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Text, Music, and Mannerist Aesthetics in Agricola's Songs

To Jak and Warwick Edwards*

Most scholarly discussions of Alexander Agricola's secular music have tended to focus on the untexted music, to the detriment of the songs. This is hardly surprising since, until recently, Agricola's reputation rested on his authorship of this considerable body of putatively ›instrumental‹ music,¹ one of the earliest and most abundant to originate with a named composer. But Agricola's tally of over forty songs is still one of the most considerable of the fifteenth century. Apart from its numerical importance, his song output is remarkable for the questions it raises concerning attitudes to text: the manner in which it was intended to be set, its role in shaping musical decisions, the identification of the texts that Agricola's settings originally set, and how words and music combine to form networks of references to previously existing songs. In addressing these issues I draw on the previous observations of a number of scholars. The first of these questions have recently been considered by Warwick Edwards in a series of studies that has substantially influenced what follows.² The boundary between Agricola's texted and untexted pieces is porous enough to have caused his modern editors considerable difficulties;³

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- 1 The question of ›instrumentality‹ and its relation of Agricola's music was the theme of the previous issue of this periodical.
- 2 See Warwick Edwards, ›Agricola and Intuitive Syllable Deployment,‹ *Early Music* 34 (2006), pp. 409–26; id., ›Agricola's Songs Without Words,‹ *Trossinger Jahrbuch für Renaissance-musik* 6 (2006), pp. 83–121; and id., ›The motet c.1500: Text Treatment and the Humanistic Fallacy,‹ unpublished paper read at the conference *On the Relationship of Imitation and Text Treatment? The Motet Around 1500*, University of Wales, Bangor, 29 March–1 April 2007.
- 3 The standard edition of the songs is *Alexandri Agricola Opera omnia*. Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae 22, ed. Edward R. Lerner, 5 vols. (American Institute of Musicology, 1961–70), vol. 5: *Cantiones, Musica Instrumentalis, Opera Dubia* (1970); several of Agricola's songs also appear in *A Florentine Chansonnier from the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent: Florence*,

and there is little evidence that the distinction was as pertinent to Agricola's contemporaries as it is to us.⁴ The question of musical and textual borrowing relates to the theme of this volume, and to a previous article in which I considered Agricola's approach to borrowed material in the *cantus firmus* Mass cycle.⁵ In addition, I continue to explore the aesthetic implications arising from the position of Agricola's music in his own time and within modern scholarship (considered in my previous contribution to this journal),⁶ but from a slightly different standpoint. In those two previous studies, I argued for a re-adjustment of Agricola's modern-day critical reception, in line with his indisputable pre-eminence in his own day; and I considered how features of his style may be placed in relation to his contemporaries', and evaluated from a theoretical viewpoint. In this study I will attempt to describe his music from a style-critical perspective, through which Agricola's peculiar individuality may be still more clearly perceived.

Texted vs untexted pieces

Before focusing on the songs in particular, one should first remark on the significance of borrowed material to Agricola's secular music in the round. It is not so much the proportion of pieces concerned that is striking, but the variety of approaches. This embraces genre categories familiar from the works of other composers, such as *formes fixes* settings incorporating plainchant *cantus firmi* (the so-called ›motet-chansons‹), but also strategies virtually confined to Agricola himself, or for which he is arguably the most significant exponent. The point is obscured by the modern tendency to classify works or groups of works, particularly in terms of genres and sub-genres, according to the handling of specific categories of compositional practice (of which borrowed material is one). This tendency privileges the distinctions between genres at the expense of the shared features. But Agricola's treatment of these categories is so free that distinctions frequently dissolve, making the classification of individual pieces more than usually conjectural: for any attempt at generalisation, an exception presents itself. The untexted secular pieces re-

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale MS Banco Rari 229. Monuments of Renaissance Music 7, ed. Howard Mayer Brown, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1983).

4 Edwards, Agricola's Songs (cf. fn. 2), pp. 97–9.

5 Fabrice Fitch, »Agricola and the Rhizome: An Aesthetic of the Late Cantus Firmus Mass,« *Revue belge de musicologie* 59 (2005), pp. 65–92.

6 Fabrice Fitch, »Agricola and the Rhizome II: Contrapuntal Ramifications,« *Trossinger Jahrbuch für Renaissancemusik* 6 (2006), pp. 19–57.

ferred to earlier are a case in point: a number of them appear to have been freely composed, but the majority incorporate a single borrowed voice from a pre-existent chanson. As Honey Meconi has noted, the borrowed material in such cases is usually stated once in its entirety and in *integer valor*, with little or no new material added.⁷ Although most of Agricola's settings conform to this model, there are exceptions: in one of his *D'ung aultre amer* settings (No. 3 in the edition), the borrowed voice is ornately paraphrased; the six-voice *Fortuna desperata* incorporates all three of the original voices; and the four-voice *Tout a par moy* has a series of ostinatos derived from the song tenor against a complete setting of the tenor itself. To all of these strategies there are precedents, some of them of long standing;⁸ but no composer before Agricola seems to have exploited their collective potential so single-mindedly.

This slippage of categories is even more marked in the songs. The majority appears to set *formes fixes*: I say ›appears‹, since most of the pieces whose texts are incompletely transmitted and not otherwise identifiable conform to normative rondeau structures.⁹ Conversely, several of the pieces transmitted with a textual incipit are unlikely to have been conceived with a text in mind. The texted/untexted dichotomy is anyway far from straightforward, and this is especially so with Agricola, much of whose demonstrably vocal music (most particularly in the sacred works) contains passages that fail to conform to the practice of many of his contemporaries. Thus, Agricola's setting of Hayne van Ghizeghem's *Allez regretz*, included in the edition as a rondeau, more closely fits the pattern of his untexted tenor settings.¹⁰ The popular *Oublier veul*, though apparently not a tenor setting, is cast in the mould of freely composed untexted pieces such as *Cecus non iudicat de coloribus* and *Pater meus agricola est*: though much shorter than these two, it has no

7 Honey Meconi, ›Art-song Reworkings: an Overview,‹ *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 119 (1994), pp. 1–42. The most compelling indicator Meconi advances for the ›untextedness‹ of such pieces is the lack of a practicable mid-point caesura corresponding to the point of its occurrence in the model.

