

# **Symphonism as a strategy of translating a symphonic poem into drawing**

## **Introduction**

*The reason why the artist started this research is to reflect upon the way artists think and create. Many of our ideas and our artistic thinking come from novels we read, films we watch, music we listen, etc. Essentially, we are very shaped by the narratives that we are exposed to. We think and create within a very historical social context.*

*In the researcher's view, we are nowadays firmly in a very distinctive era in the history of arts, which she calls 'the era of post-symphonism'. As you can logically assume post-symphonism is an offspring of symphonism. And symphonism is a historic category that began in the studios of music composers and writers in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and nowadays even if you've never heard of a single symphonist like Beethoven or Dostoevsky from old Europe, and you're just having your life here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you are still influenced. Because we all are by symphonism. So, whether you don't necessarily know about it, feel it, or touch it, it is all around us. We are living in the era of post-symphonism.*

Now, what is symphonic thinking? Modern scholars of symphonism in art begin the historical “countdown” of symphonism from the era of Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason. They come to the conclusion that it is a different type of thinking, dissimilar to the baroque thinking and inherent in classicism. Baroque thinking is characterized by the suite – a set of separate fragments, often contrasting each other, but independent from each other. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, baroque thinking gave way to symphonic thinking, which is characterized by such a logic, in which each subsequent phase follows from the previous one, carrying out the development “in a spiral” [1]. There are two basic features of symphonism to be emphasized: the development of the idea and a qualitative transformation of the idea through this development.

As it follows from its definition, the concept of ‘symphonism’ does not refer only to music written for the performance by a symphony orchestra, but has a much wider scope in other forms of art.

In 1902, a work with the original title “The Dramatic Symphony” was published, the author of which was not yet known. At that time, Andrey Bely was twenty one years old. The work represented a completely new genre of literature, “an experiment of frontal construction of a literary text in accordance with the structural canons of a music work” [2]. In this symphony of Bely, the structure of the sonata-symphonic cycle is peculiarly, but rather accurately reproduced.

The works of Bely and of other Russian symphonists have influenced the researcher's writing, thus readers can notice the presence of symphonic principles of thinking in her literary texts. This phase of her research aims to translate this thinking into drawings.

The question of translation of one language/art form to another is not simple. Proust once remarked that all poetry is written in a foreign language. Proust did not, of course, have in mind actual foreign languages. Instead, the foreign language Proust

had in mind was one he was in the process of inventing—the foreign language that is every artist's own.

But how can anyone translate the language that is not spoken anywhere? How does one translate this “otherness” into another language or another art form?

Proust experienced that foreignness himself when he translated John Ruskin's "The Bible of Amiens" and "Sesame and Lilies" into French. His sense of the idiosyncrasy of the task was so strong, and his doubt as to whether he had sufficient mastery of the language to accomplish it was so pronounced, that he once remarked, “I don't claim to know English. I claim to know Ruskin.”

The author of this research has been working for a few years already on the problem of how to translate lyric poetry to audio-visual medium. What she came up with is a "strategy of translation" that she calls 'symphonism'.

The subject of her experiment and analysis is the poem-in-drawings "On How the Palace Bridge Opens Up Its Hands". The author chose this poem due to the fact that the text is rich with features of symphonism that makes it easier to work with as an object of this 'experiment in translation'. The author, in collaboration with the visual artist Bart Dewolf, tries to translate the features of symphonism, which are inherent to the text of poetry, into the medium of the drawing.

Regarding the translation process, the researcher followed a number of steps some of which she had planned beforehand, based on previous practice and knowledge gained, and some she came up with in the process.

In order to get closer to the most complete understanding of the specificity of the application of the method of symphonism in the medium of drawing, it was necessary to make a list of means of artistic expression in both mediums - a symphonic poem and a drawing:

- (1) the structure of a symphonic poem (sonata-allegro form) - the composition of the series of drawings (sonata-allegro form),
- (2) tonality of a symphonic poem (sadness, joy, longing ...) - color scheme of the drawings,
- (3) rhythm in a symphonic poem - rhythm in the drawings,
- (4) dynamics in a symphonic poem - dynamics in the drawings.

