



Study of the Object

For Voices

SATB

Words by Zbigniew Herbert

Music by Nigel Morgan

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About the Music

I discovered the poem *Study of the Object* by the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert as a teenager and have over the years set its words several times. It continues to lay a curious spell on my imagination and recently I've become to understand its oblique and ironic world more fully and completely. Hence a further version. This choral setting forms the basis of a larger and further work (of the same title) for a variable ensemble of voices and instruments composed as a companion piece to *Metanoia* for variable ensemble composed in 1988.

Study of the Object

For Voices (SATB)

Words by Zbigniew Herbert

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Zbigniew Herbert (1924 – 1998) is now regarded as one of the foremost poets of his generation. His champions have included the Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney whose commemorative lecture and reading of 2009 can be found on [YouTube](#). Herbert's poetry often uses Latin and Greek mythology and is full of flights of the imagination that only words can engender. *Study of the Object* is one of his most well known poems in English and the translation used here is by Czeslaw Milorz and Peter Dale Scott.

The poem is in six parts set and to be performed as a continuous work. Composed in the spirit of *Metanoia* it has a particular simplicity of vocal organisation. The music is predominantly homophonic with a tonal centre on the pitch B throughout. Although a rehearsal part for keyboard is provided, the composer would prefer any accompaniment of this version to be created directly from the vocal parts themselves, and as freely as possible. The work is, as with *Metanoia*, written with student performers in mind who are encouraged to make the work their own through an imaginative response to orchestration and choral arrangements. With the latter, sections, indeed movements, may be scored for a group of soloists or semi-chorus. Tempo, dynamics, articulations and expressive markings should be considered as a guide, no more.

Study of the Object is written for and dedicated to the students of the Norfolk County Youth Orchestra and Choir and the Norwich Students Orchestra with whom the composer worked between 1986 and 1988 creating two major works *Skyscapes* for instrumental soloists, choir, and orchestra with computer, and *Metanoia* for variable ensemble.

Study of the Object

1

The most beautiful is the object
which does not exist

it does not serve to carry water
or to preserve the ashes of a hero

it was not cradled by Antigone
nor was a rat drowned in it

it has no hole
and is entirely open

seen
from every side
which means
hardly anticipated

the hairs
of all its lines
join
in one stream of light

neither
blindness
nor
death
can take away the object
which does not exist

2

mark the place
where stood the object
which does not exist
with a black square
it will be
a simple dirge
for the beautiful absence

manly regret
imprisoned
in a quadrangle

3

now
all space
swells like an ocean

a hurricane beats
on the black sail

the wing of a blizzard circles
over the black square

and the island sinks
beneath the salty increase

4

now you have
empty space
more beautiful than the object
more beautiful than the place it leaves
it is the pre-world
a white paradise
of all possibilities
you may enter there
cry out
vertical-horizontal
perpendicular lightning
strikes the naked horizon

we can stop at that
anyway you have already created a world

5

obey the counsels
of the inner eye

do not yield
to murmurs mutterings smackings

it is the uncreated world
crowding before the gates of your canvas

angels are offering
the rosy wadding of clouds

trees are inserting everywhere
slovenly green hair

kings are praising purple
and commanding their trumpeters
to gild

even the whale asks for a portrait

obey the counsels of the inner eye
admit no one

6

extract
from the shadow of the object
which does not exist
from polar space
from the stern reveries of the inner eye
a chair

beautiful and useless
like a cathedral in the wilderness

place on the chair
a crumpled tablecloth
add to the idea of order
the idea of adventure

let it be a confession of faith
before the vertical struggling with the horizontal

let it be
quieter than angels
prouder than kings
more substantial than a whale
let it have the face of the last things

we ask reveal o chair
the depths of the inner eye
the iris of necessity
the pupil of death

From *The Collected Poems, 1956-1998* (Ecco),
translated by Alissa Valles.

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Study of the Object

I

Sostenuto e calmo ♩ = 120

p

Soprano
mp
The most beau - ti - ful The most beau - ti - ful The most beau - ti - ful is the ob - ject

Alto
mp
The most beau - ti - ful The most beau - ti - ful The most beau - ti - ful is the ob - ject

Tenor
mp
The most beau - ti - ful The most beau - ti - ful The most beau - ti - ful is the ob - ject

Bass
p
The most beau - ti - ful The most beau - ti - ful The most beau - ti - ful is the ob - ject

Piano

5

S. *mp* **A** *mf preciso*
the ob - ject which does not e - xist it does not serve to ca - rry wa - ter

A. *mp*
the ob - ject which does not e - xist

T. *mp* *mf preciso*
the ob - ject which does not e - xist it does not

B. *mp*
the ob - ject which does not e - xist

P.

