

Text, Texture, and Timbre: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Art Song

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Questions

How does a composer set text?

How does the performer communicate meaning through nuances of diction and vocal timbre?

How do text, texture, and timbre interact within a piece?

Poldowski



Methodology

- I. Text - poetic analysis - Stephen Rodgers
- II. Texture - color analysis - Jennifer Beavers
- III. Timbre - K. Heidemann and V. Malawey

“Spleen,” mm. 16-34

I. Text

II. Texture

III. Timbre

22

agitato

cresc.

suivez

> cresc.

pedal A2

25

cresc.

ff appassionato rall.

ritard. ff

rinförzando

28

ff rit.

dim.

ff rit.

a tempo

ff

Angelique
Zuluaga:



Les roses étaient toutes rouges,
Et les lierres étaient tout noirs.
Chère, pour peu que tu te bouges,
Renaissent tous mes désespoirs.

Le ciel était trop bleu, trop tendre,
La mer trop verte et l'air trop doux.

★ Je crains toujours, ce qu'est
d'attendre!
Quelque fuite atroce de vous.

Du houx à la feuille vernie
Et du luisant buis, je suis las,
Et de la campagne infinie,
Et de tout, fors de vous hélas!

text by Paul Verlaine

The roses were all red,
and the ivy quite black.
Dearest, if you so much as move
all my despair returns.

The sky was too blue, too tender,
the sea too green and the air too soft.
Always I fear, such is the consequence
of waiting!
some pitiless abandonment by you.

Of the holly with its glossy leaves
and of the shining box tree, I am weary,
and of the boundless countryside,
and of everything but you, alas!

translation by Pierre Bernac

“Spleen,” mm. 16-30, text

16 *doux* *avec inquiétude* *subito p* *de plus en plus*
Je crainst toujours ce qu'est d'at.ten dre quel.que



19 *intense* *pp pressez cresc.*
fuite a. tro . ce de *vous* du houx à la feuil . le ver.
suivez *dim. morendo* *leggiero* *p pressez*

pedal A2:



22

agitato

ni . e et du lui.sant buis Je suis las

> suivez

cresc.

pedal A2

25

f

et de la campagne in . fi . ni . e et de

cresc.

ff appassionato rall.

tout "everything"

ritard. ff

rinforzando

28

ff rit. dim.

fors! de vous hé - las

"you"

ff rit.

ff

a tempo

ff

Power



power

22

ni . e et du lui s'ant buis Je suis las

> suivez >cresc.

25

et de la campagne in . fi . ni . e et de tout

cresc. >

ff appassionato rall.

ritard. ff

ff rinforzando >

28

fors! de vous hé . las

ff rit. dim. a tempo

ff > ff >

rit. >

Classification	Instruments		
Color	<i>Piccolo+</i>	<i>Horn+</i>	<i>Celesa</i>
	<i>Oboe d'amore</i>	<i>Cornet</i>	<i>Percussion</i>
	<i>Eb clarinet</i>	<i>Piccolo trumpet</i>	<i>Harp</i>
	Bass clarinet		<i>Piano</i>
	English horn		
	Contrabassoon		
	<i>Saxophones</i>		
Power	Piccolo	Horn	Timpani
	Trumpet	<i>Snare drum*</i>	
	Trombone		
	Tuba		
Standard	Flute	Violin	
Oboe	Viola		
Clarinet	Cello		
Bassoon	Bass		



Jennifer P. Beavers, “The SPC Model (Johnson 2011),” *MTO* 27.1, 2021.

Timbre

Elements	<i>Bel Canto Setup</i>	Possible Deviations
phonation	neutral	breathy
onset	balanced	glottal
pure/noisy	pure	raspy
register	modal voice , no obvious difference between chest and head voice	
vibrato	consistent vibrato	straight tone/no vibrato

Victoria Malawey, “Quality,” in *A Blaze of Light in Every Word* (2020).

“Spleen,” mm. 16-30, timbre

25

et de la campagne in . fini - e et de tout

cresc.

ff appassionato
rall.

ritard. ff
rinforzando
ff

28

fors! de vous hé - las

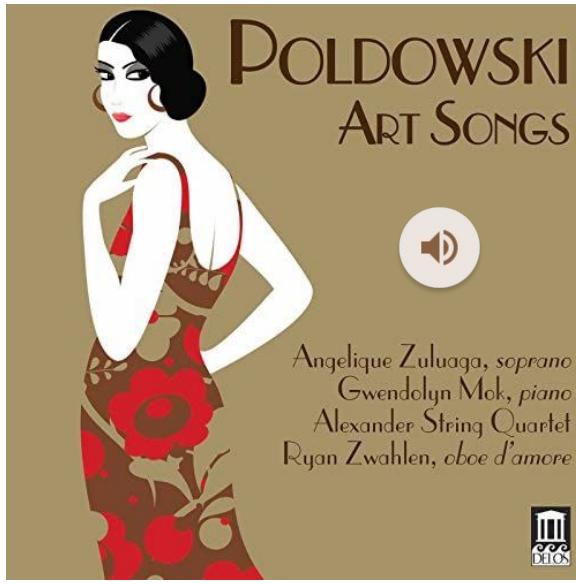
rit.
dim.
a tempo
ff

ff

timbre!

