

ČIURLIONIS:
THE TRAGIC FLIGHT OF A MISUNDERSTOOD GENIUS
Second volume

Summary

Čiurlionis' Mythopoeia and World of Symbols

In this part of this book our main attention shifts to the unfolding of distinctive mythopoetic thinking in the paintings of Čiurlionis' different creative periods. First, we briefly discuss the sources of his mythopoetic thinking and the most characteristic stylistic features of his early period of literary-psychological symbolism. Later, our attention shifts to Čiurlionis' distinctive world of symbols; following unified principles of classification, we analyze his world of metaphysical, cosmic, archetypal, plant, animal, and geometrical symbols. We devote special attention to revealing the semantic meanings of the main symbols that Čiurlionis preferred. We delve into the symbols derived from archaic Lithuanian folktales and legends, from the mythology of Eastern peoples, and from various esoteric doctrines: the bird, the sacred serpent, the tree of the world, stars, the Milky Way, the sun, the mountain, the pyramid, the altar, stairs, the ship wandering in watery expanses, clouds, the figure of the ruler of the Universe *Rex*.

An understanding of Čiurlionis' mythopoetic world is primarily connected with the most archaic Lithuanian ethnic folk traditions that had the greatest influence on his distinctive world of symbols, signs, and metaphors. "All ancient culture, which we call *folk, traditional, or ethnic*," Norbertas Vėlius maintained, "was formed under the influence of religion and mythology, and no small part of it was plainly sacral and expressed people's religious attitudes, their mythic sense and view of the world. If religion and mythology, figuratively put, may be called the soul of a community, then ethnic culture is the mirror in which that soul is reflected" (Vėlius 1996, I, p. 7). Thus, the most archaic layers of Lithuanian and ancient Baltic religion and mythology

were the foundation on which were laid the other influences that determined Čiurlionis' distinctive mythopoetic world.

Symbolic thinking is typical of various artistic movements, but mainly of Neo-Romantic *Symbolism*, traces of which influence are revealed in the paintings of Čiurlionis' early period of *literary-psychological symbolism*. In a subtler form, with different signs, this unfolding of symbolism can already be seen in his late *sonatic* paintings, typical of which are special sensitivity in color scheme and formal artistic language, clarity and transparency in the system of artistic images. In the best cyclical pictures of this period – pictures that breathe musicality and subtlety of plastic form – there unfolds a world whose unfamiliar and mysterious space is enhanced by an enciphered language of symbols, signs, and metaphors.

Being closely connected with the myths, beliefs, and theosophy of ancient Lithuanians and other, primarily Eastern peoples, many of the symbols and signs preferred by this artist have a more or less obvious esoteric nuance. Čiurlionis is a genius who combined a multitude of paradoxical qualities and whose gaze into the surrounding world combined in the strangest way pure, unpolluted consciousness and the universal interests of a creator and profound sage. His world of preferred symbols, signs, and artistic images is directly connected with the totality of basic archetypes that have emerged throughout the history of civilization.

Usually, the symbols that emerge in his pictures are drawn from the diverse forms of the natural world, the primordial elements of nature, plants, animals, and images created by flights of imagination and fantasy. In mythology and folklore, they are endowed with various powers: trees, forests, rivers, lakes, mountains, burial mounds, sacred serpents, birds, personages of the night sky, and many other well-known symbolic images that have come from distant civilizations and influence the viewer's consciousness with their silent, wordless speech.

During Čiurlionis' early stage of development, that of literary-psychological symbolism, the main creative attitudes that emphasized the importance of the symbol arose from a Romantic vision of the world – one later influenced by the

ideas of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and other representatives of Symbolist aesthetics. For them, the symbol was interpreted as *the combination of a poetic and visual image with a musical one*, and the symbolical understanding of the world born of this synthesis was regarded as *the profoundest way of knowing the essence of the things and phenomena of the world*. Moreover, when discussing these typical interpretations of the epoch when the ideas of Symbolism flourished, we should not forget that *every authentic work of art is always, in a certain sense, symbolical*.

The study of symbols and especially of their influence on fine art was deeply marked by the various movements and doctrines of modern esotericism that summed up the ideas of ancient Eastern civilizations. Here, I would immediately like to draw readers' attention to an important characteristic of Čiurlionis' cultural orientation, one that brought his worldview close to that of followers of theosophy and other esoteric movements. This Lithuanian artist was not at all influenced by what has fettered Western aesthetic and artistic consciousness for the last several centuries – the cult of *Hellenomania*. Like the theosophists, Čiurlionis sought the sources of his creative inspiration not in classical (Greek, Roman) antiquity, but in the religious, mythological, and artistic traditions of much older Asian civilizations. In other words, this genius's gaze was directed toward the deepest *primordial* layers in the history of civilization, culture, and art, and this fact explains the exceptional importance in his creative work of archaic archetypes and mythical symbols.

Starting with the texts of Helena Blavatsky, the author of *The Secret Doctrine*, followers of modern theosophy devoted special attention to various symbols of ancient Eastern civilizations, making them an inseparable part of theosophical symbolism, which constantly emphasized the connection between the most archaic Eastern beliefs (philosophical, religious, ethical, aesthetic) and the worldviews of present-day peoples. Hence also arose one of the main goals of the theosophical movement: on the basis of a comparative analysis of Buddhism, Brahmanism, Mithraism, the cult of Isis, Orphism, Christianity, Islam, occultism, and other philosophical and religious teachings, *to reveal the universal meaning of symbols* and, later, under their guidance, *to create an*

undogmatic spiritual movement uniting the peoples of various nations and to spread its fundamental principles among the intellectual and spiritual elite of all the countries of the world.

Čiurlionis' Early Symbolism

In order to correctly understand the genesis of the unusual symbolism in Čiurlionis' early pictures, it is necessary to locate it in the wider ideological and cultural contexts under whose influence this distinctive artist's worldview and aesthetic and artistic principles were formed. Knowing the underlying sources and most characteristic features of the symbolism in his pictures helps us better understand the distinctiveness of this artist's early evolution as a painter. When analyzing the vital sources that nourished the symbolism in the pictures of his early period of *literary-psychological symbolism* (1903-1906), we must inevitably return both to the field of aesthetic, psychological, theosophical, and other ideas dominant at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and to the archaic layers of Lithuanian culture, folklore, and mythology.

Čiurlionis' aesthetic views and style of artistic creation were formed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries during his music and art studies in Warsaw, when the Romantic ideas being stoked by the Neo-Romantics had not yet died out in Poland. The greatest influence on his symbolical understanding of the world was exerted by the ideas of Romanticism, the Symbolism of the Neo-Romantic movement dominant at that time, and likewise psychological and theosophical aesthetics.

In Čiurlionis' early pictures, influenced by Symbolist Orientalism, archetypal images are interwoven with Baltic symbols and images and with various others, extremely popular in the esoteric teachings of that time, from Hebrew, Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Vedic, and Christian mythology. In his pictures these symbols are the Sun, the World Serpent (grass-snake), a powerful bird, fish, boat, bridge, and the central one of the World Tree – a symbol that with various modifications becomes a sacred mountain, a temple, trees of life, knowledge, and fruitfulness, a pillar of the universe, and a cos-

mic axis symbolizing the inner *axis mundi*, the interconnectedness of Heaven, Earth, Water, and Hell. Here, apart from the symbolism of the *axis mundi*, a slowly growing vertical tree is an expression of the force, grandeur, and dynamic vital energy opposed to the static life of a stone. Together, the tree and the stone symbolize the microcosm, the constant transformations of existence.

Taken over from the civilizations of the Near East and India, the symbolic images, mythological and religious motifs, and iconographic elements in Čiurlionis' works are supplemented with abstract symbols chosen from Eastern mythology of geometrical figures, numbers, and colors – the circle of the Sun, symbolizing fullness of being, life, perfection, the triangle – supreme wisdom, the rectangle – stability. In his early pictures we likewise see various ornaments of Eastern origin, the imitation of archaic writing, naturalistic motifs, loud colors, and a sensory treatment of painted forms – in *Ožiaragis* (Capricorn, 1904), *Rytas* (Morning, 1904), *Tvanas* (Flood, 1904-1905), and *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World, 1905-1906). Dominant in these pictures are symbols from the cultural space of the Old Testament.

What may be considered one of the most clear-cut works reflecting Čiurlionis' spiritual quests at the beginning of this period is *Ramybė* (Calm, 1903/4), which was painted under Arnold Böcklin's influence and may be interpreted as a distinctive psychological reflection of his spiritual states. It is one of the most unified and, in terms of color scheme, most harmonious of his mood landscapes, conveying the atmosphere of an evening landscape filled with tranquility and sinking in expanses of water. On the one hand, this depiction of an island rising from these expanses of water with two sources of light and similar to a mythical being emerging in the evening twilight is, as it were, an expression of spiritual experiences, but on the other hand, this is not a traditional evening landscape, but a picture of metaphysical motifs that reflect a quest for hidden, mysterious essences typical both of Symbolism and of Čiurlionis' aesthetics at that time.

Roughly around 1904-1905, Čiurlionis gradually freed himself from the naturalism typical of his early pictures and from bright contrasting colors. Restrained color schemes began to emerge along with the poetic character of

his pictures. Among such pictures I would include the works *Tiltai* (Bridges, 1904/5) from the ten-picture cycle *Fantazijos* (Fantasies), *Žinia* (Message, 1904/5), and *Procesija* (Procession, 1905). Here, there already burst forth new tendencies with subtle and restrained color schemes, an improvement that later, after his second period of experimentation with art forms, unfolded with full force in the pictures of his sonatic period. However, an incomparably higher level of artistic generalization and psychological suggestiveness can be seen in the crowning pictures of this period – *Tiesa* (Truth, 1905), *Naktis* (Night, 1906), *Ūkanos* (Fog, 1906), *Bičiulystė* (Friendship, 1906/7), and the diptych *Liūdesys* (Sadness, 1906/7), in which psychologism is interwoven with an expression of mood and a unified color scheme solution that attest to essential shifts in painting technique and in the use of the means of artistic expression. The end of his period of literary-psychological symbolism is attested by this artist's rejection of the compositions formerly dominant in his work and by his ever-growing attention to the plastic side of his paintings and to the experimentation that will soon emerge in the second stage of his creative evolution.

Metaphysical, Cosmic, and Archetypal Symbols

We will begin a more exhaustive discussion of Čiurlionis' world of esoteric symbols with the most universal **metaphysical** symbols distinguished at the beginning of our classification. His language of metaphysical symbols is connected with the main **forms of existence, that is, of space and time**, and with the **primordial elements**. Most of them – *road, eternity, silence, calm, morning, light, day, night, evening, bell, cloud* – appear in one form or another during various periods in this artist's work, e.g., in *Rytas. Fantazija* (Morning. Fantasy) in the cycle *Užburtas miestas* (Enchanted City, 1904), *Diena, Vakaras, and Naktis* (Day, Evening, Night) in the cycle *Para* ([Twenty-Four Hour] Day, 1904/1905), *Amžinybė* (Eternity, 1906), and *Tyla* (Silence, 1907), where they often form the basis for the symbolism in the work of art, one that is important but not always properly understood by the viewer. The

functions and importance of these symbols, for example, of space and time, are usually different in the compositional systems of specific pictures or their cycles.

Another important part of Čiurlionis' vocabulary of preferred symbols consists of the **primordial elements**: *earth, water, fire, air (ether) or wind*. In his symbolism, as in that of East Asian landscape painting, water and wind are extremely important elements. They may embody the profoundest calm, as we see, for example, in *Ramybė* (Calm), or entirely on the contrary, in *Audra* (Storm) or in the third part of *Jūros sonata* (Sonata of the Sea), *Finale* (Banga – Wave), dislodge, change, demolish the settled states in nature of calm, order, and harmony. In Čiurlionis' work, as in East Asian traditional aesthetics, silence is associated with a state liberated from the influence of chaos – of fullness of being, harmony, and beauty, of the eternity and boundlessness of the universe. This state is distinctively expressed in a picture filled with theosophical symbolism – *Tyla* (Silence, 1907), which is dominated by aspects of *meditation* typical of the Chan (Zen) artistic tradition, by minimalism, and by subtle symbolism filled with the unsaid and aesthetic suggestion. In a letter, Čiurlionis, as it were, a Chan (Zen) adept, wrote to his beloved Sofija: "Just think, Zoselė, whether in silence we would not say much more to each other? Looking in each other's eyes, I to you, and you to me" (Čiurlionis, 1973, p. 252). In this picture, as in the East Asian aesthetics of landscape painting, silence is understood as the primordial state from which begins the effective diffusion of the potentialities of existence.

Among the symbols that occur most often in Čiurlionis' pictures, *gates, bridges, and bells* stand out in importance. They are closely interrelated, and we will encounter them in works of various periods. In these pictures, bridges perform many different functions. They connect different spaces, times, civilizations, and spiritual cultures, while gates open up paths from an existing point in space and time to other spaces, times, civilizations, and spiritual cultures. Filled with great meaning, these two symbols show something very important for understanding Čiurlionis' world – the diverse diffusion of the principle of universal harmony.

In any discussion of the metaphysical aspects of Čiurlionis' symbolical thinking, it is worthwhile to mention something directly connected with his quests for spiritual ideals – his unique sense of **height** and boundless **space**. His focus on a celestial world symbolizing eternity was determined by a dizzying sense of height and of a boundless universe, a sense that was one of the most characteristic specific features of this painter's aesthetics and symbolism. The main symbols of a dizzying sense of height – steep mountains, pyramids, towers, columns, stairs, ladders, clouds – show the focus of his consciousness on the uppermost part of the vision he created of the universe. Thus is born what is typical of Čiurlionis' pictures – a view of the world from above, a sense of height from a bird's-eye view, in which broad panoramas open up for seeing the world on the basis of original perspective solutions.

Seeking to comprehend the expanses of the universe and cosmic space, this artist's gaze tenaciously penetrated further into incomprehensible space-time. This fact determined the rise of a world of *cosmic symbols* in Čiurlionis' work and that of his contemporaries and a special treatment, typical only of him, of the objects in cosmic space. Here, there was the strangest fusion of visions derived from Camille Flammarion with archaic aspects of the mythology of Eastern peoples and Lithuanians.

Enchanted by the beauty of the night sky, Čiurlionis did not merely create distinctive nocturnal landscapes – in the fifth picture of the cycle *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World, 1905/1906), in *Naktis* (Night, 1906), and in many of the pictures in *Zodiako ženklai* (Signs of the Zodiac, 1906/1907). In visions inspired by reading Flammarion's books and contemplating his engravings, he also sought to convey the diversity of the cosmic world with its constant creative processes. To this end, in *Žvaigždžių sonata* (Sonata of the Stars, 1909), which crowns his pictures with this theme, he employed a suggestive world of cosmic symbols. Here, a rich world opened up – of the cosmic images and symbols that Čiurlionis had created, an important part of his worldview as a painter. Because of their musical associations, Čiurlionis' night-time landscapes with their cosmic theme may be called *nocturnes*.

Constantly appearing in *Sonata of the Stars* and in other pictures by this artist and reminiscent of mysteries, various mystical elements – an altar, secret writing, columns, shining bars, journeys by ship – suggest that Čiurlionis was acquainted with Masonic concepts if we bear in mind that he lived when spiritualism and theosophy flourished (Botto, 1991, Nr. 2, p. 147). Moreover, for Čiurlionis a world shining in the radiance of stars and moonlight was a spiritually close space where his inner and outer worlds interacted – a space where there unfolded the universal cosmic creative process that rules the world and that, in various forms, expressed the link between heaven and earth. Čiurlionis' pictures periodically depict unearthly winged beings similar to angels. In this cosmic epic, an important place was also occupied by the symbol of the Milky Way, which showed the path, as it were, to another world, a kingdom of souls. In archaic Lithuanian mythology, this symbol bespoke the continuation of life after death in another world beyond the Milky Way. The abovementioned sense of dizzying height and of boundless space also became a participant in the universal cosmic vision that Čiurlionis created by uniting earthly and unearthly worlds.

Often encountered in Čiurlionis' pictures, clouds, fogs, and mists played an exceptionally important role in the system of symbols and metaphors of East Asian landscape painting. They were connected with the primordial structures of the cosmos and existence, ineffable feelings of the boundless space of the universe, the spontaneous flow of human life, its metamorphoses, the flights of dreams, and their unfulfilled goals. Thus, painting fogs and mists means being able, through extremely subtle tones and hues, to express one's inner experiences.

In East Asian landscape painting, clouds, mists, and fogs likewise perform an important function separating spatial planes (the foreground, middle ground, and background, or upper, middle, and lower planes) in the composition of a picture. They emphasize what is especially important for the artist – the masterful rendition of boundless space. And finally, the way that clouds move in different spaces and times symbolizes the diversity of transitions from one spatial and temporal state to another.

Another world of Čiurlionis' *archetypal* symbols was established from the deepest layers of the subconscious. A great deal of attention was devoted to the world of archetypal symbols by the founder of analytical psychology, Carl Gustav Jung, who interpreted these symbols as the mysterious *language of the unconscious, the main form of expression of man's creative nature*. Emphasizing the archaic nature of archetypal symbols, Jung referred to them variously in his works: "primordial archaic images," "primordial examples," "archaic survivals," "structural assumptions of images" that function in the depths of the collective unconscious. This is the world of archetypal artistic symbols typical of Čiurlionis' visual and poetic expression. The most important ones were: the *child, princess, prince, mother, father, old man, sage, ruler of the universe*, and the symbol of universal cosmic order and harmony – *Rex* (King, 1909). This work shows that Čiurlionis understood the world he depicted not as elements ruled by the irrational forces of chaos, but as a unity of all earthly and cosmic processes reflecting the embodiment of harmonious laws.

The Symbolism of Plants and Animals

Most widespread in Čiurlionis' arsenal of artistic work were images from **the world of plants and animals**. Here, this painter adopted what was typical of ancient Balts and Lithuanians – a special love for plants, for the sacred character of trees, forests, and grain, which Marija Gimbutienė connected with the legacy of Old Europe and with the sphere of influence of the goddess Žemyna, who brought about the life-giving growth of plants and fruitfulness because "trees, forests and groves, rocks, hills, and mountains are filled with the miraculous powers of earth and water" (Gimbutienė, 1985, p. 152).

From Lithuanian mythology, folk beliefs, and folklore there arose Čiurlionis' special, emphatically reverent connection with plants, which was expressed in his pictures through constant depictions of flowers, trees, and other plants in various pantheistic shapes and forms, as in *Gluosniai. Rytas* (Willows. Morning, 1904/5), *Berželiai* (Little Birches, 1905), *Kiparisai* (Cypresses, 1905/6), and *Gėlės* (Flowers, 1907/8).

It should be remembered that in Lithuanian mythology and folksongs the tree was not only a constant companion in human life but also an important symbol of spiritual transformation after death because a dead person whose soul did not ascend to paradise but whose spirit remained on earth was, in folklore, usually reincarnated into a specific tree, bush, flower, or bird. Here, in Lithuanian mythology there again appears a fundamental principle of incarnation typical of theosophy because, according to ancient Lithuanian beliefs, the souls of the dead passed into plants whose grammatical gender corresponded to their sex. The souls of men were reincarnated in oaks (*ažuolai*), ashes (*uosiai*), or birches (*beržai*), and those of women – in lindens (*liepos*) or firs (*eglės*).

This endless reverence for the tree as man's closest spiritual friend was connected with the symbol of the Cosmic Tree of Life, which was typical of ancient Eastern civilizations and Lithuanian mythical folklore, and which we see in the pictures *Pavasaris IV* (Spring IV, 1907/1908) and *Vasaros sonata* (Summer Sonata), part two *Andante* (1908). This symbol fills the entire space of the picture, joining the worlds of Earth and Heaven.

Of all the phenomena of the natural world and of plants, in Čiurlionis' life the most important was the *forest*, where Lithuanians, especially the people of Dzūkija, who lived in forested localities, had for centuries been protected against enemies, fed, and sheltered. Since time immemorial, the forest was not only a constant source of vitally important natural resources that fed peasants but also an element that accompanied them at the end of life's journey. For Čiurlionis, the forest was also very important for its therapeutic power because it relieved inner disquiet and an enervated mind and refreshed and restored creative powers after strenuous, exhausting work. Thus, in Čiurlionis' life and work images of a forest filled with special symbolical meaning were constantly intertwined. Traces of this connection are obvious in an abundance of works with variations of the symbolical treatment of the forest – in *Miškelis* (Little Forest, 1906/1907), *Miškas, etiudas* (Forest, a Study, 1906?), *Miškas* (Forest, 1907/1908), and *Vasara. Miškas vasarą* (Summer. A Forest in Summer, 1908/1909). Moreover, for an artist torn by inner contradictions,

as was Čiurlionis, the forest was not only a place where he could take in the constantly changing beauty of nature but also one where he could find a state of inner calm and reflect on the paths and challenges of his life.

In the abundant world of *animals*, a special place is occupied in Čiurlionis' pictures by a symbol representing the earthly world, that of the World Serpent of Eastern origin and, in Lithuanian mythology, of the nonvenomous snake (grass-snake), and by one that connects the earth with the celestial world, that of the bird that announces good, bad, or ominous news. Filled with great meaning, both of these symbols were regarded as messengers from the world of the gods: the grass-snake brought homes joy, good luck, and riches, while the bird bore news and announced specific events. These views were close to the mythology of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and other ancient civilizations, and thus, it is not surprising that they acquired a similar meaning in the world of theosophical symbols.

The Italian art historian Andrea Botto discerned that the Lithuanian understanding of the grass-snake symbol and Čiurlionis' *Žalčio sonata* (Grass-Snake Sonata) are similar to Goethe's Masonic fairytale *Maerchen*, which in 1899 and 1918 Rudolf Steiner interpreted from a theosophical viewpoint. Botto likewise drew attention to the fact that the figures in Čiurlionis' pictures use, as it were, a secret language that only people understand – the ones who know secrets (Botto, 1991, Nr. 2, p. 147).

In Čiurlionis' symbolism, alongside the grass-snake, another important representative of the animal world was the *bird*, which was regarded as the main herald of events, a prophet of the natural world, primarily of spring and autumn, and of misfortunes. In Lithuanian symbolism, as in other civilizations, birds usually directed the human gaze toward the inaccessible spaces of the celestial world and were regarded at the main intermediaries between heaven and earth. According to Marija Gimbutienė, in Lithuanian and Aestian (Baltic) beliefs birds performed a twofold function: some of them were connected with the powers of fruitfulness, and others – with the reincarnation of souls. In this classification of symbolical powers, the swan, stork, and rooster were connected with the natural forces of fertility, while

the cuckoo, dove, nightingale, oriole, swallow, falcon, and owl – with the reincarnation of souls (Gimbutienė, 1994, p. 40).

In Lithuanian mythology and in that of other peoples, individual birds were regarded as prophets of death, companions of souls, guardians of their peace. In Čiurlionis' paintings they often performed these functions. Lithuanian folksongs attest to the belief that souls that have died before their time, that have left this world too early wander for a long time, in the shape of birds or other winged beings, the space between the worlds of Earth and Heaven. Many of the elements of our briefly discussed bird symbolism, especially the view of birds as intermediaries between worlds and the view developed in Indian mythology of birds as departing souls and spiritual messengers, were adopted by the creators of theosophical symbolism.

Another important symbol that passed from Eastern civilizations into esoteric doctrines and Čiurlionis' pictures is the *fish*, which was connected, unlike birds flying about in the spaces of the heavens, with the element of water, the netherworld, and inner depth. In different Eastern civilizations, the fish was a symbol of silence, wisdom, femininity giving birth to the world, love, rebirth, and instinctiveness. Thus, it was sometimes given the function of a demiurge creating the world by spawning or of a bearer of life. This view explains why the fish became, in theosophical symbolism, a symbol of repeated birth, immortality, and reincarnation. In Indian civilization, the fish often represented reincarnation, and after passing through various other civilizations, in Christianity it became a symbol of resurrection and rebirth.

Without exaggerating, Čiurlionis can be called a poet who exalted the beauty of the natural world and who, like his East Asian spiritual brothers, the Daoist, Chan, and Zen masters of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, emphasized through his language of symbols and metaphors man's unity with the world of nature around him. For him, as for Chinese and Japanese painters, flowers, bushes, trees, forests, rocks, mountains, and torrents of water are filled with life and the creative spirit. This pantheism, which exalted the vitality of the most diverse phenomena of the natural world, was likewise one of the clearest features of Čiurlionis' poetics as a painter, and it determined his

special attraction to depicting various phenomena of the natural world and to the landscape genre.

Geometrical Symbols and Signs

In Čiurlionis' esoteric symbolism an important place was occupied by geometrical symbols and signs that were adopted from the mythical and religious systems of ancient civilizations and from the vocabularies of theosophy and other esoteric movements and whose semantic meanings often also coincide with those of archaic Lithuanian symbols. The importance of geometrical symbols in Čiurlionis' work first attracted the attention of B. A. Leman, who wrote in a monograph: "In Čiurlionis' imagination the sphere, circle, and ellipse were always characteristic unbroken symbols of the rhythm of life, perhaps of the only person worth calling an adept of Cosmic religion" (Leman, 1912, p. 22). The main geometrical symbols and signs came from the esoteric doctrines of ancient Eastern religions, and their symbolical meanings usually coincided with the theosophical vocabulary of mystical geometrical signs. As we know from Čiurlionis' letters and the testimony of his contemporaries, he was especially interested in the myths, religions, philosophical ideas, and art of Eastern peoples. These interests as well as esoteric ones formed the symbolical meanings of many of the main geometrical signs.

In many ancient Eastern civilizations, one of the most popular geometrical symbols – the *circle (wheel)* – was regarded as *a universal sign of the sun, vital energy, the diffusion of warmth, perfection, the absolute, and immortality.*

Another symbol also closely connected with Eastern civilizations – the *triangle* – acquired special importance in theosophical and occult doctrines, where *it represented activity dynamically spreading light in various directions.* In theosophy, a triangle with its top upward denoted unexpressed, hidden supreme wisdom, and with its top downward – intellect that has already been revealed, divine wisdom that is being manifested. And a pyramid with a square base and four triangular sides was a symbol of man's complicated spiritual

evolution from a lower to higher stages or spheres of spiritual development.