8

S. *mf*
it does not serve

A. *mf preciso*
it does not serve to carry wa-ter
mp
to ca-rry wa - ter

T. *mp*
serve to ca-rry wa-ter
to ca-rry wa - ter

B. *mf preciso*
it does not serve to ca-rry wa - ter it does not serve

P.

12

S. *mf*
or to pre-serve the a-shes of a he-ro
mp dolce
it was not cra-dled by An-ti-go-ne

A. *f*
or to pre-serve the a-shes of a he-ro
mp dolce
it was not cra-dled by An-ti-go-ne

T. *f*
or to pre-serve the a-shes of a he-ro

B. *mf*
or to pre-serve the a-shes of a he-ro

P.

17 **B** *mf* *calmo*

S. *mf* *calmo* and is en-tire-ly o-pen

A.. *mf* *calmo* it has no hole en-tire-ly o-pen

T. *f* *pesante* nor was a rat drowned in it and is en-tire-ly o-pen

B. *f* *pesante* nor was a rat drowned in it

P.

21 *mf* *mp* *poco rit. . .* *a tempo*

S. *mf* from e-very side which means hard-ly an-ti-ci-pa-ted

A.. *mf* e - very side which means hard-ly an-ti-ci-pa-ted the hairs of all its

T. *mf* e-very side which means hard-ly an-ti-ci-pa-ted the hairs of all its

B. *f* seen from e - very side which means hard-ly an-ti-ci-pa-ted

P.

25 *mf* poco accel ... *f* **C** *poco lento*
p

S. join in one stream of light nei-ther blind-ness *mp*

A.. lines join in one stream of light nei-ther blind-ness can

T. lines join in one stream of light bind-ness nor death can take a-way *mp*

B. join in one stream of light nor death *p*

P.

30 *mp* *mf*

S. can take a-way the ob-ject the ob-ject which does not e-xist

A.. take a-way the ob-ject the ob-ject which does not e-xist

T. can take a-way the ob-ject the ob-ject which does not e-xist

B. can take a-way the ob-ject the ob-ject which does not e-xist

P.

attaca

II

34 *Dolente* ♩ = 55

Soprano

Alto

Tenor *p*
a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge for the beau-ti-ful

Bass *p*
a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge

Piano

38

S.

A.

T. *p*
ab-sence it will be a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge

B. *p*
for the beau-ti-ful ab-sence a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge a

P.

42 **D** *f* *risoluto*

S. mark the place where stood the ob-ject which does not e -

A. *f* *risoluto*
mark the place where stood the ob-ject which does not e -

T. a sim-ple dirge for the beau-ti-ful ab-sence it will

B. sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge for the beau-ti-ful

P.

45 *mf*

S. xist bla-ck square bla-ck bla-ck square

A. *mf*
xist mark the place with a bla-ck bla-ck bla-ck square

T. be a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge

B. ab-sence a sim-ple dirge a sim-ple dirge a

P.

48 *f*

S. *man-ly re-gret im - pri - sioned in a qua - dran - gle*

A. *man-ly re-gret im - pri - sioned in a qua - dran - gle*

T. *a sim - ple dirge for the beau - ti - ful ab - sence*

B. *sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge for the beau - ti - ful*

P.

51 **E** *p*

S. *a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge*

A. *a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge a*

T. *ab - sence*

B. *ab - sence*

P.

S. *for the beau - ti - ful ab - sence it will be a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge*

A. *sim - ple dirge for the beau - ti - ful absence a sim - ple dirge a*

T. *- - - -*

B. *- - - -*

P. *- - - -*

F

S. *a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge for the beau - ti - ful ab - sence it will*

A. *sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge for the beau - ti - ful*

T. *mark the place where stood the ob - ject which does not e -*

B. *mark the place where stood the ob - ject which does not e -*

P. *- - - -*

63

S. *be a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge*

A. *ab - sence a sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge a*

T. *xist bla - ck square bla - ck bla - ck square*

B. *xist mark the place with a bla - ck bla - ck bla - ck square*

P.