These are the features that the researcher considered important to maintain and convey while translating the source text, and therefore, kept them in mind throughout the whole process. When translating a poem into drawings it was essential that the researcher kept in mind these distinguishing features that mark the original work, so that the outcome can qualify as this poet's work.

Regarding the difficulties the researcher faced in the creative process, they were for the most part related to the differences in the means of expression of a literary text and visual art, which verifies Roman Jakobson's assertion about the nature of difficulties in translation [3].

The challenge was to maintain the sonata-allegro form and the rhythm of the poem not at the expense of the imagery and the content. The visual artist had to be creative to come up with the right means of the visual language to adequately translate the sonata-symphonic structure and the music qualities inherent in the literary text into the drawings.

For example, one of the challenges was to translate the rhythm of the symphonic poem, first - at the linguistic level of a literary work. In poetry, it means the general ordering of the sound structure of poetic speech, in which such stylistic devices as alliteration, assonance, dissonance, onomatopoeia, rhyme, anaphora, epiphora, all kinds of sound repetitions as well as meter participate.

This rhythm in the drawings was achieved through means of plastic organization of the drawings (repetitions, accents, alternations), with active interaction with colour as well as the technique of applying ink and paint.

Secondly, there was the plot-compositional level of a literary work (sonata-allegro form) at which the rhythm was also to be translated. It was executed by means of internal rhythm of each drawing (colour, composition, the technique) as well as the amount of drawings in each respective part of a sonata-allegro form. For instance, the quick-paced 'exposition' was achieved through the long shots and only 5 drawings, while the slower-moving 'development' part consists of 15 drawings which are mostly close ups. The recapitulation is loud and brings the viewer back to the pace of the exposition.

The result seemed to the authors rather fitting, after all, since it created an effect close to that of the original.

### **Preparation for work and stages of its creation**

In their work, the researchers have chosen the following tools and materials: paper, pencils, ink pens, acrylic paint, light board.

They chose the horizontal format of the paintings, with the exception of two out of twenty drawings, which were executed in a vertical format. The movement of the viewer's gaze along the pictorial plane depends on the format of the picture, and each format conveys sensations in the image in its own way. The horizontal format stretches the sensation of time that the author is dealing with in the text. This format allows to translate the dynamics of the text to audio visual medium.



Two vertical pictures "compress the image", emphasize the focus of the gaze - up or down, and enhance the height of the gaze. The main thing in these two paintings becomes either the impression of the eye's aspiration to the sky, to the trail left by the airplane (picture 13), or an artistic image of an inexorable, heavy sky and the desire to look down, at what is located under the weight of this sky (picture 1).



The poem is based on the movement of the protagonist's memory and the dynamism of the pictures of this memory: they sometimes rage and grow, then slow down.

The colours the researchers have chosen reflect their sense of music of the poem. The visual work relies on an emotional sound. Thick gray, even blackish shades of acryl, complemented by areas of geometric calmness of ink lines, remind the viewers of the memory storm of the protagonist, sometimes subsiding and starting again.



The research experiment was done in the following sequence:

- Reading a poem and listening to the audio visualisation of the work;
- Development of various sketches of a storyboard;
- Creation of a storyboard in full size in pencil;
- Execution of the original work in full size in ink and acryl on paper;
- The readiness of the paintings for further work of the animator.

### **Implementation of the method of symphonism in detail**

What means of expressiveness of graphic art and symphonic poetry can we compare?

The musical theme is created by a whole complex of expressive means. These are intonation, harmony, rhythm, tempo, register, timbre, dynamics, performing stroke and texture of the musical fabric of the poem.

Means of expressiveness in graphics are colour, drawing, composition, perspective, chiaroscuro, painterly brushstroke, texture of a painted surface, etc.

The role of composition is important in any art form; it determines the integrity and proportionality of the parts that make up the artistic whole.

## COMPOSITION

Thus, let us turn to the first feature of expressing the method of symphonism - the musical composition of a graphic work - 'sonata-allegro form'. The author takes as a basis the extrapolation of the peculiarities of the formation of the musical form of the sonata-allegro to the structure of the graphic work. When performing this extrapolation, the researcher is aware of the need to avoid too straightforward analogies, understanding that the languages of two forms of art (poetry and graphic art) use the expressive means which can be only relatively called 'equivalent'.

