of the symphonic poem *The Sea*:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{PTh: T} \quad \text{—} \quad \text{T}_4^7 \text{—} \quad \text{T}_6 \\ \text{1CTh: T}^{8-7} \text{—} \quad \text{T}_6^{6-5} \text{—} \quad \text{T} \\ \text{2CTh: T} \quad \text{—} \quad \text{T}_7 \quad \text{—} \quad \text{T}_6 \end{array}$$

**Example 10.** *The Sea*, Leitharmony (harmonic scheme)

It is worth mentioning another leitmotif which runs throughout the entire symphonic poem and consists of numerous repeated major or minor sixth chords. This demonstrates the simplest form of chord development, in this case—rhythmic, textured, and timbral (see, for example, reh. no. 25). Thus, Čiurlionis uses the technique of chord development with different qualities of chords and on different scale degrees. It is obvious that this attention towards these harmonic progressions is caused by programmatic



**Figure 2.** Čiurlionis's *Creation of the World*, part II (1904–5, tempera on pasteboard, 35.5 × 30.5)<sup>16</sup>

impulses. The manner in which the composer develops one single chord for a lengthy time provides a sound-imaginative effect. Harmonic homogeneity describes by means of sounds the homogeneity of an imaginary forest or sea panorama. Of course, homogeneity does not in the least mean monotony! However, with a seemingly small number of elements, any change, even of the smallest type, becomes significant. This is similar to changes occurring in nature, when the slightest dimming or amplification of sunlight instantly alters the perception of the surrounding space.

The technique of chord development correlates in Čiurlionis's paintings with the predominance of the one-color palette. This monochromatic style may be called “color development.” A large number of Čiurlionis's paintings can serve as an example for the realization of this principle. Demonstrated above is one painting which creates a most profound impression by the use of these means — *Creation of the World*, part II (see Figure 2).

## 2.5. Conditions of Tonality

Separately, we should mention the phenomenon of *conditions of tonality* in Čiurlionis's symphonic works. The most common in his symphonic poems—in addition to functional tonality prevailing in stable sections of the form—are the multi-valued, variable (with features of dissonant tonality), and withdrawn tonalities.

Variable tonality can be heard vividly in the third contrasting theme of *The Sea* (reh. no. 44). Its variability may be called relative, since the two tonal centers of C major and

A minor can be clearly distinguished in this theme. Tonal variability is also strongly evident in the Episode theme of the symphonic poem *In the Forest* (reh. no. 10) due to the constantly changing tonal centers:

G major/E minor — F-sharp minor/B minor.

Withdrawn tonality (with features of dissonant harmonies) can be observed in the development section of *The Sea* (reh. no. 34). This effect is achieved due to a strong concentration of dissonances (augmented triads), which almost completely “blur” the tonal and functional bases and come close to becoming the central element of the system (see Example 11). The future central key is indicated only by the pedal tone “B” (which is played only by timpani!), which is revealed as the dominant harmony only later, when resolved into the tonic chord of E major in rehearsal number 35.



**Example 11.** *The Sea*, Development Section, reh. no. 34, mm. 8–10 (harmonic reduction)

In each case, Čiurlionis uses special conditions of tonality, either for reasons caused by the musical program and imagery, or in order to achieve a special quality of sound, including instability, depth, ambiguity, colorfulness, and poignancy associated with dissonances. On the other hand, in the context of the “borderline” stylistic conditions in the various arts during the 1890s and the 1900s, typical Romantic principles are perceived in a new way, in the light of the changing time period. The special condition of tonality, and of art in general, inevitably correlates with the “condition of the epoch.”

Čiurlionis in his music and paintings could not be left out of the vortex of changes in the arts. Demonstrating himself as an heir to the strong academic traditions of European art and making ample use of the broadly recognized artistic trends of his time, he nevertheless expressed the new “artistic condition” of his epoch. According to Gražina Daunoravičienė:

Although Čiurlionis was creating his art works during the time of fading Romanticism, the compositional parameters of his music were attuned to the mystical mood of emerging Modernism. He strove for a significant renovation of sounds [and colors!—*K. S.*], perceiving this as the exceptional necessity for the evolution of music or as a historical fate. (Daunoravičienė 2016: 446)

## 2.6. Chords and Voice-Leading

The tonal triad should be considered as the central element of the system in Čiurlionis's symphonic poems. The favorite forms of its complexification are seventh chords, ninth chords, and augmented triads, which are most often separated from the usual tonal functions and behave as linear or coloristic components.