8 These are detailed in Meconi, Art-song Reworkings (cf. fn. 7).

9 This group includes the majority of the songs classed in Lerner's edition as ›chansons‹ and ›songs without recovered texts‹: *Ay-je rien fait, C'est un bon bruit, Mauldicte soit, Sonnés muses melodieusement, Votre bouche dist baisiés moy, En dispitant, Gentil galans, Il me faudra mauldire, Je ne puis plus* (assuming it is by Agricola), the piece surviving with the incipit ›D‹, and (more speculatively), *Crions Noël* and *Garde vostre visage*. Most of these pieces are mentioned, and their classification as rondeaux cautiously endorsed, in David Fallows, *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs, 1415–1480* (Oxford, 1999).

10 As first suggested in Peter Woetmann Christoffersen, *French Music in the Early Sixteenth Century: Studies in the Music Collection of a Copyist of Lyons, the Manuscript Ny kgl. Samling 1848 2° in the Royal Library, Copenhagen*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen, 1994).

discernible mid-point *caesura*,¹¹ and the incipit preserved in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, f. fr. 1596, fol. 3^v–4^r, *Oblier veul douleur et tristesse*, with its nine syllables with a feminine ending, seems inconsistent with the beginning of a *forme fixe* text, for which (barring a textual corruption) one would expect eight or ten.

It is also conceivable that several untexted pieces lurk among Agricola's settings of monophonic songs, in which the borrowed melody (often though not always popular in origin) is often treated with considerable freedom. Although this sets them apart from the re-workings of polyphonic tenors (which tend to privilege strict statements), details of melodic construction (most particularly the absence of the repeated notes associated with the setting of syllables) indicate an untexted approach. *Se congié prens* and the first of the two settings of *Adieu m'amour* feature both migration and ornamentation of the model, and imitation at the beginnings of phrases is avoided more often than not. In both cases, the repetition of the last phrase seems also driven primarily by musical considerations. *Adieu m'amour II* treats the tune somewhat more strictly, but the melodic construction of the free voices again suggests an untexted setting; the same is probably true of *Princesse de toute beauté*.¹² Although it would be overstating the case to speak of ›cumulative evidence‹ in respect of these monophonic song settings, it is tempting to conclude that in most cases, as with the composer's tenor re-workings, where ›the words of a *cantus firmus* seem to be those for the song as a whole it may often be said that Agricola sets the tune rather than its words.‹¹³ On the other hand, the imitative structure and frequent instances of prominently repeated pitches in *Et qui la dira* and *Royne des fleurs* are consistent with a texted approach. The latter is something of an oddity, and seems to have caused both period scribes and modern editors considerable perplexity. Faced with a somewhat ambiguous textual situation, Lerner and Howard Brown have independently reconstructed it as a virelai; but the evidence of the sources suggests a rather stronger formal parallel with *Se congié prens* – that is, a through-composed setting of a single stanza.¹⁴

11 The one strongly marked internal cadence at bar 12 occurs too early to be indicative of a rondeau setting, and there is little else to support the suggestion.

12 Lerner, in *Alexandri Agricola Opera omnia* 5 (cf. fn. 3), p. LIV, remarks on the ›instrumental‹ character of the contratenor, ›written without a single rest‹.

13 Edwards, *Agricola's songs* (cf. fn. 2), p. 100.

14 *Alexandri Agricola Opera omnia* 5 (cf. fn. 3), pp. XIV–XVI, and 11–13; and Brown, *A Florentine Chansonnier* (cf. fn. 3), text volume, pp. 295–6. The full text is transmitted with the monophonic version in the Bayeux manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, f. fr. 9346, fol. 4^v–5^r, whereas no source for Agricola's setting transmits more than the first

In all these cases, the status and treatment of borrowed material is a significant consideration. Perhaps the most interesting of all in this context is *Se mieulx ne vient d'amours*, based on a setting by P. Convert. In an unpublished paper read in 1982,¹⁵ Warwick Edwards showed that Agricola's setting takes over the previous setting's entire discantus, whose clear-cut phrases he interpolates with his own more ornate inventions (Example 1a and 1b).¹⁶ Convert's first phrase appears *in medias res* and in augmentation, its



Example 1a: P. Convert, *Se mieulx ne vient d'amours*, discantus

breves and semibreves clearly picked out, both visibly and audibly, from Agricola's ostentatiously ›busy‹ opening. The second phrase is adumbrated at the octave in slightly modified form, before being presented as Convert has it.

stanza. In support of their formal reading of the piece, Lerner and Howard M. Brown advocate a final cadence on *D* roughly midway through the piece, which surely cannot function as such, being undercut by the contratenor. It is far more likely that the setting concludes with the end of the musical text. Incidentally, Lerner and Brown also disregard a *signum congruentiae* at a similar cadence on *G* a few bars later, attested in two quite independent sources (*Canti C*, Venice: Ottaviano Petrucci, 1504, RISM 1504³, fol. 60^v–61^r, and London, British Library, Ms. Royal 20 A.xvi, fol. 26^v–27^r), which does not fit the sense of the words at that point, and is difficult to square with the material immediately following in the contratenor. Since Agricola's intentions appear to have confused even his contemporaries, our own conclusions are best advanced with caution.

