

# JOSQUIN AND THE SUBLIME

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## Wolfgang Fuhrmann

### *The Simplicity of Sublimity in Josquin's Psalm-Motets\**

... veni non in sublimitate sermonis ...

Ad Corinthios I, 2, 1

The Sublime, if we take it seriously as an important idea in the history of art, was considered first and foremost a category of literary criticism. Though we might regard the cathedral of Chartres or Michelangelo's Last Judgment as sublime, historically the discussion of the Sublime was situated at the intersection of poetics and the art of rhetoric, taking its examples mostly from poetry, but its categorical framework, the lore of the *genera dicendi*, from rhetoric's theory of oratorical style; poetics and rhetoric being in practice, of course, almost indistinguishable. (We shall later make some important qualifications to this statement.) It seems therefore advisable to pursue the question of sublimity in Josquin's psalm-motets through the literary medium, i.e. the texts set.

And this, indeed, opens up several interesting perspectives. For one, the genre of the psalm-motet, as it suddenly popped out of nowhere in the closing decades of the fifteenth century,<sup>1</sup> is almost revolutionary in its choice of text. Most motet texts set before fall into three (not necessarily mutually exclusive) categories:

\* I am most grateful to Leofranc Holford-Strevens (Oxford) for his comments, suggestions and improvements.

1 Disregarding simple fauxbourdon settings of obvious liturgical usage, there seems to be only one 'precursor': a setting of Psalm 120 (121) in Trent 89, fols. 220–222'. Cf. E. Nowacki, 'The Latin Psalm Motet 1500–1535', *Renaissance Studien. Helmut Osthoff zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. L. Finscher (Tutzing 1979), 159–184; here 182, and J.E. Cumming, *The Motet in the Age of Du Fay* (Cambridge 1999), 282. Throughout this paper, psalms will be numbered accounting first to Hebrew, then (in brackets) to Latin psalter versions, except where the numbers are identical.

- 1) texts of an occasional – and mostly ‘political’ – nature, and mostly poetic in form;<sup>2</sup>
- 2) texts coming from a liturgical background, such as Marian antiphons.<sup>3</sup> To this group belong also most Song of Song motets, the only substantial group of motets with biblical texts in the fifteenth century, but usually dependent on the text choice of a prior antiphon.<sup>4</sup> Within this category may be grouped another, smaller body of motets on biblical texts: the *Ave Maria* settings based on Luke 1, 28, the text normally expanded in the version according to the well-known antiphon; though some of these settings stick to the Biblical words and may therefore be more comfortably put into category 3, namely:
- 3) prayer texts, usually from the eleventh/twelfth centuries or later, such as one might find in Books of Hours and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> These form, especially in the decades around 1500, the bulk of the repertoire, and I call motets on prayer texts ‘devotional motets’.

It goes without saying that these categories can and do overlap. For instance, most of these texts – not just those of category 1 – may be labelled as poetry, though within a wide range of wildly differing formal schemes and levels of artistic success. Also, most political texts are invested with some kind of religious symbolism; Marian antiphons may also be interpreted as prayers etc. But most motet texts of the time from Dufay to Josquin arguably fall under at least one of these categories, and there are only a very few

- 2 See, among others, A. Dunning, *Die Staatsmotette 1480-1555* (Utrecht 1970); J.E. Cumming, *Concord out of Discord. Occasional Motets of the Early Quattrocento* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley 1987); V. Panagl, *Lateinische Huldigungsmotetten für Angehörige des Hauses Habsburg. Vertonte Gelegenheitsdichtung im Rahmen neu-lateinischer Herrscherpanegyrik* (Frankfurt am Main etc. 2004).
- 3 S.S. Ingram, *The Polyphonic Salve Regina 1425-1550* (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina 1973); K.-H. Han, *The Use of the Marian Antiphons in Renaissance Motets* (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University 1974).
- 4 S. Burstyn, *Fifteenth-Century Polyphonic Settings of Verses from the Song of Songs* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York 1972), and recently J. Stenzl, *Der Klang des Hohen Liedes. Vertonungen des Canticum Canticorum vom 9. bis zum Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Würzburg 2008), I, 181-231 and II, 159-167 (a complete list of settings from the fifteenth century).
- 5 There is no systematic investigation of this wide-spread phenomenon; but see H.M. Brown, ‘The Mirror of Man’s Salvation. Music in Devotional Life about 1500’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990), 744-773, B.J. Blackburn, ‘For Whom do the Singers Sing?’, *Early Music* 25 (1997), 593-610, and her ‘The Virgin in the Sun. Music and Image for a Prayer Attributed to Sixtus IV’, *JRMA* 124 (1999), 157-195. The best overview of the fifteenth-century motet, Cumming, *The Motet*, discusses text choice, albeit in passing. See also T. Schmidt-Beste, *Textdeklamation in der Motette des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Turnhout 2003).

outsiders, such as Dufay's motet *Iuvenis qui puellam*, which sets a text from a juridical text-book.<sup>6</sup>

Now, in the decades around 1500, there is a new tendency in the genre of the motet to set biblical texts freely.<sup>7</sup> The most prominent example of this are, of course, the psalm settings, but we may add also a number of other motets: Pierre de la Rue's *Considera Israel*,<sup>8</sup> Josquin's *Planxit autem David* (NJE 14.9),<sup>9</sup> if it really is his, and *Absalon fili mi* (NJE \*14.1; Josquin?/La Rue?).<sup>10</sup>

Three points are worth noting. First, all of these texts are prose, something hitherto quite unusual in the motet repertoire. It is true that the psalms themselves form a part of ancient Oriental poetry, but in setting their texts, one would have had to deal with them just as with simple prose.

Second, most of these settings do not seem to have had a specific religious function. Of course, the 'devotional motet' as a genre is generally defined by its flexible use; no one today believes that the occasional use of a liturgical cantus firmus, for instance, points to a fixed place in the liturgy for the piece in question.<sup>11</sup> Motets may have been used in a wide variety of contexts and occasions, privately and publicly, inside, outside and at the fuzzy margins of liturgy.<sup>12</sup> But the new vogue for biblical text settings that arose in the closing decades of the fifteenth century is hardly compatible with even an ornamental function in

6 The text is from the *Liber Extra*, with the interpretation of Panormitanus: see L. Holford-Strevens, 'Du Fay the Poet? Problems in the Texts of His Motets', *EMH* 16 (1997), 97-165; here 150-157. See also W. Elders, 'Guillaume Dufay's Concept of Faux-Bourdon', an essay first published in *Revue belge de musicologie* 43 (1989), and now available in Elders' *Symbolic Scores. Studies in the Music of the Renaissance* (Leiden etc. 1994), 17-41; here 24-28.

7 See the pieces mentioned in W. Fuhrmann, 'Pierre de la Rues Trauermotetten und die *Quis dabit*-Tradition', *Tod in Musik und Kultur. Zum 500. Todestag Philipps des Schönen*, edd. S. Gasch & B. Lodes (Tutzing 2007), 189-244; here 199-200.

8 *Pierre de la Rue, The Motets*, CMM 97/9, ed. N. Davison (Stuttgart 1996), 13-25.

9 Pieces edited (or to be edited) in the NJE (Amsterdam 1989ff.) are quoted with their reference numbers.

10 On the authorship of *Planxit autem David* (also ascribed to Ninot le Petit), see most recently NJE 14: *Motets on Texts from the Old Testament I*, ed. R. Sherr (Utrecht 2002), *Critical Commentary*, 94-96. The most recent contributions (citing the older literature) to the ongoing debate on *Absalon*'s composer are P. Urquhart, 'Another Impolitic Observation on *Absalon, fili mi*', *JM* 21 (2004), 343-380. (which is, albeit indirectly, of relevance to the question of authenticity), and J. Thomas, 'Absalon fili mi, Josquin, and the French Royal Court. Attribution, Authenticity, Context, and Conjecture', *Uno gentile et subtile ingenio. Studies in Renaissance Music in Honour of Bonnie J. Blackburn*, edd. M.J. Bloxam, G. Filocamo & L. Holford-Strevens (Turnhout 2009), 477-489.

