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Original Article

Научная статья

The Composition of Ernest Chausson's *Poème* in the Art of the *Fin de Siècle*

Композиция «Поэмы» Э. Шоссона в искусстве *fin de siècle**

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Abstract. The present article proposes examining Ernest Chausson's *Poème* for violin as a composition permeated with the atmosphere of the art of the end of the century — the *fin de siècle*. Stemming from a special stylistic color and originality of the musical form, the author of the work sets forth the hypothesis of the narrative element in the theatrical play which influenced its composition. At the center of the research lies the structural-semantic analysis of the *Poème* accords with the storyline motives of Oscar Wilde's drama *Salome*. The angle of interpretation of Ernest Chausson's play is determined by a number of factors that provide with significant foundations to consider the hypothesis to be significant. One of them is chronological, and according to it the *Poème* was created literally "following" the premiere production of Wilde's play in Paris. The other is aesthetic-stylistic, and it connects together in a remarkable way the semantic elements of the literary and musical texts. What is meant here is the genre-related episode of the *Poème*, significant in the symbolic sense, which demonstrates most distinctively the connection between the two works — *Salome's* dance.

Аннотация. В настоящей статье предлагается взглянуть на «Поэму» для скрипки Эрнеста Шоссона как на сочинение, пропитанное атмосферой искусства конца века — *fin de siècle*. Исходя из особого стилизового колорита и самобытности музыкальной формы, автор работы выдвигает гипотезу о фабульном слое пьесы, влияющем на её композицию. В центре исследования — структурно-семантический анализ «Поэмы», согласующийся со стержневыми сюжетными мотивами драмы О. Уайльда «Саломея». Ракурс прочтения пьесы Э. Шоссона определяется рядом факторов, дающих весомые основания считать гипотезу правомерной. Один из них — хронологический, согласно которому «Поэма» была создана буквально «вслед» премьерной постановке драмы Уайльда в Париже. Другой — эстетико-стилевой, удивительным образом смыкающий семантические области литературного и музыкального текстов. Речь идёт о знаковом в символическом отношении жанровом эпизоде «Поэмы», наиболее явственно демонстрирующем связь двух произведений, — танце Саломеи.

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Э. Шоссон, «Поэма», декаданс,
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*Were, pale and succumbing under its very heavy chains,
To the more tortuous sounds of the sharp string,
Art, languid and angry — supreme! — commits suicide!*

Ernest Chausson's *Poème* op. 25 for violin and orchestra, among other works written in similar genres, is a rare and, most likely, a preeminent example. It is bereft of the traditional attribute which literally all the symphonic poems of the second half of the 19th century possess — a programmatic title. The distinct singularity is perceived to be more essential in light of the rather unexpected autographical detail. The title page of one of the three authorial instrumental versions of the *Poème*² (the manuscripts in presentation for violin and piano) bear a poetic epigraph — “The Song of Triumphant Love,” most likely, derived from Ivan Turgenev's novelette with the same name (1881). Despite the objective connection between these two works discovered by means of an instrumental intermediary — the solo violin (presenting the novelette's “supra-storyline” constant

element³), it is hardly possible to discuss the mystical story's impact on the composition of the *Poème* seriously: any attempts to find a depiction of Turgenev's text in the free flow of the musical development fail to appear very convincing. On the other hand, it is difficult to deny the apparent close proximity of the novelette's psycho-emotional background [1] and the *Poème* generated by the mysterious, ecstatic figurativeness of verbal and sound pictures. The two works also converge in that focus which in the form of a rhetorical question was at a certain time earlier expressed by Boris Konstantinovich Zaitsev, a writer and a translator, a connoisseur of Russian literature: “The novelette is remarkable in its perception of an type of oppressive Eastern

¹ Samain A. *Au jardin de l'Infante* [In the Garden of the Infanta] (1893).

² For solo violin accompanied by orchestra, piano quintet and piano solo.

³ Ermakova N.A. “Pesn' torzhestvuyushchey lyubvi” I.S. Turgeneva: logika “obratimosti” finala [The Song of Triumphant Love by Ivan Turgenev: The Logic of the “Reversibility” of the Finale]. *Poetika finala. Mezhvuzovskiy sbornik nauchnykh trudov* [The Poetics of the Finale. Inter-University Compilation of Scholarly Articles]. Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University, 2009. Pp. 177–186.



sorcery. There is something spellbinding and hypnotic about this. But is this a song about triumphant love?”⁵ The nature of affectivity in Chausson’s *Poème* is also ambivalent: the insatiable thirst for the feeling of love and its culmination are elevated to the highest level of exaltation bordering on catastrophic quality, irreversibility, decadence and disintegration.

Composed in 1896, the *Poème* ended up being involved into an orbit of the *fin de siècle*⁴ world perception and absorbed into itself the sign of the main aesthetic models of that time: romanticism, naturalism, symbolism and impressionism. Similar to the *fin de siècle* French literature, it is permeated by subjectivism, tinged by fleeting amalgamations of styles, an “intuitive-lyrical” element, and burdened by the “syndrome of abysmal discontent.”⁶ In its magnetic beauty, *Poème* seems to reveal Gustave Flaubert’s embodied dream about an absolute style and to develop the key approach of non-classical art: literature is more than literature, music is more than music.⁷

But whereas literature, in order to increase its potential, “leads language back from grammar to the naked power of speech” “challenges its native sister, philology”

and “becomes merely a manifestation of a language,”⁸ what is it that music becomes liberated from, what domains does it infringe on? Finally, is it capable, as literature is, of turn to itself as a writing (sounding) subjectivity?

That composer who is able to destroy the empirical schemes of perception, to overcome the inertia of progressive development and to disregard the typology of functional connections, to endow each stage of form with a special role, to hyperbolize it, to express the sensual fluctuations and the “subtle states of thinking,”⁹ to subjugate in a certain sense the categories of space and time to his or her creative will comes closest of all to the answer. We catch something similar to this in the *Poème*, as well. We shall permit ourselves to presume with caution that in this work Ernst Chausson experiments with the sound continuum, simultaneously breaking free of narration and with the immanent laws of any kinds of stable structure-generating principles. Projected through the “optics of contrasts,” the *Poème* becomes permeated with subjectivism literally on all levels of composition.

The main image is created by the *E-flat minor* key, filled with “der hinbrütenden Vezweiflung; der schwärzesten Schwermuth, der düstersten Seelenverfassung.” [The brooding despair; the blackest melancholy, the darkest state of mind.] “Jede Angst,” as Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart wrote as far back as at the end of the 18th century, “jedes Zagen des schaudernden Herzens, athmet aus dem gräßlichen Es moll. Wenn Gespenster sprechen könnten; so sprächen sie ungefähr aus diesem Tone.” [Every fear, every apprehension of the shuddering heart, breathes from the poignant E-flat

⁴ End of century.

⁵ Zaitsev B.K. Zhizn' Turgeneva [Turgenev's Life]. In: Zaitsev B.K. *Sobranie sochineniy: v 5 t. T. 5. Zhizn' Turgeneva. Romany-biografii. Literaturnye ocherki* [Compiled Works: in 5 Volumes. Volume 5. Turgenev's Life. Novels-Biographies. Literary Sketches]. Moscow, 1999. P. 168.

⁶ Zinovyeva A.Yu., et al. *Zarubezhnaya literatura kontsa XIX — nachala XX veka: Uchebnik dlya bakalavrov* [Foreign Literature of the Late 19th — Early 20th Century: Textbook for Bachelor Students]. Ed. by V.M. Tolmachev. Fourth Edition, Revised and Supplemented. Moscow: Yurait, 2016. P. 28.