There are many interesting examples of how Čiurlionis, by incorporating the means mastered by composers before him, turns them into inherent elements of his individual style. We are referring to his favorite augmented structures. Čiurlionis makes the augmented triad the crucial element of his artistic palette, placing it into a new programmatic and figurative context. A particularly expressive episode of *The Sea* attracts our attention, where the composer brings in only parallel augmented triads against the background of a dominant pedal tone.



**Example 12.** *The Sea*, Transition (before the Development Section), reh. no. 25, mm. 7–9 (harmonic reduction)

Čiurlionis's voice-leading can be considered to be quite free in its stylistic manner. As can be seen from the examples above, he often incorporates parallel harmony, which must be perceived not as a disregard for the established rules, but as a conscious coloristic method. He often uses false relations that occur due to the resulting harmonic contradiction between the main chords and/or melodic voices on the one hand, and secondary chromatic lines on the other.



**Example 13.** *The Sea*, Development Section, reh. no. 31, mm. 3–4 (harmonic reduction)

Separately, we should mention the chromatic line, which became a typical technique of Čiurlionis in the context of the emergent modern music and painting of his time. Analyzing the music of Čiurlionis in connection with the universal style of the arts (painting, architecture, design, and decoration) and noting the influence of biomorphic and abstract ornaments of Jugendstil on his musical scores, Gražina Daunoravičienė concludes:

Čiurlionis tends toward a constructive line and a special function of the semitone. The chromatic progressions in its musical graphics serve at least two purposes. First, they are perceived visually, like a drawing, the outlines of a graphic or pictorial line. Secondly, semitone cells and “strokes” of different volumes are provided a dividing function: the chromatic line separates the texture into individual layers. (Daunoravičienė 2016: 429–430)

In truth, such linear techniques may easily be perceived visually. In the program context, they are like certain “waves” raging on the pages of Čiurlionis’s musical scores.

### 2.7. Texture and Orchestration

The orchestral texture in Čiurlionis’s music is characterized by a large differentiation of layers, as well as by bright contrasts. It has either ethereal clarity combined with graphical lines or immense density resulting from an array of chord layers, doublings, and a large number of instruments, frequently playing *tutti*. Čiurlionis often employs open positions of chords with far-spaced range boundaries. With the inclusion of a profound bass, a high “soaring” melody, and a “spacious” middle texture filled with passages, glissandos, or tremolos of individual instruments or instrumental groups, the texture literally “breathes”.<sup>17</sup>

The orchestral texture reaches a high level of density in the climax of the development section of *The Sea*. A wave of unisons, chromatic lines, and chords builds up, gathering tension to “collide” against the rock of the recapitulation appearing in a full orchestral *tutti*. In contrast to this, the principal themes in both symphonic poems as well as the third contrasting theme of *The Sea* are distinguished by their clear textural transparency.

The orchestration of the symphonic poem *In the Forest* appears as being quite “Classical” and even chamber-like compared that of the symphonic poem *The Sea*. Among other features, the absence of percussion, including timpani, in this score is particularly noteworthy.<sup>18</sup> The symphonic poem *The Sea* shows the evolution of the composer as well as his way of orchestrating the music. Here Čiurlionis employs a large orchestra, which is primarily the result of the programmatic idea: he paints the sea in sounds—the scale of the sound corresponds to the “chief protagonist” of the poem.<sup>19</sup> The composer brings in the harp and the organ and expands the ensemble by adding a fifth and a sixth horn, a third and a fourth trumpet, a side-drum, cymbals, and glockenspiel.

Without immersing ourselves in the numerous details of the orchestration, we shall note a few moments which seem to be the most curious for us. In the symphonic poem *In the Forest*, the retransition before the Episode which was already mentioned is worthy of notice. The almost “Impressionist” type of orchestral sound, in addition to the harmonic means, is achieved by refined orchestration: against the background

of the harp’s chords and triadic “glares” of two flutes (with the third flute playing the continuous tone), the horn and then the viola play melodious solos.