11 This was the orthodoxy of post-war Renaissance musicology, see for instance J.A. Matfeld, 'Some Relationships between Texts and Cantus Firmi in the Liturgical Motets of Josquin des Pres', *JAMS* 14 (1961), 159-183.

12 A.M. Cummings, 'Toward an Interpretation of the Sixteenth Century Motet', *JAMS* 34 (1981), 43-59. J. Noble, 'The Function of Josquin's Motets', *TVNM* 35 (1985), 9-22.

the liturgy. Of course there are some psalm settings by Josquin and others that point to liturgical use by the inclusion of a doxology at the end, but this seems more to be a kind of traditional gesture than really indicating use in the Office, where they would have oddly stood out against the usual psalmody. (In Josquin's *Memor esto verbi tui* (NJE 17.14), for instance, the return of the text opening after the doxology would probably make the piece unfit for liturgical usage.)<sup>13</sup> Moreover, about three quarters of the psalm-motets prior to the 1530s do not use the doxology, and some of them are free compilations of psalm verses which are not of any use in public worship whatsoever.<sup>14</sup> The occasional psalmodic *formulae*<sup>15</sup> – or the lamentation tone in *Planxit autem David* – also imply, by their very conscious and sporadic use, more a nod towards tradition than a liturgical indexing, though a thorough liturgico-musical investigation of that matter is still very much in need.

Thirdly, many of these text settings are lamentations of strong affect. This is true of the biblical text settings mentioned above, all of them associated with King David's grief, and this was also a factor of great importance in the psalm-motet, especially in the motets based on the penitential psalms. To be sure, there were many psalm settings that drew on the other genres of psalm texts – laudatory psalms, like the various psalms beginning with 'Laudate dominum' (Psalms 148 and 150 set by Antoine Brumel),<sup>16</sup> instructive or educational psalms like 'Beatus vir qui non abiit' (Psalm 1 set by Jean Mouton and Claudin de Sermisy)<sup>17</sup> and so on. But there is a marked tendency at least in Josquin's approach to the genre to favour texts that emphasize the spiritual needs and sufferings of the psalmist – *Miserere mei, deus* (NJE 18.3), *Memor esto verbi tui* (NJE 17.14) *Domine, ne in furore* (NJE 16.6) –, and this choice of text is also taken by some of the more impressive Josquinesque motets like *Domine, exaudi orationem meam* (NJE 16.5), *Domine, ne in furore* (NJE 16.7) or the low-voiced *De profundis clamavi* (NJE \*15.11).<sup>18</sup>

13 See also the remarks by L. Finscher, 'Psalm III. Die mehrstimmige Psalm-Komposition', MGG2 Sachteil 7 (Kassel etc. 1997), cols. 1876–1897; here col. 1882.

14 For an overview, see the still eminently usable and thorough catalogue by E. Nowacki, 'The Latin Psalm Motet'.

15 See L. Finscher, 'Zur Cantus-firmus-Behandlung in der Psalm-Motette der Josquin-Zeit', in *idem, Geschichte und Geschichten. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Musikgeschichte*, ed. H. Danuser (Mainz 2003), 123–132 (first published in *Hans Albrecht in memoriam*, edd. W. Brennecke & H. Haase [Kassel etc. 1962]).

16 *Antonii Brumel Opera Omnia*, CMM 5/6, ed. B. Hudson (Rome 1972), 53–62.

17 Of Mouton's (unedited) setting, only the *Tenor primus* survived in the single partbook BolC R142. Claudin's setting is edited in *Treize livres de motets parus chez Pierre Attaignant en 1534 et 1535*, edd. A. Smijers & A.T. Merritt (Paris & Monaco 1934–1964), vol. 9, 104–111.

18 Instead of engaging in yet another discussion on how many psalm-motets Josquin might have written, in what follows I prefer to distinguish between 'Josquin's psalm-motets' and 'Josquinesque psalm-motets', that is, pieces whose authenticity is doubted by at least

If besides we take into consideration the settings of Dido's lament from Virgil, *Dulces exuvie*, by Josquin (NJE 28.11) and some of his contemporaries (de Orto, Mouton, Ghiselin),<sup>19</sup> there emerges the picture of a growing interest around 1500 in musical readings of highly affective texts from the biblical or classical canon. These pieces, whether or not they had a clear contextual function (such as a mourning ceremony), highlight an approach to text setting and text expression which was new in that time and which is still one of its most remarkable features: the musical expression of dolorous, woeful, plaintive moods, an innovation almost without precedent in sacred polyphony.

It has always been felt that in such works based on biblical texts there is another focus, another kind of concern with the text. By syllabic, often declamatory setting the biblical words are projected more clearly, often in a simplicity which in an earlier era we could find only in liturgical 'Gebrauchsmusik' such as the psalm settings in fauxbourdon technique, the most artless of all polyphonic genres. One might say there is less musical interest in this approach, and in fact, listening to Josquin's psalm-motets, one cannot help wondering what Dufay, Ockeghem, and perhaps even Obrecht might have thought about them.<sup>20</sup> Instead of clothing a

one of the three major recent approaches to an authentic work-list, namely, the entries in MGG2 and NGD2 by Ludwig Finscher and Patrick Macey, respectively, and, of course, the *New Josquin Edition*. There emerges a minimal consensus concerning eight pieces using psalm-texts. Of these, for our purposes I shall eliminate instantly the five-voice canonic *De profundis* (NJE 15.13) which is really a mourning composition involving other texts, the tract *Domine, non secundum peccata* (NJE 16.10), which is a liturgical composition for Ash Wednesday for the use of the Sistine Chapel, and *In exitu Israel de Egypto* (NJE 17.4), a liturgical composition for Sunday Vespers. This leaves only five 'genuine' psalm-motets by Josquin: *Domine, ne in furore... quoniam* (NJE 16.6), *Domine, ne in furore... miserere* (NJE 16.7), *Memor esto verbi tui* (NJE 17.14), *Miserere mei, deus* (NJE 18.3), and *Misericordias domini* (NJE 18.4). Pieces beyond this consensus I call 'Josquinesque' in the sense that they are testimonies of Josquin's towering influence in the subgenre of the psalm-motet, and that they use techniques of text setting and text expression which are clearly indebted to the techniques developed (it seems) more intensely and eloquently by Josquin than by any of his contemporaries (though this statement is open to discussion).

- 19 See A.B. Skei, 'Dulces exuviae. Renaissance Settings of Dido's Last Words', *Music Review* 37 (1976), 77–91; M. Zywiets, 'Dulces exuviae. Die Vergil-Vertonungen des Josquin des Prez', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 61 (2004), 245–254; L. Lütteken, 'Dulces exuviae. Vergil in Mantua und das Problem der musikalischen "Renaissance"', *Renaissance – Episteme und Agon. Für Klaus W. Hempfer anlässlich seines 60. Geburtstages*, edd. A. Kablitz & K.W. Hempfer (Heidelberg 2006), 451–473.
- 20 Obrecht of course used a declamatory approach in his *Inter praeclarissimas virtutes et Laudemus nunc dominum*, edited by Chris Maas in *New Obrecht Edition 15: Jacob Obrecht, Collected Works, Motets I* (Utrecht 1995), 55–68 and 69–83, respectively. Matthäus Herbenus in his treatise *De natura cantus ac miraculis vocis* (1496) singled out two of Obrecht's motets for their syllabic text-setting: 'cantus ac hymnos, quales [...] edidit [...] Jacobus Hoberti [...] in honorem consecrationis templi atque salutiferae crucis' (ed. J. Smits van Waesberghe (Köln 1957), 58). He obviously referred to *Laudemus nunc dominum* in the first place. The latter motet can almost certainly be identified with Obrecht's

textual phrase in a flowering, exuberant musical line that makes rich sense in itself, music is subordinated to the presentation of text often in a kind of reductive asceticism. I want to argue that it is exactly this kind of ascetic approach in plain text declamation that leads towards the heights of sublimity.