So, let's see how the author expressed the first section of the sonata-allegro - "exposition" in the series of drawings.

The role of the exposition is essential. First of all, it tunes the listener to a specific narrative mood and introduces the three themes. In a generalized form, the scheme is as follows (main theme, side theme, linking theme). The exposition is represented by five drawings.



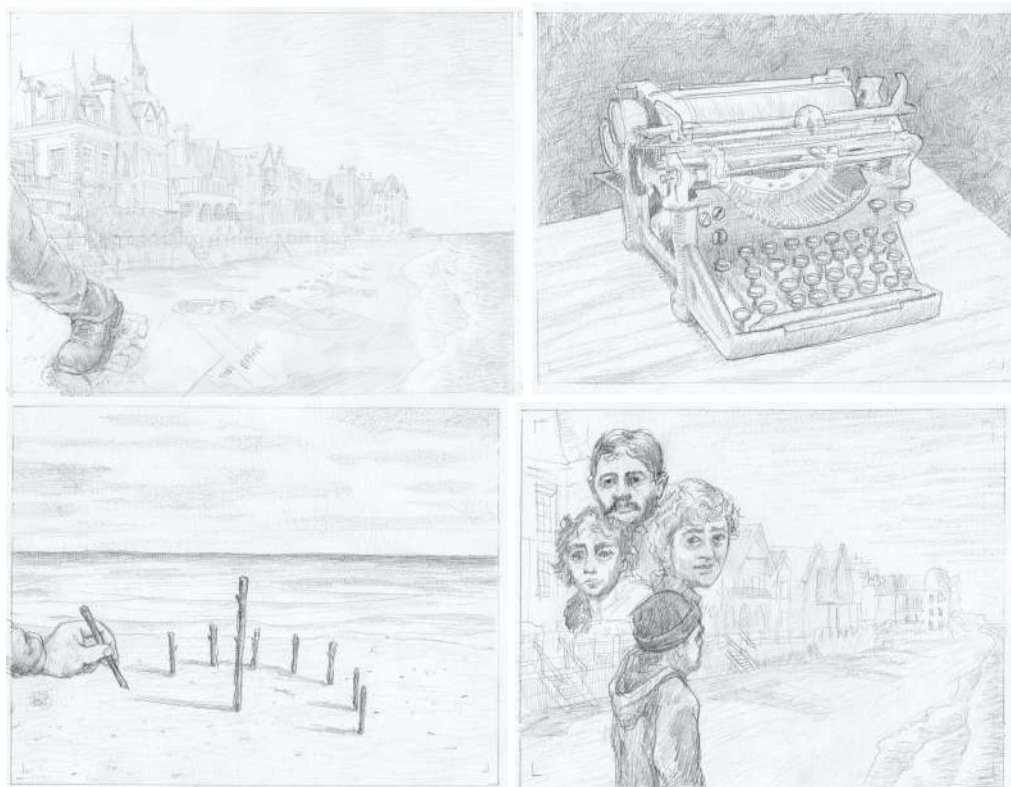
In the foreground of four of the five paintings, we see the protagonist: either he is looking into the distance, or at the Bank Bridge, or at the Ligurian Sea, or he is peering into his reflection in the canal of Brugge. Let's take the liberty to interpret it as the "main theme". As you know, the "main theme" in the sonata-allegro has an