⁷ Tolmachev V.M. O granitsakh simvolizma [About the Boundaries of Symbolism]. *Vestnik of Saint Tikhon's Orthodox University for the Humanities*. 2004. No. 3. P. 261.

⁸ Foucault M. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage books edition, April, 1994. P. 300.

⁹ A.Yu. Zinovyeva, et al. *Zarubezhnaya literatura...* P. 31.

minor. If ghosts could speak, they would speak approximately in these tones.]¹⁰ It is as if a painter, choosing an individual palette, or a Symbolist poet, forming the “prosody of his language, unlike any other,”¹¹ Chausson decides on particularly this rare key, in all likelihood, tracing in it a spectral formant conformable with the poetics of the conception and its implementation. The comparison with Eugene Ysaÿe’s *Poème Élégiacque* (1895) unwittingly suggests itself; in it the composer brought in originality in another, albeit, a no less extravagant means: notwithstanding the rather common key of the work — *D minor* — the lower boundary of register is changed in the piece — the lower string is returned a whole tone below. However, the meaning of the scordatura, which premised its application, is stipulated not by the *D minor* key as such, but by its conjugacy with the sixth degree of the scale in minor — the colorful *B-flat minor* of the middle section. In the new acoustic conditions Ysaÿe manages to build a theme of the episode with the reliance of the fifth degree of the scale (*f*) without sacrificing the semantics and expression of the chosen keys.

The Figurative-Thematic Spheres

Let us return to Chausson’s *Poème* and follow it along the sign-related and symbolist stages of its creation. Altogether, the composer bases himself on the functional algorithm of sonata form, albeit, interpreting it rather

freely. Quite apparent are other tendencies of structural design (such as the rondo form and features of the variation form¹²), as well, which are discerned according to their generic principles. It must be emphasized that the compositional processes of the *Poème*, which is a unique work in its construction, are initiated not as much by functional logic (in this sense, it controls the development only in part), as they result from the antinomy of the dynamicity of the cause-and-effect connections and the static qualities of a lengthy presence in the chosen semantic range.

Already the first *E-flat minor* section, appearing in the role of the primary theme group, is ingenious, judging by an entire set of criteria. The planning of this section is linear: it includes four sections contrasting with each other and, at the same time, permeated by common intonational-harmonic currents (see Table 1).

It is remarkable that here, in the very beginning of the form, the solo essence of the violin is expressed here vividly as nowhere else. Chausson essentially personifies its part and, concentrating on the chosen timbre, begins to carve out a complex and multifaceted image. The abundance of the frequency spectrum of the solo violin gradually colors the intonational boundaries of the theme of the *Poème*, fundamental

¹⁰ Schubart Ch. *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*. Hrsg. L. Schubart. Wien: J.V. Degen, 1806. S. 378.

¹¹ Tolmachev V.M. *Tvorimaya legenda. Posleslovie [The Created Legend. Afterword]. Entsiklopedia simvolizma: Zhivopis', grafika i skul'ptura. Muzyka [Encyclopedia of Symbolism: Painting, Graphics and Sculpture. Music]*. Translated from the French. Moscow: Respublika, 1999.
URL: <https://info.wikireading.ru/109162> (accessed: 15.03.2022).

¹² The interaction between two of them — sonata form and variation form — is mentioned by Pencho Stoianov. The scattered variational process, according to the scholar, “spans the entire form and creates an indispensable unity. <...> But just like by itself,” the scholar discourses further on, “it is not capable of withstanding the heaviness of the entire complex construction,” this generates “the need for the sonata principle, which endows a strong impulse for developing a complex form.” For more detail on this see: Stoianov P. *Vzaimodeystvie muzykal'nykh form [The Interaction between the Musical Forms]*. Translated from the Bulgarian. Moscow: Muzyka, 1985. P. 249



Table 1. The Structure of the First Theme in the Exposition of the Ernst Chausson’s *Poème*

	Until f. 2	f. 2	f. 3	f. 4–5
Solo		A		A ₂
Orchestra	Insert α		A ₁	
		Primary Theme Group		Cadence
Measures	1–30	31–64		65–96

in its significance, which at the time of its expounding (f. 2) presents itself as ascetical, desolated and emotionally anemic, and subsequently, in the cadenza (f. 4), reaches its first pinnacle in its frantic desperation (Example No. 1).

The dramaturgical objectives of the orchestral stratum are drastically different from the function of the solo sections. Both of the orchestral fragments engraft the idea of statics. Thereby, the state of intensive forebodings conveyed by the incantation quality of the elliptic formulas pervades in the introduction; the full-sounded choral exposition of the theme (f. 3), in its turn, provides a summarization to the prior monody, brings it from out of

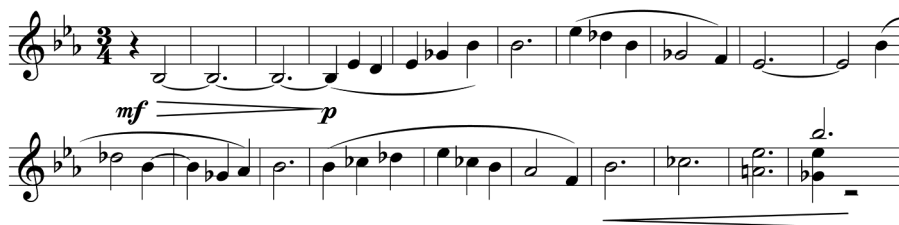
the sphere of the subjective into the space of ontological determinacy, transforms it, endows it with new energy, and conveys to us about its sage essence (Example No. 2).

Against the background of the objective modality¹³ of the harmonious polyphony of the chorale theme, the beginning of the solo cadenza (f. 4), once again, subtilizes and aestheticizes the musical fabric, emphasizes the perception with the help of the filigree qualities of the harmonic crevices. At present, this renewed version of the theme cogitates and arouses sensual vibrations, accumulating emotional depth at the turnabout of the tessitura and dynamics.

This kind of construction which we observe in the first section in *E-flat minor* is

Example No. 1

Ernst Chausson. “Poème.” Solo expounding of the Primary Theme Group in the exposition, f. 2



¹³ This characterization of the musical theme makes it possible to bring an analogy with the lingual structure, the grammatical form and lexis of which implicate a modal meaning.

Example No. 2

Chorale-like expounding of the Primary Theme Group in the Exposition, f. 3



not easy to correlate with the well-known (traditional) schemes as principles of form generation — its semantic scope is too broad. The situation becomes more complex by the fact that each of the four stages is separated and insular in its imagery; however, the boundaries between them rather have extroversive (in terms of timbre and texture), rather than semantic manifestations. Lining up into a chain of thematically related objects, they exchange their essential attributes; elaborating newer and newer guises, they “pass on to each other not only their qualities, but their energy,” — similar to symbols, they “constantly pass beyond their own boundaries.” The transformed repetitions of the theme increase greatly “the fullness of its existence” and surreptitiously direct the form along the lines of dynamic development.¹⁴

The noticeable extension of the semantic sphere of the primary theme group is connected with the transformation of the theme in the recapitulation (f. 13). Having begun with the material of the introduction in *C minor*, the harmonic motion spontaneously changes the pattern and arrives at an effective *G-flat major* (*F-sharp major*), in which the primary theme group essentially begins — the latest in a series of links in an imagined symbolic chain (see Table 2).