True to our text-oriented approach, we may ask what significance the psalms had in medieval and early modern culture. The answer seems self-evident: these texts were inspired by the Holy Spirit, they were the word of the Lord and of fathomless meaning deeply relevant to any Christian. But there was also, if less prominently, an on-going debate on the literary value of biblical prose, of its level of style and expression, and this is where the question of sublimity comes in.

For it is in the very manifesto of all modern thought about the Sublime, in the first-century treatise *On the Sublime* (*Peri hýpsous*), ascribed in its single and fragmentary source to a certain Dionysios Longinos,<sup>21</sup> that biblical style is quoted as an exemplar of the Sublime. This is, indeed, part of its revolutionary argument. Revolutionary it is as it straightly contradicts one of the most venerable rules of the system of ancient rhetoric – the doctrine of the styles of oratory, of which there are three: plain style (*genus subtile*), medium style (*genus medium*) and grand style (*genus grande atque robustum*, sometimes also called *genus sublime*).<sup>22</sup> To oversimplify, in ancient rhetoric, style depends on matter in such way that lofty and sublime subjects demand the highest, most ornate, magnificent and even pompous style, which will normally boast complex syntax, precious expressions and the whole load of rhetorical figures and tropes. In short, sublime matters demand for an elevated, artful style.

This Longinos flatly contradicts. Though he does not deny the importance of rhetorical arts, he says that the most important source of sublimity is ‘the power of forming great conceptions’, and the second is ‘vehement and inspired passion’. Both are innate; a matter of nature, not of art. And he goes so far to assert: ‘Hence also a bare idea, by itself and without a spoken word, sometimes excites admiration just because of the greatness of soul implied.’<sup>23</sup> This is prob-

*Salve crux/O crux*, ed. C. Maas, *New Obrecht Edition 16: Motets II* (Utrecht 1996), 65-83, though this work adheres to syllabic text setting only in its cantus firmus-free passages.

- 21 There is no reason to call this otherwise unknown author ‘Pseudo-Longinos’. This was just necessary when he was (wrongly) identified with Cassius Longinus (3rd cent. AD). The single source, Codex Parisinus 2036, says expressly it was written by Dionysios Longinos (while in the index the treatise is identified as being by ‘Dionysios or [!] Longinos’). The treatise seems to have been written between 25-40 AD. I have used the edition by Otto Schönberger: *Longinus, Vom Erhabenen. Griechisch/Deutsch* (Stuttgart 1988).
- 22 Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria* XII, 10, 58f. *Genus sublime* is an expression rarely found, and only in late ancient rhetorical theory; the first to coin the term seems to have been Chirius Consultus Fortunatinaus (fourth century AD). F. Quadlbauer, *Die antike Theorie der genera dicendi im lateinischen Mittelalter* (Wien 1962), 14f.
- 23 Longinus 9, 2. English quotations are taken from the translation by W. Rhys Roberts (Cambridge University Press 1899), <http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/longinus/>.



ably at the widest distance from the art of rhetoric one can imagine. And only after making this point Longinus goes on to list figures, diction and composition, which may be useful to achieve the Sublime by means of art.<sup>24</sup>

But here again, he deviates from traditional style theory. To give an example of the Sublime, Longinos writes: '[T]he legislator of the Jews, no ordinary man, having formed and expressed a worthy conception of the might of the Godhead, writes at the very beginning of his Laws, God said – what? "Let there be light, and there was light; let there be land, and there was land".'<sup>25</sup> The implication is that the Jewish 'worthy conception of the might of the Godhead' – as many of his contemporaries, Longinos was inclined to philosophical monotheism – leads to the most plain, matter-of-fact statement conceivable. This was no longer a matter of style, of form or rhetorical figures; greatness of thought in this case at least dictated the most simple expression. And thus emerges what has been called in a recent study by Dietmar Till 'das doppelte Erhabene', the 'double Sublime'.<sup>26</sup> When Boileau, in 1674, translated Longinos into French, he would distinguish between the *style sublime* of rhetorical tradition and *le Sublime* in Longinos' thought, thus kicking off a heated discussion on the relation between simplicity and sublimity that would rage on in the eighteenth century. And the reverberation of that discussion can still be felt in Haydn's oratorio *The Creation* at the moment of the creation of light, which has ever since his première been regarded as the pinnacle of sublimity.<sup>27</sup>

But we have advanced too far. And we do not easily find our way back, for there is one problem with Longinos' treatise: it was almost certainly unknown not only to Josquin but even to the most erudite of his contemporaries. No one in antiquity seems to have taken notice of this obscure text, which is extant today only in a single manuscript. Evidently, the news of its discovery spread in the 1540s; the *editio princeps* was published by Robortello in 1554.<sup>28</sup> Josquin was dead for more than three decades by then. The first Latin edition, by Pizzimenti, came out only in 1566.

So why discuss Longinos at all? Just to prepare the ground for another author who would also discuss the eloquence of the Bible in even more en-

24 Longinus 8, 1.

25 Longinus 9, 9. The quotation is, of course, biblical, conflating Genesis, 1, 3 and 1, 9-10.

26 D. Till, *Das doppelte Erhabene. Eine Argumentationsfigur von der Antike bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen 2006).

27 See, for instance, J. Webster, 'The Creation, Haydn's Late Vocal Music, and the Musical Sublime', *Haydn and his World*, ed. E. Sisman (Princeton 1997), 57-102.

28 K. Ley, 'Das Erhabene als Element frühmoderner Bewußtseinsbildung. Zu den Anfängen der neuzeitlichen Longin-Rezeption in der Rhetorik und Poetik des Cinquecento', *Renaissance-Poetik/Renaissance Poetics*, ed. H.F. Plett (Berlin & New York 1994), 241-259.

thusiastic terms and whose influence in Western culture can hardly be overestimated: Augustine.<sup>29</sup>

In his *Confessions*, Augustine describes his disappointment when he first attempted to study Holy Scripture:<sup>30</sup>

And behold, I perceive something not comprehended by the proud, not disclosed to children, but lowly as you approach, sublime as you advance, and veiled in mysteries; and I was not of the number of those who could enter into it, or bend my neck to follow its steps. For [the Scriptures] appeared to me to be unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully; for my inflated pride shunned their style, nor could the sharpness of my wit pierce their inner meaning.

The simple, humble style of biblical prose evidently alienated Augustine, who just before the passage quoted mentions having studied ‘books of eloquence’, specifically mentioning Cicero (‘Tully’). Note that Augustine conflates here an aesthetic problem – that of style – with a problem of religious ethics, that of the true simplicity and meekness of understanding.