Zuluaga:





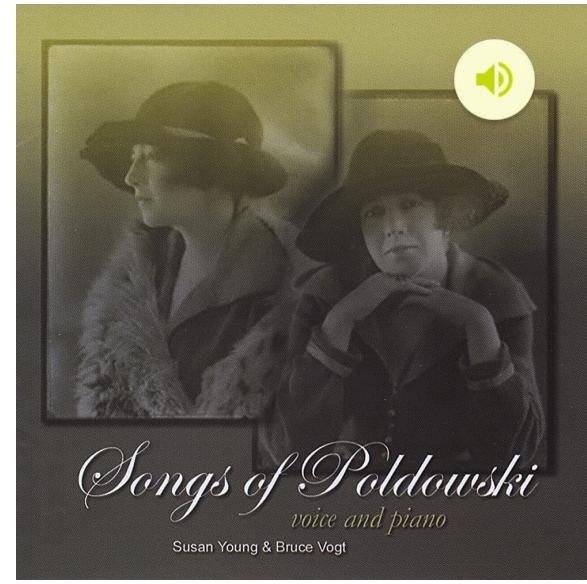
Anglique Zuluaga & Gwendolyn Mok

Poldowski, *Spleen*, Anglique Zuluaga and Gwendolyn Mok (Delos DE3538, 2017), [URL](#).

A screenshot of a digital music player interface. At the top, the word "Albany" is repeated seven times in a horizontal bar. Below this, the text "Songs by Clara Schumann Poldowski Amy Beach" is displayed, followed by a circular volume control icon with a speaker symbol. In the center is a photograph of a forest path during autumn, with trees showing orange and yellow leaves. Below the photo, the names "Lauralyn Kolb, soprano" and "Don McMahon, piano" are listed. The overall aesthetic is vintage and artistic.

Lauralyn Kolb & Don McMahon

Poldowski, *Spleen*, Lauralyn Kolb and Don McMahon (Albany TROY 109, 1994), [URL](#).



Susan Young & Bruce Vogt

Poldowski, *Spleen*, Susan Young and Bruce Vogt (DK 382663, 2003), [URL](#).

“Spleen” (all)

“Spleen,” text

stanza: 1

Les roses étaient toutes rouges,
[t] [t] [t]

Et les lierres étaient tout noirs.
[t] [t]

Chère, pour peu que tu te bouges,
[p] [p] [k][t][t] [b]

Renaissent tous mes désespoirs.
[t] [d] [p]

2

Le ciel était trop bleu, trop tendre,
[t] [t] [b] [t] [t][d]

La mer trop verte et l'air trop doux.
[t] [t] [t] [d]

Je crains toujours, ce qu'est d'attendre!
[k] [t] [k] [d] [t] [d]

Quelque fuite atroce de vous.
[k] [k] [t] [t] [d]

3

Du houx à la feuille vernie
[d]

Et du luisant buis, je suis las,
[d] [b]

Et de la campagne infinie,
[d] [k] [p]

Et de tout, fors de vous hélas!
[d][t] [d]

★ plosive consonants

Stanza 2

Le ciel était trop bleu, trop tendre,

[t] [t] [b] [t] [t][d]

La mer trop verte et l'air trop doux.

[t] [t] [t] [d]

Je crains toujours, ce qu'est d'attendre!

[k] [t] [k] [d] [t] [d]

Quelque fuite atroce de vous.

[k] [k] [t] [t] [d]

Diction

tres calme, p

Musical score page 10. The vocal line consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. The lyrics are: "bou - ge re . nais . sent tout mes dé . ses , poirs". The dynamic is *p*. The tempo is indicated as *très calme* at the top right.

Musical score page 13. The vocal line consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. The lyrics are: "pressez un feu rit. ciel é . tait trop bleu trop ten - dre La mer trop verte et l'air trop". The dynamics include *p*, *dim.*, *rubato*, and *suivez*.

Musical score page 16. The vocal line consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. The lyrics are: "doux Je crainst toujours ce qu'est d'at - ten dre quel que". The dynamics include *subito p*, *avec inquiétude*, and *de plus en plus*. The performance style includes *agitato*, *leggiero*, and *pp*.

Musical score page 19. The vocal line consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. The lyrics are: "fuite a . tro . ce de vous du houx à la feuil . le ver .". The dynamics include *intense*, *pp*, *pressez cresc.*, *dim.*, *morendo*, *suivez*, *leggiero*, and *p*.

Zuluaga:



“Spleen,” mm. 12–18, Texture

The musical score consists of three staves of music for voice and piano, with color-coded sections and dynamic markings.