In Čiurlionis' world of symbols, special importance was given to all vertical lines connected with these static geometrical figures – steep mountains shooting high up into the world of spirit, rising towers, castles, belfries, and other emphatically vertical structures that symbolized for Čiurlionis something demanding much will and effort – man's upward movement to spiritual perfection, his rise above the value system of a flat, horizontal, and vulgar world. Being on top, on mountain peaks, in the element of clouds was connected with the higher forms of human spiritual activity, with light, radiance, the spread of higher and subtler qualities.

Sometimes, the tops of Čiurlionis' highest towers were enveloped in halos of light, nimbuses of sorts, as we see, for example, in the picture *Allegro in Piramidžių sonata* (Sonata of the Pyramids). At the top, moreover, from a great height, the perspective opens up a wider horizon for seeing the world. This motif does not just constantly resound in Čiurlionis' poetic texts, in which a young person seeking a goal is advised by the archetypal image of an old sage: "Look about from high towers, then you will sense the way" (Čiurlionis, 1960, p. 276). Longing for dizzying height and boundless space was strong in the mature art of Čiurlionis' sonatic period, in which the world was usually depicted from a bird's-eye view.

All of Čiurlionis' rich world of symbols can be classified thus according to their relationship with surrounding reality and their typological features: *metaphysical* symbols, connected with the basic forms of *existence*; *cosmic* – encompassing the wide world of heavenly bodies; *archetypal* – formed from the deepest layers of the collective unconscious, from earlier times than the Indo-European protolanguage. Another important part of Čiurlionis' vocabulary of symbols consisted of those taken from the world of *plants* and *animals*. Somewhat aside from the ones connected with life forms were abstract *geometrical* symbols and signs. And finally, there was the symbolism of *colors* and *sounds* derived from theosophical texts.

Thus, Čiurlionis employed archaic symbols that were derived from Lithuanian mythology and folklore and that fused with images coming from

ancient Eastern civilizations and Christianity. However, the main layer of this vocabulary of Lithuanian symbols was often overlaid by another colorful layer of symbolism – one formed from the subconscious, arising from ancient Eastern civilizations and various tendencies in modern esotericism, primarily theosophy, and connected with the unconditional superiority of subtle spiritual matters. Traces of theosophical influence are already obvious in Čiurlionis' early stage of literary-psychological symbolism, which is dominated by the atmosphere of mystical mystery typical of Symbolist art. After the second period of questing for new formal means of artistic expression, in the third, in mature works of sonatic and metaphysical painting, which unfolded in a more refined form, the preferences of theosophists and occultists were reborn: puzzling geometrical signs, enciphered cryptographic inscriptions, symbols, metaphors, and archetypal images.

Influence of Theosophical Thought

In present-day art history, under the influence of post-modern ideology, established patterns of artistic development are being critically reconsidered with growing frequency, and there is an interest in various peripheral artistic phenomena. In the complex evolution of early 20th-century modern art, there are distinct outsider artists whose innovative experiments and ideas directly or indirectly influenced modernist consciousness or opened up paths to artistic development.

In order to better understand the distinctive artistry of the leading early 20th-century figures in Lithuanian theosophical art, Stabrauskas and his most talented pupil Čiurlionis, who are the main object of this study, it is necessary to delve into the world of theosophical ideas. The ideas of the main creators of the theosophical philosophy of art (Blavatsky, Steiner, Schuré, Besant, and Leadbeater) reflected the growing influence of the modern esotericism typical of the early 20th century. This influence was directly related to a rejection of the materialistic reality typical of artistic consciousness and to an unconditional exaltation of mysterious spiritual first principles. As the most typical features

of this period, we may indicate growing tendencies toward occultism and an intensified belief that beyond the layer of outward appearance in the world around us there exists a deeper, mysterious, spiritual reality that can be reached through mystical intuition, contemplation, meditation, or revelation. The interaction of occultism and the theosophical philosophy of art with artistic practice clearly emerged in the colorful and contradictory Neoromantic, primarily Symbolist movement that was influenced by Romantic mysticism, Orientalism, and the problems of the interaction of the arts and in the Modernism that was forming in this movement.

Every artist influenced by theosophy, anthroposophy, and other occult ideas had a specific style that was related to his childhood environment, experiences, creative potential, and national artistic traditions which were all integrated by a characteristic attitude that flowed from various esoteric teachings. This was primarily special attention to various spiritual aspects of artistic creation and of the psychology of the creative process. Many of the artists and composers inspired by the ideas of esotericism shared the quest, typical of their epoch and the Neoromantic artistic tradition, for links between *pictorial* and *musical* expression as well as special attention to the phenomenon of synesthesia. One more characteristic feature that connected these artists was an attraction to mysterious subjects enciphered in various signs and symbols and to metaphorical meanings in order to stress the importance of spiritual, nonmaterial values, and related to this attraction was a tendency in creative expression toward the dematerialization of the objects they depicted and toward the abstraction of artistic forms.

Of the figures involved in the rebirth of Lithuanian art during the early 20th century, Stabrauskas (Stabrowski, 1869-1929) received the most widespread international recognition. During his youth, while studying at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts, he developed an interest in theosophy, parapsychology, mediumistic practices, and Orientalism, and this inclination remained relevant when this artist was on his later creative path. This attraction to esoteric doctrines continued to grow during journeys to Near Eastern countries and while he was studying at the Académie Julian in Paris.

He was convinced that the spread of theosophical and, later, anthroposophical ideas would impel materialistic Western culture toward a desired dominance of spiritual values and would help artists master subtler forms of artistic expression that would capture spiritual phenomena invisible to the naked eye. Stabrauskas regarded his paintings, enriched with mysterious theosophical symbols and metaphors, as the most accessible way of spreading the idea of a new, exalted, spiritual art in the world. Because of these esoteric ideas, his creative style indeed underwent fundamental changes that were primarily connected with the growing importance of metaphysical and spiritual aspects flowing from theosophical and anthroposophical doctrines and with a growing tendency toward a symbolical, metaphorical style of self-expression. In this painter's early pictures inspired by the ideas of esotericism, we discern means of artistic expression that are typical of Symbolism, Impressionism, *Art Nouveau*, and Secession and that are intertwined with mysterious and ephemeral theosophical images. In his later creative work, Stabrauskas devoted most of his attention to lyrical landscapes, figure compositions, historical motifs, nature scenes, and the Romanticized cult of feminine beauty, and he created many mysterious and refined artistic images influenced by esotericism. He was connected to Čiurlionis and the national art of Lithuania through a Romantic, emotional tie to the cultural tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and an attraction to the nature-worshipping motifs of Lithuanian myths and legends.

Alongside historical pictures, landscapes, and figure compositions, Stabrauskas also created images of women infused with the spirit of esotericism and flights of fantasy. Delving into the world of theosophical and occult ideas determined an ever-clearer separation of two different tendencies in esoteric painting. The first was the *unrealistic*, which was dominated by tendencies to dematerialize artistic images that were often created with a mystical tinge and to dissolve them in the ether, and the second, opposed to it, was the *naturalistic*, which preserved traces of the formerly dominant realistic style that was already ever more clearly directed toward realizing as suggestively as possible the new goals of esoteric painting.

The first beginnings of a “nonmaterial” visionary artistic style can already be sensed during his early period in his poetic pictorial interpretation of the fairytale heroine *Snieguolė* (Snow White, 1891). In visionary symbolical compositions, Stabrauskas gradually creates his own distinctive artistic style, one that is influenced by theosophical and occult ideas and in which attention is mainly focused on highlighting not the physical, but the spiritual aspects of man. The most typical works employing this esoteric aesthetic and plastic approach are bright pictures in an exalted poetic style and in clear bluish tones, usually symbolizing the dominance of spiritual values, for example, *Magiško krištolo karalienė* (The Queen of the Magic Crystal, 1909/10), the series of three pictures *Vizijos I-III* (Visions I-III, 1910), and other canvases.

The first picture with these warm harmonious tones, *Magiško krištolo karalienė*, is still dominated by the unrealistic atmosphere of old folktales typical of this painter’s early works, for example, *Snieguolė*, but individual parts of its pictorial system, especially the round, halolike forms surrounding the queen’s face and the movement of her hand beside the crystal, are already connected with tendencies toward esotericism. This influence is even more obvious in the series of three pictures *Vizijos I-III*, in which a fantastic dream world is depicted as if it had burst forth from the everyday reality around us into another dreamy space of esoteric, ephemeral images, one that is illuminated by the rays of a bright sun and in which different laws apply.

The clearest examples of his second gloomy, naturalistic, psychologically oppressive, almost morbid direction are *Spiritualistinis moters portretas (Mediumė)*, (A Spiritualistic Portrait of a Woman [A Medium], 1900) and the pictures *Sielos skundas* (A Soul’s Complaint, 1914) and *Pabaisų guodimas* (Consoling Monsters, around 1920). Reflecting different aspects of how theosophy influenced this artist’s worldview, each of them is marked by similarities and differences. All of them are connected by what typifies the work of many esoteric artists – an emphasis on the symbolism of color and the disappearance of the boundaries between reality and the fantasy worlds created by imagination.

Participation in art exhibitions organized by the leaders of the Lithuanian national rebirth, especially his pupil Čiurlionis, and accentuating the national aspect not only influenced Stabrauskas' stylistic development but also revived what had already emerged in his early works – an interest in motifs inspired by Lithuanian history, mythology, and legends. Around 1908, we see in Stabrauskas' paintings the growing influence of his visionary pupil Čiurlionis, who had already formed a distinctive Lithuanian style. Traces of Čiurlionis' influence can be seen in Stabrauskas' series *Audra* (Storm, 1907/10), *Vizijos I-III* (Visions I-III, 1910), and *Simbolinis peizažas [Tarpekis kalnuose]* (Symbolic Landscape [Mountain Ravine], 1911-1913), in their increasingly poetic, soft, and clear gamut of colors, and in his attraction to the serial development of ideas. For example, his picture *Krabai ir žuvis* (Crabs and Fish, 1913) developed, as it were, the motifs in Čiurlionis' series *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World, 1905/6). Stabrauskas' works were also pervaded with the angel and bird motifs that Čiurlionis was fond of.

Although Stabrauskas' most talented pupil, the composer, painter, and subtle master of the poetic word Čiurlionis, never officially belonged to any theosophical society, theosophy, occultism, parapsychology, mediumistic practice, and spiritism as well as other ideas of esotericism, according to much reliable testimony, truly interested him and induced him to take part in esoteric gatherings held by the Stabrauskas family, so-called strawberry tea parties, which were connected with the spread of these tendencies and at which he became infected with these ideas. While studying in Warsaw and later, Čiurlionis was indeed interested in various mediumistic practices, hypnosis, telepathy, spiritist séances, life after death, and reincarnation. Čiurlionis' own letters, reliable contemporary testimony, and the symbols and metaphors employed in his works of fine art show that he was *undoubtedly influenced by various theosophical and parapsychological ideas that had acquired tremendous popularity during his lifetime*.

While studying at the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw and later, Čiurlionis was indeed interested in life after death and reincarnation. His belief in reincarnation is attested in a letter of November 19, 1908, written from Saint Petersburg to his beloved Sofija. In it, he maintained:

“You know why we are not afraid?” you said. “Because, although we will die, our bodies worn out, we will meet in other countries, and thus always You and I, for we are Eternity and Infinity.” You remember? That was very long ago, and we have probably changed our shapes more than once, only memory is weak, and remembering requires special moments. My only one, indeed, is that you saw the difference between one thought and another. Some of them are, as it were, corporeal, material, and these die quickly, and nobody can ever remember them, but others are entirely different, and they are, as it were, the thoughts of the soul, and whoever has heard them will never forget them. (Čiurlionis 1973: 81)

The theosophical thoughts scattered in Čiurlionis’ letters have received attention from various interpreters who have looked for expressions of esotericism in his works – Di Milia, Botto, Kazokas, Okulicz-Kozaryn, Introvigne, and others.

In Čiurlionis’ work there is a powerful unfolding of a universal worldview typical of theosophical doctrines through quests for unity in the many shared metaphysical, ethical, and aesthetic principles that connect the great religious and intellectual traditions, for spiritual kinship and brotherhood. Hence arose his special attention to the primordial, archaic ideals of harmony and beauty that blossomed in various civilizations, in their cultures, religions, and art. His worldview was also greatly influenced not only by Lithuanian folk culture and folklore and the traditions of the old Eastern civilizations but also by the mature esoteric ideas spread by the followers of theosophy Stabrauskas, Miciński, and Flammarion. This fact determined his unconditional elevation of spiritual values in regard to material existence. Čiurlionis understood this as a precondition necessary for knowing the world and inseparable from purposeful human spiritual development.

Čiurlionis drew the basic features of his symbolical, theosophical, and mythopoetic language from different sources of inspiration: 1) Christianity, the folklore of still vibrant archaic pagan Lithuanian culture, and the folk songs, myths, and legends of Dzūkija; 2) the mythological, religious, and philosophical traditions of Eastern peoples; and 3) Camille Flammarion’s

books and illustrations, which propagated various visions of cosmic and extraterrestrial worlds. No less important an influence on his symbolism came from: 4) the “strawberry tea parties” that the Stabrauskas family organized and that spread esoteric ideas; and 5) *the various occult and parapsychological ideas absorbed* from the intellectual circle in Bronislawa Volman’s salon. Finally, we should not forget: 6) his immediate predecessors, the representatives of symbolist art – Böcklin, Klinger, Beardsley, Stabrauskas, and others. In comparison to them, however, the vocabulary of symbols and visual iconography that thrived in Čiurlionis’ pictures stood out for its archaic Lithuanian quality and musicality. This vocabulary of symbols was connected by mythical thinking, in which the life of a specific person was only a brief flash in the complex metamorphoses of life processes.

Čiurlionis’ rich mythopoetic symbols can be classified according to their typological features and relationship to surrounding reality: the *metaphysical* ones are connected with the basic forms of *existence*; the *cosmic* ones encompass the wide world of heavenly bodies; and the *archetypal* ones come from the deepest layers of the collective unconscious, from layers that are older than the times of the Indo-European proto-nation. Another important part of Čiurlionis’ vocabulary of symbols comes from the world of *flora* and *fauna*: flowers, trees, sacred grass snakes, birds, etc. Aside from these life forms, there were also abstract *geometric* signs and symbols. Finally, too, there were *color* and *sound* symbols that echoed theosophical texts.

Because of their close connection with the ancient myths and beliefs of the Lithuanians and other, primarily Eastern, peoples, many of the signs and symbols Čiurlionis preferred also have a more or less obvious esoteric tinge. This painter’s world of preferred symbols is directly related to the totality of basic archetypal symbols that have emerged throughout the history of civilization. Usually, the symbolic images that emerge in his pictures are drawn from what had surrounded him since his childhood in Dzūkija: the amazing diversity of the natural world, the primordial elements of nature, plants, animals, and the worlds of imagination and fantasy. Endowed with various powers in Lithuanian mythology and folklore, these are trees, forests, rivers, lakes, hills, castle mounds, sacred grass snakes, birds, figures from the

night sky, and many other well-known symbolic images that have traveled from distant civilizations and affect the apprehender's consciousness with their silent, wordless speech.

Among Čiurlionis' theosophical symbols, the most important one, alongside the grass snake, is perhaps the bird – the herald of events, the harbinger of important ones in the natural world, primarily spring and autumn, or of calamities. In Lithuanian symbolism, birds usually had similar meanings as in other civilizations; they directed gazes to the inaccessible spaces of the heavenly world and were regarded as the main contacts between Heaven and Earth. According to Gimbutienė, birds performed a twofold function in Lithuanian and Aestian (Baltic) beliefs: some of them were related to the powers of fertility, others – to the reincarnation of souls. In this classification of symbols, the swan, stork, and rooster are connected with the natural powers of fertility, and the mockingbird, dove, nightingale, oriole, swallow, falcon, and owl – with the reincarnation of souls (Gimbutienė 1994: 40).

For more than a century, the accurate decipherment of Čiurlionis' universal vocabulary of symbols and of his visual iconography has caused researchers many complicated problems of interpretation. "The symbols Čiurlionis used," Genovaitė Kazokienė accurately observed, "are like forgotten hieroglyphics that, if you have the key, can be read and explained" (Kazokas 2009: 73). The essence of this subtly enciphered vocabulary of signs and symbols is an archaic, total, undifferentiated, mythopoetic apprehension of reality, when human consciousness penetrated to knowledge of its place in the interaction between the cosmic elements of the Universe and the natural ones on Earth.

In order to understand Čiurlionis's mature painting style, one needs to examine its obvious connections with the great civilizations of the East in terms of their mythological symbolism, painting aesthetic, and fine arts traditions. The comparative method applied in this abbreviated study, which primarily focuses on landscape painting, supports the conclusion that Čiurlionis's world-view and oeuvre reflect the influence of East Asian culture. His knowledge of Eastern art determined the development of the "musical painting" of his "sonata" period and the characteristic features of his art, including his spatial perception, his aerial view of the world, his concept of

man as being one with nature, the subtle color palette of his later paintings, and the significance of the fluid line in his compositions.

As he searched for his own unique language of theosophical expression, Čiurlionis could not have remained unaffected by the European fin-de-siècle obsession with orientalism and with Japanism, which bore the imprint of the great Chinese art traditions. There were a number of factors that conditioned the role that East Asian art played in the development of Čiurlionis's mature style. First of all, the civilizations of the East were considered the cradle of Western civilization in the prevailing Romantic view. Čiurlionis was familiar with popular theories that regarded the East as the source of Western languages, mythology, religion, art forms, and as the spiritual home of Romantic ideals. Second, the intellectual climate of the first decade of the twentieth century simmered with a multitude of conflicting spiritual and artistic movements connected with the advent of modernist ideology and art practice. Academic orientalism underwent essential changes. The ideas of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer that emphasized the importance of Eastern theosophical philosophy, religions, and mythology influenced a great many followers, as well as members of the theosophical movement, to "turn toward the East." Such views enjoyed great vitality in Čiurlionis's milieu.

Finally, and probably most importantly, the uniquely sensitive Čiurlionis felt a spiritual affinity with the art traditions of the East in which he discerned a great many concepts and formal techniques that enabled him to realize his idea of "musical painting." In Čiurlionis's letters, statements, paintings and in the attestations of his contemporaries we find many references to the East. In "Bičiulystė" [Friendship] (1906-1907), a mysterious figure from the East, depicted in profile and carrying the sun in his hands, seems to symbolize the artist's reverential attitude toward the cultural values of non-European civilizations. After visiting the Hermitage and the Alexander III museum in St. Petersburg, Čiurlionis wrote in a letter to Sofija: *"I saw ancient Assyrian bricks with terrible winged gods, which (I don't know from where) I seem to know well and feel that they are my gods. There were Egyptian sculptures that I liked immensely"* (Čiurlionis, M. K., *Laiškai Sofijai*, V, 1973, p. 49).

Influenced by the Romantic ideas of the time, Čiurlionis regarded European culture as a component of one shared universal world culture. He extricated himself from the narrow confines of the Northern European viewpoint and turned his attention to the cultures of the ancient Hebrews, Assyria, Persia, Egypt, Babylonia, India, China, and Japan. He delved into their cosmology, mythology, epics, legends, philosophy, systems of religion, astrology, and art. The artist's vocabulary of theosophical images, symbols, and metaphors that he assimilated from these Eastern civilizations, and his emphasis on their common roots as well as their interrelationship is evidence of his universalist world-view.

East Asian works of art, with their exaltation of nature, dizzying spaces, and ineffable poetry, could not have failed to affect a sensitive artist like Čiurlionis, who must have felt the theosophical affinity, the internal artistry, and powerful potential of the pantheistic visions expressed within them. He delved into them and understood their spirit intuitively, unlike many of his predecessors and contemporaries who primarily looked only at the external and superficially impressive aspects of East Asian art.

The earliest conclusive and clearly documented evidence of Čiurlionis' exposure to East Asian art is found in an account of his trip to Western and Central European centers of culture. In a letter from Prague to his benefactor and close friend Bronislawa Wolman dated 1 September 1906, the painter lists the works he has seen in that city's museums and mentions Japanese "panneaux," robes, and textiles. (Čiurlionis 1960: 195).

This reference to Japanese panels provides a significant clue to the artistic influences in Čiurlionis's work, because the most popular genre in Japanese painted folding and sliding screens was the landscape, which was heir to the great Chinese art tradition. Though the latter underwent some modification after being exported to Japan, it remained viable until the end of the 19th century. Thus, there can be no doubt that Čiurlionis was familiar with the art traditions of East Asia. The question of how deep and multifaceted this knowledge was can be answered by comparing the stylistic and formal aspects of Čiurlionis's art with those of the East Asian art that inspired him.

In Čiurlionis's oeuvre, the most prominent genre is the landscape, but it is not the sort of naturalistic and neo-Romantic landscape of the Western tradition that mimics reality. Čiurlionis steadily moves toward depicting a landscape as it is perceived in the artist's mind, interpreting it metaphorically, as in the East Asian aesthetic. He summons up the metaphysical meanings of the natural world, which is no longer a physical but, rather, an ideal reality rooted in his subjective consciousness. He espouses the poetry of the primeval beauty and harmony of nature that is devoid of human presence. Čiurlionis *sees the landscape as a natural all-encompassing system, closely connected with the orderly structure of the cosmos*, as do the masters of East Asian painting.

In his canvases, precipitous towering jagged mountains, gracefully soaring wooden spans, mirror-like waters, tiny skiffs, nets, oversized storm-tossed trees, a proliferation of plants, flowers, fluttering butterflies, and other motifs typically found on Japanese sliding doors and folding screens appear with greater frequency. The growing influence of East Asian painting is evidenced by his detailed studies of Hiroshige's landscapes and of Hokusai's *The Great Wave of Kanagawa*. The latter work is reinterpreted in Čiurlionis's *Sonata of the Sea. Finale*, but here it is the restrained and refined form, muted tones, and internal artistry of the great Chinese and Japanese landscape tradition, as it was preserved in the work of Hokusai and Hiroshige, that takes precedence over the bold lines and intense color that typify the style of *ukiyo-e* etchings.

Further undeniable proof of the East Asian connection is provided by the *Summer Sonata. Allegro*, (1908), a work grounded in the aesthetics of the East but to date not yet afforded a closer look by art scholars. Clearly distinguishable in the distant background is a typical Far Eastern landscape of steep mountain silhouettes, expansive waters, islands, and sailing junks. The painting stands out with its subtle color scheme, so characteristic of East Asian landscapes, and with its sensitive graphic lines. This, as well as the aforementioned painting inspired by Hokusai's well-known work, is signed with the artist's initials MKC. Even the signature is stylized like an ideogram and its placement is precisely in the accustomed spot chosen by Chinese and Japanese painters. Is this mere coincidence?

These two mature paintings, the only ones that bear the signature of the painter and in which one recognizes obvious references to East Asian art, speak eloquently of the new aesthetic coordinates of the “sonata” period. Aside from the instances mentioned above, direct allusions to East Asian art can be found in other paintings of this period as well. For example, in the *Sonata of the Sun. Scherzo* there are depictions of mountains and of connecting bridges, together with areas of water and ornamental repetitive motifs of flowers and butterflies. In the *Spring Sonata. Scherzo* we see the motif of powerful torrents of rain, so prevalent in Japanese landscapes and etchings. In the *Sonata of the Serpent. Scherzo* [“Andante” sic] images of smooth waters and of decorative butterflies are rendered in a transparent painting style and a subtle muted color palette. In *Sonata of the Serpent. Allegro* [“Paradise”sic] bridges and aqueducts stretch across far-reaching waters.

Lacking reliable sources, it is difficult to say who, out of the entire range of Chinese and Japanese painters, exerted the greatest influence on Čiurlionis. Similar motifs can be found in the work of the Chinese painters Mu Qi (Mu Ch’i), Xia Gui (Hsia Kuei), Li Cheng, Ni Zan (Ni Tsan), Ma Yuan, Ma Lin, as well as the Japanese painters Shūbun, Shukō, Sesshū, Hokusai, and Hiroshige. Added to this list we have the many followers of the various influential schools of painting, including the Chinese *wenrenhua*, and the Japanese *haiga*, *bunjinga* (*nanga*), *ukiyo-e* schools.

The fundamental principles of Čiurlionis’s theosophical worldview and his creative thought constitute another link with East Asian traditions. Foremost is his universality, which manifested itself both in the broad range of his creative activity and in his pursuits to achieve a synthesis of the arts. His multifaceted and innovative being discovered the path to self-expression in painting, literature, as well as music, which he never abandoned, contrary to popular view. Typically, he also devoted his time to philosophical reflection.

Indeed, the great masters of East Asian painting, among them Wang Wei, Mi Fu, Su Shih, Ikkyū Sōjun, Shūbun, Sesshū, Shukō, Taiga, Buson, and Gyokudō, were, like Čiurlionis, protean individuals, who concurrently worked in more than one branch of the arts. Moreover, Čiurlionis’s universality enabled him to

overstep the boundaries of narrowly construed aesthetic principles, concepts, and artistic styles, as he successfully incorporated their positive elements into a universal system of aesthetics. He transitioned naturally from one art form to the expressive means of another art form.

Interests and traits seen as exemplifying artists of East Asia also describe Čiurlionis's personality and views. He was a man of conscience, had a passion for new ideas, sought perfection, and was never satisfied with the results he achieved. He was sensitive and easily wounded. He extolled theosophical values. He was filled with dignity, understood the worth of his creative work, and stood firm in his ethical and humanistic principles. His conviction that a creative individual in essence can never attain a state of completeness was the basis for his self-criticism. He shared the belief of East Asian painters that the human creative process is an iteration of the creative model of the universe, to which only a good and pure individual can aspire. Also, similarly, he subscribed to a poetic view of solitude. "Solitude," he asserts, "is a great teacher and a friend" (Čiurlionis 1973: 50).