15 Warwick Edwards, »Words, Music and the Twilight of the Medieval Chanson,« unpublished paper read at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Ann Arbor, Michigan, November 1982.

16 All musical examples are in original note values, with whole bars always being equivalent to breves (perfect in *tempus perfectum*, and imperfect in *tempus imperfectum*). This convention is adopted for the whole movement concerned; hence, bar numbers in the musical examples differ from those in Alexander Agricola Opera Omnia, which appear in brackets alongside the captions for the musical examples.

The image displays a musical score for a discantus setting. It consists of ten staves of music, each beginning with a measure number. The notation is in a single system with a common time signature (C). The music features various rhythmic values including minims, crotchets, and quavers. Several measures are enclosed in rectangular boxes, indicating specific material of interest. The boxed measures are: measures 7-13, 21-26, 39-44, 45-50, 51-56, 63-68, and 69-74. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of the final staff.

Example 1b: Alexander Agricola, *Se mieulx ne vient d'amours*, discantus. The material of Convert's setting appears within the boxes.

Thereafter, the successive parts of the original are presented systematically. The rests between Convert's phrases are taken as a cue for subsequent interpolations. A few notes from the original are eliminated, probably to facilitate the transition to the new material; but as the opening shows, seamless transition does not appear to have been an imperative. This highly inventive attitude to the model has exact parallels within Agricola's Mass music, in which borrowed material generally (and in particular, any given statement of a song tenor) is interspersed, seemingly at random, with freely invented passages.¹⁷ The question remains whether Agricola's *Se mieulx ne vient* was conceived as texted or untexted. Edwards assumes the former, though he also notes the extent to which the strategies just noted play havoc with Convert's syllabic text-setting and clear-cut approach to phrasing. My own conclusion draws partly on internal evidence, partly on that of the sources, and also on the context of Agricola's general practice. We may observe, in passing, that no more than a single stanza of the text is transmitted in any source; but a more positive indicator of untexted conception is the absence of a clear-cut *caesura* anywhere near the place where one might expect to find it (the one conjecturally supplied by Lerner is unconvincing). The evidence of the settings previously examined, in which a degree of freedom pertains with respect to the model, points in the same direction, and tips the balance marginally in favour of an untexted reworking of Convert's original.¹⁸

But the case of *Se mieulx ne vient* introduces another factor into the equation, namely, Agricola's apparent use of texts previously set by other composers. The fact that so many of the song texts survive only as incipits affects not only the problem of classification, but also the correct identification of the texts themselves. Lerner's proposed solutions give the impression that Agricola was particularly fond of re-using texts set by others, a pattern within which *Se mieulx ne vient* would appear to fall quite neatly. But in at least two cases it has been credibly proposed that Lerner's textual identifications are incorrect. The two most obvious are *Dictes moy toutes vos pensées* and *Vostre bruit et vostre grant fame*, originally set by Loyset Compère and Guillaume Dufay, respectively. As David Fallows has remarked, neither of these fits Agricola's setting: his music for the opening of *Dictes moy toutes vos pensées* is clearly intended for four syllables, not three or five. Although the overwhelming majority of the sources (most of them Italian) agree on the

17 Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome* (cf. fn. 5), esp. p. 70–5.

18 In the spoken version of this paper I inclined to the view that Agricola's setting of *Se mieulx ne vient* was a new setting of the text used by Convert. Further reflection leads me to the opposite interpretation.

first three words, a single one gives the incipit of another text that survives in several poetry manuscripts, *Dictes le moy*, and which can confidently be proposed as the correct text.¹⁹ For *Vostre bruit*, a single Italian source underlays the complete first stanza of Dufay's rondeau. An alternative text, beginning »Vostre haut bruit le quel est tant parfait«, is not attested in any musical source, but it so exactly fits the musical details of Agricola's setting that there can be little doubt as to its authenticity.²⁰ As we shall see, the case for preferring »Vostre haut bruit« is powerfully supported by another factor to be considered presently. Meanwhile, these two demonstrable misidentifications naturally lead one to regard other possible candidates more critically. Another song text previously set by Compère, *Va-t'en regret*, must therefore excite suspicion, albeit for different reasons. It survives as a *unicum* in the manuscript Florence, Biblioteca del Conservatorio, Basevi 2439 (fols. 58^v–59^r) with that incipit only, but makes no musical reference to Compère's setting. This would not be the only instance in Basevi of scribal uncertainty regarding incipits,²¹ but in any case the profusion of »regret« poems circulating at the Burgundian court might well confuse a scribe working in that environment. Nor need the fact that the music here happens to match the words detain us too long, since a textual *caesura* occurs most commonly after the first four syllables of a line, and there is any number of words of two syllables that might plausibly precede the word »regret«. Agricola's music may well have been intended for another »regret« poem altogether. Yet another incipit, *Gentil galans*, corresponds to several poems beginning with these words, and therefore cannot be considered for lack of evidence; but it does little to contradict the suggestion that Agricola's putative use of previously set texts is largely, if not wholly, illusory.

There remains one song to consider under this heading, *S'il vous plaist bien que je vous tiengne*, whose style closely links it with *Se miculx ne vient d'amours*. The song's text is attested *only* in Basevi 2439 (which gives just the

19 Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, Q 16, fol. 25^v–26^f. See Fallows, *A Catalogue* (cf. fn. 9), p. 133 for the original suggestion and a list of the poetry manuscripts transmitting the text.