In the last book of his treatise ‘On Christian Doctrine’, finished a few years before his death, Augustine came back on the question.<sup>31</sup> Some, he

<sup>29</sup> One may point out immediately that this influence did not dwindle during the Renaissance. In the early stages of print, Augustine ‘was a best-selling author. The *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* reports 187 editions of his writings in the first forty-five years of printing. For the sixteenth century, the *Index Aureliensis* lists 487 editions of Augustine, including thirteen massive *opera omnia*. Augustine was easily the most printed patristic author and, after Aristotle and Cicero, perhaps the most printed of all ancient authors’. J. Monfasani, ‘The *De doctrina christiana* and Renaissance Rhetoric’, *Reading and Wisdom. The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. E.D. English (Notre Dame and London 1995), 172-188; here 172. Monfasani goes on to list at least 24 editions of *De doctrina christiana* (to which we shall shortly turn) before 1600, not taking into account the *opera omnia* editions just mentioned – one of them, by the way, edited by Erasmus of Rotterdam. However, many works printed under Augustine’s name were not really his; for the fifteenth-century editions Monfasani has established no less than 62 percent to be wrongly ascribed (174). Moreover, though the high number of prints seems to suggest otherwise, Italian humanism in the fifteenth century ‘generally ignored Augustine. Apart from Maffeo Vegio, none of the major Quattrocento humanists evinced any special enthusiasm for him or his writings.’ (175) An observation which should give us pause before identifying the fifteenth century as a ‘humanistic’ one generally.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* III, 5, 9 I have used Augustinus, *Bekenntnisse*, Latin text (based on the edition by Pierre de Labriolle) with German translation by Joseph Bernhart (Frankfurt a.M. 1987). For Augustine’s study of Cicero, see *Confessiones* III, 4, 7. English translation taken from *Early Church Fathers. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series I: Augustine, vol. I*, transl. Philip Schaff <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf101.toc.html>.

<sup>31</sup> For Augustine’s position on rhetoric and style as exposed in the fourth book of *De doctrina christiana* (his final word on the subject), see also: *The Rhetoric of St. Augustine of Hippo. De Doctrina Christiana & the Search for a Distinctly Christian Rhetoric*, edd.

tells us, ask if the divinely inspired writers were wise only, or eloquent as well.<sup>32</sup>

And I venture to affirm that all who truly understand what these writers say, perceive at the same time that it could not have been properly said in any other way. For ... nothing can be called eloquence if it be not suitable to the person of the speaker, so there is a kind of eloquence that is becoming in men who justly claim the highest authority, and who are evidently inspired of God. With this eloquence they spoke; no other would have been suitable for them ...

In other words, the language of the Bible has no need for a lofty style; its eloquence comes from within, from divine inspiration. The Bible, Augustine wrote elsewhere, is *sine fuco*, without make-up.<sup>33</sup> This does not necessarily lead to the absence of eloquence, to a preference of humble to lofty style, rather, as Augustine writes, it did not become Biblical authors 'either to condemn [rhetoric] or to make an ostentatious display of it', and so even in passages where one might note rhetorical effects<sup>34</sup>

the words ... seem not so much to be sought out by the speaker as spontaneously to suggest themselves; as if wisdom were walking out of its house, – that is, the breast of the wise man, and eloquence, like an inseparable attendant, followed it without being called for.

Authors divinely inspired *can* use all rhetorical devices effortlessly, but they do not *need* them to produce the grandest effect. This is the grain of Augustine's thesis. It is also the principle of what has become known as 'Christian style' or, to quote Erich Auerbach's classic essay, as *sermo humilis*.<sup>35</sup> The roots of *sermo humilis* or simple discourse are, Auerbach explains, threefold: in the self-humiliation of Christ through incarnation and passion,

R.L. Enos & R. Thompson *et al.* (Waco 2008), which collects important earlier essays by Baldwin, Murphy and others and provides a Latin text and English translation of book 4, and *Reading and Wisdom*, ed. E.D. English (cited above).

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, IV, 6, 9. Translation taken from *Early Church Fathers. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series I: Augustine, vol. II*, transl. Philip Schaff ([http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.v.IV\\_1.6.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.v.IV_1.6.html)).

<sup>33</sup> Epist 137, 18 (to Volusianus) (CSEL 44, 122f.), cf. Till, *Das doppelte Erhabene*, 59.

<sup>34</sup> *De doctrina christiana*, IV, 6, 10.

<sup>35</sup> E. Auerbach, 'Sermo humilis', in *Idem, Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter* (Bern 1958), 25-63. There is also an English translation of Auerbach's book by Ralph Manheim: *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (New York 1965).

in the social position of many early Christians (a religion relying on the Word must needs try to make itself understandable even to the unlearned), and, thirdly but not last, in the humble style of biblical prose.<sup>36</sup> It comes as no surprise that Auerbach calls Augustine as chief witness for the idea of speaking about the most sublime things in the most humble expressions (but not necessarily in artless ways); the fourth book of *De doctrina christiana* is, after all, a book on homily rhetoric. And it is here where we find Augustine entirely in accordance with Longinos, an author he most probably never read. Deborah Shuger summarizes the point admirably: 'Both Longinus and Augustine observe that grandeur can exist without any of the verbal and rhythmic techniques ordinarily associated with linguistic elevation.'<sup>37</sup>

Augustine's statement was part of an on-going debate about the literary value of the Bible in late antiquity. The apologetic undertone of his comments was obviously motivated by the criticism, even the derision of his well-educated pagan – and Christian – contemporaries of Biblical prose.<sup>38</sup>

And while the necessity of this approach, of course, dwindled during the Middle Ages, with the dawn of humanism, another epoch of literary criticism of the Bible began. Petrarch confessed that – just like his master Augustine – 'he had been repelled by the unpolished language of the Bible in his youth. Only in his mature years had he come to understand that wisdom could exist without eloquence: 'Doctrina sine eloquentia esse potest' (*De otio religioso* 105:19, Rotondi). He compared Scripture to a chaste woman in simple attire, eloquence to a painted harlot – what man in his right mind would not immediately know which one to take as his wife? (*ibid.*, 105:13–16).<sup>39</sup> Again we have Christian ideals of simplicity and sincerity confronted with the false pomp of rhetoric.

And this attitude, with a quite similar choice of metaphor, we can also find with a close contemporary of Petrarch's, the late-fourteenth-century

<sup>36</sup> Auerbach, 'Sermo humilis', 35–37.

<sup>37</sup> D. Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric. The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton 1987), 30.

<sup>38</sup> Jerome himself, the translator of the Bible, would confess how he abhorred the 'uncultivated discourse' in his youth: 'Sermo horrebat incultus', *Hieronymus Epistularum Pars I. Epistulae I–LXX*, ed. I. Hilberg (Wien 1996), 189; Letter 22, 30). Compare his advice: 'Noli offendaris in scripturis sanctis simplicitate et quasi vilitate verborum' ('In scripture, let not the simplicity or cheapness of its vocabulary offend you'); *Hieronymus Epistulae*, 463; Letter 53, 10. In what follows, I am indebted to the overview given in E. Rummel, 'God and Solecism. Erasmus as a Literary Critic of the Bible', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 7 (1987), 54–72.

<sup>39</sup> Rummel, 'God and Solecism', 57. The references are to F. Petrarca, *Il 'De otio religioso'*, ed. G. Rotondi (Città del Vaticano 1958).

theologian Heinrich von Langenstein (1325-1397), whose commentary on (Jerome's) prologue on the Bible and the book of Genesis was widely read:<sup>40</sup>

While Holy Scripture is adorned mostly with humble and vulgar speech, nevertheless it is pregnant everywhere with excellent mysteries and profound intelligence. These mysteries the Holy Spirit, which has spoken with such humility in the Scriptures, chose to darken in order to confound the arrogance of wordly wisdom. And the humble speech of Holy Scripture differs in this from the sublime and polished speech of human tradition, that suddenly, as if just under a golden cover, there [i.e., in human tradition] is hidden sorrow and the poison of lies; on the other hand, beneath the speech of Holy Scripture, as if under an unrefined surface or a rough bark, there is hidden gold, an abundance of spiritual understanding. And here is the wonderful fragrance of heavenly mysteries.