According to Čiurlionis's sister, their father spoke to them about his frequent walks in the woods, along streams and lakes, listening to bird calls, observing the habits of animals and fish. His love of nature in all its manifestations, as well as his penchant to wander through the forests of Dzūkija, delighting in their rare beauty, was passed down to all of his children, especially to Konstantinas, the eldest. Nature to Čiurlionis was a real being, just as it was to painters of the East. To him the color green is a symbol of living nature and in his writings the concept of *greenness* arises from the depths of his subconscious. He feels a constant yearning for the embrace and harmony of greenness.

Of all the early paintings of Čiurlionis' period of literary psychological symbolism perhaps the clearest example of an illustration of theosophical ideas is *Regėjimas* (Vision, 1904/5), which was created during a time of intense association with Stabrauskas and whose *iconography, meticulously composed of basic visual motifs and symbols, clearly shows that theosophical teachings were known to this artist*. The motif in this picture – a cross in the shape of the letter T with a snake and a sun – had been widely known since Helena Blavatsky's times as the symbol of the International Theosophical Society.

Another picture created at this time and connected with no less clear theosophical symbols and motifs is *Mintis* (Thought, 1904/5). In this painting in greenish-brown tones, on a large scale, in an abstract metaphysical cosmic space, one unusual for Čiurlionis and stripped of natural features, the generalized figure of a hunched man is depicted. When we look at it more closely, we notice two elements in the picture's visual system that illustrate theosophical ideas: streams of light flowing from the eyes and the light aura of a halo surrounding the head. According to the followers of theosophical doctrine, it is precisely *thought* that, reflecting the spiritual activity of a personality, emanates from the center of the main source of spiritual energy, the head, in the form of rays of different intensities and colors.

Theosophists were convinced, moreover, that energetic thoughts create various visual and sonic forms that, as they spread, employ the greater part of a psychic body's matter and attract to the source of these thoughts much of the *astral* material to which theosophists gave significance. Above the human body, especially the head, this material forms an important suprasensory astral part that is seen and perceived only with a deeper, spiritual, clairvoyant gaze. In theosophical literature, this special part that envelops the human body with an outer ethereal mantle is metaphorically called an "aura." It is, as it were, a colored, round, bright, subtle, ethereal cloudlet above a specific human head and can be seen in the visual system of the picture *Mintis*.

In Čiurlionis' early pictures, we also see another motif typical of theosophical doctrines, one that we first saw in *Ramybė* (Serenity, 1903/4): two sources of light emanating, as it were, from symbolical eyes. Later, this motif also appears in another picture, in soft greenish tones, by Čiurlionis – *Amžinybė* (Eternity, 1906?/7), in which in a starry space of flowing forms there emerges a mysterious face, adorned with a crown and from whose eyes two similar winding streams of light emanate. Here, there also emerges another characteristic feature of the pictures Čiurlionis painted under the influence of theosophy, one especially typical of the ones dealing with cosmic themes: this is a sense of conveying an illusion of boundless, gigantic spaces or, in other words, of immense spatial depth.

Čiurlionis' transition to a qualitatively new stage in his evolution as a painter emerged in 1907, when he was one of the first to open up the possibilities of abstract painting and when in his pictorial fugues and sonatas, after rejecting the many insignificant details typical of his early pictures, he formed a conception of musical sonatalike painting influenced by theosophy. The first *Saulės sonata* (Sonata of the Sun, 1907) that Čiurlionis created was enriched with various theosophical symbols that emphasize both the creative and the destructive power of the sun's energy. Here, we see many suns shining with rays of different sizes, a bird bearing knowledge, tall towers and gates rising to the sky, bridges connecting different worlds, flowers blooming. However, in Čiurlionis' work we see not only the brightness of the yellow sun, exalted by theosophists and symbolizing light, warmth, high intellect, and immortality, but also the black sun painted in *Juodosios saulės pasaka* (The Tale of the Black Sun, 1908/9), which was not only an alchemical symbol but also, in various esoteric doctrines, symbolized secret desires, negative phenomena, dissociation, renunciation, night, and the world of darkness associated with death.

In terms of its greenish-yellow tones, one of Čiurlionis' most mature sonatas, which in the clarity of their style are reminiscent of the works of East Asian masters, the third painting in this series, *Žalčio sonata* (Sonata of the Serpent, 1908), enchants us with its inner tranquility and harmony. In comparison to earlier sonatas, it is more laconic in its symbolic language and means of artistic expression and is not overloaded with insignificant details. Dominant here is one of the most important figures in Eastern and Lithuanian mythology and folklore – the serpent, which symbolizes the path to knowledge, flexibility, vitality, and wisdom. In this picture, alongside the serpent, we see other symbols: mountains, bodies of water, the walls and towers of fortresses, flying birds, creatures reminiscent of butterflies, stars, the Moon, and a crown.

For Čiurlionis, who was interested in the mythology of the world snake (serpent) of the old Mesopotamian civilizations and of the Indians, this symbolic image was most certainly directly related to the archaic, ancient Lithuanian serpent cult, which was still alive in the villages of Dzūkija. Here, this serpent was regarded with reverence not only as a being that stood out for

its amazing vitality and guarded the good fortune and wellbeing of the family hearth but also as the ruler of the Universe who looked after the harmony of the World. In *Žalčio sonata*, enriched with receptive symbols, we see the visual unfolding of these different mythical links.

One of Čiurlionis' most mature series, with its air of surprising harmony and simplicity of color, is the fifth in three parts – *Jūros sonata* (Sonata of the Sea, 1908). For him, the sea and great expanses of water in general symbolized the metaphysical boundlessness of dreams, the sea of life, existence, and the creative process. The first picture in this series, *Allegro*, has an air of dynamism and inner drama; the second, *Andante* – one of tranquility; and the third, *Finale*, is filled with threatening intimations. Here, even in comparison to the laconic *Žalčio sonata*, we see fewer symbols, but they are meticulously thought out and bring together a unified system of artistic images. Alongside the various states of the dominant seascape, in the first picture of this series there emerges the silhouette of a bird flying swiftly above the waves; in the second, there appear on the surface of the water two eyelike, faintly shining sources of light; and at the bottom, held up by a mysterious hand of fate, a ship is slowly sinking. Its direction is clear – toward other ships and cities that have sunk in history. And in the third, *Finale*, which paraphrases the motifs in Hokusai's picture *The Wave*, we see sailboats, tossed about by gigantic waves, that symbolize man's dramatic life. We encounter many theosophical symbols in Čiurlionis' sixth work, *Žvaigždžių sonata* (Sonata of the Stars, 1909), and in his seventh and last one, *Piramidžių sonata* (Sonata of the Pyramids, 1909).

In comparison to these pleasant sonatas and fugues with their subtle colors, there stand out – with a different, usually more contrasting gamut of dramatic, darker colors and often also with a language of menacing artistic symbols and metaphors – Čiurlionis' so-called metaphysical pictures, created during 1908-1909 and closely related to his sonata period: *Angelas. Preliudas* (Angel. Prelude, 1908/9), *Juodosios saulės pasaka* (The Tale of the Black Sun, 1908/9?), *Demonas* (The Demon, 1909), *Tvirtovė* (Fortress, 1909), *Auka* (Offering, 1909), *Aukuras* (The Altar, 1909), *Rojus* (Paradise, 1909), *Rex* (1909), etc. Distinguishing between the two dominant tendencies in Čiurlionis' work – late sonata painting and metaphysical painting – is fairly arbitrary because

these works are connected by similar images, symbols, metaphors, and motifs, but what differ in the latter ones are the often emphatically irrational, mysterious subjects, gloomier moods, and emphatically static compositional decisions.

In many of their typological features, Čiurlionis' metaphysical pictures are close to the works of de Chirico, who at the same time and somewhat later began creating Italian metaphysical paintings that are also dominated by a mysterious, irrational, static atmosphere. Unlike Čiurlionis' above-mentioned fugues and sonatas, which usually comprise series of three or four pictures influenced by mythopoetic thinking, the works by this Lithuanian artist attributed to metaphysical painting are autonomous, and the sequential development of ideas from one picture to another is foreign to them. Here, in comparison to the sonata pictures filled with light and harmony, the gloomy motifs of a pessimistic worldview unfold incomparably more clearly, especially in *Juodosios saulės pasaka* and *Demonas*.

We will begin our analysis of Čiurlionis' metaphysical pictures with the above-mentioned diptych *Preliudas ir fuga* (Prelude and Fugue, 1908), whose system of artistic images and symbols is connected, as it were, with another similar brownish picture attributed to the metaphysical tendency – *Angelas* (*Angelo preliudas*) (Angel [Angel Prelude], 1909). Between them exists the obvious tie of many basic stylistic features; similar, too, is the color choice of these two pictures, but the latter one is dominated by an entirely different atmosphere – one perfused, as it were, with the mystical calm and stasis of frozen time. This atmosphere is emphasized by a mountain rising high in the foreground of the picture – one reminiscent of ancient Mesopotamian cultic buildings or Persian ziggurats and castles and connected, as it were, with unearthly civilizations taken from picturesque descriptions in Flammarion's books, with the many plant forms of an exotic landscape, with graceful bridges connecting the different heights and spaces of the unreal world being depicted. On the very peak of this mountain that is reminiscent of a castle tower, a mysterious winged figure has been placed, like an Eastern sphinx, gazing into distant spaces, symbolizing the hereafter and other relationships between time and space.

Of the other metaphysical pictures, no less obvious traces of a theosophical worldview can be seen in the yellowish-brown picture *Auka* (Offering, 1909). Here, on the edge of a pyramid with stairs leading to the sky, the figure of an exalted angel rises with a face turned skyward and outstretched hands. In this yellowish-brown picture there are two more motifs that are important in theosophical symbolism: a gigantic circle which extends from the hands of the standing angel, who is connecting earth and Heaven, and which bestrides the spaces of the picture and, below the pyramid, at the bottom, two fires that are sources of light and dark forces and whose smoke of different colors is rising into the sky.

Connected with these two pictures in the symbols, metaphors, and other dominant elements of its visual system is *Aukuras* (The Altar, 1909), at the center of which a huge tower rises with several tiers and a level top, symbolizing different stages of spiritual growth. In the contours of its silhouette, this altar is reminiscent of a Sumerian, Babylonian, or other Mesopotamian temple from whose top there rises a winding stream of white smoke. Another picture characteristic of this tradition is *Rojus* (Paradise, 1909), which was inspired by Flammarion's visions and which may be regarded as an illustration of the other unearthly worlds described by this popularizer of astronomy.

Čiurlionis' metaphysical paintings are crowned by *Rex*, which is shot through with large-scale mysterious theosophical symbols and which the artist himself valued as a programmatic work that reflects a summation of his world vision. In this picture, we encounter theosophical symbols that we know well from his earlier works, especially those with a cosmic theme. In the field of activity of various elements of the Universe, alongside a cluster of stars, the Milky Way, comets, the Sun, the Moon, and the Earth, on an altar of burning light, at the center of the picture, there rise the orb of the Earth as if encircled by caring hands and a magnificent figure of the ruler of the Universe sitting on a royal throne.

When discussing Čiurlionis' attraction to esotericism, we also need to remember his attention to numerology and cryptography, which acquired special popularity at the turn of the century, i.e. to various forms of mysterious

and enciphered script that are connected with mystical symbols and that attest to his seeking, playful, and creative mind. As shown by the various signs and symbols that emerge in Čiurlionis' pictorial and musical works, sketches, and notebooks, he believed that numbers are characterized by mystical qualities that influence human life and creativity.

The nature of Čiurlionis' brilliance, his hard road to recognition, and his outstanding artistic achievements cannot be explained by any one specific factor: his exceptional innate abilities, his power of imagination, his creative passion, or, at the mature stage of his sonata painting, his perfect mastery of the technical means of artistic expression. In the history of art, a genius's influence on his surroundings is primarily determined by the scale of his personality, his universality, the totality of his creative potential, his multifaceted education, his assimilation of the cultural traditions of the past, and his ability, despite the many challenges, misfortunes, and trials of life, to consistently pursue an undertaken creative goal. People of exceptional talent are incomparably more numerous than the ones who succeed in developing their innate abilities to the highest level of genius.

This genius influenced by theosophy placed great demands on himself, was constantly afire with new plans, sought perfection in various fields of creative activity, and was not satisfied with his achievements. For him, it was more important to come up with a new idea and grasp its nature than to pursue it in practice. This fact explains *the incompleteness of many of his artistic, musical, and literary works – what we may regard as a conscious attitude because in an unspoken aesthetic hint he saw the beginning of everything, the powerful potency of being*. Moreover, Čiurlionis was the classical type of the introvert devoted to art (in this respect, he is very reminiscent of those East Asian adepts of the “way of art” who avoided titles and the outward forms of being and devoted themselves to creating art, to contemplating nature and giving it meaning). The creation of art was, for him, the highest value. Also close to Čiurlionis was the Romantic theory of artists' special mission in the world, as attested by his *credo*: “Drabness, shabby prose will never invade our Home.... Our entire Life will be consumed on the altar of Eternal, Infinite, Omnipotent Art” (Čiurlionis 1960: 238).

When we penetrate into the deepest sources of inspiration that nurtured Čiurlionis' world of symbols and metaphors and influenced his creative style, we often get the impression that far more important for this artist was *the process itself of creative quest and discovery than the result*. In this way, we can also most assuredly explain another important feature of Čiurlionis' *innovativeness and incredibly rapid creative evolution* – one that is most clearly seen in the development of symbolical language in his fine art. In six years, after starting with epigonic early paintings created under the influence of literary psychological symbolism, he was able to unfold – unbelievably rapidly, innovatively – in the fields of Poetic Surrealism, Abstractionism, Metaphysical Painting, *Art Deco*, *Jugend*, and other styles.

Thus, Čiurlionis was a universalist in many of the senses of this word: in the many facets of his life impressions, of his receptiveness to influences, of his intellectual goals, and of the forms of his creativity and in his unwillingness to limit himself to one artistic genre, conceptualized scheme, method, or school. Like a liana, he wound himself around the great Tree of Knowledge and sought to convey various forms of creative self-expression. He was not satisfied with what he had achieved and constantly searched, boldly negating what he had done the day before. His innovative work ignored its limitations and was directly connected with the classical modernism that appeared later on. Before Schönberg, Kandinsky, Klee, and other leading figures in modern art, Čiurlionis revealed the possibilities of serial musical composition, abstract art, poetic surrealism, and metaphysical painting in representational art. Thanks to his unique talent, this Lithuanian artist not only succeeded in identifying new trends in art but was also far ahead of his time in creating his own style of painting and music and in delineating new perspectives for art and music – perspectives that were then only beginning to emerge but later became an inseparable part of modernist consciousness.

Moreover, Čiurlionis' universalism, despite his contact with the above-mentioned movements, did not objectively conform to the tendency of modern art to split up into various schools. For this reason, he ignored the limitations of individual movements, methods, and principles in art and rose

above them; he did not want to adopt what others had sloughed off, for that is not the way of a universalist and genius, but of mediocrities and epigones. He sought to overcome the narrow restrictions that limit one's personality and its spontaneous creative flights.

And finally, his work was greatly influenced by a tendency, contrary to the international style of modernism, to ally himself with the traditions of Lithuanian folk art. And this happened naturally, because of Čiurlionis' close ties with the landscape in which he had lived since childhood and with the psychoethnic characteristics of the Lithuanians, of their mentality and folklore, which acquired a modern form in his music and art.

Hidden Charm of the Orient

A genuine recognition of Čiurlionis' art, is impossible without researching the mythological symbolism, art aesthetics, and artistic traditions of the great Eastern civilisations. Therefore, this concise study based on the principles of comparative methodology discusses the connections between the paintings of all three main stages of the artist's pictorial evolution and the different art traditions of Eastern countries. The main focus will be on the comparative analysis of Čiurlionis' sonata painting phase and East Asian traditional painting, prioritising the famous landscape painting. During the research, similarities and differences in solving the problems of his worldview, thinking, perspective, compositional, artistic space, artistic time, plastic, colour and colour palette will be highlighted. Based on the iconographic and stylistic analysis of Čiurlionis' aesthetic views and his paintings, the argument still continues that significant impact on the formation of a mature musical painting style of the sonata period and in solving the problems of the interaction of painting and musical language was acquired by his acquaintance with the traditions of East Asian painting, which helped the artist to create a unique style of "musical painting".

Probably, Čiurlionis' unique intuition and insight can explain his ability through his knowledge and study of the compositional, spatial, and linear

structures in Japanese classical engravings to reveal the achievements of much more sophisticated Chinese landscape painting and use them creatively in magnificent works of his late sonata period. In this respect, Čiurlionis, along with P. Klee, was one of the first representatives of the Western art tradition not only to realise the unique aesthetic value of Chinese landscape painting but also to use its principles to implement his “musical painting” idea creatively.

Čiurlionis was a personality of universal interest who was surprisingly receptive to various ideas and innovations, whose volatile imagination and cultivated intuition quickly “captured” aesthetic, artistic achievements, and socially relevant ideas of civilised Eastern worlds that were invisible to others. We cannot find many other great masters of the art *who are so open to various layers of the culture of Eastern civilisations and, at the same time, have not grown so profoundly from the colours and intonations of folk songs of their rain-washed Lithuanian landscape*. It is no coincidence that he has become a particular symbol of Lithuanian identity for artists of later generations, an unattainable ideal on which Lithuanian artists of later generations will constantly focus.

Some studies by Viacheslav Ivanov, Valerian Čiudovsky, and Ichiro Kato dedicated to Čiurlionis’ work ascertain the connections of the Lithuanian artist’s work with the art traditions of various Eastern nations, list the symbols and iconographic elements of his paintings borrowed from Egypt, Mesopotamian, Indian, Japanese civilised worlds often without a more thorough comparative analysis of formal means of artistic expression and stylistic features. In fact, it is usually a general reflection of the undoubted influence of images from the Middle Eastern, Indian, biblical and, for example, Hokusai or other Japanese woodblock carvings. However, only Aleksis Rannit and Antanas Andrijauskas’ texts address the more critical problem of the relationship between Čiurlionis and the great traditions of Chinese landscape painting, which has been outside academic art research for a long time.

In Čiurlionis’ letters, paintings and testimonies of his contemporaries, we find many allusions to different worlds of Eastern and other non-European civilisations. There is nothing remarkable here because Orientalism and Weltanschauung universalism were integral to his worldview and strongly

influenced aesthetic, artistic tastes, and creativity. His closest friends and family members testified for Čiurlionis' attention to the traditions of religion, philosophy and art of non-European nations, his immersion in theosophical visions of cosmic universalism, and his passion for the ideas of Orientalism. Józef Markiewicz, the artist's friend, points out that after returning from Leipzig, Čiurlionis read a lot and that "one area emerged from this flow of reading – Persian, Egyptian, and finally Indian philosophy". Jan Brzeziński, the other friend from his studies at the Warsaw School of Art, stated that "Čiurlionis was particularly interested in the world of Indian and Egyptian philosophy". The friend was also supported by the artist's brother Stasys Čiurlionis, who, speaking about Orientalist influences, noted that "he began to study the religious works of ancient Indian philosophy in this field, read the works of Nal and Damayanti, Ramayana, the legend of Krishna, and later Rabindranath Tagore".

At the beginning of his path to painting, in the period of "literary-psychological symbolism", in search of the uniqueness of the style in artistic expression, Čiurlionis did not stay away from neo-romantic (symbolist) orientalism, in which symbolic pictorial, mythological and religious motifs and iconographic elements inherited from the civilisations of the Middle East and India prevailed. Religion cultivated in a family environment associated him with the Hebrew Old Testament, and consequently, the Christian biblical tradition emerged out of this. Traces of the Hebrew and Christian cultural influence can be seen in the stained-glass triptych *Yahuwah and Moses* [*Jahova ir Mozė*] sketches, in the paintings the *Flood* [*Deluge*], *Christ* [*Kristus*], *Joseph's dream* [*Juozapo sapnas*] and others.

Traces of the influence of Middle Eastern art, especially of the architectural forms of the Mesopotamian region and Egypt, can be seen in all the main stages of Čiurlionis' creative evolution, even in the paintings of the late sonata period and the paintings of the metaphysical period closely related to sonata period. The most striking examples of the influence of the architectural forms of the Mesopotamian civilisational space are the paintings *Sacrifice* [*Auka*] (1909) and the *Altar* (1909) [*Aukuras*], which in their colossal architectural forms resemble the impressive Sumerian

pyramidal sacral ziggurats temples with places for religious rituals and sacrifices.

Čiurlionis' last seventh pictorial sonata, the *Pyramid Sonata* [*Piramidžių sonata*], differs from the paintings *Sacrifice* [*Auka*], the *Altar* [*Aukuras*] and other related drawings by its characteristic stylistic features, and which in comparison with these paintings, stands out with its unique musicality of artistic forms, warm colour palette and harmony of plastic forms. This cycle of paintings elevating the beauty of the Egyptian pyramids under the bright Egyptian sun crowns the artist's famous pictorial sonatas, which stand out with their unique musicality of interactions among plastic forms and breathe a sense of cosmic harmony.

Čiurlionis' deepening acquaintance with the perspective, compositional, and spatial principles of unusual Japanese painting aesthetics served as a *fundamental shift from the literary characteristics of early paintings of the literary, psychological symbolism period to search for the problem-solution of qualitatively new soft painting typical to the second stage of experimentation*. Furthermore, the growing influence of the *Japanese* and closely related *Chinese* art traditions also explains Čiurlionis' new approach to the beauty of ever-changing nature and its interpretation of the themes of its seasonal metamorphoses.

When discussing the impact of other Orientalist influences emanating from East Asia on Čiurlionis, it is impossible to bypass the wave of admiration of Japanese art and crafts in the West in the late 19th century, called Japonisme, which has left a deep incision in the history of Western art, constantly finding itself under some modernisation. The effects of Japonisme are noticed in the artworks of Monet, Whistler, Klimt, and many others painting in Impressionism, Postimpressionism, Symbolism, Secession, *Art Nouveau*, and various other modernist genres.

In search of his distinctive style of artistic expression, Čiurlionis could not stay away from the Japonisme influence, which became widespread in Europe at the beginning of the century. From the 20th-century Polish cultural and art publications, we learn about the exhibitions of Japanese woodblock printing taking place in Warsaw at the same time as Čiurlionis' studies. The

first reliable and clearly documented testimony of acquaintance with Japanese art in Čiurlionis' letters can be found from his trips to the cultural centres of Western and Central Europe in 1906. In a letter dated September 1, 1906, sent from Prague to his patron and close friend, Ms Bronislawia Wolman, the artist mentions Japanese 'panneaux', vestments and fabrics, referring to works seen in the city's museums. This allusion to the Japanese 'panneaux' is vital in explaining the uniqueness of the experienced influences, as the most popular genre of ink and full-colour ink Japanese screen painting was the landscape painting.

Deepening acquaintance with the spiritually close tradition of Japanese painting, which elevates the beauty of the changing nature, affected Čiurlionis' manner of painting, the means of his artistic expression and the innovative spatial, compositional, plastic and colour treatment of symbols and motifs gradually working their way into his canvases. Therefore, in 1906 returning from a study trip to the cultural and artistic centres of Central Europe, Čiurlionis became less and less interested in the Middle East and Indian art traditions, and more so in East Asia.

Then, starting with the paintings *Butterflies* [*Drugiai*], the cycle *Daybreak* [*Rytmetis*] and *Flowers* [*Gėlės*], new tendencies of colour temperance and decorativeness in the treatment of the central motifs of the natural world, which were related to the stylistics and concept of Japanese art, emerge. Another important factor that testifies the growing influence of the East Asian tradition of coloured ink painting during the mentioned period was *the transition from the previous fragile pastel technique to a more stable and transparent tempera technique* that reminds Chinese and Japanese coloured ink paintings.

Since 1906 under the influence of Japanese painting, changes in Čiurlionis' painting style became visible and developed in several main directions. They were associated with fundamental changes in colour and colour palette, the growth of the influence of spontaneous creative tendencies, the abstraction of plastic language, and the gradual establishment of new compositional and spatial solutions. When searching for an individual painting style, Čiurlionis'

paintings gradually departed from the material and naturalistic treatment of the painted motifs and the sharp, bright colours prevailing at the literary and psychological symbolism stage.

The diptych *Daybreak* [*Rytmetis*] and *Sadness* [*Liūdesys*], as well as two different variants of the painting *Silence* [*Tyla*], created in 1907 and 1908, in which the unfilled empty spaces typical of East Asian paintings acquire a unique power of emotional impact on the perceiver, can be considered as almost chrestomathic examples of the strengthening of new painting tendencies influenced by Japonisme. In their temperance, colour culture, soft drawing, the emotional impact of unfilled spaces, and minimalist means of artistic expression, these paintings remind the landscapes by Japanese painting masters under the Zen aesthetics influence.

During the transition from the second stage of the search for formal means of artistic expression to the sonata painting style, the most popular scenes in Čiurlionis' paintings were the change of seasons in the Japanese and Chinese painting traditions and various images of the natural world, mostly vegetation, trees, floral motifs, ornamental birds and butterflies. Various motifs in the interpretation of the natural world characteristic of Japanese art appeared in his paintings: reflections of ornamental plants, flowers, birds, mountains, deep gorges, streams of water, and images of different parts of nature on a level like a mirror surface.

Manifestations of the spread of these Japanese tendencies can be seen in the works *Flowers* [*Gėlės*], in two paintings with the same name *Etude* [*Etiudas*], *Spring* [*Pavasaris*], *Summer* [*Vasara*] and other works. Here, Čiurlionis, like Chinese and Japanese artists, seeks to convey the inner "flight of the spirit", its resonance colliding with amazing demonstrations of the beauty of the natural world. Adopting the integrity of the visual system, the decorativeness of the details, the freedom of the spontaneous manner of painting, the empty spaces and the natural flow of paint, which are characteristic of the Japanese art tradition, he painted sonata cycles full of vibrant rhythms and exaltation, vibrating with their own energy and musicality, for example, the triptych *Summer* [*Vasara*] (1907) that paved the way for his famous pictorial sonatas.