20 The reading in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, f. fr. 1719 was adopted for the recording of the song by Fretwork and Michael Chance on *Alexander Agricola: Chansons*, Harmonia Mundi U.S.A., HMU 907421 (issued 2006). See Fallows, *A Catalogue* (cf. fn. 9), p. 404, and also Françoise Féry-Hue, *Au grey d'amours ... (Pièces inédites du manuscrit Paris, Bibl. nat., fr. 1719): étude et édition*. *Le moyen français*, 27–8 (Montreal, 1991), p. 185.

21 See for example the indecipherable but apparent confusion attending Agricola's *Pourquoy tant*. See Alexandri Agricola Opera omnia 5 (cf. fn. 3), p. LXX, and Fallows, *A Catalogue* (cf. fn. 9), p. 322.

corrupt incipit »Sy vous plaist«). Poetry collections transmit two poems beginning with these words, a rondeau and a virelai, both of which share a nearly identical first stanza. An anonymous setting of the virelai, composed at the latest in the early 1460s, is transmitted in the Nivelles and Dijon chansonniers (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Rés. Vmc. 57, and Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, 517, respectively). Both versions of the text had currency during Agricola's lifetime:²² indeed, the virelai appears in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, f. fr. 1719, fol. 90^r,²³ which transmits a significant proportion of the texts that Agricola set to music. Yet the music that survives is clearly intended for a rondeau, not a virelai: there is a clear mid-point *caesura* just over the halfway mark, and neither manuscript suggests the presence of any further music, as might be needed to set a *tierce*. In any case there is no musical reference to the earlier work. Given the pattern that we have seen emerge from the other putative cases of shared text, this is no longer so surprising; but I suspect that the cause in this instance is slightly different. Agricola may have known of the existence of both texts, but not necessarily of the previous musical setting of the virelai.²⁴

Text/musical allusions in context

It would seem, then, that Agricola's re-use of other composers' texts is not as consistent a practice as may have appeared. However, far from weakening the case for text-musical correspondences in his songs, this realization actually clarifies and strengthens it. For the three pieces we are left with, all of them undoubtedly texted, form a consistent pattern. *Je n'ay dueil qui de vous ne viengne* and *Vostre haut bruit lequel est tant parfait* both begin with a point of imitation that quotes the opening contratenor gestures of songs by Johannes

22 This is demonstrated by a unique variant for the first stanza, found in the only poetry collection to transmit the rondeau (*La Chasse et le depart d'amours*, Paris 1509, first published three years after Agricola's death). Agricola's reading agrees with the reading transmitted in all the virelai sources, including Nivelles and Dijon. See Alexandri Agricola Opera 5 (cf. fn. 3), pp. XXXVIII–XXXIX.

23 Féry-Hue, *Au grey d'amours* (cf. fn. 19), p. 233. See also Alexandri Agricola Opera omnia 5 (cf. fn. 3), pp. XXXVIII–XXXIX.

24 An alternative scenario is worth entertaining, speculatively: if Agricola did know of the previous setting of the virelai, then his choice of the alternative (rondeau) version may have been motivated by the desire not to be musically beholden to the text's past associations. This assumes, naturally, that no previous setting (now lost) existed of the rondeau itself; and it rests on the hypothesis, articulated below, that the textual allusions in Agricola's settings were intended to accommodate a corresponding musical one.

Example 2a: Johannes Ockeghem, *Je n'ay dueil que je ne suis morte* (4 vv. version), bb. 1–3

Example 2b: Alexander Agricola, *Je n'ay dueil qui de vous ne viengne*, bb. 1–8

Ockeghem and Dufay, respectively, *Je nay dueil que je ne suis morte* and *Vostre bruit et vostre grant fame* (Examples 2a–d). The demonstrable correspondence of the *Je n'ay dueil* pieces confirms *Vostre haut bruit* as the correct text for Agricola's setting, since its relation to Dufay's song exactly matches that of the other pair: to the textual allusion corresponds a literal musical quotation. The third song in the group is the virelai *Se je vous eslonge de l'oeil*, whose *tierce* begins with a near-identical textual paraphrase of the same place in Ockeghem's *Ma maistresse* («Hélas de vous me doit complandre» for «Hélas de vous bien plaindre me devroie», Example 2e and 2f). This time, Agricola treats the corresponding place's tenor incipit as a point of imitation.²⁵ Throughout

25 First observed in Louise Litterick, *The Manuscript Royal 20.A.XVI of the British Library* (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1976), pp. 111–6. The manuscript Florence, Biblioteca

Example 2c: Guillaume Dufay, *Vostre bruit et vostre grant fame*, bb. 1–5

Example 2d: Alexander Agricola, *Vostre hault bruit lequel est tant parfaict*, bb. 1–7

Example 2e: Johannes Ockeghem, *Ma maistresse*, bb. 35–7

Example 2f: Alexander Agricola, *Se je vous eslonge de l'oeil*, bb. 62–8

Riccardiana, 2794, fol. 44^v–46^r, gives the piece to »heyne«, while in the manuscript Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. XIX.178, fol. 14^v–16^r the ascription is to »Alexander«. The nature of the cross-reference, supported by the identical treatment of the textual incipits of *Je n'ay dueil* and *Vostre haut bruit*, greatly strengthens the case for Agricola's authorship.

my explorations of Agricola I have returned to the ludic drive that is such a marked feature of his music,²⁶ and it is hard not to interpret this shared feature in this light.²⁷ In the first two cases, what is borrowed is the least recognizable or syntactically essential part of the polyphonic incipit, the one bearing the least audible relation to the textual allusion. Were it not for the clear parallel with the other two songs, the musical relationship in *Se je vous eslonge* would undoubtedly go unnoticed, for the point of imitation in question is the least distinctive of the three. At the same time the allusion to the model has been foregrounded, to some extent, by the use of imitation in all voices. The displaced attitude to the model mirrors a similar situation in the text, which alludes to the earlier text without quoting it outright. Seen in the light of these pieces, Agricola's putative recycling of pre-existent texts (considered earlier) seems all the more implausible, because foreign to his approach: to the textual allusion corresponds a musical one, but in each an element of displacement inheres. The playfulness of these concealed references puts one in mind of Pieter Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, in which the painting's putative subject is represented as a distant figure in the middle ground, his wings and feet barely visible as he hits the water.²⁸