The theme is provided with a new quality by its sudden “recoloring,” creating the visible effect of a change of theatrical decorations. The given process has a complex character, taking to account the fact that Chausson makes use of resources of the most varied compositional levels — modal-harmonic (the beginning of the theme is heard in major), tonal-functional (the subdominant sphere is intensified: the contravention into the subdominant is substituted by the ellipse into the “Schubertian” VI degree), and timbral (in the orchestral version of the *Poème* the theme is opened by a group of woodwinds and string instruments and “diminished” in the direction of a gradual textural attenuation).

¹⁴ *Poeziya frantsuzskogo simbolizma. Lotreamon. Pesni Maldorora* [The Poetry of French Symbolism. Lautréamont. Les Chansons de Maldoror]. Edited by G.K. Kosikov. Moscow: MGU, 1993. Pp. 7–8.



Table 2. The Structure of the First Theme in the Recapitulation of the Ernst Chausson's *Poème*

	f. 13	f. 14	f. 15	f. 16
Solo			A ₃	A ₄
Orchestra	introduction a₁	A ₃	...	A ₄
	<i>C minor, D major → → (E-flat minor)</i>	<i>G-flat (F-sharp) major, G-flat (F-sharp) minor</i>	<i>D minor</i>	<i>B minor</i>
Measures	198–205	206–224		225–240

The aforementioned principles of the primary theme group are the essence of the manifestation of the developmental quality, and from this purely technological point of view of the form the functional multilayer aspect of the theme in the recapitulation is worthy of its associative multiple meaning.

Let us put on hold here our overview of the principle theme, dispersed throughout the entire *Poème* and glance at the context in which its unexpected and at times radical transformation.

On both sides of the recapitulation of the primary theme group, we observe extensions of rather convincing sound massifs, consisting in themselves the imagery of a totally different variety. Similar to the domains of the primary theme group in the exposition and the recapitulations, they are in a state of dramatic conflux with each other.

The entire *Animato* section (m. 8 f. 5 and until the end of f. 12) is built as a phased and rather lengthy process of formation and the assertion of the second macro-theme, distributed between the functions of the transition theme, the subsidiary theme group and the conclusive theme. It is rather curious that it is unfolded not only in the exposition, but also beyond its confines, in the development section. All in all, the expounding is thematically heterogeneous and structurally discreet.

A dramaturgically significant role here is relegated to the demonstration of two thematic substances discerned, due to its characteristic features, as a certain projection of an anthropomorphic dichotomy of the corporal and the spiritual. Not a trace remains in them of the melancholy mood of the initial theme: in the first (subsidiary theme group₁) — along with the rhythmic quality of the triplet pulse and the roused tremor of the piquant harmonies, the unbridled energy of the living flesh, almost felt physically, plunges into the music; the sensuous outburst of the second (subsidiary theme group₂), conveyed by the intension of the ascending motives, devolves into a blind, imperative, insuperable obsessiveness (the conclusive theme).

Despite the outward disconnectedness, both thematic substances are functionally equivalent, which stipulated its *changeability* in the compositional-dramaturgical disposition. They are united by an intonational genesis (a resemblance of separate thematic elements built into the continuous motion of rhythmical-intonational varying): the auxiliary turns in the initial constructions: the tertial basis of the motives demonstrated either by moves around the principal pitch or in filling in pitches; descending arpeggio transitions from one phrase to the next.

It is quite noteworthy that both in the exposition and in the development

section only one dramaturgical strategy is maintained: the rhythmically active (physical) element is nurtured by an energetic tone of the thematicism, which, while reaching an emotional pinnacle, escalates into a phase of sensuous euphoria. In this aspect, the development section, doubling the “scenario” of the subsidiary theme group and the conclusive theme from the exposition, demonstrates even more in relief the “heterogeneity” of the thematic structure — the “matter” becomes clad in the formula of a beguiling dance (f. 11) (Example No. 3) and, gradually “shedding” its “plastic” attributes, becomes sublimated into the affectation of all-absorbing passion (f. 12).

The first large-scale section of the *Poème* concludes with a triumphant cadenza in *C major*, at the peak of an emotional surge. Synoptically summing up its basic landmarks, it must be reminded that this includes the introduction, the exposition and the development section of the sonata form, in which an unfolded presentation of two *macro-themes* takes place. At this expositional-developmental stage, they do

not have any mutual influences on each other, but are isolated one from another, at the same time, within each thematic sphere there is a continual process of formation of an individual scale of expression occurring. The comparison of the dynamic amplitude and the developmental quality of both of the macro-themes indirectly connected with it reveals a measure of its dramaturgical weightiness in the first half of the form. The *E-flat minor* theme accumulated the expression little by little, step by step, as if preserving the energy for something more significant; it seemed that it was ready to depart from the preset semantic boundaries, “foretelling” by the shrill declamation of the solo violin the complex trajectory of its compositional “destiny.” Unlike the first macro-theme, the second, situated at the basis of the subsidiary theme group, the conclusive theme and the development sections, is oversaturated by textural and intonational metamorphoses, tessitura-based, dynamic descents and ascents, as well as harmonic clarifications and shadings. However, this is particularly what its

Example No. 3
Episode I, Dance



The musical score for Example No. 3, Episode I, Dance, is presented in three systems. The top system shows the violin part, marked **Animato (a Tempo)**. The middle system shows the piano accompaniment, starting with a dynamic marking of *p* and a section marked **11 Animato (a Tempo)**. The bottom system continues the piano accompaniment. The score is in 3/4 time and E-flat major.

structural compositional purpose consists in — i.e., in the hypertrophy, the redundancy of the fundamental components, which may be “read” as a motivated dissipation of energy defining the target setting of the form. The music desperately aspires to the goal of showing the fullness of the sensuous sphere, it is mosaic, figurative and decorative, whereby it evokes allusions with the colorfulness of Gothic stained glass. Shall we realize — who is pictured on it? What is it that draws our imagination?

The beginning of the recapitulation, marked with a radical pitch displacement of the primary theme group, fixated the critical moment of the *Poème*. In the special symbolic space of the second stage everything comes into motion: the tonalities change speedily, the customary contours of the forms are effaced, and themes separated from each other at a certain time prior find themselves at a unified semantic field. The process of thematic interaction is carried out by the method of diffusion and begins already in the expounding of the primary theme group in the key of *G-flat major*. For the first time within the scope of one thematic structure, the composer displaces the “focal point” from the general concept (the chorale) towards one concrete object — the voice of the solo violin (f. 15). We shall view it more distinctly in the following section in *B minor* (f. 16), at first, recognizing in it the sad melody of the monologue in *E-flat minor*. Our attention

is immediately drawn by the textural and harmonic “elucidation” of the theme, which is facilitated by the reduction of certain elements which made it heavier, — the initial leap by the interval of a perfect fourth expressing the perfect authentic cadential move in the initial phrase. In the soaring cantilena the earlier emanations of refined lyricism, reverie and illusoriness previously untypical of it are sensed. They do not cease either at the moment of penetration of characteristic, but, nonetheless, weakened patterns of the subsidiary theme group and the conclusive theme into the main theme. In this free communication of two semantic spheres, the primary theme group immerses of the unknown element, producing new associative and symbolic sets (Example No. 4).

The second macro-theme, spilling out the energy of insurmountable feeling in the first section of the *Poème*, passes onto a different state in the recapitulation. As a persistent, obtrusive thought, one of the local themes of the subsidiary theme group is repeated — the same one that in the exposition and the development section conveyed the expression of amorous exaltation. Here already, nothing reminds of its whimsicality, capriciousness and liveliness: in this instance, it is emotionally weak, as if effete with a passion which has worn it out. Only in the first statement in *G-sharp minor* the elaboration is advanced by the triplet harmonic bases, which supports

Example No. 4

The Final Statement of the Primary Theme Group in the Recapitulation, f. 16



The musical score for Example No. 4 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the solo violin, and the bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked *Poco meno lento*. The key signature is one flat (G-flat major). The score begins with a measure marked with a box containing the number 16. The piano accompaniment features a triplet harmonic base in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *p* and *pp*.