Staff 1 (Measures 10–12): The piano part is divided into three sections: "power" (red), "standard" (yellow), and "color" (blue). The vocal line includes lyrics: "bou - ge re . nais . sent tout mes dé , ses , poirs Le". Dynamic markings include *f*, *p*, and *rall.*

Staff 2 (Measures 13–15): The piano part is divided into three sections: "color" (blue), "standard" (yellow), and "color" (blue). The vocal line includes lyrics: "pressez un peu rit. ciel é tait trop bleu trop ten - dre La mer trop verte et l'air trop". Dynamic markings include *p*, *dimm.*, and *rubato suivre*.

Staff 3 (Measures 16–18): The piano part is divided into three sections: "color" (blue), "standard" (yellow), and "color" (blue). The vocal line includes lyrics: "doux Je crainst toujours ce qu'est d'at. ten - dre quel que". Dynamic markings include *avec inquiétude* (*rapide*), *p*, *de plus en plus*, *agitato*, and *leggiero*.

Texture

Poésie de Paul VERLAINE.

Musique de POLDOWSKI.

1 Andante

CHANT *Andante sans trairer* *rall. dim.*

standard

PIANO *ben legato* *20*

4 *plamento* *p* *dolce*

Les ro . ses é . taient tou les rou . ges et les

pp

Lier . res é . taient tout noirs

avec désespoir

Chè . re pour peu que tu te

20 suives

lier . res é . taient tout noirs

Chè . re pour peu que tu te

20 suives

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power

The musical score consists of ten staves of music for voice and piano. The vocal line is primarily in red, while the piano accompaniment is in yellow. The score is annotated with various musical terms and dynamics. The first staff begins with 'power' (red), followed by 'standard' (yellow) and 'color' (blue). The second staff starts with 'standard' (yellow), followed by 'power' (red) and 'color' (blue). The third staff begins with 'color' (blue), followed by 'standard' (yellow) and 'power' (red). The fourth staff starts with 'standard' (yellow), followed by 'power' (red) and 'color' (blue). The fifth staff begins with 'color' (blue), followed by 'standard' (yellow) and 'power' (red). The sixth staff starts with 'power' (red), followed by 'standard' (yellow) and 'color' (blue). The seventh staff begins with 'color' (blue), followed by 'standard' (yellow) and 'power' (red). The eighth staff starts with 'standard' (yellow), followed by 'power' (red) and 'color' (blue). The ninth staff begins with 'color' (blue), followed by 'standard' (yellow) and 'power' (red). The tenth staff starts with 'power' (red), followed by 'standard' (yellow) and 'color' (blue).

breathiness
connotes
intimacy

10

bou - ge re . nais . sent tout mes dé . ses . poirs

p

rall.

très calme

p

13

pressez un peu rit.

p

dim.

ciel é . tait trop bleu trop ten - dre La mer trop verte et l'air trop

rubato

suivez

2d.

Les roses étaient toutes rouges,
Et les lierres étaient tout noirs.

★ Chère, pour peu que tu te bouges,
Renaissent tous mes désespoirs.

Le ciel était trop bleu, trop tendre,
La mer trop verte et l'air trop doux.
Je crains toujours, ce qu'est
d'attendre!
Quelque fuite atroce de vous.

Du houx à la feuille vernie
Et du luisant buis, je suis las,
Et de la campagne infinie,
Et de tout, fors de vous hélas!

text by Paul Verlaine

The roses were all red,
and the ivy quite black.

★ Dearest, if you so much as move
all my despair returns.

The sky was too blue, too tender,
the sea too green and the air too soft.
Always I fear, such is the consequence
of waiting!
some pitiless abandonment by you.

Of the holly with its glossy leaves
and of the shining box tree, I am weary,
and of the boundless countryside,
and of everything but you, alas!

translation by Pierre Bernac

Conclusion

Zuluaga: 

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S P L E E N

Poésie de Paul VERLAINE.

Musique de POLDOWSKI.

1

Andante

CHANT

standard

4

*p lamento**dolce*

Les ro . ses é . taient toutes rou - ges et les

7

f avec désespoir

lier . res é . taient tout noirs

Chè . re pour peu que tu te

power

standard

**breathiness
connotes
intimacy**

color 3

très calme p

10

bou - ge re - nais - sent tout mes dé - ses - poirs Le

13

presser un peu rit. **p** **dim.**

ciel é - tait trop bleu trop ten - dre La mer trop verte et l'air trop

rubato **suivez**

16

avec inquiétude **subito p** **de plus en plus**

doux

Je crainst toujours ce qu'est d'at - ten - dre quel que

agitato **leggiero**

19

intense

pp **pressez** **cresc.**

fuite atro - ce de **vous** du houx à la feuil - le ver -

dim. morendo

suivez **leggiero** **pedal A2:**

4 standard power

22 agitato cresc.

ni e et du lui_sant buis Je suis las

> suivez > cresc.

pedal A2

25 f appassionato rall.

et de la campagne in . fi ni e et de tout “everything” ritard. ff

cresc. ff Ped. rinforzando Ped.

28 ff rit. dim. timbre!

fors! de vous hé las rit. “you” a tempo

ff Ped. ff Ped. ff Ped.

31 dim. p rall. pp sostenuto pp ppp