As was mentioned earlier, many of Agricola's strategies for borrowing noted earlier have a history, and in his own generation the fashion for textless re-workings is well documented. But I know of no parallels for the specific musical strategy embodied in these three songs, and the link between musical borrowing and textual citation is also less amply documented. What evidence there remains, however, is suggestive. In the rondeau *Du tout plongiet / Fors seulement l'actente* ascribed in several sources to Antoine Brumel, the link between the rondeau text and that of Ockeghem's original is allusive rather than literal, while the *Fors seulement* tune is quoted strictly, albeit transposed downwards. Now Brumel's output is remarkable for its great

26 Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome* (cf. fn. 5), pp. 73–4, and Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome II* (cf. fn. 6), pp. 20–3.

27 Throughout what follows, I deliberately resist the use of the term »intertextuality«. While undoubtedly a convenient label, I argue that its adoption in musicological circles has been at the cost of a notable restriction in its original meaning within literary theory (at least when employed in the current context, denoting the use of quotation and allusion). Further on this question, see John Milsom, »›Imitatio‹, ›Intertextuality‹, and Early Music,« in *Citation and Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Musical Culture: Learning from the Learned*. *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music* 4, ed. Suzannah Clarke and Elizabeth Eva Leach (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 141–51.

28 A fine study of this painting is Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400–1700* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), pp. 71–99.

variety of styles and techniques; yet one cannot help but notice that *Du tout plongiet* both looks and sounds uncannily ›agricolesque‹ – note the sinuous and unpredictable turns of phrase, the undermining of phrase divisions, even the occasional play with overlapping cadential figurations.²⁹ In this light, the unique ascription to Agricola in its earliest extant source, *Canti C* (Venice: Ottaviano Petrucci, 1504, RISM 1504³), fol. 5^v–6^r, is worth taking seriously.³⁰ At the very least that ascription is more plausible than weight of numbers alone might suggest, and is further supported by intriguing circumstantial evidence.

For the subject of *Fors seulement* re-workings leads naturally to the one that most closely matches Agricola's three chansons, Ockeghem's own setting of *Fors seulement contre ce qu'ay promis*. Crucially, its opening words are identical with those of the earlier song. It seems all the more significant that *Fors seulement contre ce qu'ay promis* appears to be a very late work: based on the evidence of the sources, David Fallows' suggestion of a date after 1485 raises the intriguing possibility that the connections of text and music are a direct result of Agricola's documented professional contact with Ockeghem during this period.³¹ That hypothesis is clearly strengthened by the other demonstrable exchange between the two, concerning Ockeghem's *Je n'ay dueil*, which on source-grounds seems also to be a late piece. Whether Ockeghem's *Fors seulement contre ce* was Ockeghem's response to his younger colleague's

29 Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome II* (cf. fn. 6), pp. 37–8.

30 I thank Jaap van Bentem for drawing my attention to the significance of this work's source-transmission. Apart from the reading in the manuscript Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Mus. 1516, no. 2, apparently directly derived from *Canti C*, all four remaining sources transmit a reading a fifth lower (that is, at a pitch consonant with the piece's sombre text, uniquely transmitted in the second chansonnier of Margaret of Austria, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, 228, fol. 18^v–19^r), and three ascribe it to Brumel. It is most likely that the setting's higher notated pitch in *Canti C* is the result of direct editorial intervention by Ottaviano Petrucci (or his editor, Petrus Castellanus), though it could represent an earlier transmission of the work under Agricola's name. The authority of the ascription to Brumel in Basevi 2439 (one of the so-called ›Scribe B‹ sources, and probably the next-oldest source after *Canti C*) should not, perhaps, be overstated, given the many problems posed by this scribe's production. On this point see most recently Fabrice Fitch, ›Alamire vs Agricola: The Lie of the Sources‹, *The Burgundian-Habsburg Court Complex of Music Manuscripts (1500–1535) and the Workshop of Petrus Alamire: Colloquium Proceedings Leuven ... 1999*. Yearbook of the Alamire Foundation 5, ed. Bruno Bouckaert and Eugeen Schreurs (Leuven, 2003), pp. 299–308.

31 Documented in Martin Picker, ›A Letter of Charles VIII of France Concerning Alexander Agricola‹, *Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music: A Birthday Offering to Gustave Reese*, ed. Jan LaRue (New York, 1966), pp. 665–72. See also Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome* (cf. fn. 5), pp. 84–5.

music-textual allusions (re-visiting for the occasion the transposition-method that was something of a personal signature of his own), or whether it was Ockeghem's pair of songs that sparked Agricola's interest in pursuing the practice more intensively, the connection can hardly be accidental. It further supports my view that, perhaps alone of his generation, it is Agricola who is Ockeghem's true inheritor.³² Incidentally, the strict quotation and downward transposition of the discantus of *Fors seulement l'actente* in *Fors seulement contre ce* also clearly recalls *Du tout plongiet*. Agricola's possible authorship of the latter thus fits very comfortably within this nexus of interrelationships between the two composers.³³

These interrelationships suggest an attitude to text that is far from casual. Nevertheless, I suspect that the choice of texts was motivated primarily by musical considerations. Clear evidence for such a priority is Compère's quodlibetic rondeau *Au travail suis sans espoir de confort*, whose first stanza incorporates the incipits of several famous songs. As one might expect, Compère consistently matches the tunes to the words where appropriate. But the remaining text stanzas demonstrate that the poem is unlikely to have had a prior existence independently of Compère's song, since they contain no further such references, and only in a musical setting does the conceit become unworkable after the first stanza.³⁴ These instances show that it is the music that drives the text. To be more precise, the texts have plainly been chosen (and were, I suspect, deliberately designed) with a view to enabling musical references.³⁵