Table 3. The Structure of the Second Half of Ernst Chausson's *Poème*

	f. 17	f. 17	f. 18	f. 18	f. 19	f. 20	f. 20	f. 21–22
Solo	B₂	C₃	C₄	D₁	† D₂	†	C₅	A₆
Orchestra	B	B₄	C₄	D₁	† D₂	A₅	... A₅	A₆
	Transition theme	Recapitulation; Subsidiary Group		Conclusive Theme		Episode II		Coda
	<i>B major</i> → (<i>G-sharp minor</i>)	<i>G-sharp minor</i>	<i>E minor</i> , <i>F-sharp minor</i>	<i>F-sharp minor</i>	<i>C-sharp minor</i>	<i>E minor</i>		<i>E-flat minor</i> , <i>E-flat major</i>
Measures	240–245	246–254	255–266	267–270	271–282	283–284	285–300	301–347

the delicate melody of the solo violin. The volatile attempt to “summon up courage” is undertaken in the transitional construction (f. 17), where the theme, overcoming the tonal barriers in the guise of *B major*, *E minor*, *D major* → (*D minor*), *D major* → (*E minor*), *D major* → (*F-sharp minor*), heads towards this new, hitherto unconquered tonal pinnacle (see Table 3).

The entire subsequent section, starting with f. 18 and going up to f. 20 (28 measures), is distinguished by a systemic “folding” of the motion (the progressing reduction of structural units from four-measure groups in the subsidiary theme group to the one-measure units in the conclusive theme) and thereby provides an immense incentive to the pressing of the key dramaturgical stage of the form — the second culminating episode of the *Poème*. What occurs in it, passes the semantic thread onto all the steps of the figurative evolution and accumulates in itself the dramaturgical result of the *Poème*. The initial motive of the primary theme group appears absolutely unexpectedly in an extraordinary semantic transformation (f. 20). It becomes difficult to recognize the theme in its non-standard tessitura,

metrical, harmonic and textural guise: it not only overwhelms by its immensity and grandiosity, but also evokes a sense of terror in us, frightening us by its personified veracity (Example No. 5).

What does it exclaim about so vociferously? — is it about Death, the finiteness of everything Existing? Possibly, about the temporal irreversibility confined into the Symbolist mirror-world? There is no doubt that we have before us a symbol: “the pure and simple ‘truth’ — intimate and at the same insistently demanding penetration.”¹⁵ Similar to many other “mysteries” of the *Poème*, it is impossible to interpret if we are to stem from a mere immanent procedural quality. It must not be forgotten, either, that if we are to include into the analytics the storyline narrative as one of the compositional motivations, a momentous answer to the enigma would not occur, and a precise and univocal answer would not be given, since we have before us a space that is symbolic and allegorical. So, what then is the

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 11.



Example No. 5
Episode II, a Motive of the Primary Theme Group in Augmentation

role of the Turgenev-style narration? — an insinuation, a metaphor, the quintessence of semantic, sign-related points-impulses? Wherein lies its initial goal? These questions reveal the essence of the analytical problems and unwittingly impel reflections to that boundary beyond which the narrative of the new storyline transpires.

The Artistic Content and the History of Creation

Apparently, a more or less convincing substantiation of the hypothesis about the hidden programmatic sources of the *Poème* must be sought in the psychologically sensitive atmosphere of the art of the “*fin de siècle*” with its typical subject matter, if you will, the “clichés” of the period of decadence and its specific emblem studies.

Joris-Karl Huysmans’ novel *À rebours* [*Against the Grain*] (1884), which was perceived with great enthusiasm by the apologists of the decadence, became, to a certain degree, an “anthology” of the characteristic motives of the Symbolist aesthetics. In one of his chapter the author recreates in the form of artistic discourse an event which in 1876 stirred the *beau monde*: two paintings by Gustave Moreau *Salome dancing before Herod and The Apparition*. The appeal of the canvases turned out to be stronger than the criticism addressed to their address and set up the mechanism

of the creative reception, which lasted for several decades.¹⁶ [2]

No less significance for the art of the *fin de siècle* was exerted by the intertextual

¹⁶ The beginning was set by Gustave Flaubert, who worked from August 1876 to February 1877 on *Herodias*. In his letter from May 2, 1876 to Ivan Turgenev, the future translator of the novelette into Russian, Flaubert writes: “Il y a au Salon deux ou trois tableaux vantés qui m'exaspèrent. <...> Je crois que Iaokhanann (traduisez: saint Jean-Baptiste) viendra.” [In the living oom there were two or three vaunted paintings which exasperated me. <...> I think that Iaokhannan (traslate: St. John the Baptist) will come.] (URL: <https://flaubert-v1.univ-rouen.fr/jet/public/correspondance/trans.php?corpus=correspondance&id=12550&mot=&action=M>). After several months, on August 17, 1876 Flaubert writes to his niece Caroline Commanville: “...Maintenant que j'en ai fini avec Félicité, Hérodias se présente et je vois (nettement, comme je vois la Seine) la surface de la mer morte scintiller au soleil. Hérode & sa femme sont sur un balcon d'où l'on découvre les tuiles dorées du Temple. Il me tarde de m'y mettre.” [Now, that I have finished with Felicite, Herodias presents herself, and I see (as clearly as I see the Seine) the surface of the dead sea glitter in the sun. Herod and his wife are on a balcony, from which we discover the golden roof tiles of the Temple. I am late in placing myself there.] URL: <https://flaubert-v1.univ-rouen.fr/jet/public/correspondance/trans.php?corpus=correspondance&id=12614>

technique applied by Huysmans in the story about Salome. The author of the novel canonized the plotline in the same angle of aesthetization of vice, in which Moreau presented it, having exposed the neuroses of the *fin de siècle*: “This conception of Salomé, so haunting to artists and poets, had obsessed Des Esseintes for years. How often had he read in the old Bible of Pierre Variquet, translated by the theological doctors of the University of Louvain, the Gospel of Saint Matthew who, in brief and ingenuous phrases, recounts the beheading of the Baptist! How often had he fallen into reverie, as he read these lines <...> But neither Saint Matthew, nor Saint Mark, nor Saint Luke, nor the other Evangelists had emphasized the maddening charms and depravities of the dancer. She remained vague and hidden, mysterious and swooning in the far-off mist of the centuries, not to be grasped by vulgar and materialistic minds, accessible only to disordered and volcanic intellects made visionaries by their neuroticism; rebellious to painters of the flesh, to Rubens who disguised her as a butcher's wife of Flanders; a mystery to all the writers who had never succeeded in portraying the disquieting exaltation of this dancer, the refined grandeur of this murderess.