The third contrasting theme of *The Sea* (reh. no. 44) is orchestrated very colorfully. Čiurlionis brings in the low woodwind instruments as the melodic voices (the clarinet and bass clarinet in octave unison), and the accompaniment is provided by the second bassoon, tuba, harp, and organ.

Whatever type of orchestration Čiurlionis chooses, he demonstrates it very intensively. Without contradicting the clear division of texture and timbre layers, he often creates immensely dense colors, only occasionally lightening the texture and leaving clean, unmixed timbres to sound.

Such picturesque intensity of color can be observed in many of Čiurlionis’s paintings. Almost all of his works combine two features of this picturesque texture: a density of color mixed with clear graphics or impressionistic blurriness of lines. In relation to the texture and density of color, especially in the context of the marine theme, we will give the examples of the painting *Ship with Sails* (1905) and the *Sonata of the Sea* cycle (1908).<sup>20</sup>

### 3. The Colors in Čiurlionis’s Paintings

Mikalojus Čiurlionis anticipates many of the discoveries of twentieth century painting, up to the method of Tachisme, however extravagant this comparison may sound. This means, of course, not the spontaneous coating of paint on the canvas, but rather a new approach to color, a color spot, as an artistic and expressive means.

In working with color, he showed himself as being ahead of such avant-gardists as Nicolas de Staël and Mark Rothko. Čiurlionis’s paintings and marine studies are just a step away in terms of their style from the paintings of



Figure 3. Čiurlionis’s *The Sea: A Study* (1908?, oil on canvas, 18.6 × 21.0)<sup>22</sup>

Rothko! In order to understand this, we should compare one of Čiurlionis's sea studies with Rothko's painting *Blue and Grey* (see Figure 3).<sup>21</sup> The sea in Čiurlionis's work is almost abstract, and the artist does not need anything extra to represent it: no foaming waves, no bright sunlight, no sailing ships. He simply divides the canvas into two halves and fills it with paint. If in its nature the sea is a dense mass of water, then in Čiurlionis's painting it is merely a mass of paint, that is, color. The title of the painting by Rothko is self-explanatory. Rothko refers to the colors, making them the main "protagonists" of the paintings and the bearers of the idea, the image, the method of influence, and the philosophical concept.

### Conclusion

We have examined two main works for orchestra by Čiurlionis: the symphonic poems *In the Forest* and *The Sea*. By the example of these compositions, which in our opinion are the most illustrative of his musical works, we have tried to identify the characteristic features of the composer's harmonic style and relate them to his visual art works.

Remaining in line with Romantic harmony, Čiurlionis actively used its established elements. This is associated with a number of tendencies which are characteristic of both the overall harmonic "vocabulary of the epoch" and the composer's individual language. Let us generalize them:

- individualized interpretation of forms with a general orientation towards the Classical and Romantic traditions;
- an inverse relationship between harmony and form: bringing secondary themes to the fore, their more diverse harmonic solutions being compared to the principal themes; the prevalence of transitional over thematic sections; the emancipation of dissonance;
- a large role for modality within the tonal-functional system;
- a different approach towards tonality—the special conditions of tonality (multi-valued, variable with features of dissonant harmonies, withdrawn tonality, etc.);
- use of Romantic harmonic techniques (chromatic extension of the diatonic system, linear and coloristic functions, the techniques of chord development and chord sets, additional structural elements, etc.);
- a qualitatively new attitude to texture and instrumentation as an artistic, colorful means of expression.

Čiurlionis's versatile work correlates perfectly with many of the various artistic (and musical) trends of the epoch. Visionary—we might even say prophetic—in its tone, it clearly looks to the future. It is amazing how, without declaring any

new ideas and forms, he nevertheless uses them as naturally as if they had already existed in art before him.