The individual paintings of the mentioned period with their emotionality are close to the manners of Japanese landscape painting masters Tenshō Shūbun, Sesshū Tōyō and Sesson Shūkei and the masters of Rinpa Painting School like Hon'ami Kōetsu, Tawaraya Sōtatsu, their colour scheme and occurring motifs.

The growth of the influence of Japanese pictorial aesthetics in the sonata period is definitely confirmed by the reinterpretation of the dominant motif of Katsushika Hokusai's painting *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (*The Great Wave*) from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* in the final part of the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonatos*] – the *Finale*. It shows that Čiurlionis valued more the moderate colour palette, the sophistication of form, the faint tones, the mastery of plastic expressions musical effect of the Chinese and Japanese landscape painting traditions than the sharpness of the drawing and the intensity of the colours, which are characteristic of *ukiyo-e* woodblock printing.

Comparing Hokusai's *Wave* and Čiurlionis' *Finale* from the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*], it stands out that the Lithuanian artist is more poetic and lyrical but, at the same time, gives a more dramatic interpretation of the chosen story, which conveys the spirit of musicality. Hokusai, who adored the Japanese landscape painter coryphaeus Sesshū's paintings, guided by Confucius's statement that a man of wisdom delights in water as water reveals the change, felt a special attraction to the depiction of water elements and their association with intense blue colour when the various shades of green were spiritually closer to Čiurlionis.

In our eyes, the direct contact with the unique tradition of Japanese art has become to Čiurlionis like a key, opening the door to a qualitatively new painting style of his mature sonata period. Having seen the works of Japanese artists, he was able to observe here the profound layers of the majestic aesthetics of Chinese landscape paintings, which were associated with the most refined achievements in painting in the world.

The deepening influence of Chinese landscape painting in the sonata period first helped Čiurlionis to understand the problems of perspective, composition, artistic space, artistic time, plastic language, art interaction,

colour and colour palette culture. But, on the other hand, it assisted him in breaking away from the naturalism, ballast of materiality, and literariness characteristic of the previous stage of literary and psychological symbolism to realise the possibilities of new spatial solutions, subtle lines, calligraphic drawing, musical rhythmic and arabesque structures, and artistic expression of empty space.

Susceptible to beauty and having seen the works of East Asian artists full of intoxicating spaces and unspeakable poetics, Čiurlionis had to understand the spiritual kinship and the potential possibilities of artistic expression in these paintings to realise the closer interaction of painting and music. Unlike many of his predecessors and contemporaries, whose Orientalist attitudes focused on the externally effective aspects of East Asian art, Čiurlionis looked deeper and sought to make creative use of the perspective, compositional, rhythmic, and plastic possibilities of artistic expression.

The only one of the previous generations of Čiurlionis' researchers, in whose works we find argumentative allusions to artist's connections with traditional Chinese landscape painting, was Rannit, who, in search of connections between the Lithuanian artist and Chinese painting, appealed to the thoughts expressed by the masters of Daoist aesthetics and great Chinese landscape painting and to the "spiritual harmony" with the creative energies of the Universe characteristic of both Lithuanian artists and Chinese painters.

Rannit also rightly pointed out the similarity of the principles of the perspective used in the Chinese landscape painting in the landscapes of the *Song* epoch leading artist Li Cheng to the ones we see in Čiurlionis' *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*]. There is a grain of truth in the fragmented but undeveloped insight of the latter. Perspective solutions characterise Li Cheng's spectacular landscapes, an educated sense of composition, laconic nature of the means of artistic expression and the compelling juxtaposition of empty spaces, asymmetrical compositions, different spatial planes, the use of the possibilities of artistic expression that are close to the paintings of Čiurlionis' sonata period. Like Čiurlionis, he is familiar with asymmetrical musical composing principles of different planes and the motifs of the visual system of the main paintings and their accompanying details.

How these stylistic features found their way into the paintings of the Lithuanian artist and remained strong is still a mystery. Perhaps these fundamental principles of the aesthetics of East Asian painting were established after the perception of the paintings of the Japanese landscape masters, which he indeed saw and where earlier mentioned principles of classical Chinese landscape painting unfolded. Consequently, considering these problems, *we cannot rule out Čiurlionis' journey into the perception of the basic stylistic features of the older Chinese landscape tradition via the bypass of Japanese art.*

In the absence of reliable documented sources, sometimes it is difficult to say precisely which of the Chinese or Japanese landscape painters was the main source of inspiration for one or another of Čiurlionis' paintings that influenced such compositional, colour scheme, and plastic decisions close to East Asian art. The interpretation of the last part of the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*] – *Finale* (1908) is a more straightforward task as it shows absolutely obvious insinuations of the Hokusai painting. However, when the focus shifts to the *Allegro* (1908) of *Summer Sonata* [*Vasaros sonata*] and other sonata period paintings, this task becomes much more difficult, as similar motifs were painted by Chinese painters Xia Gui, Ma Yuan, Japanese Sesshū, Hokusai, Hiroshige, and many other representatives of influential Chinese schools like *wenrenhua*, Japanese *Sumi-e*, *bunjinga* (*nanga*), *ukiyo-e*, *Tosa*.

The painting *Summer Sonatas. Allegro* (1908) confirms the undoubted influence of the aesthetics of East Asian landscape painting, created under the influence of the Orientalism aesthetics and which background depicts a typical East Asian landscape, and so far, it has not been discussed in detail by any art critic. The silhouettes of steep mountains and towers are in its foreground, and islands and floating junk boats scattered across the water are in the background. Boats or tiny fishing boats on the vast stretch of water were a favourite motif of the Daoist, Chan and Zen aesthetic ideals of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, symbolising a break away from the commotion of society and escape to the refuge of nature.

In this picture, we see the motifs of many other mountains, footbridges over the gorges painted in their nonconformist outsider spirit close to the famous

Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen landscape painting traditions that have existed for many centuries. In their paintings, these masters loved to depict small figures of wanderers appearing on the mountain ranges and deep gorges of the natural world or small fishing boats surfacing in vast expanses of water, creating a unique atmosphere of mysterious silence, inner accumulation, which is close to many of the best works of the sonata and metaphysical period of the late Čiurlionis. Here Orientalism organically intertwines with the esoteric elements of theosophy, as evidenced by the *Summer Sonatas* [*Vasaros sonata*]. The pyramid-shaped altars depicted at the bottom of the *Allegro* are emblazoned with esoteric signs, between which the initials of the artist MKČ can be spotted at the bottom of the right-hand side altar. Currently, a delicate colour palette of the *Summer Sonata. Allegro* [*Vasaros sonata. Alegro*] painting has considerably faded compared to its older, previously published reproductions, so the many motifs of landscape painting full of its symbolic meanings are not always clearly visible. The painting is distinguished by a perspective solution, typical of East Asian landscape painting, the landscape from the bird's eye view, a play of different spatial planes, soft yellowish-green colour and a sensitive graphic drawing. *Summer sonatas. Allegro*, as discussed earlier, the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*], inspired by Hokusai's *The Great Wave*, is signed with the artist's initials MKČ. Even the signature ideogram is stylised according to the stylistics of hieroglyphic characters, and it is signed precisely in the usual place for Chinese and Japanese artists. Is this a coincidence?

I can emphasise that these are the ONLY two paintings signed by Čiurlionis, which show clear quotations from East Asian art, and eloquently speak of new, significant aesthetic orientalist landmarks in the sonata period. Moreover, the fact that he puts his signatures on only two works clearly testifies to the fact that he considered the turn of his painting style toward the direction of understanding the traditions of East Asian art to be extremely important for his creative evolution.

Of all the Eastern aesthetics and art areas, the Chinese Chan and a closely related Zen landscape painting tradition were the closest to Čiurlionis in their intimate exaltation of natural beauty, emotionality,

delicate psychologism, meditative nature, high colour palette culture and conciseness of artistic style. As the masters of landscape painting in Chan and Zen, the Lithuanian artist *considered the landscape a natural all-encompassing system closely related to the structure of space and the natural world.*

The reflection of the diversity of the natural world's forms of beauty was one of the most striking features connecting Čiurlionis with the Chan landscape painting tradition. From the outset, its proponents have paid particular attention to the genre of landscapes that elevates the charm of nature, which they associate with the practical implementation of ideas that heighten spiritual values. Wang Wei, an influential creator and painter of Chan landscape painting, said that “the artist must first follow the idea (Yi) when painting a landscape”.

Čiurlionis was close not only to the attitudes of “painting the ideas” but also to the meditative approach of Chan artists to the painting as a particular prayer, a deep suggestive concentration and the spontaneous release of inner spiritual attitudes. It was also related to the artist's interpretation as a thinker delving into the essence of the processes of existence and the natural world inherent to the Chan tradition. The meditative approach and the poetisation of loneliness brought Čiurlionis closer to the artists who professed the aesthetic ideals of Chan and Zen. According to him, “solitude is a great teacher and companion”. In the aesthetics of Taoist, Chan, and Zen paintings, solitude has been associated with the ascetic way of life chosen by a true artist and philosopher, the refuge of nature, which is treated as the most favourable spiritual environment for the creator to give birth to new meaningful ideas and works of art.

The first reliable allusions to the tradition of Taoism, Chan and Zen aesthetics and art are found in the *Drawings of Men and Mountains* [Vyrų ir kalnų piešiniai] painted by Čiurlionis in 1905, depicting motifs very reminiscent of Laozi, the inspirers of the abovementioned trends, and various patriarchs of Chan Buddhism. In the right corner of the drawing, there are motifs of mountainous woody areas that are characteristic of East Asian landscapes

directly related to the calls by Taoist, Chan, and Zen ideologues for creators to flee from outer life to the refuge of natural creativity to foster creativity.

Later, in the paintings of the Lithuanian artist's sonata period, many elegant moods, melancholic motifs, and previously unusual empty spaces appear, which are close to the painting of the Chan landscape. In Čiurlionis' diptych *Daybreak* [*Rytmetis*], *Silence* [*Tyla*], the *Winter Motif* [*Žiemos motyvas*], born of the perception of natural beauty, an exclusive role is put on the empty, unfilled areas emphasised in the aesthetics of Chan, which is often, but not always, the central segment of the pictorial system. In the aesthetics of the emphasis on emptiness characteristic of the Chan tradition, Čiurlionis, following the paths drawn by the Chinese landscape painters Liang Kai, Ma Yuan, and Mu Qi, develops unique compositional schemes of natural washed-out forms in which emptiness sensitively interacts with other natural world motifs depicted in the paintings.

Čiurlionis can be closely associated with the masters of *Southern Song Landscape Painting*, especially with the paintings of a prominent painter Ma Yuan through the principles of composition, the emotional impact of empty spaces and delicate colour balance. The empty space in the painting acquires the aforementioned symbolic meaning in the aesthetics of the landscape and becomes an important starting point for the compositional system created in the painting. Similar functions can be performed by analogues of emptiness in poetry, music, and theatrical process, where silence and pause are linked to the powerful potential of existence.

Unlike in Western art, in the paintings of Čiurlionis' sonata period, as in Chan's landscape paintings, the horizon line usually was stretched unusually high, so the panoramic view of the world was presented from a bird's eye view. Therefore, in the vast expanses of wide horizons that open up to the gaze down below in Čiurlionis' paintings, as well as the great Chinese landscape painters of the *Song* and *Yuan* epochs, spectacular panoramas of mountains, rivers, forests and deep gorges spread in front of the perceiver's eyes.

The Lithuanian painter is also associated with a refined tradition of landscape painting, a desire to depict cosmic nebulae, morning haze and various mists,

which, like Chinese landscape painters, allowed him to highlight different planes for painting nature, to remove strict boundaries between reality and volatile imagination and the worlds of fantasy-created unreal visions.

In the sonata period paintings of the Lithuanian artist, when the bright colours disappeared, and the restrained lighting soon prevailed, as if the light was shining through the fog or haze, the unfilled areas, full of symbolic meaning, and the development of themes in a subtle range of several restrained tones appear. These stylistic and plastic language shifts that prepare the harmony of his famous sonata paintings can be seen in the laconic *Winter Motif* [*Žiemos motyvas*], enchanting the delicate colour balance and playful drawing of fragile trees and in other paintings of a similar minimalist style.

Regarding the Lithuanian artist's connections with the aesthetics of Chan's painting, it is worth remembering not just Čiurlionis' desire for the restrained beauty of muted colours but also the aesthetic value of ascetic naturalness and inadequacy. The sonata paintings of the Lithuanian artist are dominated by the search for great poetics of the ordinary. It is directly related to another characteristic feature of his pictorial aesthetics: the search for the essence of the underlying phenomena hidden under the outer layer of visibility. This longing for depth, certainty, and the desire to break out of the canonisation of external creation promoted Čiurlionis' tendency to unexpected perspective decisions, asymmetrical compositions, improvisational forms of creativity, and playfulness.

Čiurlionis, like the painters of the Chan and Zen tradition, is also characterised by a focus *on the simplest and the most minimal means of artistic expression made available to the artist*, distancing himself from the external brilliance and richness of forms. Supporters of the concise and ascetic artistic style, Chan and Zen artists, are represented by unfilled spaces, a beauty of simplicity, and aristocracy. The ordinary objects, materials they are made of, and textures show the exceptional beauty of the aesthetic value of naturalness. Therefore, the artist does not have the opportunity to disguise his thoughts under any external things in the creative process but must expose the true power of his talent.

Thus, on the way to the mature sonata period of Čiurlionis' pictorial evolution, the influence of East Asian art traditions became more and more diverse. The motifs typical of Chinese and Japanese landscape paintings gradually penetrated Čiurlionis' paintings: steep mountains like towers, graceful high wooden bridges, smooth mirror-like water surfaces, boats, nets, magnified trees bent under the storm with expressive branches, and a lot of other images typical to screen or room dividers' painting like mountains, rocks, gorges, rivers, water streams, trees, bushes, flowers, flying stylised birds, dragonflies, butterflies. Čiurlionis, who had a sense of authentic art and developed intuition in the sophisticated East Asian painting tradition enhancing the beauty of untouched nature, saw the ideas and means of artistic expression that helped him implement the long-matured idea of the "musical painting".

So, the Lithuanian artist has many similar features to Chan's tradition of landscape painting, first of all, ecstatic love for nature, its seasonal changes, meditative creativity, seriousness, poetics of muted beauty, ascetic grandeur, elegance, emphatic restraint in the search for the beauty of a mysterious alien exterior. As the tradition of Chan art, his paintings are also characterised by the avoidance of symmetry, balance, and straightforward repetition. Asymmetrical composition and active emphasis on an aesthetic hint in Chan's aesthetics are considered signs of good taste. The artists of the Chan tradition remind the perceiver that *there is another profound inexpressible essence beyond the sight that can only be gradually approached*. Landscape painting affected by such aesthetic ideals has a philosophical implication. Therefore, artists seek *to involve the perceiver of their works in the creative process itself, to help him recreate what is thought, felt, but not shown*. The Chan art tradition's other main stylistic features are serenity, naturalness, conciseness of style, abandonment of form sophistication, close connection with poetry, calligraphy, love for asymmetry, drastic manner of stroke, and pale colour spots, and *dramatic, often breaking lines and virtuosity*.

One of the most exclusive features of Čiurlionis' mature painting, which brings him closer to the tradition of Chinese landscape painting, was related to Wang Wei's invitation to painters *to follow the idea* in the process of artistic

creation. Such attitude was not foreign to Čiurlionis, as the desire to “paint an idea” had evolved and spread in the earlier stages of his pictorial evolution. It is evidenced by the book cover project *Thought* [*Mintis*] in paintings *Danger* [*Pavojus*], *Thought* [*Mintis*], *Truth* [*Tiesa*], *Friendship* [*Bičiulystė*], *Sadness* [*Liūdesys*], and others.

Like the Chinese painters, Čiurlionis *did not paint a true reality but an ideal reality born of subjective visions of conscious, subconscious, and volatile imagination*. In his works, he, like the Chinese painters, unlike the representatives of the Western landscape, gave an unconditional preference not to the urban world but to the exaltation of the beauty and harmony of the primordial natural world untouched by human hands.

In landscapes, Čiurlionis, like Chinese and Japanese scroll painters, often used moving focus, preferred asymmetrical composition, and often avoided symmetry (although there are symmetrically composed paintings too) and precise compositional axes. The paintings of the Lithuanian artist are related to the East Asian landscape paintings by using the bird's eye view and a desire to convey the impression of vast spaces. It appears in the cycles *Zodiac* [*Zodiakas*], *Spring* [*Pavasaris*], triptych *Raigard* [*Raigardas*] and the first two paintings of the *Summer Sonata* [*Vasaros sonata*] – *Allegro* and *Andante*. In these compositions conveying the infinity of spaces, the relationships between different spatial planes are essential, which gives a special persuasiveness to the depicted elements of the landscape. The emphasis on the vertical upward stretching lines not only emphasises the priority of spiritual origin in theosophy and the philosophy of the peoples of the East over the material beginning but also conveys the idea of orientation to the Absolute.

The painting cycles of the sonata period can also be characterised by employing a flexible, visionary angle, allowing the preceptor to roam freely in the visible landscapes and move over hills, forests, roads, and paths. This basic principle of landscape painting, closely related to the presentation of the image from the bird's eye view, is no less pronounced in Čiurlionis' cycles than in the East Asian landscape painting, where majestic overgrown mountains carved with gorges, rivers and streams are depicted. Although the flat smooth,

horizontal Lithuanian landscape levels the depiction of the world from a mobile viewing angle from the heights of a bird's eye view, in the paintings, the *Hymn* [*Himnas*], *City* [*Miestas*], *Angel. Prelude* [*Angelo Preliudas*], *Sonata of the Pyramids. Allegro* [*Piramidžių sonata, Allegro*], the *Altar* [*Aukuras*], the artist removes the limitations of space created by the frames of the paintings; therefore, the paths of the perceived imagination stray further beyond the landscape space defined by the frames of paintings.

In Čiurlionis' paintings, like in East Asian landscape paintings, the problem of conveying the illusion of the depths of space and its infinity, which was first addressed by the great Chinese masters of landscape painting, becomes especially important. *Jin* dynasty era landscape painters Zhong Bing and Wang Wei first marked and later his namesake, *Tang* era painting coryphaeus Wang Wei established new principles of spatial perspective and achieved much to create the illusion of the depths of space. Together, they outlined the later tradition of painting landscape in Chan and Zen, expressed by the idea of wandering in the space of a painting, with the illusion of infinite space extending beyond the frame of that particular painting.

Characterised by the versatility of artistic self-expression and rich experience in musical creation, Čiurlionis, like the great masters of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting (Ma Yuan, Sesshū), sought to connect the pictorial and symbol systems of painting to the natural rhythms of nature. Therefore, in Čiurlionis' cycle paintings of the sonata period, the visual structures consistently unfold not only in the panoramic space but also in a time when the gaze moves in a horizontal scroll of the landscape.

The dissemination of the central motifs here is constructed on the basis of the main principles of the dynamic dramaturgy of contemporary arts. The only difference is the direction of the development of motifs – in Chinese and Japanese landscape paintings, the visual structures of the work roll from right to left, and in Čiurlionis' paintings is the opposite. In both cases, however, the perceptual process relates to the fact that *the field of perception of a part or fragment of the cycle is limited only to a certain space and time covered by the gaze and the meditative process of perception.*

In Čiurlionis' paintings, like in his works of music and literature, we encounter various, sometimes complex, compositional solutions to enhance the effect of musicality when more playfully interacting climactic moments emerge. An eloquent example of such musical dramaturgy is *Sonata of the Grass Snake* [*Žalčio sonata*], with its characteristic change of static and dynamic vertical and horizontal linear structures over the passing time. In the specific paintings of the discussed cycle, the diffusion of artistic visual systems in *Allegro*, *Andante*, *Scherzo*, and *Finale* takes the form of an intensifying, soothing, but obviously undulating *drama* of time with an intense energy charge.

Consistent exposition of the main themes and leitmotifs in the various paintings of the cycle enables the perceiver of the art to prepare psychologically and be able to "read" the work as a whole, unfolding in the passing time, evaluate aesthetic qualities, symbolic meanings, unexpected twists of thought, the entrance of new motifs and expert plastic solutions.

This temporal principle of musical composition (since the importance of plot in the mature works of Čiurlionis of the sonata period fades away compared to the early paintings of the literary, psychological symbolism period) gives the artist an opportunity seamlessly involve the perceiver in the process of understanding art. Using various accelerations and decelerations of the rhythm, depending on the persuasiveness of the depicted motifs, the significance of the development of the main themes and leitmotifs, and the accumulation or easing of their effects, he reveals to the perceiver the most secretive spirits and invites him to a dialogue with the artist's thoughts, moods, emotional experiences. Empowering the temporal dynamic process of diffusion of the image systems in the cycles of the sonata period, Čiurlionis presents a coherent sequence of development of musical themes and motifs, requiring the perceiver to experience a dynamic process through various intermediate tempo development phases starting from the beginning, development, culmination to the end.

Čiurlionis successfully realised his aspirations to create a "musical painting" when he found an adequate graphic-plastic form corresponding to the specifics of the plot or idea. Mature Čiurlionis did not give in to the superficial

charm of colour. Like the East Asian masters of landscape painting, he rolled out his ideas extensively using the possibilities of perspective, composition, creative space, artistic time, the subtle tones of symbolic language, and the artistic expression of halftones. Due to the influence of East Asian painting aesthetics, Čiurlionis' sonata painting in Orientalism in the first half of the 20th century stood out with the special sophistication of the art form, its musicality, and the sensitive relationship between colours and forms. In this respect, the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*] is undoubtedly one of the perfect examples of the interaction between painting and music in the history of the world's art.

Thus, in his search for a unique style of artistic expression, Čiurlionis did not stay away from the various manifestations of Orientalism that had spread in the West, starting with the biblical tradition, Egyptomania, Indomania, Japonisme, and ending with the elements of magnificent Chinese landscape painting. According to the comparative analysis, it strongly influenced the development of Čiurlionis' artistic style, which changed significantly during the three main stages of creative evolution, constantly including new segments of Eastern, esoteric doctrines and artistic traditions. In the first stage of the psychological literary symbolism of creative evolution, the Lithuanian artist experienced the influence of the images of the civilised worlds of the Middle East. In the second stage of the search for new means of artistic expression, after the farewell to symbolic naturalism, Čiurlionis immersed himself in complex compositional and formal plastic solutions influenced by the tradition of landscape painting, which was directly related to the increasingly significant influence of Japonisme.

In the third already mature sonata period, the formation of Čiurlionis' musical painting style was greatly influenced by the acquaintance with the painting of the landscape influenced by the East Asian Chan aesthetic ideals. Few stylistic features of the earlier sonata period remain from earlier manifestations of Orientalism, as the refined tradition of East Asian landscape painting style gradually establishes a new approach to perspective, composition, principles of change of rhythmic structures, colour palette culture, arabesque forms,

sensitive graphic drawing and other formal features of the musical, artistic style.

Čiurlionis is connected with the East Asian landscape painting tradition by *pantheism, cosmo-universalism, meditateness, a tendency to philosophy, the interaction of art, the poetics of simplicity and the symbolic nature of painting*, the focus on ever-changing beauty, attraction to the relationship of spatial planes, unfilled areas, attempt to go beyond the picture, depiction from a bird's eye view, usage of calligraphic elements in the painting, highlighting and stylisation of arabesque forms, the supreme culture of the colour palette, craving for time-evolving motifs, spontaneous warped lines and emphasis on rhythmic repetitions, *non finito*, i.e. the principle of non-utterance, aesthetic allusion. Many of the late sonata period paintings stood out because of the perfection of plastic language, the subtle gradation of tones and halftones. However, the essential difference between the colour system of Čiurlionis' paintings and the works of East Asian landscape artists is determined by the predominance of green tones in many of the paintings of the Lithuanian artist, which has arisen due to the predominance of coniferous forests in Dzūkija landscapes.

The Growing Relevance of the Problems of Space and Time

Directly connected with questions, especially important for Čiurlionis, about the interaction of painting and music is another significant, little studied field of problems – that of the structural interaction of *artistic space* and *artistic time* in the spacetime created by the artist's imagination and fantasy. Without analyzing the physical phenomena of space and time in the natural sciences, we will focus our attention on an interpretation of the structural interaction of *artistic space* and *artistic time* that emerged during the mature stage of Čiurlionis' sonatic painting.

Space and time – these are the fundamental categories of existence that interact in Čiurlionis' artistic work at various points of contact and in various forms, making the problems of *spacetime* relevant. Spacetime, or, in other

words, *the unified continuum of space and time*, is a four-dimensional totality whose three *spatial* dimensions, by interacting with a fourth *temporal* one, express the unity of spatial and temporal parameters and structures. As one of the main forms of material existence, this totality objectively expresses the spatial (distance, orientation, etc.) and temporal (sequence, duration of events) connections existing between different objects in the world around us.

Čiurlionis' intensive quests for a closer integration of the spatial structures of painting with the temporal ones of music and for new means of artistic expression not only highlighted, in his pictures, stylistic tendencies typical of abstractionism, poetic surrealism, and metaphysical painting but also led to *what is typical of all the arts – a revelation of the similar inner morphological architectonics of works of art*. Through means of pictorial artistic expression based on spatial principles, for example, the play of musical vertical lines, such quests helped this Lithuanian artist attain *analogues* of temporal art, i.e., of musical language, and masterfully employ them to implement his ideas about integrating the arts. Moreover, in Čiurlionis' sonatic pictures, which were influenced by the aesthetics of East Asian landscape painting, there were soon established *cyclical principles of artistic thinking unfolding in time* and an organic *inner musicality* that was influenced by a harmonious interaction of spatial and temporal structures and that essentially separated the pictures of his mature sonatic period, influenced by an original concept of spacetime, from works by other Symbolist and Modernist contemporaries inspired by the cult of musicality and the interaction of the arts.