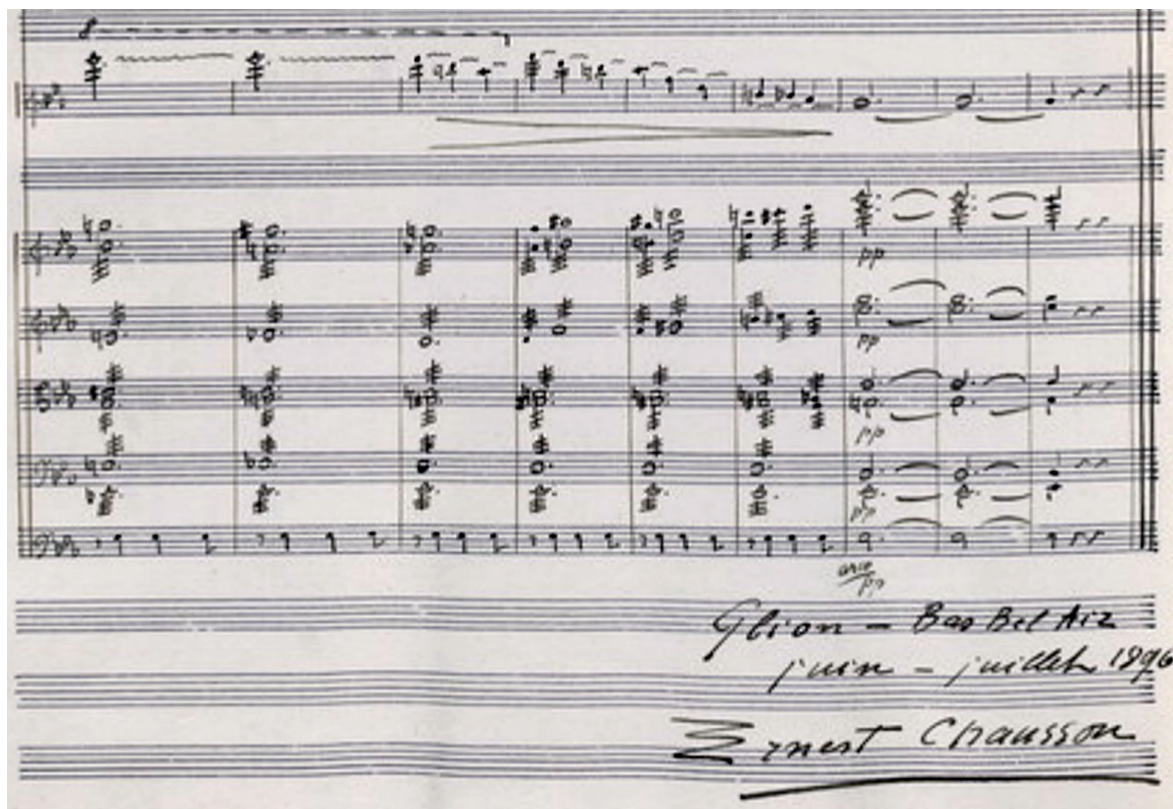
In Gustave Moreau's work, conceived independently of the Testament themes, Des Esseintes as last saw realized the superhuman and exotic Salomé of his dreams. <...> She became, in a sense, the symbolic deity of indestructible lust, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, of accursed Beauty, distinguished from all others by the catalepsy which stiffens her flesh and hardens her muscles; the monstrous Beast, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, baneful, like the Helen of antiquity, fatal to all who approach her, all who behold her, all whom she touches.”¹⁷

At the time when the French doctors, headed by Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund Freud, who joined the latter, cured hysteria with hypnosis and studied the phenomena of other forms of neuropathology, Oscar Wilde, who was inspired by the ideas of Huysmans' decadent “manifesto,” took the risk of writing a play in which he showed disease as an object of art. For this reason, small wonder that the drama demonstrating deviant behavior of the main heroine prepared a difficult path towards the reader, and then to the listener [3]¹⁸ Created in 1891, Oscar Wilde's *Salome* was published for the first time in 1893 and immediately gained a scandalous type of popularity in artistic circles. The premiere of Wilde's masterpiece took place another three years afterwards, on February 11, 1896 on the stage of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris; in April of the same year Ernst Chausson began his work on the *Poème* and finished it already on June (Il. 1).

In this chronology of events, at a first glance, there is nothing which would indicate directly the connections of the musical composition with the fashionable and disturbing storyline. And, nonetheless, in the context of another situation in which Chausson first demonstrated himself in the role of an active observer, the hypothesis about the specific program of the *Poème* acquires a more visible configuration. It is referred to the production in 1893 of Maurice Maeterlinck's drama *Pelléas et Mélisande* and the quickly matured conception of Claude Debussy's opera. Having experienced, no less than his younger colleague, the impression from the original aesthetics of the Belgian dramatist, Chausson begins his work on the song cycle *Serres chaudes*

¹⁷ Cit. from: *Against the Grain* by J.K. Huysmans. Translated from the French by John Howard. New York, Lieber & Lewis, 1922. Pp. 93–95.

¹⁸ Scheduled for production in June, 1892, the London premiere did not pass the censorship due to ethical considerations and was cancelled.



Il. 1. Autograph score of Ernst Chausson's "Poème" for Violin and Piano (ending)

opus 24¹⁹ set to the early poems from the writer's book of poems with the same title.²⁰

The musical language of the songs²¹ [4] demonstrates Chausson's openness to a

new style, unseals the composer's readiness to take root in a special, aestheticized living environment, to set himself on the path of elite art, to share the progressive views of his contemporaries, — in other words, to accept everything to which Debussy with a feeling of profound invigoration called upon his mentor in one of his letters from 1893: "In truth, music is supposed to be a hermetic science guarded by texts which require such a lengthy and difficult interpretation, which would most likely dishearten a crowd of people who make use of it with a brashness that is incorporated in the use of a handkerchief!"²²

¹⁹ The cycle *Serres chaudes* was completed by Chausson in March 1896. It is symptomatic that certain pivotal characters of the hitherto *Poème*, the work on which would begin in April of the same year, are foreseen here. The key of the last song *Oraison* [Prayer] (1895) — *E-flat minor* (!) is especially appealing.

²⁰ Maurice Maeterlinck's poetry book *Serres chaudes* came out in 1889.

²¹ "These melodies are little drama with an impassioned metaphysics," — this is how Claude Debussy spoke about them. For more about this see: L. Vallas. *Les Idées de Claude Debussy*. London, Oxford University Press, 1929. P. 70.

²² Unpublished correspondence of C. Debussy and E. Chausson. In *Revue de musicologie* (7/1–2) 1925–1926. P. 118.

The popular idea of the synthesis of the arts which, among other things, Debussy speaks so elegantly about, as it is known, acquired diverse forms of its expression in the second half of the 19th century. For the aristocrat Chausson the Wagnerian paradigm was etalon; for the aesthete Wilde it was the doctrine of the Pre-Raphaelites, who perceived the “synthetic character” as the result of the interaction between the arts on an inter-lingual level. According to Natalia Tishunina, “whereas each one ‘quoted’ the artistic ‘pretext’ in its own way,” the languages of the various arts “have interpenetrated into each other and have created an image that was absolutely new in its meaning and content. <...> The art forms themselves have become primarily artistic elements in the creation of a new aesthetic whole.”²³

Oscar Wilde’s pan-aestheticism, built into this conception art, as well as literature, has found an original interpretation. His prose is circumstantiated, ornamental and visual. At the same time, it is subjective to the utmost degree, which the writer himself convincingly insisted on. In particular, Wilde said the following regarding the originality of *Salome*: “I took the drama — the most objective of all the forms of art — and made of it something as distinctly subjective as a lyric poem or a sonnet; at the same time I enlarged its field and enriched its world of characters.”²⁴

Chausson, most likely, “moved” along a similar direction — that of synthetic quality,

individualization and subjectivization of the creative process, while the artistic elite nurtured his endeavors with its experience. Thus, for example, the composer declined Eugène Ysaÿe’s suggestion to compose a violin concerto for him, but did not reject the opportunity itself to write a composition in another genre on a commission from the virtuoso. As it is known, the *Poème* became that very oeuvre, as it was inspired by Ysaÿe’s *Poème élégiaque*, which was written a year earlier.