66

S. *a sim - ple dirge for the beau - ti - ful ab - sence*

A. *sim - ple dirge a sim - ple dirge for the beau - ti - ful ab - sence*

T. *man - ly re - gret im - pri - sioned in a qua - dran - gle*

B. *man - ly re - gret im - pri - sioned in a qua - dran - gle*

P.

attacca

79

S. *mf*
 wing of a bli-zzard cir-cles cir-cles the black square

A. *mf*
 wing of a bli-zzard cir-cles cir-cles on the black sail

T. *mf*
 o-ver o-ver the black square on the black

B. *mf*
 o-ver o-ver the black square on the black

P.

83

S. *f*
 a hu - rri-cane beats beats on the black sail the

A. *f*
 a hu - rri-cane beats o-ver the black square the

T. *f* *>*
 sail beats on the black sail o-ver the black square

B. *f* *>*
 sail beats on the black sail o-ver the black square

P.

87 Pesante ed espressivo ♩ = 55

S. *mp* , **H** *mf* <

wing of a bli-zzard cir-cles cir-cles the black square all space swells

A. *mp* , *f* -

wing of a bli-zzard cir-cles cir-cles the black square now

T. *f* *mp* , *f* -

o-ver o-ver the black square now

B. *f* *mp* , *mf* <

o-ver o-ver the black square all space swells

P.

91 *f* *mp* >

S. *f* *mp* >

like an o-cean swells all space now and the is-land sinks be-neath the

A. *mp* >

now swells now and the is-land

T. *mp* >

now swells now and the is-land

B. *f* *mp* >

like an o-cean swells all space now and the is-land

P.

The musical score consists of five staves. The top four staves are for voices: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The bottom two staves are for the Piano (P.). The lyrics are: "sal - ty in - crease", "sinks be - neath the sal - ty in - crease", "sinks be - neath the sal - ty in - crease", "sinks be - neath the sal - ty in - crease". The score is divided into three measures. The first measure is in 4/4 time, the second in 4/4 time, and the third in 3/4 time. The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and a more active treble line.

attacca

IV

Tranquillo ♩ = 60

99

mp *poco cresc.* *mf*

Soprano
mp emp - ty space now you have emp - ty space more beau - ti - ful

Alto
mp emp - ty space now you have emp - ty space more beau - ti - ful

Tenor
mp emp - ty space now you have emp - ty space more

Bass
mp emp - ty space now you have emp - ty space more

Piano

poco dim. *mp* **I** *p cupo*

S.
mp more beau - ti - ful than the ob - ject than the place it leaves it is a

A.
mp more beau - ti - ful than the ob - ject than the place it leaves it is a

T.
mp beau - ti - ful than the ob - ject than the place it leaves it is a

B.
mp beau - ti - ful than the ob - ject than the place it leaves it is a

P.

106 *mp*

S. *mp*
pre world a white pa-ra-dise of all po-ssi-bi-li-ties

A. *mp*
pre world a white pa-ra-dise of all po-ssi-bi-li-ties

T.
pre world of all po-ssi-bi-li-ties

B.
pre world of all po-ssi-bi-li-ties

P.

111 **J** *Risoluto* ♩ = 100

S. *sotto voce* you may en-ter there cry out ver-ti-cal
f

A. *sotto voce* you may en-ter there cry out ver-ti-cal
f

T. *sotto voce* you may en-ter there cry out cry out
f

B. *sotto voce* you may en-ter there cry out
f

P.

114

S. *ho - ri - zon - tal per - pen - dic - u - lar light - ning light - ning*

A. *ho - ri - zon - tal per - pen - dic - u - lar light - ning light - ning*

T. *cry out cry out light - ning*

B. *cry out cry out light - ning*

P.

117

K *Tranquillo* $\text{♩} = 60$
mp

S. *strikes the na - ked ho - ri - zon a - ny - way you have cre - a - ted a*

A. *strikes the na - ked ho - ri - zon a - ny - way you have al - rea - dy cre*

T. *light - ning strikes the na ked ho - ri - zon a - ny - way you have cre*

B. *light - ning strikes the na ked ho - ri - zon a - ny - way you have cre - a -*

P.