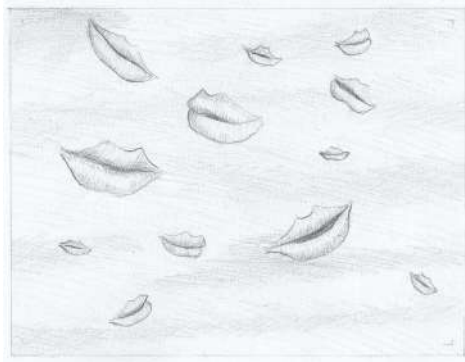
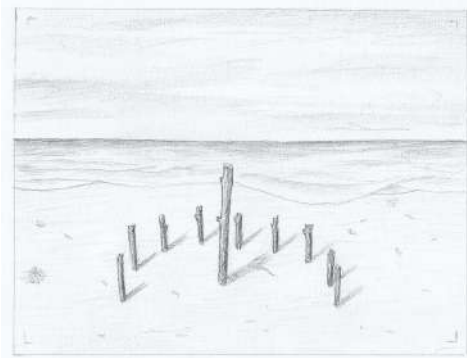
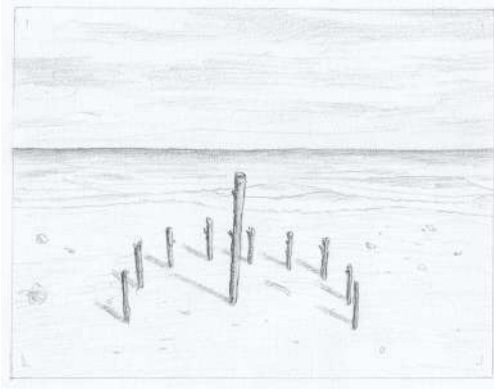
active, dynamic character, it is given in the main key. Here, in the poem, it is the real inner state of the protagonist that is full of movement of feelings and memory, and this inner state of his will prevail, dominate, penetrating into subsequent layers. The main theme is expressed figuratively through the protagonist, as well as symbolically through the Palace Bridge and the sky, which personify the state of the protagonist at the beginning and at the end of the poem, showcasing the qualitative transformation of his inner condition.

The quality of development of the "main" theme is guaranteed by the "linking theme" - the images of the elusive time: the sticks in the hand of the protagonist (the base of a sundial). Sticks are featured throughout the exposition phase as a linking theme.

The "side" theme is the symbol of the past - the water - contrasting the "main theme". The side theme gives dynamics to the development of the "main" theme.

The next part - "development" - is represented by ten pictures. Development is the second large section of this work. The development of themes takes place in it in conditions of tonal and harmonic instability. In the process of this development, a modification of themes occurs.





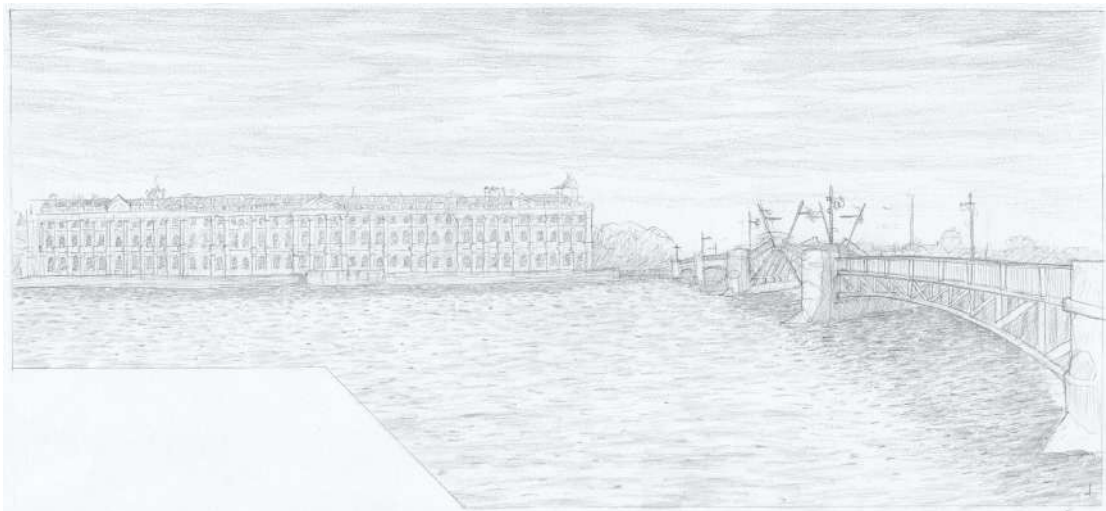
Permanent instability is the main property of the development phase. Instability is expressed in harmonic structure (constant modulations), in metrics (torn rhythm of shots in moving image) and in thematism (themes do not exist in full, but in the form of isolated motives).