An important feature of Čiurlionis's talent is his universalism. Therefore, any thorough research of the works of such an artist as Čiurlionis inevitably leads to cognition of a broader cultural context. In the epoch of Art Nouveau (and, more broadly, in the Romanticist era)—this is not only a historical, biographical, or stylistic context, but also the context of the artist's parallel creative activities and ideas. In this rich contextual field, it becomes fascinating to search for the subtle connections and impulses which make us suddenly switch from one work of art to another, or when we perceive one artistic text, to keep in mind and imagine a number of other texts. In this article we have attempted to suggest several such impulses. Some people will find them subjective, while others will find their own varieties or will not look for them at all, continuing to perceive the different arts separately. However, there is no denying that the work of Čiurlionis remains in constant internal interaction, inviting the performer, listener, and viewer to enter into a creative dialogue with it.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The concentric form of the poem was defined by Algirdas Ambrazas (see: Ambrazas 2000).
- <sup>2</sup> In this paper, the following symbols are used:  
< >—signs of chromatic high and low degrees in a chord;  
oT—Tonic of minor key;  
Tp—relative key for tonic;  
Sp—relative key for subdominant, etc.  
The numbers at the top of the letter indicate the additional tone of the chord; the numbers below the letter indicate the tone of the chord on which it stands. See more about this: Kholopov 2003: 533–534.
- <sup>3</sup> See the rehearsal number 1, mm. 1–12.
- <sup>4</sup> In this paper, when analyzing harmony, we use the terminology developed by Yuri Kholopov (Kholopov 2003: 453).
- <sup>5</sup> See: Čiurlionytė-Karužienė and Grigienė 1977, figure No. 4.
- <sup>6</sup> See: Mildažytė-Kulikauskienė 2007: 49, illustration No. 19.
- <sup>7</sup> See: Claude Debussy *The Sea*, part I, *Modéré sans lenteur*, 4 mm. to the no. 3.  
It is interesting that Debussy's *The Sea* was written two years after Čiurlionis's *In the Forest*, i.e. in 1903, although most likely Debussy was not familiar with the work of the Lithuanian composer.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Preludes* by Franz Liszt, Breitkopf & Härtel edition, m. 3 after rehearsal mark L.
- <sup>9</sup> Abbreviations:  
PTh—Principal theme,  
CTh—Contrasting theme,  
R—Recapitulation,  
Я-Coda—"mirror" Recapitulation-Coda,  
no.—rehearsal number.
- <sup>10</sup> A similar effect is observed in the first poem, where the main theme also serves as a conclusion.

- <sup>11</sup> Gražina Daunoravičienė, in relation to the late period of Čiurlionis's creativity (since 1904), writes about "the tendencies to the autonomous layers, to saturation them with carefully selected constructional elements and to the creation of strategies for operating these elements" (Daunoravičienė 2013: 141).
- <sup>12</sup> Genovaitė Kazokas writes about the use of symbols and combination of "multiple planes" in Čiurlionis's painting and about "the introduction of the fourth dimension—the notion of time—to the flat surface of the painting" (Kazokas 2009: 24–25).
- <sup>13</sup> See: Čiurlionytė-Karužienė and Grigienė 1977, figure no. 125; 190–192.
- <sup>14</sup> These contradictions are partly polytonal since the A major appears only after resolution into the tonic, replacing the A minor.
- <sup>15</sup> See: Čiurlionytė-Karužienė and Grigienė 1977, figure no. 46.
- <sup>16</sup> See: *Ibid.*, figure no. 62.
- <sup>17</sup> In this respect, the texture of Čiurlionis is close to Scriabin's overtone ideas. The texture of the First Contrasting theme of *The Sea* is very significant in this regard.
- <sup>18</sup> The orchestration of *In the Forest* poem: Fl. I-II, Picc.; Ob. I-II, Eng.h.; Cl. I-II, Bass Cl.; B-n. I-II; Hn. I-IV, Trp. I-II, Tbn. I-III, Tba; Hp; Strings.
- <sup>19</sup> The orchestration of *The Sea* poem: Fl. I-II, Picc.; Ob. I-II, Eng.h.; Cl. I-II, Bass Cl.; B-n. I-II; Hn. I-VI, Trp. I-IV, Tbn. I-III, Tba; Timp., S.dr., Cym, Glock.; Hp, Org.; Strings.
- <sup>20</sup> See: Čiurlionytė-Karužienė and Grigienė 1977, figure no. 53; 197–199.
- <sup>21</sup> For Rothko's *Blue and Grey* see Fondation Beyeler collection at: [https://www.fondationbeyeler.ch/en/collection/work?tx\\_wmdbasefbey\\_pi5%5Bartwork%5D=119&cHash=9a435a0ce0890051c0aa9b75074a138c](https://www.fondationbeyeler.ch/en/collection/work?tx_wmdbasefbey_pi5%5Bartwork%5D=119&cHash=9a435a0ce0890051c0aa9b75074a138c) [last checked 11.11.2020].
- <sup>22</sup> See: Čiurlionytė-Karužienė and Grigienė 1977, figure no. 51.