The first mentions of sketches of Chausson’s future poem relate to 1893, from which it follows that that the initial impulse towards nurturing the creative idea for the composer may rather have been served by the literary version of the biblical storyline in Wilde’s rendition, rather than the production of his song.

It would seem that of no small importance in this intriguing story was the bold statement made by the author of *Salome*: “making a prose poem out of paint.”²⁵ Chausson creates something related on the conceptual plane. He also stems from the chamber, intimate qualities of utterance, albeit, he accommodates these traits onto a different language model. Similar to Wilde, who “raised” drama from the refined poetics of a novelette, Chausson based himself on a large-scale form — a concerto for a soloist and, permeating it with a lyrical, personal manner of narration, modified with an inclination towards a synthetic genre in the vein of a poem.

As far as the time of the final compositional layout of the *Poème*, most likely it could not have occurred without the influence of Wilde’s drama, which took place three months after its publication; most likely, it was “activated” as a provocation which

²³ Tishunina N.V. *Zapadnoevropeyskiy simvolizm i problema vzaimodeystviya iskusstv: opyt intermedial'nogo analiza* [Western European Symbolism and the Issue of the Interaction Between the Arts]. St. Petersburg: Russian State Herzen Pedagogical University, 1998. P. 133.

²⁴ Wilde O. *De Profundis*. London: New York: A.R. Keller & Co., Inc. 1907. P. 20. URL: <https://archive.org/details/deprofundiswild00wild/page/20/mode/2up> (accessed: 05.04.2022).

²⁵ Wilde O. *Pen, Pencil and Poison: A Study in Green*. URL: <http://public-library.uk/ebooks/74/24.pdf> (accessed: 05.04.2022).



induced Chausson to connect together the various spatial-temporal art forms and, thereby, to extend the prospect of artistic reception of the multivalent subject matter “demanding a lengthy and difficult interpretation.”

The time has come to delve into the sphere of the mysterious, stirring semantics of the *Poème*, and also to glance at the compositional narrative in the aspect of the sought storyline.

It must be agreed upon, that the profound poly-semantic and symbolic figurativeness

of *Salome*, being manifested in music, is inconceivable without extravagant compositional solutions. The choice of the tonality presents one of them.²⁶ For this reason, our attention is drawn once again to the key of *E-flat minor* of the primary theme group and, at the same time — the final song (*Oraison*) from Chausson’s song cycle *Serres chaudes*, in which through the emblems of the topos of Death — the extinguished moon, baneful flowers, the black dawn — there is a narrative presented of a suffering lonely soul.

Oraison

*Vous savez, Seigneur, ma misère!
Voyez ce que je vous apporte!
Des fleurs mauvaises de la terre,
Et du soleil sur une morte.*

*Voyez aussi ma lassitude,
La lune éteinte et l’aube noire;
Et fécondez ma solitude
En l’arrosant de votre gloire.*

*Ouvrez-moi, Seigneur, votre voie,
Éclairez-y mon âme lasse,
Car la tristesse de ma joie
Semble de l’herbe sous la glace.*

*Prayer*²⁷

*Lord, you know my wretchedness,
you see what I bring you:
baneful flowers of the earth,
and the sun on a woman’s corpse.*

*My torpor too you see, the moon
missing and the dawn black;
send me the rain of the glory, Lord,
make my wasteland bloom.*

*Show me the way, and shed,
light on my dim soul.
for so grievous is my joy it seems
but grass beneath the ice.*

²⁶ Quite exemplary in this connection is the reaction of Richard Strauss, who made a mark on the page, next to the first line of the play: “How beautiful is the princess Salome tonight,” to use the key of *C-sharp minor* (A. Ross. *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. New York: Picador, 2008. P. 7).

²⁷ Maeterlink M. *Hothouses: Poems*. Translated by Richard Howard. Princeton University Press. 2003. P. 69.

The poetics of Wilde's *Salome* does more than merely appeal towards the typified symbols of the art of the end of the century. The aesthetics of "created beauty," which was so venerated by the Irish playwright — the beauty of the unnatural, the ugly, the perverted — becomes conducive to the personification of symbols, which are drawn in in the capacity of the main protagonists into the ornate design of the narration:

The young Syrian. *How beautiful is the Princess Salome to-night!*

The Page of Herodias. *Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things. <...>*

The young Syrian. *How pale the Princess is! Never have I seen her so pale. She is like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver. <...>*

Salome. *How good to see the moon! She is like a little piece of money, a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin. <...>*

The Page of Herodias. *Oh! How strange the moon looks! Like the hand of a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a shroud.*

The young Syrian. *She has a strange aspect! She is like a little princess, whose eyes are eyes of amber. Through the clouds of muslin she is smiling like a little princess. <...>*

Herod. *The moon has a strange look tonight. Has she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman.... I am sure she is looking for lovers. <...>*

Herod. *Ah! look at the moon! She has become red. She has become red as blood. Ah! the prophet prophesied truly.*

In the *Poème* the central motives of decadence preserve their sign-related role; among them of greatest importance is the symbolism of the Moon and everything with which the latter is concordant, in one way or another. What is especially important, the present symbol draws together into its semantic areal and attributes the frame of the antagonistic pair — Salome and the prophet Jokanaan. The nonverbal text extends to a significant degree the associative range of the symbol, since the concrete image, having lost its lexical guise, passes onto an "aggregate" state, turns into a supple, mobile substance. It is particularly in such a changeable and inconstant guise does the primary theme group appear in the *Poème*. In the initial monody it is lukewarm, as the dim gleam of the moon, in the chorale-like section it is mystically religious, transcendental resembling the melancholy of the full moon, in the cadenza it is piercing to the same degree as the power of the moon cycle is potent, while in the *G-flat major*, recapitulation expounding it is infernal as an eclipse.

But whereas in Wilde's drama the symbol, which reveals itself in all its fullness, bears an intriguing function within it and creates a bifurcated net of cross-related semantic and associative connections, in the conditions of the abstract lexis of the *Poème* the difficulty of its discernment appears, as does the problem of semantic determinacy stemming from it. Thereby the foundation for differentiating the links for the symbolic chain is laid by means of musical language.

Most likely, the most stable correlation of the material and its semantic interpenetration was shown by the transformed pivotal motive of the primary theme group at the stage of the conclusion of the recapitulation, in the second culminating episode (see above, Example No. 5). The main phrase of the theme immediately acquires a number of new, highly expressive qualities, and all of them, while complementing each other, displace those features which were inherent



to it before, at the prior stages of the form. We shall enumerate them.

1. The theme is stated in an incomplete form (it contains only the phrase of the initial thesis).

2. The register of the theme is noticeably altered (in the form of a significant proportion of descent of pitch).

3. The theme's time signature is transformed from 3/4 to 9/8, most likely, under the influence of the second macro-theme, written in the time signature of 6/8 and possessing the pulsation of triplets.

4. Compared to the exposition, the key of the theme is displaced up a semitone — from *E-flat minor* to *E minor*.

The uniqueness of this modification of the theme consists in the occurrence that some of its parameters are turned towards Christian symbolism. In the dramaturgy of the *Poème* they speak for themselves: they present themselves as justified necessity for the storyline, while in the aspect of perception, they stipulate the precise penetration into the image. Such an associative-semantic function is especially carried out by the metro-rhythmical organization and key of the theme's main motive. The predominating role of these parameters can be traced out during the entire course of the *Poème*. At the same time, here, at the climax of the entire form, they are brought to their semantic pinnacle.