S. *world* *we can stop at that*

A. *a- ted a world* *we can stop at that*

T. *a- ted a world* *we can stop at that*

B. *ted a world* *we can stop at that*

P.

attacca

V

124 *Enfatico* ♩ = 90

mf *f*

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

of the inn - er eye do not yield
of the inn - er eye do not yield
o - bey the coun - sels do not yield to mur - murs mu - tte - rings
o - bey the coun - sels do not yield mu - tte - rings

f *f* *p* *p*

Piano

130

ff *mp misterioso* *mf*

S.
A.
T.
B.

sma-ckings it is the un - cre - a - ted world crow - ding
sma-ckings it is the un - cre - a - ted world crow - ding
sma-ckings it is the un - cre - a - ted world crow - ding
sma-ckings it is the un - cre - a - ted world crow - ding

ff *mp misterioso* *mf*

P.

S. *and co-mman- ding their trum- pe- ters to gild*

A. *and co- mman- ding their trum- pe- ters to gild*

T. *and co- mman- ding their trum- pe- ters to gild e- ven the whale asks for a*

B. *and co- mman- ding their trum- pe- ters to gild e- ven the whale asks for a*

P.

S. *o- bey the coun- sels ad- mit no one*

A. *o- bey the coun- sels ad- mit no one*

T. *por- trait of the inn- er eye ad- mit no one*

B. *por- trait of the inn- er eye ad- mit no one*

P.

attacca

VI

157 *Ritmico* ♩ = 55

f *mp poco sostenuto*

Soprano
f *mp* *f*
 ex - tract from the sha-dow of the ob-ject which does not ex - ist

Alto
f *mp* *f*
 ex - tract from the sha-dow of the ob-ject which does not ex - ist

Tenor
f *mp* *f*
 ex - tract from the sha-dow of the ob-ject which does not ex - ist ex -

Bass
f *mp* *f*
 ex - tract from the sha-dow of the ob-ject which does not ex - ist ex -

Piano

162

S.
f *mf* *f*
 ex - tract from po - lar space ex - tract

A.
f *mf* *f*
 ex - tract from po - lar space ex - tract

T.
mf *f*
 tract from the stern re - ve - ries of the inn - er eye ex - tract

B.
mf *f*
 tract from the stern re - ve - ries of the inn - er eye ex -

P.

168 *mp* *crescendo e allargando f*

S. a chair beau - ti - ful and use - less like a ca - the - dral

A. a chair beau - ti - ful and use - less like a ca - the - dral

T. a chair like a ca - the - dral

B. tract a chair like a ca - the - dral

P.

173 *subito meno mp* **N** *Animato* ♩ = 80 *mf*

S. in the wil - der - ness add

A. in the wil - der - ness a crum - pled ta - ble cloth to the i - dea of or - der add

T. in the wil - der - ness add

B. in the wil - der - ness place on a chair to the i - dea of or - der add

P.

179 *cresc.* *f* *ff* *f*

S. the i - dea of ad - ven - ture let it let it let it be

A. the i - dea of ad - ven - ture let it let it let it be

T. the i - dea of ad - ven - ture let it let it let it be a con - fe - ssion of faith

B. the i - dea of ad - ven - ture let it let it let it be a con - fe - ssion of faith

P.

185 *p poco meno* *mp allargando e cresc* *mf* *pesante* ♩ = 60 *f*

S. quie - ter than an - gels more sub - stan - tial than a whale let it have the

A. *pp* (quasi parlando) be - fore the ver - ti - cal stru - ggling with the ho - ri - zon - tal let it have the

T. more sub - stan - tial than a whale let it have the

B. *ff* prou - der than kings let it have the

P.

189

S. *mp* , *mf* *mp*
 face of the last things if we ask re - veal o chair the depths

A. *mp* , *mf* *mp*
 face of the last things if we ask re - veal o chair the depths

T. *mp* , *mf* *mp*
 face of the last things if we ask re - veal o chair the depths

B. *mp* , *mf* *mp*
 face of the last things if we ask re - veal o chair the depths

P.

194

S. *mf* *p*
 of the inn - er eye the i - ris of ne - ce - ssi - ty the pu - pil of death

A. *mf* *p*
 of the inn - er eye the i - ris of ne - ce - ssi - ty the pu - pil of death

T. *mf* *p*
 of the inn - er eye the i - ris of ne - ce - ssi - ty the pu - pil of death

B. *mf* *p*
 of the inn - er eye the i - ris of ne - ce - ssi - ty the pu - pil of death

P.