By contrasting the 'sublime and polished speech' of 'wordly wisdom' with the plainness of Biblical language, Langenstein implies that the true sublimity lies in the heavenly mysteries. Therefore, Christian writing and of course Biblical texts can be plain, simple and, if you like, nude.

The relevance of this discussion to the emergence of biblical texts and especially psalms in polyphonic compositions should now become more evident. For the austere and ascetic tone of these works correlates to the ideas of sublime simplicity in the Bible. To be sure, the psalms are regarded as a special case in Biblical literature. They are one of those biblical books that have always been regarded as being of more elevated, poetic style than others: Song of Songs, Isaiah, Job, and Psalter.<sup>41</sup> (It is significant that these texts

40 Stadtbibliothek Mainz, Hs. 1449, f. 95: '[Q]uamvis sacra scriptura humili et vulgari sermone plurimum decoratur, tamen ubique excellentibus misterijs et profundis intelligencijs est gravida, que misteria spiritus sanctus, qui locutus est in talibus scripturis quadam humilitate, voluit obumbrare, ut confunderent superbiam sapientium huius mundi. Et in hoc differt sermo humilis sacre scripture a sermone sublimi et polito humane tradicionis, quod subito, quasi sub aurea superficie, latet luctum et sepe falsitatis venenum. E converso autem sub sermone sacre scripture, quasi sub inculta superficie aut rudi cortice latet aurum multiplicitas spiritualis intelligencie. Et redolet mira celestium misteriorum suavitas.' The text is taken from C. Ocker, *Biblical Poetics Before Humanism and Reformation* (Cambridge etc. 2002), n. 101 on p. 107, the translation is partially Ocker's on 107-108.

41 See, for instance, Jerome, the same Jerome who had called the biblical style in his youth 'sermo incultus', praise the eloquence of the Bible: 'Denique quid Psalterio cantorius? quod in morem nostri Flacci, et Graeci Pindari, nunc iambo currit, nunc alcaico personat, nunc Sapphico tumet, nunc semipede ingreditur. Quid Deuteronomii et Isaiae Cantico pulchrius? quid Salomone gravius? quid perfectius Job? Quae omnia hexametris et pentametris versibus, ut Iosephus et Origines scribunt, apud suos composita decurrunt.' *Chronicon Eusebii*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris 1844-1890), vol. 27, col. 36, quoted after J. Dyck, *Athen und Jerusalem. Die Tradition der argumentativen Verknüpfung von Bibel und Poesie im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (München 1977), 29: n. 18.

also figure prominently in the history of music.)<sup>42</sup> The psalms, then, occupy a middle position between the humble style of, say, the report on the creation and the elaborated prose of an ancient or humanist rhetorician. Let us take the opening sentences of Psalm 51 (50) *Miserere mei, deus* in the Vulgate and King James translations as an example.

Miserere mei, Deus: secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.  
Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam.  
Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea:  
et a peccato meo munda me.<sup>43</sup>

Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness;  
according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.  
Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness,  
and cleanse me from my sin.<sup>44</sup>

On the one hand, this is plain prose. From the outset, the author comes to the point. There is no artful introduction, no flattery, no complex syntactic construction. But there is a certain amount of amplification and metaphor. As is well known, the psalms exhibit the traditional Oriental *parallelismus membrorum* or ‘thought rhyme’, i. e. the author says the same thing twice in different words, and in this example, even four times (though the second parallelism is more intensely pleading): ‘Have mercy upon me’, ‘do away mine offences’, ‘wash me thoroughly from my wickedness’, ‘cleanse me from my sin’.

But this rhetorical display would have probably still seemed poor from a humanist point of view. The issue of humanism has to be addressed here because it has so often been discussed in connection with Josquin’s and his contemporaries’ modes of text setting. But there is very little evidence to suggest that humanism might have had anything to do with the renewed interest in biblical texts ca. 1500 – in fact, the evidence points in the opposite direction.

<sup>42</sup> *Carmina Scripturarum. Scilicet antiphonas et responsoria ex sacro scripturae fonte in libros liturgicos sanctae Ecclesiae Romanae derivata*, ed. C. Marbach (Strassburg 1907, repr. Hildesheim etc. 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Vulgate translation. – Actually, Jerome undertook no less than three revisions of the Latin psalters current at his time; the version used in Roman liturgy is the so-called *Psalmi iuxta Septuagintam* (that is, the Latin version of the Greek translation of the Hebrew original), which, alas, was itself current in diverse versions prior to Jerome. For an overview of this complicated matter, see J. Dyer, ‘Latin Psalter, Old Roman and Gregorian Chants’, *Kirchenmusikalisches Jahrbuch* 68 (1984), 11–30; there are many specialist philological studies. A thorough study of the texts used by Josquin and his contemporaries still remains to be done, but as far as I am aware they used the current Latin Septuaginta version known to them since childhood days.

<sup>44</sup> Translation according to the *Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

Essentially there were two humanistic approaches to the Bible during Josquin's lifetime.<sup>45</sup> One was to go back to the original text, revising and therefore criticizing the Vulgate. The New Testament was studied in its original Greek famously by Lorenzo Valla and Erasmus, while Johannes Reuchlin, Johannes Faber Stapulensis (Lefèvre d'Étaples) and Giannozzo Manetti went back to the original Hebrew, both, interestingly, with special regard for the Psalter. We might call this the philological approach.

Another route we might call the elegant approach, which took resort to writing biblical texts anew, paraphrasing them in more elegant language, often in classical verse, to make it more palatable to the educated audience. This had been already a practice of (Late) Antiquity for reasons outlined above<sup>46</sup> and it was taken up by (mostly Italian) humanists who evidently thought poorly about Biblical style: Maffeo Vegio (1407-1458) for instance, recast the penitential psalms into Latin elegiac distichs, but Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494) probably topped this by transmogrifying the Lord's Prayer into Greek hexameters.<sup>47</sup> Aurelio Lippi Brandolini (ca. 1454-1497) justified his stylistical polishing of the historical books in the Old Testament against clerical attacks by stating that the original text 'put many people off ... by its inelegance. ... And so, as I knew that there is nothing so horrid or uncultivated (as Cicero says) which does not gain splendor through rhetorical arts ..., I have wished to attempt whether I can add some light to most beautiful things by means of elegance and beauty of speech ....'<sup>48</sup>

45 For what follows, see, among others, Rummel, 'God and Solecism', and J. Monfasani, 'Criticism of Biblical Humanists in Quattrocento Italy', in *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus*, ed. E. Rummel (Leiden etc. 2008), 15-38. Compare also chapter XII, 'Italian Humanism and the Scriptures' in the classical study by C. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (Chicago 1970), 563-614.

46 Erika Rummel lists some examples: Juvencus paraphrased the Gospels in Vergilian style, to speak in a fashion worthy of Christ's glory: *ut Christo digna loquamur* (*Praefatio* 28). Caelius Sedulius gave a poetic account of biblical miracles in his *Paschale Carmen* to attract educated men to the love of divine things: "Enter the lovely green meadows, forever in bloom, and the blessed abodes through the hidden springs of piety" (lines 53-56). Arator read his epic *De actibus apostolorum* to enthusiastic audiences in Rome, and Peter of Riga composed his *Aurora*, a metrical paraphrase of Old Testament themes. Their efforts constitute a form of literary criticism: they are an oblique comment on the unsatisfactory nature of biblical prose, or at any rate, evidence that the Bible was regarded as a literary genre that admitted of variation.' Rummel, 'God and Solecism', 56-57.