'Development' is the central and most important section of the poem-in-drawings, it is an extensive part (10 paintings out of 20) and exceeds the exposition in size. In addition, closer to the end of the development (at the point of the golden section of the entire form - the 16th picture) is the general climax (the moment of the highest tension in this poem).

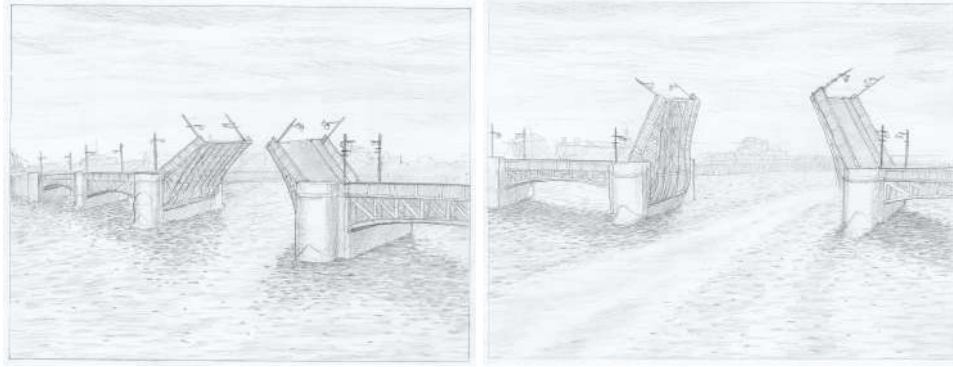
The development opens with the protagonist's thought about 'the passing of time'. We see his boot coming out of the frame, and the beach is littered with footprints. The development repeats the previous topic, but with greater strength and emotionality.

As is well-known, before the *recapitulation* in the sonata-allegro form, a *prediction* is built. This is the highest point of *development*, the culmination, the point of the golden section of the form. In this work, it is represented by the 16th drawing - a full-face view of the Hermitage and the Palace Bridge, which now appears for the second time, already not solo, but as part of an ensemble - in tandem with the Hermitage. The drawing follows the text and thus visualizes the return from the protagonist's memory journey to the very place where the poem began, to the present. The protagonist stands in front of the Hermitage, reincarnating the lost time. The Hermitage appears in front of the viewer in its entire length, then the protagonist's gaze moves along the Hermitage building, and then rests against the Palace Bridge. The bridge is gradually opening, the viewer sees the remains of the protagonist's memories - flying lips from the past, which periodically interrupt the images of the opening bridge. As a result, the viewer sees a trail escaping into the horizon between the opened doors of the bridge - a trail from the departed steamer. The outline of the trail appears in the poem for the last time and is the final echo of the plane's trail in the sky, which appeared in pictures 11 and 13.

All this can be perceived as a kind of a dynamic *'reprise'*. The Palace Bridge, which echoes the "exposition", vividly demonstrates its reprisal nature: the 'exposition' is a closed Palace Bridge with a heavy overhanging November sky, a dynamic "reprise" is an open Palace Bridge with a clearing sky.







Let us note a feature of constructing a composition in the reprise - a linear-graphic "multi-angle", subordinate to a certain external static condition. It seems that the hero is standing and looking at the bridge, but the viewer understands that the bridge appears in each subsequent picture from a changed perspective, the impression is created that the protagonist begins to soar over the Neva, following the trail of the departed steamer, saying goodbye to his expectations, which have become past tense. On the one hand, it is conveyed so that this "landscape" is a phenomenon outside of time and space, belonging to the category of eternity. But at the same time, the composition is filled with hidden dynamics of internal development. It manifests itself in the fact that the viewer sees the bridge not traditionally from the shore, like it was presented at the beginning of the poem, but from "over the Neva", as though "in a soaring perspective", if we consider the given perspective is the view of the protagonist. It was important for the author to choose this angle in order to capture the musicality of development in the symphonic sense of the word. The exposition has a view exclusively of the bridge from the shore, the development - a view of the bridge and the Hermitage from the shore, and a reprise - two different views of the bridge from above the water. In addition, in the development and reprise, we see the symbol of flying lips. These lips, dynamically flying over the Neva and through the protagonist's consciousness, reflect the pace of the main theme - the hero's agitated and seething memory. In contrast, water reflects a more restrained pace. The water element seems to slow down the movement itself. Such a comparison emphasizes the contrast between the air and water elements, free flight in the boundless sky of memory and a more restrained floating movement of the real, material world.