To conclude on the question of text/musical borrowing, it remains to note that this particular practice seems to have originated in the 1480s, coinciding with the arrival on the scene of Agricola's generation. In the previous decades, the combinative chanson and the motet-chanson also incorporated borrowed materials, but these were monophonic in origin – sacred or popular, or both, and never drawn from the repertoire of polyphonic songs. I have argued elsewhere that, for Agricola's generation, the incorporation of personal devices and techniques was a key feature of the treatment of inherited genres, and that one of Agricola's responses to the question,

32 Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome II* (cf. fn. 6), esp. pp. 43–4 and 56.

33 By contrast, there is little or no evidence of such an approach in Brumel's surviving output.

34 Quodlibetic poems are likewise well documented, but these tend not to be set as *formes fixes*.

35 As Warwick Edwards has suggested, Agricola's attitude to text (which is observable in the work of many other composers before the middle of the sixteenth century) seems to treat text as a starting-point, a point of reference, rather than something to be >set< in the sense later understood. See Edwards, *Agricola* (cf. fn. 2), esp. pp. 422–3.

as seen in the cycles on *Malheur me bat* and *In mynen zyn* (and to a lesser extent in *Le serviteur*), was to bring different techniques of borrowing together within a single cycle.³⁶ The same decade also marked the coming into fashion of the untexted re-workings of polyphonic songs with which Agricola has been particularly associated. When considered in the context of the rest of his output, the number of these settings is no longer so remarkable, for the problem of borrowed material seems to have been a particular stimulus to his creative imagination; indeed, it now appears even more likely that the vogue for this particular brand of textless piece was launched by Agricola himself. Equally, the significance of the incipit quotations of *Je n'ay dueil*, *Vostre haut bruit* and *Se je vous eslonge* is far greater than their mere number would suggest, for they show him bringing the same preoccupation to bear on the *formes fixes*, which come full circle with Agricola: the genre through which borrowing from polyphony originated now draws on its own materials as the basis for new settings.³⁷

Of course, Agricola's generation was also the last for which the *formes fixes* and (perhaps not coincidentally) the *cantus firmus* Mass constituted viable genres. Within a few years of his death, composers were turning their attentions elsewhere. The notion of the ›final flowering‹ is a widespread stylistic trope, one that might reasonably be invoked here; but what makes this last phase of the *formes fixes*' development so remarkable is its peculiar self-consciousness, as though the genre itself were drawing on its own substance, (re)interpreting or reflecting on its own history. As we have just seen, other contemporaries also were sensitive to this trend, and a similar attitude can be glimpsed during earlier periods, notably in the late fourteenth century; but with Agricola this attitude extends into other spheres of his output: one discerns a similar attitude in the ›poly-technic‹ approach to borrowed material in the Mass cycles just mentioned, which summarize a range of techniques with which that genre had been associated over the course of its development. This self-consciousness arguably carries over into Agricola's

36 Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome* (cf. fn. 5), esp. p. 83. The use of ›signature‹ techniques arguably pre-dates Agricola's generation (one thinks of Ockeghem's habit of downwards transposition, mentioned above, which features both in putatively early works like the *Missa L'Homme armé* and in later ones like the *Salve regina* and *Fors seulement contre ce*), but with the following generation it undeniably gathers momentum. That this momentum should appear to accelerate towards the end of the vogue of *cantus firmus* Mass cycles is in my view unsurprising, as the remarks below should make clear.

37 The foregrounding of these original incipits marks these songs out from the occasional quotations found in other songs (as between Ockeghem's *Ma maistresse* and ?Barbingant's *Au travail suis que peu de gens croiroient*).

relation to musical style; in this sense, Agricola might almost be described as a mannerist.

Agricola and mannerist aesthetics

The term has sometimes been used rather loosely, so I should begin by defining the precise meaning here intended. What follows draws much of its substance from John Shearman's classic study of 1967, which was the first to evaluate sympathetically (not to say, vindicate) the art-historical period with which the term was associated.³⁸ Previously, both the period and the term had tended to be judged negatively and, before Shearman's study, the use of the term in musicological circles also carried pejorative connotations.³⁹ Shearman defines Mannerism as a self-conscious approach to style (the word he relates to »maniera«), characterized by an emphasis on artifice and virtuosity (that is, the overcoming or transcendence of difficulty); a preference for copiousness, abundance of detail, complexity and contrast; a tendency to downplay expression as an end in itself; and (somewhat more tangentially) the cultivation of the unusual and the striking. Although Shearman's attitude towards the trans-historical application of the term is cautious,⁴⁰ his definition

38 John Shearman, *Mannerism* (Harmondsworth, 1967).

39 In English, the terms »mannerism« and »Manneristic« (applied to the repertoire of the late fourteenth century) were first discussed extensively in the introduction to *French Secular Music of the Late Fourteenth Century*. Publications of the Medieval Academy of America 55, ed. Willi Apel (Cambridge, MA, 1950), pp. 4 and esp. 10sq. For the earlier history of the term's use within musicology, see Ludwig Finscher, »Manierismus,« *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Sachteil 5 (Kassel and Stuttgart, 1996), cols. 1627–35. The pejorative overtones then associated with these terms gave rise to the phrase that has since gained wide currency, »Ars subtilior«, first proposed in Ursula Günther, »Das Ende der Ars Nova,« *Die Musikforschung* 15 (1963), pp. 105–20. That negative readings of the term »Mannerism« persisted in musicological circles well after the publication of Shearman's monograph is attested, for example, in Richard H. Hoppin, *Medieval Music*, New York, 1978, p. 472. The most thoroughgoing attempt to apply Shearman's theories to the music of the period covered in his work is Maria Rika Maniates, *Mannerism in Italian Music and Culture 1530–1630* (Manchester, 1979); and from the same author on fifteenth-century music, see ead., »Mannerist Composition in Franco-Flemish Polyphony,« *Musical Quarterly* 42 (1966), pp. 17–36. The latter study is principally concerned with textual relationships in combinative chansons, however, and little is said on musical style proper (and nothing at all on Agricola's).