47 Monfasani, 'Criticism of Biblical Humanists', 36-37.

48 A. Brandolini, *Epithomas in sacram judeorum historiam ex volumine quam Bibliam appellant et Josepho historico fidelissimo*, *Praefatio* (Biblioteca Vaticana, Cod. Ottobon. lat. 438, fol. 2'): '[M]ultas [*sic*] ab sui lectione ... propter inconcinnitatem avocabant. ... Itaque quum scirem nihil esse tam orridum tamque incultum (ut inquit Cicero) quod non splenderet oratione et tanquam excoletetur, tentare volui an addere aliquam pulcherrimis rebus lucem ornata et venustate orationis possem; ...'; quoted after Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, Vol. II, n. 123, 826-827 (translation partially based on Trinkaus, II, 604). See generally on this work Trinkaus, II, 601-13.

Such ‘improvements’ were commented unfavourably upon by Bartolomeo della Fonte (1446–1513) in a treatise on penitence (ca. 1480), when he criticizes ‘certain persons of such perverse custom that they wish to hear, read or approve of nothing unless it gratifies the ears with a seductive sound. To them the Lord will rightly say on that last day, Depart from me all who were Christians and neglected to read the Scriptures’.<sup>49</sup> But such an approach was not necessarily irreligious or irreverent, at least not when the practice spread outside Germany. Eobanus Hessus (1488–1540), professor of history at Marburg, published a complete poetic paraphrase of the Psalter, like Vegio in elegiac distichs, at the request of none else than Luther and Melanchthon themselves, who enthused about the results.<sup>50</sup> Another paraphrase came from the Scottish scholar George Buchanan in 1566. In order to understand the difference between Christian plain style and humanistic style ideals more clearly, let us have a look at the opening of Psalm 51 in Hessus’ paraphrase, which was especially singled out for praise by Luther and Melanchthon:<sup>51</sup>

SVmme pater, qui scepra tenes altissima rerum,  
 Cuius & hoc tantum dextera claudit opus.  
 Cuius magna preces clementia nullius unquam  
 Repulit, haud falsa voce rogantis opem.  
 Respice me nimia peccati mole gravatum,

49 B. della Fonte, *Donatus sive de poenitentia ad Julianum Medicem* (Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelferbytnaus 43 Aug. Fol., fols. 125<sup>v</sup>–126): ‘Verum sunt quidam ita perversis moribus ut nihil audire, nihil legere, nihil probare velint, nisi quod aures blandiore sono permulceat. Quibus iure dicitur a Domino ultima illa die: Discedite a me omnes qui Christiani fuistis et sacras litteras legere neglexistis.’ Fontius goes on to concede that ‘although divine writings ought to be bare and simple so that all may openly understand what is written for the salvation of all’ (‘quamquam divinae scripturae nuda ac simplices esse debent, ut omnes aperte intelligant quae ad omnium salutem scribuntur’), that there are also Christian authors with a cultivated style, especially the Church fathers. All quotations after Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, II, n. 63, 837 (original) and 631 (translation, modified).

50 See J. Pelikan, *The Reformation of the Bible – The Bible of the Reformation. Catalog of the Exhibition* with contributions by V.R. Hotchkiss & D. Price (New Haven & London 1996), 74 and 171. Poetic paraphrase in the vernacular, of course, was a concern of most reformators, especially when it came to community chant; but this can no longer be regarded as a specifically humanist/classicizing concern. On the other hand, the reformation initiated by Luther had, in its very first years, a quite strained relationship to humanism. Hessus was one of the leading figures in working out a compromise between piety and (humanistic) learning, and his psalm paraphrases are a kind of symbol to this integration. See G. Huber-Rebenich, ‘Der lateinische Psalter des Eobanus Hessus und das Ideal der *docta pietas*’, *Die Musen im Reformationszeitalter*, ed. W. Ludwig (Leipzig 2001), 289–303.

51 Huber-Rebenich, ‘Der lateinische Psalter’, 293.



Mole, sed immensum pondus habente premi.  
 Et nunc illa tuæ subeat miseratio menti,  
 Qua tibi fidentes sæpe levare soles.  
 Nunc opus esse tuum misereri queso memento,  
 Quando hic, heu nimium, quod misereris, habes.<sup>52</sup>

Highest Father, who holdest the most high sceptre of things,  
 whose right hand encloses even this great work.  
 Whose great clemency never repels anyone's prayer  
 who asks for support with unfeigned speech.  
 Look at me, weighed down by the excessive mass of my sin,  
 how I am crushed by the mass, of immense weight.  
 And now may this mercy come to Thy mind,  
 with which Thou usest to relieve the believers.  
 I ask that Thou now may remember that it is Thy wont to have mercy,  
 because here you have, alas, more than enough to have pity on.

Though Hessus' paraphrase includes a certain amount of interpretation and might, in fact, be regarded as a hybrid form of paraphrase-commentary (inspired by Lutheran doctrine, of course), it is very evident that he attempts to apply just the rhetorical techniques of flattering apostrophe whose absence was noted in the original psalm, and further introduces new images (like the sceptre in God's right hand) and metaphors (the weight of the sin). While the psalmist states his request clearly in the very first three words ('Miserere mei, deus'), Hessus uses the first four lines just for addressing the Lord (very much as a humanist would address a noble dedicatee), and comes to the request only in a roundabout manner in line 7. Small wonder that in the end Hessus needs no less than 96 verses (or 48 distichs) to paraphrase a content that is expressed in the original in 42 verses (or 21 distichs).

To sum up: Both approaches, the philological and the elegant, distance themselves from the Latin Psalters current at the time. The philologists would go *ad fontes*, while the 'elegant' paraphrases would try to make the coarse Biblical texts more palatable to an audience well versed in ancient literature and poetry.

In other words, there seems not much ground for regarding the psalm motet as an offspring of specific humanist trends. Instead, the interest in the Biblical Word, as evident in the development in the motet around (and after)

52 I used the following editions: *Psalterium universum carmine eligiaco redditum atque explicatum, ac nuper in Schola Marpurgensi aeditum, per Helium Eobanum Hessum, publicum eius Academiae professorem* (Tiguri Christ. Froschouerus s. d. [ca. 1540]), *Psalterium Davidis carmine redditum per Eobanum Hessum. Cui accessit Ecclesiastes Salomonis, eodem genere carminis redditus* (Lipisiae 1584).