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## Santrauka

Čiurlionio įvairialypės kūrybinės veiklos tyrimai neišvengiamai verčia nerti į įvairias meno ir mokslo sritis. Šio lietuvių kompozitoriaus ir tapytojo kūryboje ryškus muzikinių ir vaizdinių principų tarpusavio ryšys. Išlaikydamos romantinę harmoniją, Čiurlionis aktyviai naudojo jos nusistovėjusius elementus, pavyzdžiui:

- individualizuota formų interpretacija, orientuojantis į klasikinę ir romantinę tradicijas;
- harmonijų ir formų inversija: antrinių temų išryškėjimas, įvairesni jų harmoniniai sprendimai, lyginant su pagrindinėmis temomis; dominuoja moduliacijos, o ne tematinė medžiaga; disonanso emancipacija;
- didelis modalumo vaidmuo toninėje-funkcinėje sistemoje;
- kitoks požiūris į tonumą: ypatinga tonumo įvairovė (daugialypės vertės, kintamas su disonansinių harmonijų bruožais, nykstantis tonalumas ir kt.);
- romantinių harmonijos modelių naudojimas (chromatinis diatoninės sistemos išplėtimas, linijinės ir koloristinės funkcijos, akordų sudarymo technikos ir akordų sekos, papildomi struktūriniai elementai ir kt.);
- kokybiškai naujas požiūris į tekstūrą ir instrumentuotę kaip į menišką, spalvingą išraiškos priemonę.

Straipsnyje brėžiamos paralelės tarp Čiurlionio muzikos harmonijų ir būdingųjų jo paveikslų bruožų. Autorius išnagrinėjo harmoninę kompozitoriaus simfoninių poemų „Miške“ ir „Jūra“ kalbą ir nustatė panašias struktūras jo paveiksluose. Harmoninė akordų sudarymo technika koreliuoja su vyraujančia vienos spalvos palete Čiurlionio paveiksluose (plg., pavyzdžiui, „Pasaulio sukūrimas“, I dalis). Šis monochromatinis stilius gali būti vadinamas „spalvos kūrimu“.

Muzikinei faktūrai Čiurlionio kūryboje būdinga didžiulė sluoksnių diferenciacija ir ryškūs kontrastai. Mokslininkai tyrinėja analogišką „kelių plokštumų“ įvairovę menininko paveiksluose (žr. Kazokas 2009).

Čiurlionio pamėgtų struktūrų (ypač padidintų triadų) koncentracija gali būti laikoma disonansinėmis monochromatinėmis akordų sekomis arba papildomais konstrukciniais elementais, keičiančiais pagrindinius funkcinius santykius. Čiurlioniui reikšmingas pats garsas kaip harmo-

nija – spalva, kurios kontekste visuma yra svarbesnė nei detalės. Kalbėdami apie Čiurlionio paveikslus, ryškias spalvų ir šviesos dėmes – „spalvų akordus“, kurie paveiksluose yra sukaupę intensyvią energiją, – galėtume palyginti su jo muzikos harmoninių akordų disonuojančiomis koloristinėmis funkcijomis. Pavyzdžiui, Čiurlionio paveiksle „Veidai“ vos pastebimi žmogaus veidų kontūrai paskęsta intensyvioje spalvų masėje. Pagrindines technines ir menines priemones suteikia pati spalva. Kaip griausmingas akordas, muzikoje skrodžiantis orkestro faktūrą, paveikslo viduryje prasimuša

ryški purpurinė dėmė. Taip atsiranda paradoksaliai stabilaus ir nepriklausomo „skambesio“ disonansas.

Savo meninėje kūryboje Čiurlionis nuspėjo daugelį XX a. naujovių. Dirbdamas su spalvomis, jis lenkė tokius avangardistus kaip Nicolas de Staëlis ir Markas Rothko. Svarbus Čiurlionio talento bruožas yra jo universalumas. Kontekstinė analizė ir sugestyvus požiūris atveria naujus jo kūrybos suvokimo būdus.

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