40 It appears that Shearman is not hostile to trans-historical interpretations *per se*: witness for example the repeated parallels he draws between Mannerist and Gothic art (Shearman, *Mannerism*, cf. fn. 38, pp. 25 and 175–7; more generally on the application of the term outside its period, *ibid.*, p. 35). Rather, he sees previous unfavourable assessments of Mannerist art as resulting from the uncritical application of aesthetic assumptions foreign

inevitably invites it, since ›style‹ as a category surely cuts as much across historical boundaries as do those of genre and medium, which Shearman readily acknowledges.⁴¹ Thus, while artistic phenomena lying outside the period may not qualify as ›Mannerist‹ in the strict sense, one may legitimately identify traits within them redolent of Mannerist preoccupations. In identifying such traits within Agricola, it goes without saying that I intend none of the pejorative connotations that may continue (misguidedly, in my view) to be associated with the term in some musicological quarters.⁴² Indeed, Shearman implies that such connotations are all but inevitable, since Mannerism is inherently »a vulnerable style ... [in that] every conviction upon which it [is] based is easily reversible – the idea that complexity, prolixity and unreasonable caprice are beautiful, or that virtuosity is something to be cultivated and exhibited, or that art should be demonstratively artificial.«⁴³ Just as Agricola's music demonstrably embodies a penchant for abundance of detail, copiousness, and contrapuntal complexity, so his reception-history is testimony to the easy reversal of these qualities into defects.⁴⁴ His seeking out of the unusual, likewise amply documented,⁴⁵ may similarly be regarded as ›unreasonable caprice‹: Shearman observes that »to a succeeding period with different views, Mannerism [seems] simply decadent.«⁴⁶

Those features of Agricola's style that have their basis in rhythm⁴⁷ clearly resonate with Mannerist aesthetics, albeit on a superficial level. Even the predilection for sharp contrasts suggests an analogy between Agricola's frequent juxtaposing (or better, ›counterposing‹) of very long and very brief note values (Example 3) and the extreme application, typical of Mannerism, of the technique of *contrapposto*, which effects a similarly unlikely balance of opposing forces.⁴⁸ But the key to Shearman's definition concerns the notion of style, and it is here that Agricola most truly qualifies as Mannerist. This is best seen in the play with cadence, discussed in my previous contribution to

to the period (ibid., esp. pp. 135–6). Hence his understandable caution on drawing direct parallels with other historical periods.

41 Ibid., pp. 32–4.

42 The reactions to the spoken version of this paper served notice that these misgivings are still deep-seated within the musicological community, and relatively widespread.

43 Shearman, Mannerism (cf. fn. 38), pp. 186.

44 Fitch, Agricola and the Rhizome (cf. fn. 5), esp. p. 85.

45 Fitch, Agricola and the Rhizome II (cf. fn. 6), esp. pp. 20–3.

46 Shearman, Mannerism (cf. fn. 38), p. 186.

47 Fitch, Agricola and the Rhizome II (cf. fn. 6), pp. 32–7.

48 Shearman, Mannerism (cf. fn. 38), p. 85.

Example 3: Alexander Agricola, *Missa Le Serviteur*, Kyrie, bb. 1–6

this journal:⁴⁹ Agricola habitually differentiates cadential figures from cadential function. The latter may come to saturate the polyphonic fabric (as happens in the setting of *Amours, amours*),⁵⁰ or may be introduced without a corresponding *tenorizans* motion in another voice – a technique I have dubbed »blind cadence«.⁵¹ Alternatively, fully formed cadences may succeed each other so rapidly that their structural function is weakened. As Shearman remarks, it »was common for Mannerist artists to adopt artistic forms or compositional devices, originally conceived with expressive functions, and to use them in a *non-functional* way, *capriciously*.«⁵² Agricola’s blind cadences illustrate the non-functional use of a compositional device; and there is something equally wilful and capricious in the virtuoso piling-up of cadence upon cadence in *Amours, amours*. One’s aesthetic response to such a passage is arguably unconnected with its *expressive* import: in Shearman’s phrase, its »ambition lies less in expression than in the conquest of difficulty.«⁵³ The same is true of the countless *meraviglie* with which Agricola’s music abounds, whether the virtuosity involved is compositional or interpretive. The distinction is

49 Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome II* (cf. fn. 6), pp. 37–42.

50 Musical example in *ibid.*, p. 39.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

52 Shearman, *Mannerism* (cf. fn. 38), p. 19, *emphasis mine*.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

pertinent here, because Shearman's exploration of the notion of »difficultà«⁵⁴ puts the emphasis on the artist's virtuosity, whether of conception or execution, whereas in music, responsibility for these two functions is invested, respectively, in composer and performer.⁵⁵

To expand on the matter of expression, it is precisely a consequence of Mannerist aesthetics that expression becomes, again in Shearman's phrase, »an ornament of style«.⁵⁶ That is not to say that it has no place within Mannerism,⁵⁷ but that the overt portrayal of emotion is inimical to the cultivation of »maniera« for its own sake. This hyper-refined sensibility is of course an index of courtly art, and applies arguably to much of the medieval song repertory. But it is most strongly marked in Agricola's output, which is noticeably devoid of the sort of »text sensitivity« associated most particularly with the advent of Josquin; that is, the expression of the words' meaning and emotions (to paraphrase Nicola Vicentino).⁵⁸ It is precisely this extremity of courtly detachment that links Agricola to *ars subtilior*, which (*pace* Shearman) clearly partakes of Mannerist tendencies in the positive sense he intends.⁵⁹ It accounts in part for the fact that the boundary between

54 Ibid., pp. 21 and 41. Significantly, the last of these passages mentions Gioseffo Zarlino's adverse judgment against »extravagant polyphonic effects«.