Unlike the real three-dimensional spatial world that people live in, the subjective *artistic space* created by Čiurlionis stands out for its multidimensionality and polysemanticity. Here, because of the influence of various ideas about worldview, aesthetics, theosophy, etc., an *external* understanding of space is intertwined with an *internal subjective* one, while *what is typical of the real world – the unbroken, one-dimensional, irreversible flow of time – is replaced by a different, subjective, discrete, multidimensional perception of artistic space and artistic time – a perception revealed in his painting through*

distinctive forms. In one group of pictures, we see a human past marked by traces of ancient civilizations; in a second – archetypal symbols and images drawn from the mythology and religion of various peoples; in a third – the dominance of dreamlike visions of the future; in a fourth – a wandering based on Flammarion's descriptions and engravings in the boundless expanses of cosmic space; in a fifth – a quest connected with the generalized features of natural images and symbols for the musical harmony of abstract plastic forms, lines, and spaces.

Thus, in Čiurlionis' pictures a subjective understanding of *inner* artistic space spreads and radiates its energy *outwardly*, while the artist's flights of imagination and fantasy build bridges connecting with what was spiritually close to him since childhood – the spaces of the natural world of Dzūkija. The basic principle that constructs Čiurlionis' system of artistic images proceeds from a distinctive subjective intertwining of artistic space with artistic time as well as from an intimate meditative relationship with the natural world of his native place and from listening closely to its secrets. In this way, the parameters for grasping his local native space *expand* into grand panoramic visions of the landscapes of the natural world or of the boundlessness of the Universe. Typical of Čiurlionis' spatial perception of the world and of the pictorial thinking that emerged because of its influence, especially during his sonatic period, are an organic intertwining of spatial and temporal structures as well as a phenomenological *narrowing* in specific works of his field of interest. He replaces images of the real world with a harmonious autonomous artistic world created by his rich imagination and enriched with musical geometrical forms, arabesque structures, symbols, signs, and metaphors – a world which is dominated by different laws and motifs inspired by his fantasy.

When comparing Čiurlionis' early pictures with his most mature ones in terms of the interaction of artistic form with spatial and temporal structures – the harmonious pictorial sonatas *Sonata No. 3 (Žalčio sonata* [Grass Snake Sonata]) and *Sonata No. 7 (Piramidžių sonata* [Sonata of the Pyramids]) – we see their perfected solutions in interpreting the relationship between spatial and temporal structures as well as in composition, perspective, color,

color scheme, rhythm, etc. So, what determined these essential changes in this artist's rapid evolution as a painter? We will try to answer this question by shifting our attention to a detailed discussion of the influence of natural science, physics, philosophy, and aesthetics on Čiurlionis' interaction of the arts as well as of some other essential connections between artistic space and artistic time with relevant scientific problems.

As attested by close friends and contemporaries, at the beginning of the 20th century Čiurlionis plunged into the latest trends in the natural sciences, into the study of books about physics, chemistry, astronomy, and geology, which undoubtedly expanded the horizons of his knowledge and the opportunities for his quest for new means of artistic expression. He was likewise interested in developments in philosophy, psychology, and theosophy, which he discussed in the salons of Kazimieras Stabrauskas and Bronisława Wolman with the leading followers of the Young Poland movement and with Warsaw and Cracow intellectuals and artists who had various worldviews. In Čiurlionis' milieu, the followers of esotericism also exhibited in their worldviews a desire not to be left behind by the latest discoveries in the natural sciences and physics – discoveries which involved both a rationalist concept of evaluation and a pointed criticism of vulgar materialism and positivism.

When we move from the world of objective physical space to the subjective artistic space of the artist, especially to the relatively hermetic expanse of the psychology of creative processes, we encounter other patterns determined by the various processes involved in the functioning of artistic consciousness. The features of the artistic space in which a work is born during the creative process are always influenced by the characteristics of a specific civilization and historical epoch, of the worldview of an art group and subject, and of an art form with its typical style and interpretation of reality. In literature and poetry, for example, artistic space is not marked by such obvious sensory verisimilitude as it is in the visual art of painting; thus, it is usually, as in the other temporal art of music, perceived associatively. Čiurlionis, who did parallel work in all three of these arts, not only eventually grasped these differences more and more clearly but also, inspired by Romantic ideas of the

universal interaction of the arts, sought the *universal* principles that connected them – formal, structural, morphological, and others of self-expression and composition.

Spatial Nostalgia and Camille Flammarion's Influence

Čiurlionis' spatial nostalgia was most clearly revealed in his pictures with a cosmic theme, where his attention was directed, not without the influence of theosophical ideas, toward a celestial world that symbolizes boundless spaces. In order to grasp the distinctiveness of Čiurlionis' spatial world of puzzling astronomical, cosmological symbols that stress the beauty of a night sky strewn with stars and constellations, it is necessary to explain this Lithuanian artist's relationship with the interest, which grew rapidly in the West at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, in knowing the structure of the Universe, constellations, the solar system, and the planets closest to Earth. With the rise of esoteric trends, significant achievements in astronomy and cosmography were intertwined, in the strangest way, with the views of theosophists, of whom Camille Flammarion stood out for his suggestiveness in spreading visions of unearthly civilizations and cosmic processes. Receptiveness to knowledge about astronomy, the constant spread of information about the processes of the Universe, and interest in the astronomical understanding of ancient Eastern civilizations, in the myths of non-European peoples, and in the mysterious phenomena, pushed aside by academic science, of parapsychology, magnetism, telepathy, hypnosis, and spiritualism – all this was one of the most clear-cut features of Čiurlionis' personality and of his grasp of a world that emphasized the importance of cosmism. *Along with Stabrauskas, Flammarion had perhaps the greatest influence on Čiurlionis' worldview, his concept of spacetime, and his world of artistic images, but he has not received suitable attention in Čiurlionis studies; therefore, we will briefly discuss his views and the main aspects of his influence on this Lithuanian artist.*

Of the many sources that inspired Čiurlionis' work – the beliefs of ancient civilizations and Lithuanian folklore about the structure of the cosmos, the theosophical understanding of the cosmic processes taking place in the Universe – perhaps the greatest influence on his worldview was exerted by the

eminent French astronomer, popularizer of scientific and esoteric knowledge, and writer Flammarion, who depicted other planets and various unearthly life forms in his engravings. Published in huge print runs, translated into various European languages, and abundantly illustrated with impressive images of the cosmos, the movement of stars, Mars, and other planets, this author's books were widely discussed in Čiurlionis' milieu of intellectuals and artists. It is known that Čiurlionis read Flammarion's books and had them in his home library in Druskininkai. Jadvyga Čiurlionytė writes: "Among the literature translated into Polish, there were two books by Flammarion." (Jadvyga Čiurlionytė, 1970, p. 202) Čiurlionis was also interested in this Frenchman's fantastic engravings and drawings depicting unearthly life forms, which with their graphic portraits of an unearthly world formed this Lithuanian's system of artistic images.

This French astronomer's ideas and engravings did not impress Čiurlionis only with their visual suggestiveness. After all, relying on the research of the comparative linguistics of his time, Flammarion emphasized the archaic character of the Lithuanian language and its connection with the Sanskrit spread by the Aryans, and he pointed out the connections of Lithuanian mythology with the archaic mythical systems of ancient India. When dealing with ancient myths, he even provided individual examples of the obvious similarity between Lithuanian and Sanskrit. These ideas strengthened Čiurlionis' pride in his national roots and encouraged his interest in Lithuanian legends and tales, folk music, and artistic traditions.

The diverse world revealed in Flammarion's books and engravings, of the grandeur of the Universe and of the component parts of the cosmos, exerted a tremendous influence on the unfolding of Čiurlionis' rich imagination and on his aesthetic views and the systems of cosmic artistic images that filled his pictures. We can easily find visions similar to Flammarion's descriptions in a picture by Čiurlionis in brownish and orange tones – *Marso pasaulis* (A Martian World) from the ten-picture cycle *Fantazijos* (Fantasies, 1904-05), in which, against a background of architectural niches, there are the strangest depictions of lacelike plants with musical lines. Moreover, something else

described in Flammarion's books – winged angellike creatures with graceful legs flying in circles near the shore of a sea or some other body of water – can be seen in an almost identical depiction in one of Čiurlionis' pictures of his late metaphysical period – *Rojus* (Paradise, 1909).

Cosmism and wandering in the night sky's cosmic "infinity of the Universe" was one of the most clear-cut features of Čiurlionis' feeling for the world and an important theme in his painting, revealed not only in many of his individual pictures but also in the programmatic cycles *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World, 1905-06), *Zodiako ženklai* (Signs of the Zodiac, 1906-07), *Žvaigždžių sonata* (Sonata of the Stars, 1908), and the notable *Rex* (1909). Interest in the mysterious beauty of a night sky encompassing boundless space, fused with study of the books on astronomy that were popular at the turn of the century and with reflections, typical of theosophy, about "the highest, most powerful sphere of the human spirit," promoted Čiurlionis' interest in the problems of the cosmos and heavenly bodies, which eventually became one of the main themes of his fine art.

In the recollections of those close to him we encounter many various attestations that Čiurlionis was fond of wandering at night about the forests around Druskininkai and contemplating a night sky shining with heavenly bodies and twinkling stars that thrust him into deep reflection. Thus, his sister Jadvyga, when speaking in her recollections about his special relationship with immeasurable cosmic space, related that her brother Konstantinas liked to wander about the great forest near Druskininkai when the moon was breaking through the branches of the pines and stars were shining, or he would even go with his brothers to Mergežeriai, which were surrounded by majestic forests, and these brothers would part and go in opposite directions around these lakes until they met halfway in the moonlight.

Although Flammarion was important, he was not the only source for developing the cosmic theme to promote Čiurlionis' treatment of spatial problems. Alongside the popular astronomical and theosophical theories that had spread at the beginning of the century, a no less significant influence on his painting was exerted by the cosmic visions hidden in the archaic mythology

of the Lithuanians and of Eastern civilizations. In them, Čiurlionis sought answers to the riddles of how the processes taking place in the Universe developed and how life forms appeared.

The unfolding and establishment of the cosmic theme as one of the most important ones to possess Čiurlionis' consciousness can be seen in many pictures, of which these primarily stand out: *Marso pasaulis* (A Martian World, 1904-05), *Naktis* (Night) from the four-picture cycle *Para* ([24-Hour] Day, 1904-05), *Jūra naktį* (The Sea at Night, 1906), the three-picture cycle *Kibirkštys* (Sparks, 1906), *Naktis* (Night, 1906), *Ūkanos* (Mists, 1906), the cycles *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World, 1905-06) and *Zodiakas* (Zodiac, 1905-07), *Žvaigždžių sonata* (Sonata of the Stars, 1908), and the largest-format picture *Rex* (1909).

For example, in the pictures of the cycle *Zodiako ženklai* (Signs of the Zodiac) with their decorative color schemes there emerge the huge spaces typical of the later mature paintings of Čiurlionis' *sonatic* and *metaphysical* period with their subtler and sharper graphic composition. Compared to earlier pictures, these compositions obviously become more decorative. Here, all the colors in this cycle are subdued, and the unified restrained system of color schemes in these pictures – pale yellowish-greenish and difficult to describe – drown, as it were, in cosmic mists. Nevertheless, in comparison to earlier treatments of color in pictures with a cosmic theme, the colors and color schemes here are perceptibly clearer.

The cycle *Zodiako ženklai* (Signs of the Zodiac) led, through the intermediate nocturne *Miškas* (Forest, 1907) with its subtle and musical lines and forms, to the highest level of development of the cosmic theme in works during the periods of *sonatic* and *metaphysical painting*. In these works, Čiurlionis' artistic form evolved rapidly, and tendencies that confirmed his growing mastery continued gaining strength – in unity of composition and color scheme, suggestive spatial thinking, musicality, and decorativeness. These tendencies were revealed with full force in works more mature in composition and plasticity than the cycle *Zodiako ženklai* – the two pictures of *Žvaigždžių sonata* (Sonata of the Stars, 1908) with their air of pan-musicality and

amazing harmony and *Rex* (1909), which we may regard as Čiurlionis' best plastic works on the cosmic theme. In these mythopoetic pictures enciphered in a mysterious symbolic language, the painter already ascends to another aesthetic generalization, in Nietzsche's words, to the highest level of "conversation with the gods."

The unfinished *Žvaigždžių sonata* – which is the penultimate, the sixth of the seven pictorial sonatas created by Čiurlionis and which consists of only two pictures, *Allegro* and *Andante* – stands out for its distinctive interpretation of cosmic spaces and the special unity of its compositions and color schemes. This is indeed the most musical and most harmonious work with a cosmic theme by this painter – a work in which a unified system of artistic images interweaves various cosmic mists with rhythmically moving comets, stars, planets, and other varicolored heavenly bodies with a dominant greenish-yellowish color scheme and various emanating sources of light.

Enriched with an abundance of cosmic objects, the first picture in this cycle, *Allegro*, is dominated by elemental, chaotic forces that operate in cosmic space by creating and destroying various heavenly bodies. With a sudden vital flight, this background world ruled by chaotic cosmic forces is dissected, as it were, by the *rising* figure of an angel that resolutely divides the entire space and the *horizontal* Milky Way strewn with a multitude of stars, constellations, and heavenly bodies and that is oriented toward a world of spiritual values – an angel whose vertical upward movement is associated with spiritual forces that exalt theosophical theories and control worldly processes.

The second, more monumental picture of this cycle, *Andante*, is dominated by a calmer and more clearly balanced system of smaller artistic images at the center of which there are five basic compositional components that emphasize the harmonious structure of cosmic space and its rhythmically interacting forces and metamorphoses. This meticulously thought-out system of artistic images consists of: the biggest segment in this composition, an *earthly orb*; a symbol of stability and of seeking perfection, a *pyramid*; a symbol of boundless cosmic space and of the inexhaustible diversity of heavenly bodies, the *Milky Way*; and an *angel* showing the upward direction to spiritual perfection. And

finally, there is the last important element of this complex composition: a symbol of the path to knowledge and wisdom, a *grass snake*, the movement of whose flexible body from the lower left to the top of this picture occupies the greatest space of all the component segments in this composition. With its body, the grass snake traverses not only the earthly orb but also the pyramid, the Milky Way, and, moving forward, the angel that is only halfway along the path to knowledge. All of these variations on the basic theme of the cosmos are directly connected with Flammarion's ideas and works as well as with the influence of theosophical symbols, signs, and systems of artistic images.

Transformations of Artistic Time

Alongside the theme of space, time is the second basic form of material existence; it objectively manifests itself in the *duration* of existence of material objects and in the sequential *change* of their states of being and of events following one after the other. In different civilizations, epochs, cultures, and fields of knowledge (philosophy, science, mythology, religion, art) there exist various concepts of time. In the history of civilization, there were eventually established two basic concepts of time: *cyclical* and *linear*. The sources of the first are connected with the cyclical alternation of the seasons that have determined human life since the most ancient times: spring, summer, autumn, winter, and the constant repetition of this four-part cycle. Thus, too, when mythic consciousness was formed, time was understood as *the constant alternation of periodically repeating processes* that were based on the principle, in Nietzsche's words, of "eternal return" and on the disappearance of clear-cut boundaries between the beginning and end of a cycle. Followers of the second, linear concept imagined the flow of time as a straight line of development in which this flow, in relation to the present, unfolded in one direction *from the past to the future*. This concept of time is characterized by *one-dimensionality, continuity, unbrokenness, and inevitability*.

When we look closely at Čiurlionis' concept of time, especially the one established in his pictures during his sonatic period, from various perspectives,

it becomes clear that it is connected not only with space, but also with other fundamental philosophical categories: *eternity, infinity, life, existence, transformation*. By nature, time is *one-dimensional* and *relative*, but its existence can be *objective*, independent of the influence of external factors, or *subjective*, unfolding in human consciousness in the form of various *artistic images*, among them ones relevant to us and typical of painting, music, and poetry. Thus, by nature or its manner of unfolding, time can be classified as *cyclical*, revolving like a wheel, and *linear*, consistently moving in one irreversible direction. Moreover, as a manifestation of specific events described in literary texts, time can be characterized by Bergson's preferred concept of 1) duration (*durée*). Here, it can also be marked by 2) continuity or discontinuity, 3) infinity or finitude, and 4) inevitability.

In the article "Laikas Čiurlionio tapyboje" (Time in Čiurlionis' Painting), one of the most authoritative students of Čiurlionis, Aleksis Rannit, aptly observes that, from a broader philosophical point of view, time is, in Čiurlionis' work, one of the most perplexing themes to consider. Here, the most important contradictions emerge in connection with his concept of time: time is treated as unreal, as an experience that seems to disappear when the mind tries of grasp an infinity of perceptions. According to this art historian, the view that, in Čiurlionis' art, time is unreal could be based on this Lithuanian artist's constant inclination to fantastic (sometimes even occult) experience. This experience could also reveal how a timeless state of being appears in an aesthetic form and in a visual one in his pictures (Rannit, 1976, p. 31).¹

Čiurlionis' texts and world of artistic images and symbols indeed show that he interprets the phenomenon of time on the basis of scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic ideas, but along with this we also have a strong sense in his pictures of *unreal* time that proceeds from a theosophical worldview and other esoteric teachings and is connected with otherworldliness, eternity, and life after death. In this artist's pictures, interpretations of time are often intertwined and are overshadowed by mythical, cyclical schemes of the

¹ This article appeared in two versions: „Laikas Čiurlionio tapyboje,” in *Aidai*, 1975, no. 8; “Time in M. K. Čiurlionis,” in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1976, no. 1.

consistent alternation of seasons – schemes that proceed from the depths of the folklore of Dzūkija and whose traces we see in his archaic systems of artistic images and symbols, likewise in the picture cycles *Pavasaris* (Spring), *Vasara* (Summer), *Žiema* (Winter) and in the pictorial sonatas *Sonata Nr. 2* (*Pavasario sonata* [Spring Sonata]) and *Sonata Nr. 4* (*Vasaros sonata* [Summer Sonata]), which depict the alternation of the seasons of the year.

When dealing with manifestations of time in Čiurlionis' painting, music, and literature, we should understand that here we are speaking not about an *objective* concept of time formed from a philosophical or scientific viewpoint, but about a *subjective* understanding, often emotionally and keenly experienced, that emerges in his pictures in various visual forms. Unlike objective time, which like a flowing river has only one irreversible nature and cannot flow in the opposite direction, *subjective artistic time, which often has an existential hue, unfolds in the artist's active imagination and causes a multitude of associations.* Thus, without any particular difficulty it can involuntarily flow backwards, and the present can most strangely intertwine with the past and the future and, in subjective artistic consciousness, combine and weave various artistic images and their systems.

Embodied in all works of art, thus, too, in the spatial ones of fine art, artistic time is always subjective, and its unique understanding in painting is conveyed through every artist's individual style and through the language of the images, symbols, signs, and metaphors that comprise its essence. Possessing rich experience in the creation of music and distinguished by an innate sense of melody and rhythm, Čiurlionis sought to subject painted motifs to the principles of the temporal art of music. His intentions are obvious in the sketches for the pictures of his sonatic period, for example, *Sonata Nr. 6* (*Žvaigždžių sonata* [Sonata of the Stars]) and the diptych *Preludas ir fuga* (Prelude and Fugue, 1908). Here, more clearly than in pictures painted in tempera and masking the lines of the design with colors, we can see the process of establishing musical lines and transforming them into abstract images.

The Integration of Spacetime Structures and Cyclical Thinking

After a closer look at the twists and turns in Čiurlionis' evolution as a painter, we will be convinced that during his early period of literary-psychological symbolism (1903-1906), under the influence of Neoromantic (Symbolist) ideas in painting and theosophy, his pictures were dominated by a plot-driven, narrative interpretation of the world. After intensive experiments with form during the winter of 1906-1907, there emerged a special attention to the problems of harmonious interaction between artistic space and time – an attention that unfolded on Čiurlionis' path to a qualitatively new style that was already typical of Modernist Art, emphasizing the formal aspects of painting, and in which the importance of the interaction of different aspects of spacetime and of spatial planes with temporal structures was combined with a clear decorative background and a subtle graphic design. Here, stylistic clarity and decorativeness are organically connected with something adopted from East Asian landscape painting – restrained, subdued choices of color and color scheme and an illusion conveying boundless space. This emphasis on space is reflected in the diptych *Liūdesys* (Sadness, 1906-1907), and in many later pictures it became an inseparable part of choices in composition and perspective.

The spontaneous brushstrokes that emerged in Čiurlionis' pictures of this period and that flow involuntarily, as it were, from the depths of the subconscious are similar to the works of first-generation and lyrical abstractionists as well as of tachists. However, along with tendencies toward spontaneous abstract self-expression, in compositions of this second period we can discern an attraction to formalized arabesque and ornamental structures as well as a desire to break up spaces. These tendencies connect Čiurlionis with the analytical and synthetic goals of the Cubists to give a new form to space by changing the points of view toward the objects being painted, by including dynamic temporal structures in paintings, and by highlighting the thought-out forms of the objects being painted.

New interpretations of artistic time had begun, since 1905, to spread intensively

in the first manifestations of the Classical Modernism being born: in Matisse's Fauvism, Picasso's Cubism, and Delaunay's Simultanism (Orphism). They are especially noticeable in the work of Italian Futurists inspired by Marinetti's ideas and of Chirico, who originated metaphysical painting. In manifestos and programmatic texts, these artists enthusiastically exalted the establishment in their works of the concepts of subjective time connected with the latest achievements of physics, philosophy, and quasi-sciences.

The process of seeking a closer interaction between the structures of artistic space and artistic time eventually began to emerge in Čiurlionis' distinctive *concept of cyclical thinking*, which *became the most characteristic feature of his maturity as a painter during his sonatic period*. This feature essentially separated his concept of spacetime – that is, of the interaction of spatial and temporal structures – from the quests of most of his predecessors and contemporaries. Alongside individual pictures and diptychs, Čiurlionis created picture cycles of greater scope; for example, *Laidotuvų simfonija* (Funeral Symphony, 1903) consists of seven pictures, *Rūstybė* (Wrath, 1904) – three pictures, *Tvanas* (Deluge, 1904) – five, the lost *Audra* (Tempest, 1904) – six, *Fantazijos* (Fantasies, 1904-1905) – ten, *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World, 1905-1906) – thirteen, and *Zodiakas* (Zodiac, 1906-1907) – twelve. However, this abundance of cyclical pictures hindered the logical and consistent development of systems of artistic images and symbols in time.

Eventually, Čiurlionis understood that, to implement his plan for the organic interaction of the arts, twelve or thirteen pictures in one cycle are clearly too many, and two are too few. Thus, while breaking into knowledge of the formal structural principles and inner architectonics connecting different arts, he began to seek, during the sources of his sonatic period, in 1907, a handier number of pictures for the consistent logical development of cyclical thought in time. He took examples for solving this problem from the music he knew best, even though there was something widespread during the 19th century, derived from the classical aesthetics and philosophy of art of highly influential German rationalism, and handy for sequential thinking – a structure in three parts (*thesis-antithesis-synthesis*).

Gradually acquiring an ever-stronger position in Čiurlionis' creative arsenal, the structural model for developing a tripartite theme in time first emerged in some literary triptychs created in 1907 – *Mano kelias* (My Path), *Karalaitės kelionė* (Journey of a Princess), *Karalaičio kelionė* (Journey of a Prince), and *Pasaka* (Fairytale). In these works, the role of dynamic lines and rhythmic elements and the sequential development of several basic thematic collisions attest to innovations in the interaction of artistic space with temporal structures – changes that naturally arose from the musical cyclical thinking typical of this artist.

Objectively assessed, the cyclical thinking that emerged in these tripartite picture cycles that restore a unified stream of flowing time laid the path to sonatic cycles of a higher artistic level that highlighted their musical spirit, were even more clearly structured, and were freed from literary associations. *Probably, the tripartite model of pictorial thinking achieved perfection when it was implemented in practical terms in a masterpiece in three parts of the sonatic period – Sonata Nr. 5 (Jūros sonata [Sonata of the Sea], 1908).* Unlike earlier three-picture cycles, here we can already speak, more or less justifiably, about the consistent development of a single dominant theme in time. Thus, we can regard *Jūros sonata* as one of the most mature cycles in Čiurlionis' sonatic painting – one that attests the transformation of an original concept of spacetime and in which the contours already emerge of a unified new strategy of artistic creation. In musical terms, this is the logical temporal, often polyphonic development of basic visual structures and motifs belonging to a specific theme.

However, by experimenting Čiurlionis eventually came to the conclusion that what was more convenient for implementing his concept of spacetime was not the tripartite structure used in *Jūros sonata* to develop a chosen theme, but one in four parts. Nevertheless, as to what determined the selection of this four-part structure as a canonical model, we do not find any conceptual explanation in Čiurlionis' own texts, but by relying on an analysis of his works and creative process we can propose some more or less plausible hypotheses. For example, in four-part *Sonata Nr. 1 (Saulės sonata [Sonata of the Sun])*

we already encounter not a single, unified narrative but, in musical terms, a polyphonic associative exposition consisting of at least four independent thematic lines. A more consistent system of artistic images, unfolding in time, cyclical, and polyphonic, emerges in *Sonata Nr. 2 (Pavasario sonata* [Spring Sonata]), which depicts in turn the rampaging torrents of water of nascent spring; replacing them, a powerful windmill begetting jets of wind; the mysterious underwater world of fish; and finally, symbolizing the boundless universe, spaces at the bottom of which can be seen an orb of the earth and two tall structures reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower.

The choice of the four-part cycle dominant in Čiurlionis' pictorial sonatas, like that of the earlier tripartite one, may have been prompted by what had already existed in the history of art – the canonical structural models for the development of ideas in time in the artistic and musical traditions spiritually closest to him. This choice may have been inspired by the four-part model for the sequential alternation of the seasons that was widespread in East Asian landscape painting or perhaps by something in Western music – an almost cultic cycle of concerti for violin and orchestra, *The Four Seasons* (Italian *Le quattro stagioni*), composed by Antonio Vivaldi around 1718-1720 and published with sonnets accompanying the music.