Only two (!) measures in the 9/8 meter at the beginning of the second episode (Example No. 5) compel us to reevaluate the meaning of the metro-rhythmical component and to endow it with a sign-related symbolic function. It must be reminded that the two macro-themes are contrasted to each other by a number of their parameters, including the metro-rhythmical (the first is presented by the meter of 3/4, while the second is presented by 6/8). What is characteristic, both metric versions contain in one way or another the element of duple meter, which is perceived through the prism of the contrasting dramatic events of the storyline as a sign of

“imperfection.” The first macro-theme, with its prophetic, measured tone of utterance, diversity of personalities, ascetic quality and chorale-like texture accommodates a greater amount of manifestations of the spiritual and the mystical. In the second macro-theme, the triple meter presents one of the means of identification of the element of genre, which, nonetheless, transfers a semantic “bridge” between the lowly and the elevated, the trivial and the extraordinary, the fleeting and the spiritual, the evident and the unidentified, the temporary and the eternal. In one sole spot of the *Poème* — the beginning of its main climax — the Christian symbolism of triunity is proclaimed as representing the Absolute. The religious basis is also testified by the key of the main motive of the primary theme group, which hearkens back to the great images of J.S. Bach's spiritual revelations — the grandiose introductory chorus of the St. Matthew Passion and the tragic *Crucifixus* from the *Mass* in *B minor*.

A colossal emotional effect is aroused by the crossing of all the dramaturgical and compositional lines of the *Poème* in the main primary motive. In this case, concretizing them would, in all likelihood, be redundant, if one would consider that effect of symbolic and semantic infinity to which Chausson aspires in this central moment of the form. And still, at least one of the reverse projections of the general culmination deserves to be examined by us in its intended purpose. Since it becomes quite difficult to carry on a discussion of the role of the two segments connected with each other notwithstanding the formidable distance from each other beyond the compositional context, let us devote some time to the aspects of the structural organization of the *Poème*.

The Formal Design of the *Poème*

The tectonics of the form is as apparent (because of the alternation of the two macro-themes) as it is specific (taking into consideration their grouping and correlation

with each other). The constructive basis is comprised by five sections (**A B A₁ B₁ A₂**), endowed with the following functions: **A** is the statement of the primary theme group, **B** is the statement of the transition theme, the subsidiary theme group, the conclusive theme and the development section, **A₁** and **B₁** present a dynamicized recapitulation, and **A₂** is the coda based on the material of the primary theme group.

During the segmentation of the sonata form, accentuation is made on the binary aspect of the form visible as the result of the regrouping of the sections of the form. The segmentation is emphasized by the deep caesura before the recapitulation and the very compositional structure of this section, carried out according to the “outline” of the exposition and the development section (see Table 4).

Table 4. The Structure of Ernst Chausson’s *Poème*

EXPOSITION + DEVELOPMENT SECTION	RECAPITULATION
Introduction — until f. 2 (mm. 1–30), <i>E-flat minor</i>	Introduction — f. 13 (mm. 198–205), <i>C minor</i> →
Primary Theme Group — f. 2–5 (mm. 31–96), <i>E-flat minor</i>	Primary Theme Group — f. 14–16 (mm. 206–239), <i>G-flat major (F-sharp major)</i>
Descent in the range ↓ before the Subsidiary Theme Group — f. 5 (mm. 97–104), transition theme, f. 6 (mm. 105–112) <i>E-flat major</i>	Ascent in the range ↑ before the subsidiary theme group — f. 17, transition theme (mm. 240–245) <i>B major</i>
Subsidiary Theme Group 1 — f. 6–7 (mm. 113–122), <i>B-flat major</i>	Subsidiary Theme Group ₁ , Subsidiary Theme Group ₂ — f. 17 (mm. 246–254), <i>G-sharp minor</i>
Subsidiary Theme Group 2 — f. 8–9 (mm. 123–145), <i>C minor, E minor</i>	Subsidiary Theme Group ₂ — f. 18 (mm. 255–266), <i>E-minor, F-sharp minor</i>
Conclusive Theme — f. 9 (mm. 146–151), <i>E minor</i> → <i>G minor</i>	Conclusive Theme — f. 18 (mm. 267–270), <i>F-sharp minor</i>
Culmination and descent in the range ↓ Based on the material of the Conclusive Theme before Episode I — f. 10 (mm. 152–163)	Culmination and ascent in the range ↑ Based on the material of the Conclusive Theme before Episode II — f. 19 (mm. 271–282), <i>C-sharp minor</i>
Episode I — f. 11 (mm. 164–179), <i>G minor</i> on the material of (<i>D major</i>) → <i>E minor</i>	Episode II — f. 20 (mm. 283–284, 9/8), <i>E minor</i>
Culmination of Episode I on the material of the Subsidiary Theme Group ₂ — f. 12 (mm. 180–188), cadenza in <i>C major</i>	Culmination of Episode I on the material of the Subsidiary Theme Group ₂ — f. 20 (mm. 285–300), Ascent in the range ↑ before the Coda
Descent in the range ↓ before the Recapitulation – f. 12 (mm. 189–198)	



The differences between the two main large-scale sections of the *Poème* are also very intriguing. At the conclusion of the first large-scale section of the form there is an emotional ascent, which is aided by the expansion of the authentic harmonies which facilitate the resolution into the stable tonality — the exemplary cadenza in *C major*. At the conclusive stage of the second (recapitulating) section, the development is purposely disorientated: it is absolutely elliptic, destructive, void of any tonal logic, nor does it have any goal to which this development could be directed. The dramaturgically opposite outcome of each of the section, as it seems, has been suggested to Chausson by the inner factors of the storyline, maintaining the dialectic catalyst in a state of tension — Salome's dance and the prophet Jokanaan's execution. These nodal scenes, forming the two pinnacles of the form, served as the basis of the no less significant two episodes of the *Poème* situated at the culminating spots of the first and second structural "circles."

The episodes stand out from all the thematic material by their greater character and metaphorical qualities. Special attention within the first episode is drawn by the "withdrawal" from the genre-based theme (f. 11) and its alignment with the second secondary theme group (f. 12). In this structural approach — the contrast of the corporeal and spiritual matter manifested in sound — Chausson, whether consciously or not, enters into a discussion with Wilde: "The statue is concentrated to one moment of perfection," we read in his essay *The Critic as an Artist*, "The image stained upon the canvas possesses no spiritual element of growth or change. If they know nothing of death, it is because they know little of life, for the secrets of life and death belong to those, and those only, whom the sequence of time affects, and who possess not merely the present but the future, and can rise or fall from a past of glory or of shame. Movement, that problem of

the visible arts, can be truly realised by Literature alone. It is Literature that shows us the body in its swiftness and the soul in its unrest."²⁸

The composer challenges Wilde's assortment and demonstrates convincingly the universality and multi-functionality of musical resources. In particular, during the entire course of *Poème*, Chausson makes use multiple times of the phenomenon of *diachrony* as one of the instruments with the aid of which the semantic strata, while setting up the connections between the present and the future, begin to translocate within the storyline time of the narration. Thus, if we consider the tragic denouement of the plotline, it would hardly seem to be accidental that the tonal plan of the "dance" at the stage of its conclusion leads to the key of *E minor* (!) — the key of the second, fateful episode of the *Poème*. Moreover, at the end of the development section, the fragment in *E minor* (mm. 176–179) is devoid of any thematic material (!), whereas at the culmination of the recapitulation it is individualized to an extreme. Why is it so in the first case and different in the second? The answer lies on the surface: at the end of the development section, the pledge has already been made (by means of the dance), the tragedy (the death) has been foretold, the intended action (the kiss) shall be carried out.