The rhythmic organization of the poem-in-drawings also played an important role in the recreation of music qualities of the poem by means of graphics. The piece is saturated with rhythmic formulas. We feel the rhythm in the almost uniform strokes of ripples of water, present in 10 pictures out of 20. We can see it in the repeating strokes of the November sky, in a carefully drawn architectural ornaments of buildings and bridges.

The rhythm is revealed in the regularly recurring angle of the protagonist's body in profile on the left of each of the canvases, which creates visual dynamics. In addition, the rhythm is also expressed in the uniform alternation of the following elements: the sundial, the ghosts of writers, the house of Sagan, trails of an airplane and a ship, lips, the bridge.

As you can see, the author deliberately aimed to recreate the sonata-allegro structure through drawings. In this experiment, composition, which is the structure of the sonata-allegro form, formed the basis for the synthesis of poetry and graphics.

**However, not only composition served to this experiment-in-translation.**

All means of artistic and musical expression are subordinated to this. The following features of symphonism such as rhythm, color, dynamics, etc. are also aimed at translating the symphonic nature of the text piece into the medium of drawings.

Rhythm conveys movement and is a characteristic property of any living organism. Musical rhythm has its own characteristics. In music, rhythm in the broad sense of the word determines the organization in time of the entire composition. Rhythm in music links together tempo, meter (uniform movement of time fractions) and rhythmic pattern (combination of durations). However, rhythm can also be present in a graphic work. A sign of rhythm in a drawing is a certain pattern in the repetition of phenomena, forms, elements. It is thanks to the rhythm of the parts that make up the whole work that we catch its character: calm or anxious, majestic or fussy.

The color in painting can be comparable to the timbre (coloration of the sound of a voice or instrument) and register in music.

Intonation is the bearer of meaning in music; a melodic image grows out of it. Intonation in painting can sound in lines, color combinations, black-and-white modeling.

Dynamics (strength of musical sound) can be compared with saturation, "sonority" of local colors or transparency, watercolor lightness of coloring in painting.

So, let's consider how these categories of music are embodied in the medium of the drawing.

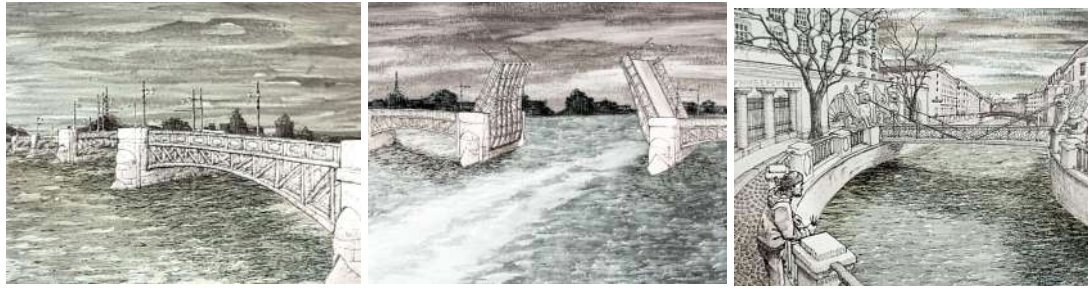
## RHYTHM

The rhythm in this poem-in-drawings is embodied in the plastic organization of works (repetitions, accents, alternations), with active interaction with colour, as well as the technique of applying ink and paint.

20 paintings can be divided into several clusters (repeating elements), in which the rhythm of the whole cycle is embodied.

### 1. Water.

One of the leitmotifs of the cycle is water, which sets the rhythm for all the other elements. Bart Dewolf has depicted water in all of the paintings in a special manner, maneuvering while hatching, making them look alive.



## 2. Protagonist.

Against the "trembling" background of water, the protagonist's figure in the foreground stands out powerfully in all the paintings in which he is present. The chiaroscuro of this figure is more expressive, the strokes are more intense, the rhythm is more forced. Bart uses the crosshatching technique here, adds a second layer of lines that are drawn in the opposite direction. Using crosshatching builds the illusion of darker tones with fewer lines.