In Vivaldi's four-part cycle there are separate concerti devoted to spring, summer, autumn, and winter, each by tradition consisting of three movements, two of which – the first and the third – pulsate with energy and are linked by a middle one that is calm. In these concerti, revolutionary in their artistic form, listeners are enchanted by what is typical of Vivaldi as of later, no longer avant-garde music (composed after Anton Webern, for example, that of Luigi Ferrari), by what upholds the vitality of a system of artistic images – the gurgling of flowing brooks, the twittering of birds, the barking of a dog, buzzing flies, drops of water, and other sounds imitating natural phenomena. Thus, it seems that such a work by Vivaldi, one that breathes with the sounds of nature, could surely have been an ideal source of inspiration for Čiurlionis' pictorial sonatas, but at the beginning of the 20th century, before the tumultuous rebirth of his music in 1930 turned these concerti into some

of the most frequently played classical music in the West, Vivaldi had been almost completely forgotten. Thus, he could hardly have been known to Čiurlionis, for this composer is not mentioned anywhere in his letters or in the testimony of his friends. Therefore, we must reject this hypothesis.

When explaining the establishment of the four-part structural model of spacetime in the cycles of the sonatic period of Čiurlionis' evolution as a painter, it would seem that there are incomparably more well-founded grounds for speaking about the influence of the East Asian tradition in landscape painting. Widespread in this tradition was a model for structuring artistic time by depicting the seasons in four parts and reflecting their changes in sequence; this model also determined the establishment of a four-part cyclical structure with musical names in works of the sonatic period.

In this concept of spacetime, the temporal aspect of painted works was combined with *features of aesthetic apprehension*, that is, with the apprehender's ability to "read" what is being revealed before his eyes – systems in time of artistic images and symbols, literary works, as it were, with all the *narrative thematic lines described* in the images being contemplated.

Unlike the narrative arts (literature and poetry), which reflect the specifics of the *temporal arts*, in *spatial art* (painting) we encounter a different flow of artistic time, especially when speaking about forms of Modernist art, in which there dies out or completely disappears what is typical of classical Realist, Romantic, or Neoromantic (Symbolist) painting – the *thematic dimension* of artistic time. We saw the beginning of these changes in Čiurlionis' second creative period when, experimenting during the winter of 1906-1907 in the cycles *Vasara* (Summer), *Žiema* (Winter), and *Etiudas* (Étude), in which we can clearly see the process of dematerializing the real forms of nature, he opened up a different concept of art – one typical of Modernist abstract painting, but already distant from a traditional treatment of theme.

With these pictures, Čiurlionis *entered a new field for solving the specific Modernist relations between space and time*. In the pictures of this period, the apprehender encounters a somewhat different approach from that of most Modernists toward the problems of painting and music. In his pictures there

emerges an avoidance of a Realist reflection of reality, and in these cycles an increasingly important role is acquired by a totality of abstract forms, lines, and rhythmic structures. Thus, what is already becoming strong here is the interaction of spatial and temporal structures typical of the tradition of formal abstract painting.

The gradually deepening interaction between means of artistic expression – spatial painting and temporal music – emerged as Čiurlionis transitioned from literary-psychological symbolism to a second period of intensive quests in the field of the inner architectonics that connects various art forms, when the systems of naturalistic artistic images typical of the symbolism in his pictures began to shift to the interaction of increasingly abstract, expressive lines and forms with an air of musicality.

This process unfolded in parallel both through creating cyclical pictures while employing an arsenal of new means of artistic expression and through apprehending works of art already marked by tendencies toward integration because one's gaze, while moving in time from one specific picture in a cycle to another, also approached a different system of artistic images – one that departed from the Realism and Modernism created by the artist with an aura of musicality and was close to Abstraction and Poetic Surrealism. In Čiurlionis' work, the growing influence of musicality – that is, of the means of artistic expression typical of the temporal arts – was directly connected with the cyclical thinking that unfolds in time and became established because of his many years of musical activity. In essence, these features separate Čiurlionis from Wassily Kandinsky, František Kupka, Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian, and Kazimir Malevich, who under the influence of the cult of musicality evolved from Symbolism to Abstraction.

When we plunge into increasingly decorative and abstract painting that departs from a Realist apprehension of the world, into painting in which there are changes in the significance of the temporal and spatial structures typical of narrative art, we encounter in abstract pictures, for example, in *Drugiai* (Butterflies, 1906), only *relationships between abstract lines, forms, masses, spaces, planes, and colors* detached from reality. Therefore, what become the

main objects of artistic apprehension are here the compositional and formal connections between these structures.

In truth, in the later pictures of Čiurlionis' sonatic period, which seek to highlight the effect of musicality, we seldom encounter completely abstract forms, although their tendency toward generalization, formalization, and arabesque structures is obvious. This new characteristic of interpreting the structures of artistic time, which emerged during the mature stage of his evolution as a painter, was determined by many years of creative work in the field of musical composition as he created musical works in various genres and forms. Systematic and meticulous work with many formal and structural segments of musical language and professional mastery of their means of artistic expression undoubtedly influenced the plasticity of these pictures. Here, there emerged new tendencies toward decorativeness, restrained color schemes, and abundant arabesque structures, and there was a growing effect of musicality created by meandering spontaneous lines that helped one better grasp the architectonics of the forms connecting different arts.

Nevertheless, the cyclical pictures of Čiurlionis' sonatic period, which comprised the core of his spacetime concept, *were combined with music not only by cyclical thinking and their similar inner architectonics, which connected various arts, but also by a thematic link*, the logical consistency and continuity of the ideas they developed, their similarities in composition, perspective, color scheme, and rhythm for developing basic formal structures and ideas, and most importantly – the organic, meaningful link of a specific plan or idea in pictures that were different but comprised a unified cycle.

The Distinctive Concept of Spacetime During the Sonatic Period

Let us now move on to the more detailed solution of the problems that interest us the most – those of the interaction between *artistic space* and *artistic time* in the spacetime concept of the picture cycles during Čiurlionis' sonatic period. In this concept, special importance is acquired by the use, in the arsenal of means of artistic expression in painting, of the equivalents of these means in

the temporal art of music and by the growing influence of *syncretic* spacetime structures united into a harmonious totality as well as by their musicalization. As Čiurlionis moved on in his evolution as a painter from his second, *experimental* period to his third, *sonatic* one, there emerged in the new, artistically more mature model he created of the pictorial sonata more harmonious interactions between spatial and temporal structures. In other words, there formed a qualitatively new concept of *spacetime*, and there gradually became established rapidly improving musical solutions to problems in composition, perspective, and color scheme – solutions that combined into a unified system of artistic images all the pictures in a specific cycle of sonatic paintings. Typical of their style is the ability to be transformed and to acquire distinctive new syncretic forms created by the imagination by combining the spatial and temporal arts into analogous means of artistic expression. In these forms, as we can see, for example, in the drawings for *Sonata Nr. 6* (*Žvaigždžių sonata* [Sonata of the Stars]), not only do visual structures closely intertwine among themselves as they unfold in time, but the connections with images of objective reality also gradually disappear from the systems of increasingly formalized artistic images brought together in symbolical structures.

The shifts in Čiurlionis' thinking as a painter and his new principles for developing ideas in time, borrowed from his earlier experience as a composer, can be understood better with the help of the sketches for pictures during his sonatic period. In order to preserve the course of his artistic undertaking, in subtle contour drawings, for example, in the sketch for the picture *Juodoji saulė* (The Black Sun), this artist spontaneously conveys his nascent visions, with several strokes demarcating the main directions for developing his ideas and combining other segments of artistic form into a unified composition. When we compare the original sketches for his planned undertakings with the final pictures, it becomes clear that, as the contours of an undertaking unfolded, the creative work in Čiurlionis' consciousness intensively moved further and often greatly departed from the ideas of his original undertaking. That a musical, formal, and structural principle that unfolds in time for developing sonatic cycles is so important for Čiurlionis' concept of spacetime

should not be surprising because what he knew best was precisely the totality of means of artistic expression in the language of music. Here, alongside these factors special importance was acquired by skills in musical composition cultivated over many years, mastered principles of musical dramaturgy, understanding of the ways of artistic expression lying in thematism, knowledge of melody and mode as a system of various interrelated sounds and accords, a sense of rhythmic structures, and mastery of the most diverse spontaneously arising factures. He sought analogues of all these principles of musical language and inner architectonics by employing the means of artistic expression of the spatial art of painting.

No less important a role in the transformation of Čiurlionis' mature concept of spacetime is also performed by the quest in the means of artistic expression in painting for the dynamics of musical sounds connected with temporal structures, that is, for analogues reflecting the diversity of sound levels in a musical work. After all, it was important for him to create, in the pictures of his sonatic cycles with pretensions of authentic musical expression, emotional tensions that would highlight the culminations of basic themes and their contrastiveness, reveal the possibilities of a specific vocal range, and open up the space in his pictorial sonatas for a widely employed counterpoint understood as a combination of several independent melodies played at the same time. Moreover, alongside a special sense of *timbre* acquired through subtle chromatic solutions and flexible musical lines, special importance was acquired in his concept of spacetime by one more temporal structure typical of music – *tempo*, which was directly connected with speed, which is important for the dynamics of different pictures in a cycle, for the movement and development in time not of sounds, but of mobile rhythmic structures and of formal plastic systems of artistic images and symbols.

Also directly connected with the distinctiveness of Čiurlionis' temporal musical thinking is the desire, typical of his cyclical pictures, while developing the main motifs to create greater intrigue and attract the apprehender's attention. Seeking greater range and the many voices characteristic of polyphonic music, in the pictures of his sonatic period Čiurlionis also

cleverly employs an analogue of musical *counterpoint* for the purpose of artistic expression. The essence of this analogue consists of several subject or theme lines that unfold at the same or different times and are reminiscent of combinations of various melodies – of the most complex interweaving, combining, separating, changing of places, speeding up, and slowing down of their dominant leitmotifs, all dependent on what is being done in the specific picture of a cycle.

When we compare the cycles of sonatic painting that Čiurlionis created emphasizing the problems of spacetime with works by East Asian masters of landscape painting that are similar in genesis, style, and the depiction of ideas, it becomes clear that there are three essential differences. The first one is that the spacetime system of artistic images, which in works by Chinese and Japanese masters of landscape painting is presented in a horizontal scroll consistently moving from one motif to another, is usually divided in Čiurlionis' cycles of sonatic painting into four separate pictures. However, a four-part canonical sonata structure is not always followed by this artist; for example, *Jūra* (Sea) and *Piramidės* (Pyramids) each have three parts, while *Žvaigždės* (Stars) is only a two-part pictorial cycle.

However, the differences in these parts do not change the essence of the painting of ideas during his sonatic period. The second striking difference is Čiurlionis' attention, incomparably greater than that of East Asian landscape painting, to highlighting musicality in the course of conveying the harmonious interaction of spacetime structures. And finally, Čiurlionis develops his spacetime systems of artistic images in a different direction. In East Asia, they unfold from right to left, while in Čiurlionis' work – in the opposite direction, from left to right. This principle of painting ideas and developing spacetime structures is perhaps most consistently implemented in *Sonata Nr. 3* (*Žalčio sonata* [Grass Snake Sonata]), whose world of visions is uniformly typified by the formalization of spacetime systems of artistic images and symbols, by inner musicality, and by a subtle sense of the harmonious interaction of different artistic forms.

Thus, by relying on his rich experience in musical composition and by

employing sounds, mode, rhythmic structures, melody, and other segments of musical language, Čiurlionis found, in the spacetime concept of his mature sonatic period, their more or less close *analogues* in the arsenal of means of artistic expression in the spatial art of painting. He felt that the effective employment of analogues of musical language – not only spatial ones but also the temporal ones that productively supplement them, analogues taken from examples of musical language of the means of artistic expression in fine art – would evoke, according to his perception of spacetime in his cycles of sonatic painting, associations begetting a powerful emotional effect like that of good music.

Taken over from earlier experience composing music, the clever application of analogues of temporal structures in painting determined the musicality and refined plasticity and color schemes of Čiurlionis' mature sonatic painting. In the best pictures of his sonatic period, we see a qualitative leap in the fields of perspective, composition, color scheme, color, and metaphorical and associative thinking. By employing the principles of *idea painting* and analogues of musical language, these essential shifts in the fields of composition and of the means of artistic expression help *not only to solve the problems of the harmonious interaction of artistic space and artistic time, but also to embody in a practical way Richard Wagner's idea of a unified work of art*. In Čiurlionis' mature pictorial sonatas, what becomes dominant in terms of artistic style and plastic form is a most perfect interaction between spacetime structures in which the various formal plastic elements of visual painting are subordinated to the general principles of composition in idea painting.

When we see the obvious excerpts in the pictures of his sonatic period *Sonata Nr. 4 (Vasaros sonata [Summer Sonata])* and *Sonata Nr. 5 (Jūros sonata [Sea Sonata])*, it becomes clear that Čiurlionis adopted the cyclical decisions dominant in his concept of spacetime – pertaining to composition, perspective, color scheme, and the development of ideas and motifs in time – from East Asian ink painting and adapted for his own needs the poured tempera manner close to clear Chinese colored ink as well as motifs exalting the beauty of nature. What became Čiurlionis' guide and source of inspiration

was the harmonious world of nature, which also exerted an influence on the establishment of a four-part cyclical structure with musical names in the works of his sonatic period. In these pictures, temporal structures interact closely with important aspects of composition – empty spaces, different spatial planes, and rhythmic structures unfolding on the principle of the repetition of meandering dynamic lines and clever arabesque forms.

In Čiurlionis' concept of spacetime, the fusion of all these external and internal factors with their different sources and nature influenced his painting style, in which models of a harmonious interaction between spatial and temporal structures acquired a logical completeness in his most mature sonatic cycles – *Sonata Nr. 3* (*Žalčio sonata* [Grass Snake Sonata]), *Sonata Nr. 5* (*Jūros sonata* [Sea Sonata]), and *Sonata Nr. 7* (*Piramidžių sonata* [Sonata of the Pyramids]). Here, we also encounter what is characteristic of East Asian landscape painting – *multipoint* spatial perspective, which is based not only on the interaction of the Chinese and Japanese “three great arts” (painting, calligraphy, and poetry), but also on the spatial and temporal repetitions of musical rhythmic structures cleverly employed to emphasize dynamic action. In Čiurlionis' sonatic pictures consisting of cycles, as in the horizontal scrolls of Chinese landscape painting, the stream of a system of images is organized in a horizontal sequence with the viewer's gaze sequentially apprehending systems of artistic images and symbols passing from one picture to another and dynamically replacing one another.

Ultimately, in Čiurlionis' concept of spacetime artistic space and artistic time are also directly connected with subjective spiritual states and a sensitive emotional relationship with various metamorphoses of the natural world and a sense of boundless space that was important for him. In the most mature cycles of his sonatic period, Čiurlionis subtly conveyed through clear restrained colors and a harmonious play of rhythmic structures the distinctiveness of his spatial-temporal musical thinking. These sonatic cycles stand out for the power of their flights of imagination and fantasy, the musicality of their compositional decisions, the high culture, typical of East Asian painting, of their colors and color schemes, their subtle graphic drawing, and the power

of the emotional effect of their boundless spaces.

When we compare the first two cycles of sonatic painting with five later ones, we are struck by the rapid growth of Čiurlionis' artistic mastery of composition, perspective, and professional technique. In the late pictorial masterpieces of Čiurlionis' sonatic period, which enchant us with their magnificent boundless spaces, special importance is acquired by the consistent development in time of the main systems of thematic lines and images. The organic connection opening up in these cycles between artistic space and artistic time was inspired by the dramaturgy that had come from East Asian landscape painting of developing artistic motifs or episodes in time because each picture in a sonatic cycle of usually three or four parts is *a specific visual narrative created through pictorial means of artistic expression and, at the same time, part of the same unified spatial and temporal continuum or, in other words, of the stream of universal being*, which our thinking artificially breaks down in order to squeeze real phenomena into theoretical schemata.

In the unity of its artistic style and of its subdued greenish-yellowish color scheme and in the development of the temporal consistency of its main theme, one of Čiurlionis' most consistent and harmonious works is *Sonata Nr. 3 (Žalčio sonata [Grass Snake Sonata])*. Here, as we move in turn from one picture in this cycle to the next, we are enchanted by the emotional power of empty space on different planes, the laconic nature of the system of images in these pictures, their decorativeness, the gradual growth of tension, and the approaching culmination of a theme unfolded before the apprehender's eyes when the real goal of this undertaking is revealed only in the last picture of this cycle. Alongside the main theme devoted to a narrative about a complex path to perfection in order to achieve a symbolical crown, there also unfold unearthly light, the flights of birds, the abyss between two different worlds, and other subthemes in this polyphonic musical pictorial cycle.

One of the clearest examples of play with the structures of artistic space and artistic time is the tripartite masterpiece created by Čiurlionis in 1908 *Sonata Nr. 5 (Jūros sonata [Sea Sonata])*. Here, a depiction of the expanses of the sea and of the fury of the powerful elements of nature illustrates, as it were,

theosophical ideas that speak about two parallel worlds existing alongside us: the *real* one, ruled by the elements of nature, and *another one beyond it*, full of calm and vestiges of the past, poorly known to us, metaphorically conveyed here as an *underwater* world ruled by different laws and forces. All these parts of a pictorial sonata with an aura of the harmonious interaction of different first principles operate as a system of artistic images unified in composition and color scheme and filled with mysterious symbolism. This system stands out for its complex compositional, spatial, and temporal solutions; in this tripartite cycle, as the apprehender's gaze moves from one picture to another, a rhythmic alternation of dynamic action emerges – one based on the harmonious interactions of suggestive symbols and metaphors that sequentially unfold in time but differ in their dominant moods and in the billowing dynamism of their visual structures.

The first picture in this cycle, *Allegro*, is distinguished by its dynamism and restless atmosphere of furious natural elements. A stormy sea is depicted here, in upheaval and menacingly billowing, symbolizing the powerful elements of nature. Masterfully integrated in the first plane at the bottom of this picture is the generalized image of a bird, flying low above the waves of the sea and symbolizing dynamic vitality and the rapid flow of time. The second picture, *Andante*, depicting a ship slowly sinking below the surface of the water, symbolizes a transition from a world ruled by the spontaneous elements of nature to another, underwater one full of calm, with many relics of the past settled at the bottom of the sea. In this foreign, dynamically mysterious world of watery depths we dive, as it were, into another dimension of existence and stopped otherworldly time, foreign to the chaotic elements of nature. And finally, the third and last picture crowning this cycle, *Finale*, is again associated with the dynamic, rhythmical alternation of existence and natural processes. Here, the metaphorical depiction of tiny ships colliding and of a dramatic struggle with a powerful wave symbolizing the element of the sea – a wave in which we also see the artist's initials MKČ – acquires an existential undertone that embodies the tragic nature of human life.

The unified spatial-temporal continuum of this tripartite pictorial sonata fuses

several features that are typical of Čiurlionis' mature spacetime vision. If we look at this cycle from the aspect of the artist's sense of the world and of the ideas he developed, what strikes us, first of all, is the existential distinctiveness of his chosen theme expressing the transitoriness and fragility of human life. But if this picture cycle is mainly analyzed from its formal plastic and stylistic aspects, what is then most imposing for the apprehender is the unity and musicality of the system of artistic images in the cycle, the high cultural level of the graphic drawing, and the subtle amber color scheme that dominates this cycle and that is close to the spatial and chromatic decisions of the great Chinese landscape masters of the *Song* and *Yuan* dynasties. When discussing the compositional treatment, linear drawing, and great spaces of the last picture in this cycle, *Finale*, it is also worthwhile to mention its obvious connections with Hokusai's picture *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*.

Thus, if we look at the seven cycles of pictorial sonatas that best express the essence of Čiurlionis' concept of spacetime, we will see that they are characterized by a multiplicity of themes, even though all of them have a single dominant main theme that he identifies by providing each cycle of sonatic painting with a main name that accords with his painting of ideas. As surviving sketches show, this name becomes the ideological axis of an undertaking at first of only the most general form, of a composition of the component parts of a cycle that defines a field of other themes, motifs, symbols, signs, and metaphors connected with the main theme, that promotes an opposition between the different modes and motifs of the cycle in color and color scheme, and that intensifies their development in all the pictures of the cycle.

In a specific cycle of sonatic painting the number of secondary themes chosen alongside the main one is diverse; therefore, the treatment of spatial, temporal, and rhythmic structures, thematic lines, motifs, composition, and perspective varies. However, all of the cycles created by Čiurlionis are connected by the purposeful development of an undertaking typical of the painting of ideas, an organic connection between spatial, temporal, and rhythmic structures, the inner musicality of an interaction between the lines and forms in pictures, and the development of ideas in time typical of cyclical thinking while consistently

moving in the creative process from one picture in a cycle to another.

In order to implement his undertakings in various pictorial sonatas, depending on specific needs, Čiurlionis chooses a different number of pictures. Thus, the dynamics and dramaturgy of developing the main spacetime motifs in the pictures of specific cycles are not uniform; sometimes the unfolding of the main thematic lines and motifs proceeds consistently; sometimes, after a part full of dynamic energy, pauses unexpectedly appear, as, for example, in *Scherzo*, the third part of *Sonata Nr. 2 (Pavasario sonata [Spring Sonata])*. In the unfolding of the rhythmic dramaturgy of other sonatas, parts of unequal intensity replace one another, while sometimes there even emerge breaks in the development of the main theme and the mysteriously unspoken and aesthetic hints that Čiurlionis liked.

Mastery at the sonatic stage of his evolution as a painter of many technical means of artistic expression close to musical language – of meandering lines, subtle subdued colors, empty spaces, rhythmically repeating arabesque structures, and spatial forms that create the effect of musicality – showed Čiurlionis' mature professionalism. Many of these means of artistic expression evolved from the traditions of East Asian landscape painting or were connected with the expansion of musical principles into painting and with new tendencies in the nascent currents of Modernist art to emphasize form, color, structural thinking, and abstraction. It was precisely the inventive use of the universal architectonics of spatial and temporal art forms in the pictures of Čiurlionis' sonatic cycles and in his literary works that helped attain the desired effect of musicality.

For Čiurlionis, as for East Asian landscape painting, the metaphors, symbols, and systems of artistic images unfolding in his distinctive “irreversible” concept of artistic time were usually presented from the perspective of a bird's-eye view. The artistic images in his cycles of sonatic painting were consistently developed on a temporal plane. Thus, cycles of sonatic painting consisting of several pictures created according to the principles of the temporal art of music *cannot be grasped in an instant*; it is necessary to contemplate them *step by step*, as if one were reading a book. As one's gaze moves horizontally according

to the concept of artistic time laid out in the cycle, the opportunity arises to attentively follow the guidelines indicated by the artist, that is, to “read” and grasp in sequence, from beginning to end, the entire development of artistic images, symbols, metaphors, and ideas unfolding in time.

In Čiurlionis’ concept of spacetime, spatial and temporal structures are intertwined with archaic mythical symbols, philosophical ideas, theosophical visions, and images proceeding from various civilizational worlds. All these streams of spiritual culture fuse with symbols drawn from book culture, Lithuanian folk mythology, and art history. Thus are born Čiurlionis’ distinctive mythopoetic systems of artistic images, which are dominated by a different world, opposed to reality, of fantastic visions and symbols. If we look more closely at the most essential features of Čiurlionis’ creative expression, we sometimes get the impression that he consciously created his own distinctive *anti-world* in confrontation with the real, alienated world full of tragedy. The tragic split between these two different worlds, the symbolism of various gulfs and of gates, and the contours of an anti-world can be seen best in his eloquent sketches and drawings.

Similar allusions arise when we also analyze, in greater detail, other late pictorial sonatas and individual pictures that Čiurlionis created during his mature period. The most highly enriched in terms of dominant motifs and the diversity of its most complex spatial and temporal structures is a most laconic two-part work devoted to a cosmic theme – *Sonata Nr. 6 (Žvaigždžių sonata* [Sonata of the Stars]). It is devoted to artistic reflection in spacetime about that boundless space that extends between the earth’s layer of atmosphere and the multitude of heavenly bodies and that is called the cosmos. The most important theme of this diptych is perhaps the encounter in spacetime between space and time as well as between chaos and the laws of cosmic order. Thus, in the first picture of this cycle, *Allegro*, the powerful forces of chaos are dominant, while the second picture, filled with calm, *Andante*, is dominated by the laws of cosmic order. The polyphonic development of the main spatial and temporal structures and of the rhythmic forms of various cosmic objects, this abundance of spacetime motifs, passes from this cycle

to a picture with a cosmic theme by this artist, one that is enchanting with its diversity of spacetime structures and highly monumental as if summarizing his quests for the interaction between space and time – *Rex* (1909), in which the language of artistic images is expressed through the idea of the universal harmony of the most complex, contradictory processes taking place in the Universe.

Thus, having discussed in various aspects the evolution in Čiurlionis' work of his interpretations of the interaction between artistic space and artistic time and the original concept of spacetime that crystalized in his mature stage as a painter as well as its role in the compositional principles, temporal structures, and means of artistic expression taken from music, we may state that this attention to the problems of spacetime was determined by different factors. First of all, it was influenced by Čiurlionis' intellectual interests, his attention to cosmological, theosophical, and Orientalist problems, by Flammarion's ideas, and by fundamental shifts in physics and the natural sciences. Here, a no less important role was also played by the basic idea that possessed this artist's consciousness during his sonatic period of the harmonious interaction between painting and music.