1500, seems to reflect a general tendency in late medieval religious culture. The trend to rely on the Scripture as the sole source of truth – the *sola Scriptura* principle – was well established in the theological and spiritual culture of the Late Middle Ages before the Reformation, and the humanists had an interesting but not decisive part in it.<sup>53</sup> (It may also be pointed out that interest in vernacular translations of Scripture – again, something which was of no great concern to fifteenth-century humanists – had also begun long before Luther’s first attempt; the history of early printing counts no less than eighteen Bibles in High and Low German printed before 1522.)<sup>54</sup>

All this is to say that we should be very careful in identifying the specific approach to texts and text setting around 1500 with humanistic concerns. I argue instead that the sublimity of Josquin’s psalm motets must be understood from the perspective opened up by Longinus, but more importantly reinforced by Augustine: the idea that humble style can convey great ideas, that the power of a few inspired words can overcome the loquacious chatter of worldly purpose. An idea admirably expressed by an author who was – in his years as Augustinian monk, and as an avid reader of this order’s patron – deeply steeped in the use of the psalms for collective and personal devotion. After praising the words of joy in the laudatory psalms, Martin Luther continued:<sup>55</sup>

WJderumb / wo findestu tieffer / kleglicher / jemerlicher wort / von Trawrigkeit / denn die Klagepsalmen haben? Da sihestu aber mal allen Heiligen ins hertze / wie in den Tod / ja wie in die Helle. Wie finster vnd tunckel ists da / von allerley betrubtem anblick des zorns Gottes. Also auch / wo sie von furcht vnd hoffnung reden / brauchen sie solcher wort / das dir kein Maler

- 53 K. Schreiner, “Die wahrheit wirt uns menschen verkündt durch Gottes Wort mündlich und schriftlich”. Debatten über das geschriebene und ungeschriebene Wort Gottes in volkssprachlichen deutschen Theologien der Frühen Neuzeit’, *Normieren – Tradieren – Inszenieren. Das Christentum als Buchreligion*, ed. A. Holzem (Darmstadt 2004), 177–223, here 177–180. On p. 178, Schreiner quotes H. Schüssler, *Der Primat der Heiligen Schrift als theologisches und kanonistisches Problem im Spätmittelalter* (Wiesbaden 1977), 91, with the unequivocal statement that theology in the fourteenth and fifteenth century understood itself ‘grundsätzlich als Schrifttheologie’, that Holy Writ was ‘die maßgebende Quelle und Norm oder “Regel” des christlichen Glaubens’. This is not to say that the reformators of the sixteenth century were not original in this respect, but merely that they isolated and radicalized a strain of thought already existent in late-medieval theological thinking in a way which Berndt Hamm would call ‘innovation’, see B. Hamm, ‘Wie innovativ war die Reformation?’, *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 27 (2000), 481–497, here 489–491.
- 54 J. Pelikan, *The Reformation of the Bible*, 49–50. Pelikan refers to H. Reinitzer, *Biblia deutsch. Luthers Bibelübersetzung und ihre Tradition* (Wolfenbüttel 1983), 85.
- 55 M. Luther, ‘Vorrede auff den Psalter’, *Biblia. Das ist: Die gantze Heilige Schrift / Deutsch / Auff’s new zugericht. D. Mart. Luth.* (Wittenberg 1545; repr. Stuttgart 1983), fol. CCLXXXIX.

also kündte die Furcht oder Hoffnung abmalen / vnd kein Cicero oder Redkündiger also furbilden.

On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There you look into the hearts of all the saints as into death; yes, as into hell itself. How gloomy and dark it is there, with all kinds of troubled forebodings about the wrath of God. So, too, when they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict for you, and no Cicero or any other orator so portray them.<sup>56</sup>

To repeat, the declamatory way Josquin treats the text might seem humble, ascetic and even coarse at first glance, but it is also of powerful expressivity. It does not try to clothe the words into well-formed musical lines, but, so to speak, to express their soul.

One way to achieve this is the use of a melodic style characterized by the increased frequency of melodic skips compared to steps. A good example is the beginning of Josquin's *Domine, ne in furore* (NJE 16.6).<sup>57</sup> The text (a compilation; the beginning is taken from Psalm 38 [37]) reads:

Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me  
neque in ira tua corripias me

Put me not to rebuke, O Lord, in thine anger:  
neither chasten me in thy heavy displeasure.

To set the first call to the lord, the three syllables of 'Domine', Josquin opens with a series of imitation spinning around in the 'C major triad': *e c g* [Ex. 1]. While in the Dufay/Ockeghem generations a melodic leap normally would be smoothed out by stepwise motion in the counterdirection, a rule in fact still valid in Palestrina style, here the three notes sound isolated; almost like someone calling out over a distance.

The effect is not one of exuberance, as in a seemingly similar passage in Dufay's *Se la face ay pale* chanson and Mass [Ex. 2], but one of austerity and rigidity; an impression enhanced by the fact that all four voices start in unison, using the same pitches. Technically, this kind of short imitation in unison (or in the octave) is indebted to the Milanese style of Gaspar van Weerbeke and Loyset

<sup>56</sup> *Luther's Works, American Edition*, edd. J. Pelikan & H. Lehmann (St. Louis 1955-1986), vol. 35, 255-256.

<sup>57</sup> See also Ludwig Finscher's analysis: L. Finscher, 'Four-voice motets', in Sherril, 249-279; here 275-278.

Compère, but Josquin immediately transforms and concentrates this model by the closely overlapping imitation in strict unison, which produces a more insistent effect. Slightly varied, the point is repeated in all voices, making an ill fit to the text rhythm; here, the motif is also expanded in a way the melodic contour of which (*e* [*f*] *g* *c*) is roughly similar in the two upper voices and the Bassus [Ex. 3]. This expanded version is taken up at the start of the second half-verse, 'neque in ira tua' (starting with the Tenor in m. 15).<sup>58</sup> What was clearly an expressive device at the very outset is now used also as a formal sign, emphasizing the correspondence between the two half-verses, the *parallelismus membrorum* (form and expression, pace Hanslick, are of course almost indivisible in music).

Example 1, *Domine, ne in furore* (NJE 16.6), mm. 1–6.

Example 2, Dufay, *Missa Se la face*, Kyrie II, mm. 64–66.

Note also that the expanded version ends usually with a falling fifth (first to be seen in Superius and Altus, mm. 5–6, than taken up in the Tenor, mm. 17–18, and present with hypnotic intensity in almost every measure from 23 onward

<sup>58</sup> Joshua Rifkin probably would call this motivicity though it is closer to later procedures of motivic usage than the techniques Rifkin describes by that term, as I understand it. See J. Rifkin, 'Motivik – Konstruktion – Humanismus. Zur Motette *Huc me sydereo* von Josquin des Prez', *Die Motette. Beiträge zu ihrer Gattungsgeschichte*, ed. H. Schneider (Mainz 1992), 105–134; *Idem*, 'Miracles, Motivicity, and Mannerism. Adrian Willaert's *Videns Dominus flentes sorores Lazari* and Some Aspects of Motet Composition in the 1520s', *Hearing the Motet. Essays on the Motet of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. D. Pesce (Oxford etc. 1997), 243–264.

through 35). It seems to me that such a phrase ending – outside the Bassus line, where it was common in cadential progression –, was quite unusual around 1500, and was used for special effect. Instead of simply petering out, the end of the phrase has the dignity and finality of a pseudo-cadence. From the perspective of ‘correct’ Latin prosody, a phrase like ‘corripas me’ (mm. 25–33) is startlingly wrong, and thoughts about Josquin’s French pronunciation may find here nourishment.<sup>59</sup> But as this is part of the just-mentioned concatenation of closely related motifs in which Josquin explores the hypnotic effect of repeated falling fifths, the ‘French’ effect may be just a by-product of that.

One could quote many other examples for melodic progression by leap in Josquin’s and also in the Josquinesque psalm-motets.<sup>60</sup> It is not just a startling deviation from what listeners in Josquin’s time would have considered the musical norm, it is also demanding on the singers, forcing them to devote more accent to the single pitches, therefore enhancing text declamation. Even on this micro-level, one can find evidence for Ludwig Finscher’s thesis that Josquin’s psalm-motets were primarily directed to an audience, perhaps even more so than to be enjoyed or appraised by the singers<sup>61</sup> – arguably the first pieces in the Western tradition of polyphony clearly designated as *Darbietungsmusik*.