The rhythm created by strokes serves to characterize the protagonist and the evolution of his sensations. The artist deliberately creates his own rhythm with strokes for each piece of clothing. Energetic, of different lengths, rhythmically laid wide strokes of dark color on the sleeve make the contours of the clothes uneven, wavy. All the rhythms of clothing are multidirectional and create the impression of mobility, disorganization, which are characteristic of the movement of the protagonist's memory.

## 3. The sky (St. Petersburg's sky, misty sunrise, Brugge by night, Normandy's beach sky, the sky above Francoise Sagan's mansion).

The sky in all drawings is made using liquid acrylic, while it is always different. The authors intentionally use another material for the execution of the sky - acrylic - to express the continuity and the qualitative development of the condition of the protagonist: from heavy and hopeless to the brighter state of mind.



## 4. Sundial.

The first picture of this cluster begins in the morning. Then the hand of the sundial changes its position, creating a sense of the passage of time. Alternating with the

faces of the writers' ghosts, the moving time literally personifies the movement of the protagonist's memory.



#### 5. Architecture (buildings, bridges).

Architectural rhythms, filigreed precision of each line of the Hermitage and bridges express thoughts of the lofty, divine level, evoke the appropriate lyrical mood. A calm meter-rhythm is inherent in buildings and bridges.



### COLOUR

It is also important to consider such a connecting criterion of music and painting as colour, as it determines the "tonality" and mood of the visual works. The whole cycle of drawings is distinguished by monochrome colouring, which conveys the elegiac mood of the poem.

The work is sustained in black and white ink, while a separate element made in acrylic is the sky - the personification of the hero's inner state - the main part of the work. We see how the shades of the sky gradually change from picture to picture. First, we observe a thick dark heavy sky, then the shades gradually turn into light pastel colors.

Proceeding from this colour, as well as from the general emotional character of the work, it can be argued that the work has a minor "tonality". The colour of the minor key is also used in the musical sequence that accompanies the poem, and contributes to the identification of the dramatic beginning, as presented in this work, where there is a struggle and conflict of themes.

### DYNAMICS

Now we will draw a parallel with such a category of music as dynamics.

The nascent work of memory of the protagonist in the first pictures personifies piano (Italian - quietly). Then we observe a gradual increase in volume, in music the term *crescendo* (Italian sound reinforcement) is used. The wave of memory grows in the

next 10 paintings and already sounds like forte (Italian - loudly) and, finally, pours out into a huge, significant emotional wave that rolls over the Palace Bridge and the Hermitage - the inner enlightenment of the protagonist, which, like fortissimo (Italian - very loudly) is the brightest, most intense element of the work - drawings 16, 17, 18, 19. The end of the work - open Palace Bridge (drawing 20) - is accompanied by a gradual decay of volume - diminuendo - the viewer sees the open horizon and the trail of the departed steamer.

Thus, we revealed that in the rhythmic organization of the piece colour and dynamics are actively involved. Having analyzed the rhythmic structure of the piece, we come to the conclusion that all the identified elements of the rhythmic organization of the work are aimed at the analogy between the musical rhythm of the poem and the rhythm of the drawings.

### **Conclusion**

In the process of this practical study of the topic, it can be concluded that the relationship between graphic art and poetry, the interaction of sound and color is tangible: in poetry it is timbre and tone, in graphic art - color and rhythm are equivalent to them. In both arts, rhythm is of great importance, that's how the plot is created.

Nevertheless, color is one of the most important systems of emotional expression in both visual art and poetry.

In the visual arts, it is possible to express not only the mood of the symphonic poem, but also the rhythm, dynamics, composition.

The translation of one through the other is very interesting in terms of practical applications in visual arts and poetry. By combining the traditions of both art forms, having managed to understand their means of expression, summarizing the experience of the previous interaction of arts, we can say that the researchers have created a fruitful experiment. Symphonism as a strategy of translation does build bridges between various art forms, resulting to an artistic "cross-pollination" [4]. But it also results to a deeper perspective and understanding of one's own way of thinking and language.

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