This totality of diverse factors that fused harmoniously and influenced Čiurlionis' work encouraged him to get involved in new quests for interactions between the spatial and temporal arts – quests that emerged in Modernist artistic consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century, that provoked the disappearance of the narrative principle dominant in the earlier Realist, Romantic, and Symbolist tradition of Western art, and that *stimulated a growing interest in the formal structural principles of the inner architectonics of musical art forms – principles that connect different arts*. Other important factors that determined Čiurlionis' distinctive concept of spacetime were his innate synesthetic abilities and the *principles of cyclical thinking* that were inspired by his many years of earlier work in music.

The temporal principle of musical composition (because the importance of theme grows weaker in the mature works of Čiurlionis' sonatic period when compared to the early pictures of his period of literary-psychological symbo-

lism) provides this artist with the opportunity to unobtrusively include the apprehender in the process of apprehending the work of art and to guide him after himself. Through various accelerations and decelerations that depend on the suggestiveness of the plastic picture in a cycle, on its significance for developing the main themes and leitmotifs, and on the concentration or thinning out of their effect, he opens up the most mysterious spiritual flights for the apprehender and prompts him to a dialogue with the thoughts, moods, and emotional experiences that he is revealing.

After achieving maturity in the last, sonatic stage of his evolution as a painter, Čiurlionis solved, in his concept of spacetime, the dilemmas of the interaction between artistic space and artistic time by relying on the temporal principles best known to him for creating music. He consistently developed his ideas about sonatic cycles in painting by employing the canonical principles of a musical sonata, where systems of artistic images and symbols pass in sequence from one picture in a cycle to another. In this creative strategy influenced by Čiurlionis' concept of spacetime and based on the temporal principles of music, the unique nature of his approaches was revealed. What became the basic platform for the interaction of the arts in his concept of spacetime were *the patterns that obey the universal principles of composition and the inner architectonics that connects all art forms* and that has in a specific art form its own specific and, at the same time, analogous universal means of artistic expression. These means preserve the possibilities for a closer interaction between the spatial and temporal arts because analogous laws of architectonics operate in these arts – of composition, structure, rhythm, mode, stylistic unity, purity, and other universal aspects.

Moreover, exceptionally important in Čiurlionis' concept of spacetime was the tradition of East Asian landscape painting, of its principles of composition and perspective and for treating artistic space and artistic time; in the pictures of Čiurlionis' sonatic period, influenced by these principles, there were established a wide-ranging gaze at the world from the heights of a bird's-eye view and the interaction of different spatial planes. Also taken from East Asia were models for developing ideas in time and the formal solutions in color

and color scheme that helped Čiurlionis highlight, by employing meandering rhythmic lines, the musicality of the artistic systems he created.

And finally, the essence of Čiurlionis' successful solution to the problems of spacetime crystalized because of his universal work in music, painting, and literature – a unique ability to find analogues of the means of artistic expression in all of them. This bent permeated his original concept of spacetime, whose most characteristic feature was the purposeful application of the principles of the temporal art music to the requirements of the spatial art painting. Here, too, is revealed a specific feature of Čiurlionis' concept of spacetime and of his interpretation of artistic space and artistic time: his main goal was to create, in comparison to the Romantics and Symbolists, a conceptually new style of painting with an air of inner musicality.

From Sensitivity to Sound and Color to Synesthesia

Čiurlionis had universal creative powers and was active in the fields of music, painting, literature, prose poetry, photography, and art theory. His childhood and many later years of his life were filled with music, and he constantly lived in the world of its sounds. With the emergence of his extraordinary musical abilities, he began to systematically play music during childhood, at first under the supervision of his organist father; later, he ended up in the Duke Mykolas Oginskis Music School and Orchestra and, still later, in the Warsaw Institute of Music and the Leipzig Conservatory. Although Čiurlionis' musical abilities ordained the development of his talent as a composer, his passion for drawing and genetic sensitivity to color, which burst forth after he completed his advanced study of music, ultimately set him on his path as a painter.

Thus, the most important fields of Čiurlionis' self-expression were *music* and *painting*, in which, contrary to widespread stereotypical views, he never stopped his parallel activities. Here, I would immediately like to present his sister's testimony. His sister Valerija Čiurlionytė-Karužienė recalls:

He always combined his painting hours with music hours. Sometimes he would paint and suddenly put aside his painting and go into another room in another house, for in one house there were musical instruments, and in another house, in a small room, he would paint. And lo, some sort of combination took place – there he undertook his third picture, *Saulės sonata* [Sonata of the Sun]. And Kastukas came – he absolutely needed to try out in music his planned sonata motif, this sonata movement. And it could not at all be said that this is a musical illustration. Not at all; this is something entirely different. Yes, there was that *scherzo* playfulness, but there were also stormy things. It was pure creative improvisation, which was never recorded anywhere.” (Valerija Čiurlionytė-Karužienė, 2006, p. 232)

Although Čiurlionis’ greatest achievements were in the field of fine art, *the most clear-cut element of his artistic worldview was this panmusical understanding of the world with elements of mythic consciousness and typical of the Pythagoreans and the artists of some Eastern civilizations*. Čiurlionis picturesquely conveyed its deepest essence in a letter written from Leipzig on May 22, 1902, to his close friend Marijonas Markevičius: “I imagine the whole world as a great symphony; people are the notes....” (Čiurlionis, 1960, p. 153) Not only can this all-encompassing sense of musicality be felt throughout Čiurlionis’ creative expression, but it also became the main part that harmonized his feeling for the world and his creative process. Not by accident, the greatest achievements in his field of mature sonatic painting proceeded from the depths of this understanding of a *panmusical* world almost mythic in its universality.

In order to emphasize Čiurlionis’ uniqueness in the Western artistic tradition, during the interwar years Mikalojus Vorobjovas published a monograph in German devoted to this artist’s work. In it, he observed:

In the history of painting, a painter-poet is not news, but a painter-musician is something new, and for the first time this was so clearly embodied by Čiurlionis. From a typical painter-poet he eventually became a painter-musician, for the musician in him was more and more absorbed – it was not replaced – by the painter. In this instance, there is certainly no basis for talking about becoming an absolute painter, only a painter in the French sense.

(Vorobjovas, 2012, p. 60)

In Čiurlionis' sense of the world, filled since youth with Romantic ideas about the harmonious interaction of sounds and colors, even after he had traversed the mistaken paths of Neo-Romantic Symbolist art and while he was penetrating the new spaces of Modernist art, something typical of the Romantic aesthetic tradition – the leitmotif of a quest for the close interaction of painting and music – remained the most characteristic feature of his work, and we see traces of it in all of his fields of artistic expression. Thus, once Čiurlionis was consumed by a passion for painting, one of the most important problems to excite him soon became the interaction of painting and music.

Thus, we have approached what is at the heart of Čiurlionis' mature sonatic painting – the ties between the interaction of the arts and synesthetic experiences. This was an additional important factor that influenced his views about the problems of the integration of the arts. Čiurlionis differed in important ways from most other artists endowed with synesthetic abilities: primarily, in his unique creative potential, cultivated intuition, special emotional sensitivity, feeling for what is genuine, and great experience in the field of musical composition. He also stood out for the universality of his creative expression, that is, his ability to express himself freely in the fields of painting, music, literature, photography, and art theory and criticism. Here, his knowledge of the connections between different arts, of their interaction, and of the possibilities for artistic expression, like his abundant arsenal, drawn from different creative fields, of work “instruments” that he employed in his creative process, was broader and more professionally refined than that of many of his predecessors and contemporaries who found solutions to the same problems of the interaction of the arts.

Influenced by Neo-Romantic universalism and Wagner's ideas about a *universal* work of art, Čiurlionis dived into quests for connections between painting, music, and poetry. He saw them with a composer's eyes. This fact explains the distinctive nature of Čiurlionis' approaches to the problems of the integration of the arts. Not by chance, Vytautas Landsbergis drew attention to the essential distinctive quality of this Lithuanian artist's point of departure:

Among Romantic composers who widely employed the expression of tone color in music and who also had color hearing, Čiurlionis was the only genuine painter. Among modern painters oriented toward music, he was the only professional composer, deeply acquainted with the technique, aesthetics, and ethics of musical art. (Landsbergis, 2022, p. 62)

When delving into the processes of the interaction of the arts in Čiurlionis' work, many theoreticians fail to always correctly employ the concept *synthesis*, and this failure distorts the true meaning of his quests and discoveries in the field of the interaction of the arts. The concept *synthesis* (Gr. *synthesis* 'putting together into a whole') has several meanings; it can mean the combining of two or more arts into a third distinctive, new art form or the combining of various elements or parts of an object into a whole and sometimes – the manifest result of such combining. However, when interpreting the problems involved in Čiurlionis' interaction between painting and music, we encounter a different totality of circumstances because he does not see his goal in the mechanical combination of two (or more) arts into a new unified *ensemble*; instead, he seeks, on the basis of his synesthetic abilities, to dive into their underlying primordial layers and highlight the interrelationship and possibilities for functioning of their means of artistic expression.

In the interpretation of Čiurlionis' contribution to the problems involved in the interaction between painting and music, special importance falls to the phenomenon of synesthesia, which is still poorly understood and provokes much discussion among scholars in different fields. This phenomenon is usually connected with involuntary associations that arise between different senses when visual, auditory, or other images and concepts unconsciously recombine from one system of images to another.

Synesthesia (derived from Gr. *syn* 'union' + *aisthēsis* 'sensation' – *synaisthēsis* 'synchronous sensation') is usually regarded by today's scientists as a neurological phenomenon in which two or more sensations are interconnected and the appearance of one regularly influences the diffusion of the other. Every instance of synesthesia always involves at least two different sensory phenomena, of which one regularly and unconsciously evokes and

determines the appearance of the other. Synesthesia may appear and develop between any two sensations, and almost any combination of sensations is possible. Thus, there exist many different types (kinds) of synesthesia that are far removed from the sphere of aesthetic and artistic activity. Research performed in 2004 by the American Synesthesia Association distinguished 152 different forms of synesthesia (Dossier du magazine *Sciences & Vie*, 2009, p. 113). A specific type or kind of synesthesia is defined by the main sensation that causes a specific new sensation. In scientific literature, a person with synesthetic abilities is called a synesthete. Despite much research, synesthesia remains until now a puzzling and poorly understood phenomenon.

A significant factor that focused on the problems of synesthesia and influenced Čiurlionis' work was connected with the rebirth of Romantic ideas in Neo-Romanticism and in its most widespread Symbolist movement. Its main standard-bearers were Richard Wagner with his *Gesamtkunstwerk* (that is, idea of a unified work of art) and the ideologues of French Symbolism – Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud. The importance of synesthesia was exalted by Baudelaire in his cult work *Les Fleurs du mal* (Flowers of Evil), in the poems “Correspondances” (Correspondences) and “Parfum Exotique” (Exotic Perfume). These ideas were developed by another cultic ideologue of synesthesia, Rimbaud, who in the poem “Voyelles” (Vowels) attributes specific colors to the vowels of the French alphabet – A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue – and plays with these colorful vowels in his verses as if orchestrating his sensations. The spread in French Symbolism of ideas about synesthesia was first described in detail in 1902 by the French physician, poet, and Sinologist Victor Segalen in his work *Les Synesthésies et l'école symboliste* (Synesthesias and the Symbolist School) (Segalen, 1902, pp. 57-90).

Synesthetic abilities are rather rare, and this phenomenon has not, until now, been sufficiently researched and explained. Alongside Čiurlionis, the leading artists, or synesthetes, standing out for their synesthetic abilities have been Ferenc Liszt, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Scriabin, Jean Sibelius, Wassily Kandinsky, Vladimir

Nabokov, Olivier Messiaen, and György Ligeti. Synesthetic ideas or similar experiences were employed in the works of the artists James Whistler, Aubrey Beardsley, and Max Klinger and the musicians Scriabin, Messiaen, and Ligeti. Čiurlionis' relationship with the colors of painting and the sounds of music was deeper, strongly influenced by his unique creative potential and synesthetic experiences. This assertion is based on many important testimonies. For example, once, when talking with his brother Stasys after a concert in which Richard Strauss's musical poems (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Death and Transfiguration*, etc.) were performed, Konstantinas declared that, while he was listening to these works, the musical background had, for him, nuances of color. (Žilevičius, 1950, p. 493)

About Čiurlionis' typical synesthetic sensations of *space-time*, *sound-image*, and *color-sound* and his ability "to hear every note without touching the keys of a musical instrument" and to compose in a musical notation book without a piano, we also have another anecdote, recorded by Andrzej Markiewicz but related by his father, Piotr, who was Čiurlionis' close friend and visited him in Warsaw in 1903, when he was living in a tiny fourth-floor room and did not even have a piano. The guest found him lying on his bed in his clothes and writing something in a musical notation book. Asked by Markiewicz's father, Čiurlionis answered that he was composing a symphony. The old man was amazed that he could compose a musical work without a piano. Hearing his response, Čiurlionis only laughed and answered that in the creative process an instrument was entirely unnecessary for him because he heard every note without touching any keys. Čiurlionis threw his notebook in a corner and, for the first time, showed Markiewicz's father a folder with his drawings, thus again amazing his friend. (Andžejus Markevičius, 2006, p. 116)

In the chapter "Tapyta muzika" (Painted Music) in the abovementioned monograph devoted to Čiurlionis' work, when discussing his quests as a painter in the field of the interaction of the arts, Mikalojus Vorobjovas also mentioned that, when this Lithuanian artist told his friends in Warsaw about the impressions he experienced when listening to Strauss's symphonic poems, it became clear that Čiurlionis had *audition colorée*, that is, a special

hearing in colors, which eventually became an important segment of his creative potential and helped him solve the complex problems involved in the interaction between painting and music. In Čiurlionis' person this ability was also combined with other no less important abilities: a sensitive reaction to musical sounds, odors, and colors, which created, in this artist's consciousness, rich visual and musical associations comprised of many chromatic structures. Incidentally, Čiurlionis used to say that it is not enough for the composer merely to write down in a notation book the music that he hears in his heart; therefore, he transferred the sounds, colors, and rhythms that he matured and carried about in his heart not only to his preludes, fugues, sonatas, and other musical works but also to the famous pictures of his sonatic period, which are imbued with the spirit of musicality. This plunge into the world of fine art and parallel work in the fields of music and painting made these synesthetic abilities important on his creative path.

When we examine the problems of this artist's important contacts with the natural world and, consequently, of the transformation of his experienced impressions into specific works, there is great value in Čiurlionis' sister Jadvyga's recollections about an excursion with three brothers and two sisters to the picturesque Raigardas Valley with its many legends. She tells us about her brother's typically keen sensations of *sound-images* and *color-sounds*: Walking through a beautiful pine forest with murmuring trees, we often stopped, and Kastukas would say, "Listen!" But listen to what? And each of us heard something unique, entirely different and saw something entirely different. And indeed, you know, some sort of understanding was born that you can see a sound and hear a color. Of course, this seems absurd, but when you later listen to Čiurlionis' music and look at his pictures, it cannot be said that I see, but somehow you spontaneously feel such a deep, deep understanding – more than you see and more than you hear. (Čiurlionytė-Karužienė, 2006, p. 231)

This idea of seeing sounds and hearing colors was already embodied in a picture during his early period of literary-psychological symbolism – *Miško ošimas* (Murmuring Forest, 1904). Here, the trunks of tall trees are depicted

as strings that are strummed by a mysterious hand to evoke the sounds of a murmuring forest. However, such obvious associations with the world of music – associations that are typical of his Symbolist period and that may be regarded as this artist's ability "to see sounds and hear colors" – will not be encountered in his later work. An entirely different spirit of musicality imbues the pictorial cycles of his sonatic period with their exaltation of the beauty of untouched nature – *Sonata No. 2 (Pavasario sonata – Spring Sonata)* and *Sonata No. 3 (Vasaros sonata – Summer Sonata)*. Here, there is already a transition to far subtler plastic and chromatic solutions that are connected with synesthetic experiences and that, through masterfully employed means of artistic expression adopted from his work in music, profoundly convey an impression of musicality.

The essential difference between those artists whose work unfolded on the margins of synesthetic experiences and Čiurlionis lay in the fact that what was for them only a strong attraction, an idea, a metaphor was for this Lithuanian the profoundest characteristic of his existence and creative expression. Imbued with synesthetic experiences, Čiurlionis profoundly felt the ties between the inner morphological structures of painting and music, and this feeling prompted him to create a different, highly personal system for composing musical pictures – a system whose distinctive and most characteristic features were most clearly revealed in his mature cycles of sonatic painting.

Because of Čiurlionis' special sensitivity, the musically inspired impressions that he saw stood out for their intensity. This artist's creative imagination turned auditory forms into visual ones and created new images in which, after passing through his consciousness, symbols, metaphors, puzzling esoteric signs, colors, and sounds taken from the natural world were formed, in the shape of winding lines, amebic and geometrical forms, arabesques, and combinations of ornaments, into unified systems of artistic images that convey a theme or idea expressed in the name of a specific cycle. Indeed, by expanding the conceptual boundaries of the artistic world, the visual impressions influenced by Čiurlionis' synesthetic sensations, his soaring visual and receptive auditory memory, his associative, metaphorical thinking,

and his spontaneously flowing torrent of memories organically combined the expressive means of different art forms in the creative process.

The practical implementation of sonatic painting indeed demanded knowledge and competence in the structure of various arts, in the architectonics of forms, in the means of artistic expression, and in other fields: in *music* – the polyphony, counterpoint, rhythms, and tonalities of sounds; in *painting* – images, lines, forms, colors, and color schemes; in *literature* and *prose poetry* – the characteristics of verbal expression. When Čiurlionis entered the last evolutionary stage of his sonatic painting, he had already mastered polyphony, counterpoint, and the many other creative principles and means of artistic expression needed by a professional composer, and he had distinguished himself for his sense of artistic style, his cultivated intuition, and his ability to understand the primordial morphological structures connecting different art forms as well as the inner architectonics of these art forms. These were the most important factors that helped him solve, more successfully than his predecessors and contemporaries, the problems of the interaction of the arts. Also connected with Čiurlionis' quests in the field of the interaction between painting and music were the quests for the most promising opportunities to bring painting and music together by another synesthete of rare talent, Wassily Kandinsky, and by his closest comrades in the Blue Rider group, Paul Klee and Lyonel Feininger, who worked on the margins of synesthetic experiences. The creative interests of this group's members in the integration of the arts are revealed in the almanac they published, *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), in which special importance was given to the problems of the interaction of image, color, and sound, thus highlighting formalistic and growing tendencies to dematerialize painting.

Here, the reader's attention should immediately be drawn to the fact that Čiurlionis, unlike, for example, Kandinsky and the Fauvists, Orphists, and Futurists, cared little about the idea of *chromatic music*. To tell the truth, this idea was close not only to Kandinsky but also to Scriabin, whose work is called *light in music, visible music, or audible light*. "For those musicians who experience synesthesia," writes Greta Berman, "it seems to have an overwhelmingly large

impact on both their thinking and their work. They are not able to ignore it, even if others cannot perceive things the same way they do.” (Berman, 1999, p. 15) This observation of Berman’s may, with complete justice, be applied to Scriabin, whose connection with Čiurlionis and Kandinsky lay not only in his synesthetic abilities but also in his visionary qualities, worldview, attention to the philosophy, religion, and art of Eastern peoples, similar aesthetic interests, and passionate quests for closer ties between music and art.

It is known that Scriabin was acquainted with Čiurlionis’ artistic quests. (Sabaneev, 1925, p. 144) Their spiritual relationship is confirmed by the many fundamental ideas with which, as Nicholas Roerich aptly observed, both of them arrived too early. “Scriabin and Čiurlionis,” he maintained, “have much in common. And the very nature of those two brilliant artists has many similar features.” (Rerichas, 2006, p. 54) Indeed, both of them were impacted by *Gesamtkunstwerk* aesthetics, which had acquired tremendous influence at the turn of the century, and seeking practical implementation of the idea of a *universal* work of art, they worked in parallel in the artistic fields closest to them: Čiurlionis in three arts – music, prose poetry, and painting – and Scriabin as a composer, pianist, and author of philosophical and poetic texts.

Despite similar universal synthetic artistic goals, eventually resisting Neo-Romantic aesthetic ideals, they ultimately pursued different paths in the fields of Modernist innovations and forms of experimentation as well as means of artistic expression. When composing piano music, Čiurlionis inclined toward rationality and avoided external effects, while the more spontaneous Scriabin did not avoid extravagance and created a distinctive music of colors by relying on a circle of fifths and various color and light effects. In Čiurlionis’ pictorial sonatas, *what was important was not so much color as the composition of a specific picture or cycle of pictures, color scheme, spatial relationships, musical rhythm, and a subtle graphic-linear composition.*

Another creator who was close to Čiurlionis in his creative quests was the synesthete French composer Olivier Messiaen, who devoted special attention to integrating the arts and highlighting the colorfulness of music. He admitted that, whenever he heard music or read notes, he immediately saw

colors directly connected with the sound of that music. Messiaen invented a distinctive new method of musical composition – one that was based on an original system of harmonies and rhythms supplemented by transcribing the singing of birds as notes, that was influenced by the musical traditions of Eastern countries, and that was specially intended to convey in both directions the synesthesia of sounds and colors. He valued highly Čiurlionis' works in music and especially in fine art (he collected reproductions of his pictures), and he called this Lithuanian artist “an extraordinary composer of music and of painting” and his spiritual brother. They were indeed connected by a most profound reverence for the world of nature, by ties with the artistic traditions of Eastern peoples, and by a constant quest for new and original means of artistic expression.

The Blue Rider group headed by Kandinsky also included his friend, a reformer of 20th-century music, Arnold Schönberg, who was connected with the year-younger Čiurlionis by a passion for painting. The Swiss art historian Antonio Baldassarre maintained: By the end of the 19th century, the “musicalization” of the visual arts was a wide-spread idea shared by many intellectuals and artists, particularly within the Symbolist movement. This idea eventually resulted in the emergence of the concept of visual music. Although it is difficult to identify the precise origins of visual music, composers from Central and Eastern Europe played a leading role, including Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis and Arnold Schönberg. (Baldassarre, 2008, p. 8).

This Lithuanian painter's work was dominated by images of the natural world and visions of soaring fantasy, and Schönberg's – by portraits painted in an expressive manner. In truth, they were also connected by quests for the most modern means of artistically expressing musical language and by tendencies toward serial composition. Not by chance, Vytautas Landsbergis, Gražina Daunoravičienė, and Šarūnas Nakas discerned many connections between some of Čiurlionis' late preludes and Schönberg's piano pieces of the same period: composed in 1909, *Drei Klavierstücke* (Three Piano Pieces), Opus 11, plays in the same mysterious, nervous way, easily flaring up, as Čiurlionis' work, although the latter has rather greater contrasts and an open

incomplete musical form. In this respect, Čiurlionis' music, like his painting, was close to the radical, most innovative quests of the Modernist composers of that time for new means of artistic expression. Earlier than Schönberg and another Austrian composer, Josef Matthias Hauer, who was influenced by Chinese musical traditions, Čiurlionis created serial compositions and open, unfinished musical forms. For him, the principle of *non finito* was not a manifestation of mannerism or arrogance, but the natural consequence of ineffability.

Drawing attention to the stylistic features of Čiurlionis' music, the Finnish semiotician Eero Tarasti observed:

This is not the kind of "picturesque" music that Liszt created out of his travel experiences in his *Années de pèlerinage*, or Debussy and Albéniz in their musical "post cards". Čiurlionis's piano pieces are all purely musical, *tönend bewegte Formen*, without any intentional programmaticism. (Tarasti, 1987, p. 71)

Although in Lithuanian music Čiurlionis was often a Neo-Romantic of the post-Mahler epoch, in his work, as in that of Béla Bartók and the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky, who was descended from a Lithuanian noble family, the use of folk music was consonant with the attraction, typical of the Austrian composers Schönberg and Mahler, to constructive thinking, polyphony, modern harmonies, and musical arabesques.

Plunging Into the Inner Architectonic World of Art Forms

Barely a few years had passed since Čiurlionis' plunge into the world of fine art when what became established in his creative self-expression was painting in which, after a period of literary-psychological symbolism, in the second stage of his creative evolution, which was one of intense formal experiments, there gradually formed *a new, distinctive vision of musical painting*. At that time, according to the testimony of his friends, Čiurlionis was consumed by the ideas of Leonardo da Vinci, who enchanted him, and by those of the Romantic and Neo-Romantic aesthetic tradition about the interaction of the

arts and about the fusion of sound, color, line, form, and the other primary segments of a work of art into a unified whole. These ideas were reflected in the syncretic categories of *space-time*, *sound-image*, *color-sound*, *art-music*, and such others that similarly embody the indivisibility of two different first principles – categories that ultimately fused with the idea, important for his worldview, of the all-embracing harmony of the universe. The originality of Čiurlionis' solution to the problems of the interaction of the arts became clear *when he understood that painting could not be mechanically linked. He did not force his way into the musical world of temporal art, but in the structural principles of painting, in artistic means of expression, he began to seek analogs of musical language without exceeding the bounds of fine art.*

After journeys in 1906 to Western European cultural and artistic centers, Čiurlionis was manifestly dissatisfied with the eclectic naturalistic painting style, oriented toward external effects, of his early period of psychological symbolism. When this period enriched with bright colors and mysterious symbols had ended, he was more and more possessed by ideas of color-sound and sound-image, that is, of the totality of musical and nonmusical sounds as well as of the interaction between painting and music. Most probably knowing about the works with musical names of many of his Romantic and Symbolist predecessors, Čiurlionis was not interested in the external transference of musical subjects to painting; instead, he sought deeper inner connections between painting and music. Music was since Čiurlionis' childhood and later remained the fundamental point of departure and metaphysical core of his concept of sonatic painting – of the new concept, forming during his sonatic period, of the interaction between the arts.

Čiurlionis did not renounce his first passion – music – until the very end of his life. By working in parallel in music, literature, prose poetry, and various fine arts, he had an opportunity to compare the compositional, structural, and inner architectonic principles of these arts and their means of artistic expression. In his pictures this painter plunged into the inner architectonics of artistic forms. Without invading the element of the temporal art of music, he purposefully sought to highlight in painting and prose poetry the similar

principles of the musicality of art forms.