With this we come to another aspect of Josquin’s psalm-motet style, and this is, to put it bluntly, monotony. Or, to speak more historically informed, anti-*varietas*. The best example of this is, of course, the famous ostinato in *Miserere mei, deus* (NJE 18.3; see Facs. 1), which consists of just two pitches, and which is an excellent example of what one might call musical ‘nakedness’ in contrast to adorned or embellished melodic progressions, forming a musical equivalent to the Christian sublimity of plain style. (By the way, could

59 D. Fallows, ‘French and Italian accentuation in Josquin’s motets’, *Regards croisés. Musiques, musiciens, artistes et voyageurs entre France et Italie au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. N. Guidobaldi (Paris 2002), 105–118. But T. Schmidt-Beste has brought forward weighty arguments against the theory of ‘French pronunciation’; see his *Textdeklamation*, 35–40. Schmidt-Beste argues that even while in spoken Latin with French pronunciation a more or less involuntary lengthening of the final syllable might have occurred regularly, this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that such ‘incorrect’ pronunciation might have been carried over into musical text setting; late-mediaeval French scholars were quite aware of ‘correct’ accentuation. A passage as the one quoted above Schmidt-Beste would qualify as ‘iso-chronic declamation’: a text setting in which three or more same note-values are strung together, while the phrase usually concludes with – and often also is opened by – one or two longer values, a technique not particularly French (see *op. cit.*, 52–53).

60 A particularly impressive instance, whether by Josquin or not, is the beginning of the low-voice *De profundis* (NJE \*15.11), at the same time a superb example of word-painting. On the authenticity question, see most recently P. Macey, ‘Josquin and Champion. Conflicting Attributions for the Psalm Motet *De profundis clamavi*’, *Uno gentile et subtile ingenio*, 453–468.

61 Finscher, ‘Four-voice motets’, 275.

Example 3, *Domine, ne in furore* (NJE 16.6), mm. 1–35.

s Do - mi - ne, ne in fu - ro - re tu - o ar -  
 s Do - mi - ne, ne in fu - ro - re tu - o  
 s Do - mi - ne, ne in fu -  
 Do - mi - ne, ne in fu - ro -  
 s - gu - as me, ar - gu - as me,  
 s ar - gu - as me, ar - gu - as me,  
 s ro - re tu - o ar - gu -  
 re tu - o ar - gu - as me, ar -  
 s ar - gu - as me, ne - que  
 s ar - gu - as me, ne -  
 s as me, ne - que in i - ra tu - a,  
 gu - as me, ar - gu - as me,  
 s in i - ra tu - a, ne - que  
 s - que in i - ra tu - a, ne - que in i -  
 s ne - que in i - ra tu - a  
 ne - que in i - ra tu - a cor -

it have escaped to any singer in Josquin's time that this austere piece opens with a pun – the first syllable, *Mi*, corresponding to its solmization? This, indeed, might be more than a pun, urging us to provide *musica ficta* in each recurrence of the ostinato to transform it at least in one of the voices into a *mi-fa*-relation – something the old Smijers edition at least tried to suggest.)

Another category of monotony pertains to melodic or contrapuntal progressions which circulate or rotate in themselves. *Miserere mei, deus* with its

## Example 3 (continued).

in i - ra tu - a cor - ri - pi - as me,  
 ra tu - a cor - ri - pi - as me, cor - ri - pi -  
 cor - ri - pi - as me, cor - ri - pi - as me.  
 ri - pi - as me, cor - ri - pi - as me, cor - ri - pi - as

cor - ri - pi - as me. Quo - ni - am sa - git -  
 as me. Quo - ni - am sa -  
 Quo - ni - am sa - git - te tu -  
 me. Quo - ni - am sa - git - te tu - e

Facsimile 1: The ostinato soggetto of *Miserere mei, deus* in the version of the Medici codex.

Miserere mei deus Miserere mei deus miserere mei deus  
 iferere mei deus miserere  
 mei de us miserere mei de  
 us, amplius laua me ab iniquitate mea et a peccato meo mun

ostinatos forms in itself such a circulating structure. But also on a smaller scale we may note a kind of rotating monotony, for instance in the setting of 'Et secundum multitudinem ...', where the voices ascend by two steps, only to fall back three times on their pitch of departure [Ex. 4]. Such reductions of musical variety – and the piece is full of the kind of quasi-ostinatos, small-scale repetitions, small-scale melodic movement etc. – bring a sense of litany, of urgent pleading for mercy into the piece. The simplicity of approach lends an emotional immediacy and impact to the text sung hardly possible even

in the most beautiful and sad Dufay chanson. And this is exactly because a beautiful Dufay chanson will be – from a strictly musical point of view – more rewarding than Josquin’s *Miserere*.

Example 4, *Miserere mei, deus* (NJE 18.3), mm. 24-34.

25  
et se - cun - dum mul - ti -

30  
tu - di - nem mi - se - ra - ti - o - num tu - a - rum

8  
nem mi - se - ra - ti - o - num tu - a - rum

Which is not to denigrate neither Dufay nor Josquin, but simply to say that Josquin (and some of his contemporaries) found a new way of musically communicating with their listeners – not only in the psalm-motets, of course, but especially here. A way – I suggest – which had little to do with classical rhetoric but almost everything with Augustinian thinking about the sublimity of the humble but divinely inspired style in Holy Writ, enforced by a widespread tendency to rely on biblical truth, on sole scripture, around 1500.

To be sure, I do not intend to deny the possibility, perhaps even the necessity of analyzing the rhetoric of Josquin’s music.<sup>62</sup> In a sense, I have done just this. You can never escape rhetoric. But I would caution against a too straightforward application of musico-rhetorical terminology instead of looking closely on how and why music expresses or signifies text at a given historical moment.

A final thought. One might feel tempted to ask: If the biblical words were sublime per se, why set them to music? How could music possibly add to their sublimity? All through the Middle Ages, the psalms had been recited in the Office with the most sparse of musical embellishment; all the power rested in the words. The psalm settings by Josquin and his contemporaries, however ascetic they may seem, are considerably more eloquent than the liturgical recitation. Moreover, they not just embellish the text, but emphasize it, interpret

62 See P. Macey, ‘Josquin and Musical Rhetoric. *Miserere mei, Deus* and Other Motets’, SherrJ, 485-530, taking up ideas from Macey’s Ph.D. dissertation *Josquin’s ‘Miserere mei Deus’. Context, Structure, and Influence* (University of California, Berkeley 1985).



it, indulging, from time to time, in word painting. In short, they signify an engaged, emotive reading of the text, effectively doubling its syntactic and semantic content, as if its power could no longer be trusted to stand for itself; they construct a 'speaker', a 'musical subject' represented by the singers, but not identical with any of them. Of course, this was a tendency already present not just in earlier polyphony but, perhaps, also in some chant melodies, but it now came to the fore and would remain there for centuries. The invention of musico-rhetorical terminology by a German music theorist named Joachim Burmeister in Rostock at the end of the sixteenth century is one of the reflections of this process.

Christian Kaden has analyzed this musical doubling of the affective and semantic text content as a symptom of a thorough 'semiotization' of Early Modern Culture, which may be interpreted a shrinking belief in the power of rituals and ritual texts, even of world-harmony itself.<sup>63</sup> I can only hint at this larger perspective here, but it seems that the sublimity of Josquin's psalm-motets would be a vital factor in this process. Exactly when the force of the words is fading, you need the eloquence of music.

63 C. Kaden, 'Abschied von der Harmonie der Welt. Zur Genese des neuzeitlichen Musik-Begriffs', *Gesellschaft und Musik. Wege zur Musiksoziologie. Festgabe für Robert H. Reichardt zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. W. Lipp (Berlin 1992), 27-53; *Idem, Das Unerhörte und das Unhörbare. Was Musik ist, was Musik sein kann*, (Kassel etc. 2004), 181-190.