An analogous role of the foreboder of the catastrophe is played by the figure which forms yet another semantic "resonance" with Wilde's drama. Its concise six-note motive is generated at the very beginning of the cadenza out of a lengthy trill, as if picking up the restless oscillations of the air, and afterwards impulsively waves upwards (Example No. 6).

²⁸ Wilde O. *Intentions*. London: Osgood, McIlvaine, 1894. P. 134. URL: <https://archive.org/details/intentions01wild/page/134/mode/2up> (accessed: 05.04.2022).

Salome. Who is he, the Son of Man? Is he as beautiful as thou art, Jokanaan

Jokanaan. Get thee behind me! I hear in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death. <...>

Salome. Suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan.

Jokanaan. Art thou not afraid, daughter of Herodias? Did I not tell thee that I had heard in the palace the beating of the wings the angel of death, and hath he not come, the angel of death? <...>

Herod. It was the blowing of the wind. It has passed away. But no, I hear it again. Do you not hear it? <...>

Herod. Salome, Salome, dance for me. I pray thee dance for me. I am sad tonight. Yes, I am passing sad to-night. When I came hither I slipped in blood, which is an ill omen; also I heard in the air a beating of wings, a beating of giant wings. I cannot tell what that they mean.... <...>

Herod. Ah! it is cold here! There is an icy wind, and I hear... wherefore do I hear in the air this beating of wings? Ah! one might fancy a huge black bird that hovers over the terrace. Why can I not see it, this bird? The beat of its wings is terrible. The breath of the wind of its wings is terrible. It is a chill wind. <...>

Example No. 6
The Motive of the “Wings,” f. 4.



The appearances of the symbolic motive, at first, are rarefied and unobtrusive and for this reason, as it may seem, insignificant in the figurative-substantive direction of the *Poème*. However, notwithstanding the considerably small-scale summarized scale of sound, they still attract attention by several remarkable peculiarities:

1) the figures are either detached either in terms of timbre or in terms of structure: the first two statements surround the cadenza on both sides (beginning of f. 4 and end of f. 5), and the third statement with the help of a short inclusion of the solo violin forestall the primary theme group in *G-flat major* in the recapitulation (Example No. 7);

Example No. 7
The Chorale-Like Statement of the Primary Theme Group in the Recapitulation, f. 14.





2) the location of all the figures takes place in various sections of the form, but stands out solely (!) in the areas of the primary theme group, adding to its opacity and duskiess the outbursts of apparition impulses, which are infernally mysterious and somewhat awful;

3) finally, what speaks the most convincingly of the sign role of the present figure is its concentration in the general culmination of the piece, in the sphere of harmonic entropy.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, what remains is to shed light on the question about the specific features and the role of the finale of the *Poème*. In the coda, Chausson gradually “retreats,” withdrawing from the eventful narration, whence the impression arises that the dramatic vector of the plot does not lead the composer and does not motivate his artistic choice, any more. Moreover, the very beginning of the coda includes an element of a certain artificiality, since the “seams” are visible, the traces of the mechanical conjoining of the two sections are heard. The tutti apotheosis of the primary theme group does not sound as an organic continuation of the preceding culmination; it rather presents a sort of pinnacle and source of the coda, descending from which, the composer gradually “dissipates” the theme and arrives at an entire levelling of its intonational qualities. The tendency towards an incremental decrease of the individual element “softens” the drama of Wilde’s concept, imprinting the latent image of the psychedelic elegiac finale in its perception. It is possible that this is particularly what Claude Debussy wrote in his article at the *Revue musicale. S. I. M.* From January 15, 1913: “The freedom of its form never goes against its harmonious proportion. The sense of dreamy gentleness is at its most touching at the end when, leaving aside all trace of description and anecdote, the music becomes that very feeling which inspires its

emotion. Such moments in the work of an artist are very rare.”²⁹

Indeed, the endings of the literary and the musical manifestations of the story of Salome are cardinally different. Wilde’s drama does not presume an exhaustive conclusion, since its author “raises by design a problem the author considers to be unsolvable.”³⁰ The ending of the *Poème* is principally different and, in all possibility, allows for various versions of interpretation. First, the figurative roundedness of the coda may be explained by the necessitated return into the natural fold of the immanence of the musical syntax because of a breakoff of the narrative path in the main section of the work. Second, the idea of the depersonalization of the sound material (in the spirit of Stephane Mallarmé’s substantial poetics), the departure from the inner-storyline space of the form seems no less plausible to us (let us remember Chausson’s Symbolist literary surroundings). Finally, a third version is also admissible, according to which, in the coda the composer brings into action the transition from tragedy as the expression of the rational to the mystery of the irrational.

The point is that during the entire course of the *Poème* the composer convolves into a tight structural knot two semantic spheres, two ontological categories — Love (as one of the brightest manifestation of Life) and Death. Their continuously replenishable individual allusions saturated the broad

²⁹ “...Rien n’est plus touchant de douceur rêveuse que la fin de ce Poème, où la musique, laissant de côté toute description, toute anecdote, devient le sentiment même qui en inspira l’émotion”. (See: J. Chailley. Tourguéniev et le “Poème” de Chausson. *Revue des études slaves*. Paris, 1977. Vol. 50, No. 1. P. 88).

³⁰ Ricoeur P. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 2. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. University of Chicago Press, 1990. P. 22.

discursive field by means of multi-ordinal pluralities (whether conceptual, situational or symbolic).

By no means an unimportant role in this process was relayed to the variant-variation method of development, serving as a means for conveying the lingual devices applied by Wilde, — repetitiveness and refrain qualities. It is remarkable that the variation and “leitmotif” qualities of the *Poème* is accorded with an exceedingly detailed manner of writing in Turgenev’s novelette directed at a “disintegration and fragmentation” of the discourse and bringing in more and more new conditions of combining power of the semantic units.³¹ Along with this, the figurative world of Turgenev’s *Song* [5] is close to Wilde’s drama, as well; it also presents the significance of the symbolism of the moon and possesses motives of unaccountable attraction, immersion into trance, vice, crime, the perniciousness of passion, and, finally, the element of “the incomprehensibility, the insolubility of the human soul.”³²

Thus, maybe, is it here, the key towards the decipherment of the programmatic title of the *Poème* initially declared by Chausson? What if the *Song of Triumphant Love* presents the hitherto absent figurative-semantic sphere, expanding in a multifaceted way the “mirror corridor” of

the decadent symbolism, the counterbalance the apocalyptic quality of Wilde’s play, a certain semantic cross course between the extremity of *Salome* and the suppleness and plasticity of the *Poème*? Alas, no univocal answer exists to these questions. But even if our surmise is true, it remains unclear, in the cause of which idea does Chausson present the drama and simultaneously wishes to hear in it a repercussion of a story that celebrates Love in its highest manifestation...

Let us turn for the final time to Wilde’s source text. Let us remember, what is it that Salome pronounces at the very end of her conclusive monologue. “The mystery of love is stronger than the mystery of death,” she says, “only love has meaning.”

In the spacious, ephemeral coda Chausson “leaves aside” not so much as the storyline, as the inexhaustibility of this assertion. The composer lines up a summarizing chain of existential conceptions, which leads perception away into the sphere of the illusory, intangible and visionary. Proclaiming the immutability of the prophetic imperative of the main theme, the musical material frees itself from its yoke and in its free levitation imbues itself with spiritual experience: it passes through contemplation, stupor, delusion, opens itself up to a mystery...



³¹ Ermakova N.A. Op. cit.

³² Tishunina N.V. Op. cit. P. 105.



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