Having rich experience in the creation of music and being a painter deeply imbued with the most diverse nuances of sound, Čiurlionis visualized the forms he saw not only as static in space but also, as it were, as diffusing music in time. Moreover, by creating in parallel in three art forms, he had an ideal opportunity to take each further step in the direction of the interaction of the arts and to naturally reveal the inner points of contact between poetry, painting, and music. Constant contact with music taught him *to think comprehensively and nurtured the ability to create complex compositions and operate at the same time with the many different elements and structural layers in a work of art. His further path toward a more organic interaction between the arts was also conditioned by mental conclusions about genuinely existing parallels between the language of painting and music.*

Seeking maximal “musicality” in pictorial expression, Čiurlionis ever more clearly grasped the connections between the different inner architectonic principles of the arts and made them the point of departure of his compositional solutions. In many of the pictures of his mature sonatic period with the musical names *prelude*, *fugue*, or *sonata*, images of tangible reality were replaced by formalized, abstract, linear, rhythmic, arabesque structures with which he played like an improvising musician.

When Čiurlionis identified himself with an artist’s vocation and periodically shifted from music to poetry and fine art, what had formed earlier in the temporal art of music – his skills acquired in composition – did not disappear, and when he sought in fine art a solution to original compositional problems of space and time, these skills were naturally transferred to the spatial art of painting. Moreover, through parallel work in different art forms the processes of artistic integration grew faster, acquiring new stimuli and possibilities. Seeking to create paintings more organically than his predecessors had (in their “musical pictures” they usually limited themselves to merely external musical titles or themes), in his pictures Čiurlionis was already able, through the plastic forms of fine art, to express not *outer musicality*, but a *deeper inner one through pictorial means – through the play of colors, light, and darkness, through meandering lines, and through the architectonics of plastic forms.*

The need to seek adequate analogs of musicality in painting compelled Čiurlionis to clarify the equivalencies between painting and music and the possibilities for composition in their material forms of existence, for example, *in colors, sounds, arabesque forms, flexible musical lines, unfilled spaces, and other forms, able to imitate temporal structures, of artistic composition and the inner architectonics of works of art.*

When Čiurlionis was solving the problems of the interaction between the arts, the significance of the inner architectonics of musical forms, typical of various arts, was shown by something that no student of Čiurlionis has commented on in greater depth but that is extremely important for an understanding of the problems of the integration of the arts – an episode recorded in Sofija's recollections about association with her husband. "I do not know," she writes, "how my creative work would have developed if Konstantinas had lived. He encouraged me to try to apply musical architectonics to poetry. He explained the musical structure of works of art – I felt that I would need to study much, to study music." (Sofija Čiurlionienė-Kymantaitė, vol. 3, 1988, p. 329)

This fragment of recollections clearly *shows the special importance of an architectonics of musical forms in Čiurlionis' conception of the interaction between the arts* because in surviving fragments of his theoretical texts he encouraged creators of poetry "to try to apply musical architectonics to poetry" and maintained that there are no boundaries between different branches of art: "Music combines within itself poetry and painting and has its own architecture. Painting can also have the same architecture as music and express sounds with colors. In poetry the word must be music. Joining together words and thoughts must produce new pictures." (MA CBR, f. 146-19)

The growing attention in Čiurlionis' work to the inner architectonics of a picture, to quests for analogs of the language of music, and to real connections between colors and sounds and the moods that they evoke was directly connected with essential changes in increasingly decorative plastic language and in the means of artistic expression. After a second brief period of experimentation, formerly dominant literary images and symbols were replaced by generalized images, decorative symbols, increasingly abstract arabesques, and geometrical structures. Along with the growing spread of

these structures, the general image of sonatic paintings also changed. In these pictures, generalized laconic musical lines and rhythmic structures gradually emerged.

Here, the tendencies to make plastic language decorative and musical are directly connected with the emergence of a subtler color scheme close to East Asian painting with colored ink during the 9th to 14th centuries as well as with the development of these same motifs in several different improvisational registers. This process can be seen in the new solutions typical of Čiurlionis' later sonatic painting – solutions that involved composition, space, rhythm, and color scheme and in which masterfully employed discoveries emerged in the second stage of a quest for new formal means of artistic expression.

By interacting harmoniously or contrastively in sonatic pictures and especially in their cycles with meandering dynamic lines and various combinations of colors and color schemes from dark to light, linear structures and spatial forms together correspond to the musical functions of tones with different pitches from low to high. For example, in the picture *Fuga* of the diptych *Preliudas*. *Fuga* (Prelude. Fugue, 1908) the dispersion of its main dominant decorative motifs, presented on several different levels or spatial planes, is the equivalent of a musical melody and performs its functions in the system of images in this picture. To develop the theme, a decorative landscape is employed – motifs of hills, rows of firs, and huge bodies of water in various configurations with reflections of these firs. As in a musical polyphonic fugue, this entire system of images is developed on several different planes, one above the other; it comprises the sounds of a fugue that one after the other create a theme. Most of all, Čiurlionis preferred the transformation of the sonata form.

The fugue (from Latin *fuga* 'flight, running away') is the most popular complex form of imitative polyphonic music that was developed by Čiurlionis' favorite composers, Bach and Schubert. In this musical genre, the melodic theme selected by a composer for improvisation is presented, in a set order, in several different voices. The voice with which a fugue begins does not break off, but when another voice joins this musical composition, the first one, as if improvising, runs further, and the other one, again joining in, pursues

it, repeating its twists and turns at a different pitch. Thus, when listening to fugues, the listener forms the impression of a dynamic musical composition in which some voices run and others, joining in later, pursue them, as it were. Hence arose the name *fugue*.

Thus, in the picture *Fuga* Čiurlionis speaks forth in a new language of musical architectonics, seeking with new, more abstract forms to achieve an effect of rhythmic alternation in musical structures – an effect that is created by the formalized silhouettes of firs, hills, castles, and bent human figures. In order to achieve the effect of musicality in a system of artistic images in a picture, he astutely employed what was widespread in the East Asian tradition of landscape painting – alongside water, the motifs of mirrorlike reflection, repetition, and further rhythmic development – principles that imitate, as it were, the dispersion of rhythmic musical melodies. With its restrained greyish color scheme and subtle tones and halftones, this picture – whose system of images is dominated by firs reflected on the flat surface of water, the towering structures of mountains, and the silhouettes of bent figures, vertical lines illustrating, as it were, theosophical ideas and crowned with nimbuses of light at their top – indeed looks not only like a work of visual art but also like the notation of a musical work that has been written down in an esoteric language of signs and that can be played.

The Sonatic Form of Čiurlionis' Concept of the Interaction of the Arts

This *fugue* can be assessed as an important transitional work whose structure and formal plastic language reveal new features of Čiurlionis' musical *architectonics of painting*. The musical structures and main thematic lines that emerged in this fugue were further developed in his famous pictorial sonatas, in which the canon of the fugue described above – the development, connections, and improvisations of its main and secondary themes – is transformed and changes because of the greater number (usually three or four) of pictures typical of his pictorial sonatas.

In comparison to fugues, pictorial sonatas have a more complex form and

visual structure. Cycles of sonatas do not merely contain more thematic lines, symbols, signs, and other elements. By employing experience acquired from experiments with the architectonics of art forms, Čiurlionis sought to convey an effect of musicality not through thematic motifs or narratives depicting musicians or musical instruments, but exclusively through the language of plastic means of artistic expression in painting, that is, through the visual forms typical of painting. The fact that he boldly undertook such a complex task primarily tells us that this painter had already attained such a level of mastery that he painted to highlight the architectonic analogs of complex forms of musical language. However, in him we can sense not only the quests and discoveries of a second stage in the formal means of artistic expression, but also the effect of an earlier period of literary-psychological symbolism – an effect that lies in literary vestiges that have not disappeared and in the need to read, step by step, a change in the complex, abstract, formal, and rhythmic structures that are unfolding.

The most characteristic features of sonatas are compositional, rhythmic, and spatial refinement in pictorial solutions, a subdued color scheme, and a fluid manner (like that of watercolors in the technique of tempera painting) that helps achieve the chromatic unity of the clear tones and halftones dominant in a specific cycle of pictures. Dominant here is subtle transparent linear composition – the astute composing of various formalized symbols, arabesques, rhythmic graphic structures, and geometrical forms.

Thus, in the fugue, which had become the model for solving the problems of the interaction between the arts, there emerged for Čiurlionis the principles of the main theme, of its offshoots and the insertion of other themes, and of the architectonics of conveying the effect of musicality in painting – those compositional, rhythmic, spatial, chromatic, and arabesque principles that were later purposefully developed in cycles of sonatic painting. These cycles preserved a new structure – more rigid than that of a fugue, canonical, and consisting of a four-part sonata theme (*Allegro*, *Andante*, *Scherzo*, and *Finale*) with the development of associated motifs.

The clear developmental logic of the art forms of the sonata not only limited

the scope of some earlier cycles of pictures, for example, the seven parts of *Laidotuvių simfonija* (Funeral Symphony) and the thirteen parts of *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World), but also highlighted the lack of inner logical connections typical of the pictures comprising these huge cycles – a lack that, when Čiurlionis later changed his creative strategy, could be clearly seen in cycles of three- or four-part pictorial sonatas.

In the rigidly structured canon of a four-part sonata, Čiurlionis discerned the model of cyclical composition on the basis of which he could, *by logically moving from one picture to another, develop the ideas of his intended theme*. In his preferred compositional structure for three- or four-part pictorial sonatas, he was able to find those clear principles of consistent logical development that were connected with the inner architectonics of a work of art and that were so lacking in his early cyclical works of literary-psychological symbolism.

In each of the late pictorial sonatas, regardless of the number of pictures comprising the cycle, a specific theme clearly named in the cycle is dominant, and typical of this theme is a distinctive visual, compositional, and plastic solution. Thus, while preserving the same canonical form of the sonata model, these cycles nevertheless differ from one another in their names, the number of pictures in a specific cycle, their rhythmic structures, the moods expressed, and their dominant themes and motifs – all of which are ultimately determined by the creative strategy chosen by the artist himself for the practical implementation of his undertaking.

Created in 1907, Čiurlionis' first four-part pictorial sonata cycle, *Sonata Nr. 1 (Saulės sonata [Sonata of the Sun])*, exhibits tendencies to stylize the forms of the real world and to formalize and dynamize decorative systems of artistic images – tendencies that were implemented by employing musical lines and rhythmic repetitions of expressive silhouettes of bent trees and amoebic forms. Still foreign to this four-picture cycle of rich yellowish colors are the clarity, typical of later works, of painting in tempera and refinement of artistic style. In order to strengthen the musical effect, starting with *Sonata Nr. 2 (Pavasario sonata [Spring Sonata])*, part one *Allegro*, Čiurlionis astutely introduced, at the beginning of the cycle, rhythmic flexible musical graphic

lines, constantly changing in space and time, and the reflections in water of rhythmically repeating visual forms. The visual image of this picture is reminiscent of the score of a musical work – one that has been written down in different, unfamiliar signs and that can immediately be played.

When passing from one cycle of sonatic painting to another, Čiurlionis' creative fantasy transformed the temporal art of music into forms typical of the spatial art of painting. His later cycles of sonatic painting improved rapidly in terms of composition, plastic language, and color scheme, and in terms of aesthetics and stylistic maturity they already revealed a higher level of aesthetic value on a unified continuum of space and time. Typical of Čiurlionis' mature cycles of sonatas are ever more harmonious solutions in composition and perspective that were achieved through a rapidly improving mastery of the formal plastic aspects of painting and of the means of artistic expression.

In this process of quests, real analogs between musical and pictorial language emerged, primarily connected with the relationships of linear, chromatic, tonal, rhythmic, formal, arabesque, and melodic segments in the compositional structures of various energetically active pictures. Experimenting with colors and various linear structures and forms revealed that in the compositional space of a picture, for example, melodic functions can be performed by a soft, flexible, energetically or dramatically unfolding, ascending or descending line, while various shifting expressive or placid forms and the subtlest chromatic tones and modulations can perform the functions of diffusing musical tones and melodies. These processes were revealed in Čiurlionis' most mature sonata cycles, created in 1908: *Sonata Nr. 3* (*Žalčio sonata* [Sonata of the Grass-Snake]), *Sonata Nr. 4* (*Vasaros sonata* [Summer Sonata]), *Sonata Nr. 5* (*Jūros sonata* [Sonata of the Sea]), *Sonata Nr. 6* (*Žvaigždžių sonata* [Sonata of the Stars]), and *Sonata Nr. 7* (*Piramidžių sonata* [Sonata of the Pyramids]).

In these, his last pictorial sonatas, Čiurlionis astutely employed the principles of musical composition and, in fine art, their analogs as well as those of the musical means of artistic expression, and he ever more consistently plunged into the morphological connections between the arts and their world of inner architectonics, all of which helped him highlight in his pictures not the outer,

but the inner musicality of art forms. Doing parallel work in various fields of art and comparing the possibilities of their plastic language and artistic expression, he had an excellent grasp of the fundamental truth that André Malraux constantly repeated in his texts – that *art is primarily the language of art forms*.

Having grasped this axiom, in his sonata painting Čiurlionis mainly focused his attention on the problems of the inner architectonics of morphology and form in art. This was the magic key that opened the door to the successful application in fine art of analogs of musical language and that provided the opportunity for a fruitful integration into sonatic painting of the principles of East Asian landscape painting: primarily, its typical cyclical thinking, principles of perspective, a bird's-eye view of the world, the development of ideas in time, and the unity of subdued color schemes in pictures.

Thus, in solving the problems of the interaction between painting and music, Čiurlionis went incomparably further than the Pre-Raphaelites who outwardly imitated musicality, the Romantic and Symbolist artists Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Jean Delville, Moritz von Schwind, Henri Fantin-Latour, Max Klinger, Gustav Klimt, and James Ensor, and the many other salon painters who served the tastes of philistines. When we discuss the generations of painters of the Pre-Modernist epoch, a more organic connection between painting and music is typical only of the Impressionist James Whistler and the Symbolist Odilon Redon.

Typical of the best pictures during Čiurlionis' sonata period is a horizontal repetition (with abundant tonal modulations) of rhythmic metaphorical images, symbols, and sign. An important compositional role is performed in these pictures by meandering dynamic lines that join these stylized forms into a unified organism and that not only enhance a musical-rhythmic effect but also provide the pictures with an atmosphere of inner energy, tension, and lifelike dynamism. Including in his pictures dynamic analogs of musical language and influenced by East Asian traditions of landscape painting, Čiurlionis introduced into his cycles of pictorial sonatas the characteristics of artistic time. Typical of his sonata cycles is an organic syncretism of musical-

visual thinking.

Endowed by nature with imagination and creativity, Čiurlionis felt an attraction to harmony and the unified development of ideas, and not by chance, he chose to implement his goals about the interaction of the arts through the canonical form of a musical sonata with a limited number of parts – a form that he applied to the cycles of his mature pictorial sonatas. A natural question arises: what effect did this choice have on the further creative evolution of an artist who created such a well-defined concept of musical painting? In response to this question, we may briefly state that Čiurlionis, after finding the key to solving the problem that had long tormented him of the harmonious interaction of painting and music, elevated the idea of musical painting in his most mature cycles of pictorial sonatas to an entirely new level in terms of artistic value. At this level, there disappeared the aimless wandering that was typical of the earlier periods of his creative evolution; during his sonata period, his path of deepening interaction between the arts became more and more consistent, and the plastic quests that accompanied his creative process often ended (as in Picasso's work) with significant discoveries.

The musical effect in Čiurlionis' cycles of sonata painting is strengthened by the ability, typical of rhythmic repetitions of motifs and meandering lines, to create as artistic images and symbols unfold the illusion of time *speeding up* or *slowing down*. The subtle and sensitively psychologized introduction of temporal structures into the compositional solutions of his pictures inevitably also affects their viewers. Here, inner subjective space becomes a characteristic of consciousness that is already projected into the systems of artistic images of a specific picture or cycle.

The psychophysiological aspects of the effect on the viewer of Čiurlionis' musical pictorial sonatas, their typical longing for unity, give cycles of pictorial sonatas a special harmony that permeates not only their content but also their form, rhythms, colors, and the unified solution to the color schemes of different pictures in cycles. Čiurlionis was especially successful in implementing his goals of highlighting the musicality of his pictures when he found an adequate graphic-plastic form that met the specifics of fine

art. During the mature period of his work, this painter did not yield to the superficial charm of color, but like East Asian painters, he revealed his ideas on the plane of the subtlest tones and halftones. Thus, the best examples of Čiurlionis' painting during his sonata period are distinguished by a special musicality and harmony. In this respect, his famous *Jūros sonata* (Sonata of the Sea) is one of the most perfect examples in the history of world art of the interaction between painting and music and, indeed, of musical painting.

Moreover, the employment of various analogs adopted from music of pictorial language and of the means of artistic expression in East Asian landscape painting became here, in the works of his sonata period, important auxiliary instruments for implementing his undertakings. Thus, in Čiurlionis' musical pictures the structure of the images is revealed not only in panoramic space but also in time. The themes that he chose for his musical pictures during his sonata period were usually developed in cycles. Here, as in East Asian painted scrolls that usually depicted the changing seasons, the sequence of images, as in music and literature, is understood in terms of artistic time. What differs is only the direction in which motifs are developed: in the East the structure of images in a work moves from right to left, while in Čiurlionis' pictures – in the opposite direction. However, in both instances what connects the process of apprehension is that the field for apprehending a part or fragment of a cycle is limited only by the particular space encompassed for viewing and apprehending.

Because the importance of theme gradually weakens in the mature works of Čiurlionis' sonata period (in comparison to the early pictures of his literary-psychological symbolism), the temporal principle of musical composition gave the artist an opportunity to imperceptibly include the viewer in the process of understanding the work of art and to lead him after himself. By applying various accelerations and decelerations of rhythm, depending on the plastic suggestiveness of a picture in a cycle, the significance of developing the main themes and leitmotifs, and their concentration or sparseness, he opens up for the viewer the most secret spiritual flights and encourages a dialog with the thoughts being developed by the artist, his moods and emotional

experiences.

In the three- or four-part sonata with a cyclical canonical form Čiurlionis discerned the model of cyclical composition that he employed flexibly when creating his cycles of pictorial sonatas. For example, in the traditional four-part sonata structure that Čiurlionis preferred, parts with a different tempo and emotional intensity alternate as *fast-slow-fast-slow*. Thus, in the structure of a musical sonata Čiurlionis was able to find those clear compositional principles of musical language that were connected with the inner architectonics of a work of art and that were so lacking in the early pictorial cycles of his period of literary-psychological symbolism – in *Laidotuvių simfonija* (Funeral Symphony, 1903), *Tvanas* (Flood, 1904/5), and *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World, 1905/6).

Čiurlionis masterfully applied the clearly structured sonata model that he had taken from music to implement his goals in painting. This model provided an opportunity to present his systems of artistic images by following the rationally and purposefully defined logic of the sonata form, as in the horizontal scrolls of East Asian landscape painting, where there is consistent movement from one picture to another to the very end of the cycle. This was usually done by depicting the objects being painted from a bird's-eye view and by often employing different perspectives, different points of view.

Thus, by relying on his many years of experience as a composer and by employing canonical art forms derived from music as well as parallels in the artistic language of music and fine art, Čiurlionis created *an original analog of the canonical form of the musical sonata – his own structural model of a painted sonata*. In it, harmoniously included in the unified compositional system of a usually four-part cycle based on the dynamics of rhythm (reflected in naming the parts after musical tempos – *Allegro, Andante, Scherzo, Finale*) are many of the universal, fundamental principles of inner architectonics that are typical of both the temporal and the spatial arts. This Čiurlionian model of a painted sonata has a clearly defined basic theme with its dominant motifs, symbols, metaphors, and enciphered signs – contrasting, polemicizing among themselves, dynamic, filled with profound calm and concentration,

developed according to the patterns in the artistic form of a musical sonata.

The interactions of temporal-musical and spatial-pictorial structures that emerged in this form of the painted sonata were based on archaic, cyclical, mythopoetic models of vital processes that pass through four basic phases of development: the birth of an idea (form), its growth or culmination, its decline, and its end or disappearance. Thus, there arises the cyclical temporal thinking typical of his painted sonatas, as mentioned in an earlier section.

One of the most important distinguishing features of Čiurlionis' painted sonatas is their connection with mythic consciousness, with its cyclical flow of artistic images. This feature is developed in two different directions – a *horizontal-linear* one conveying earthly structures and a *vertical-sacral* one oriented to celestial space. Following models of the universal vital processes of mythic consciousness, this cycle passes through the four basic phases of development and, as it were, logically completes their unified structure.

The artistic images developed in specific sonata cycles are distinguished by their different musical tonality, dominant mood, and color schemes and tones with the processions typical of musical works and the display of various rhythmic spatial structures in time. In comparison to earlier works, in the cycles of sonata painting we see rapid growth in compositional and plastic culture as well as a growing decorativeness in plastic language that is organically connected with subtle color schemes. Typical of each of Čiurlionis' seven cycles of painted sonatas are his own principles of dramaturgy and exposition (highlighting) because his artistic images, symbols, and signs are constructed in individual parts of these pictorial cycles by following the requirements for developing a musical theme, and each succeeding picture in a cycle develops in its own way the thematic motifs that were expressed in the preceding one and that are an inseparable part of a single basic system of images.

Each cycle of sonata painting has its own specific gamut of colors, in which from the first picture to the last there is one dominant tone, pale and subdued – yellowish, greenish, brownish, or bluish. Mikalojus Vorobjovas wrote: Like the shapes, the brushstrokes of color in the *Sonatas* are light and bright. This artist is everywhere satisfied with a minimum of materiality; thus, his

compositions are, at first glance, indescribably fragile and spiritualized in an unearthly way. Nevertheless, they have usually arisen through uncommon empathy with natural phenomena, by most ardently experiencing such real phenomena as the sun, melting snow, etc. (Vorobjovas, 2012, p. 63)

Thus, despite the widespread view of Čiurlionis as a spontaneous artist with an emotional style (undoubtedly, there is some truth here), when discussing his best works (his sonata paintings and his late piano compositions), we cannot ignore their important constructive analytical nature, which can be clearly seen in the solutions to complex compositional problems that demanded rationality, professionalism, and an excellent grasp of the means of expression in different arts.

Foreign to the pictures of his sonata period is their overloading with unnecessary secondary details. What typifies his creative thinking is clarity of style, conciseness of form, and artistic purity. In his pictures special importance is acquired by empty, unfilled spaces, pauses, and the emotional effect of silence on the viewer; these qualities, directly connected with growth in his humane and aesthetic culture, are reflected in the best paintings of his most mature period. By not being overloaded with unnecessary details, the empty artistic spaces here sensitively reflect the level of Čiurlionis' mature thinking during his sonata period, the aristocratic nature of his spirit, and his powers of generalizing art.

As shown by our analysis, during the early stage of his creative evolution Čiurlionis was greatly influenced by various Neo-Romantic, primarily Symbolist, theories that exalted the link between the musical and the visual as well as synesthetic experiences. Eventually moving on from music to painting, which exerted an ever-greater influence on him, for a while he did parallel work in music, literature, and prose poetry. In his concept of the integration of the arts, Čiurlionis mainly focused his attention *on the architectonic world of inner artistic forms that had been of little interest to his contemporaries*, and he sought, through the possibilities of formal, plastic, and compositional means of artistic expression, to convey the process of presenting musical-pictorial forms in space and time by highlighting the compositional equivalents of

analogous musical structures in fine art.

Moreover, by plunging into the inner architectonics connecting different art forms, Čiurlionis was able to find, in the spatial art of painting, reliable analogs of the temporal art of music. Doing so helped him more profoundly grasp the compositional, structural, and morphological principles connecting these fields of creative activity as well as the arsenal of means of artistic expression. Contrary to the widespread view of Čiurlionis as a typical intuitivist, his cycles of sonata painting, like many of his late musical works, are distinguished by their rationality because the systems of pictorial and poetic images developed during his mature sonata stage obey the strict canons of the musical form of the sonata.

An important factor that helped Čiurlionis implement his original vision of the interaction between painting and music was what we have discussed in various aspects – the synesthetic abilities that helped him grasp the possibilities for the interaction of images, colors, rhythms, and other structures and opened up the path to the radical Modernist innovations that linked Čiurlionis to Kupka, Kandinsky, Klee, Feininger, and other Modernists. These connections, which emerged when solving the formal problems of perspective, composition, and color scheme, also found a direct echo in the prose poetry and piano music that he was creating at that time and that revealed the new tendencies toward constructive thinking that were typical of innovative works in serial music.

Thus, the different ideas developed by Čiurlionis the synesthete in various fields of artistic expression were powerful and enriched his imagination and creative arsenal. By employing structural and rhythmic analogs of musical language, he created an original style of musical painting that on an entirely different level of interaction between the arts organically embodied the old idea of “musical painting.” Thus, his original concept of harmonious interaction between painting and music cannot be squeezed into the framework of any specific artistic movement.

And finally, at the mature sonata stage of Čiurlionis’ creative evolution, the connection between painting and music was based not only on synesthetic experiences, on the diffusion of soundscapes, but also on East Asian

traditions of landscape painting that combine elements of calligraphy, poetry, and musical rhythmic. Hence arises what typifies the pictures of his sonata period – his own distinctive principles of perspective, composition, color scheme, and the development of ideas in time. They fused with *cyclical temporal thinking* that proceeded from many years of musical experience and *that was one of the clearest distinctive features of sonata painting*. At this stage of evolution in painting there formed something that was not merely unique in the history of fine art – pictorial forms of artistic expression that slipped (soundlessly) from the sphere of influence of musical sounds and that combined the aesthetic principles of *non finito*. From here there remained only a step to “music without sounds,” which spread in later artistic practice and, like Čiurlionis, emphasized the importance of silence, things left unsaid, and aesthetic suggestion, which became equally important not only in pictorial sonatas but also in individual late musical works.

Translated by Jonas Steponaitis