55 The musical examples reproduced in original notation in Fitch, Agricola and the Rhizome II (cf. fn. 6), pp. 21–2 and 32–3, are now of one sort, now of another, or (more rarely) of both: the beginning of *D'ung aultre amer IV* calls on the performers' virtuosity, whereas in the *Agnus Dei III* of *Missa In myne zyn*, the contrapuntal problems arising from the *cantus firmus* treatment are the domain of the composer.

56 Ibid., p. 101.

57 Ibid., pp. 174–5.

58 Don Harrán, »Vicentino and his Rules of Text Underlay«, *Musical Quarterly* 59 (1973), p. 621. This notion of text sensitivity, and its application to Agricola and his contemporaries, is critiqued in Edwards, *The Motet* (cf. fn. 1). See also Edwards, Alexander Agricola (cf. fn. 1), p. 423.

59 Shearman's resistance to the specific parallel with *ars subtilior* is surprising, given those he draws between Gothic and Mannerist art (cf. fn. 40). It would appear to stem in part from a misapprehension that polyphony and monody (which he equates with *prima* and *seconda prattica*) constitute distinct musical *styles*; whence he argues that, because *ars subtilior* failed to bring about the paradigm shift from the one to the other, it cannot therefore constitute »a pervasive *stylistic* phenomenon«, as Mannerism does (ibid., p. 97, Shearman's emphasis). But this objection is easily countered, since monody and polyphony are better described as *techniques*, not *styles*; once this point is accepted, the parallel is more readily countenanced, especially since *ars subtilior* was not only widely and self-consciously cultivated (think of the songs emanating from the circle of the *fumeux*), but recognized and even criticized by contemporaries, just as Mannerism was (witness the tongue-in-cheek refrain of Guido's ballade *Or voit tout en aventure*: »Certes, ce n'est pas bien fait«!). Elsewhere, Shearman dismisses the productions of the *ars subtilior* as purely intellectual caprices, a

Agricola's texted and untexted music is so difficult to establish, and it is present in both the secular and the sacred work. Such promiscuity of outlook should not be misinterpreted as indifference or (worse still) insensitivity to the text: rather, the music/textual cross-references we have noted in the songs can be interpreted in the same light, which informs the practice of *ars subtilior* composers as well.⁶⁰ This specifically courtly context also might explain why the Mannerist tendencies of Agricola's music find some of their most sophisticated expression among the secular pieces.

Perhaps no single work of Agricola's illustrates this more strikingly than *S'il vous plaît bien que je vous tiegne*, which we have already considered from the textual point of view. This is surely the oddest song in Agricola's output (Example 4). Like *Allez regretz* it consists of two equal discantus lines over a lower voice, a tenor in *Allez regretz*, and a contratenor in *S'il vous plaist bien*. Given the proximity of these two (presumably) untexted pieces, it is worth recalling that *S'il vous plaît bien*'s status as a song would be far from certain, were it not for the clear medial cadence at bar 38.⁶¹ The mapping of the text onto the music is anyway far from straightforward: the second discantus in particular has lengthy passages in longer note values suggestive of syllabic underlay, but they are just as likely to occur in the middle of a phrase as after a rest.

The opening passage sets the tone for the rest: the incipits of the three voices, for example, might have been taken from different pieces. The contratenor's opening material has the look of a pre-existent tenor, and the first discantus begins with a dotted long (almost the longest duration available) set against bursts of semiminims in the second discantus. From the point of view of pitch, this opening would be a good subject for what Dennis Slavin has called »the Binchois game«, in which a group of musicologists was played the beginning of a few songs, and invited to guess their finals.⁶² *S'il*

form of paper music that »can scarcely have been performable« (ibid., p. 35). From a purely musical perspective this verdict of Shearman's is curious, considering the rhythmic complexity of much of the serial and post-serial music contemporaneous with the writing of his monograph (much of which far exceeds what is encompassed in *ars subtilior*). Subsequent recordings of the repertoire have since demonstrated *ars subtilior*'s aesthetic qualities.

60 It is no accident that allusion and self-conscious stylisation are features of literature in the Mannerist period also. See Shearman, *Mannerism* (cf. fn. 38), pp. 91–6.

61 Christoffersen, *French Music* (cf. fn. 10), vol. 1 (descriptive volume), p. 161, and vol. 2 (catalogue volume), p. 138, proposes that *S'il vous plaist bien* may be an instrumental work.

62 Dennis Slavin, »The Binchois Game: Style and Tonal Coherence in Some Songs from the Mid-Fifteenth Century,« in *Binchois Studies*, ed. Andrew Kirkman and Dennis Slavin (Oxford, 2000), pp. 163–80.

The image displays a musical score for a piece by Alexander Agricola. The score is written for three voices: Discantus I, Discantus II, and Contratenor. The music is in a common time signature (C) and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into seven systems, each starting with a measure number: 6, 11, 18, 24, 30, and 34. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as minims, crotchets, and quavers, along with rests and accidentals. The Discantus parts feature intricate melodic lines, while the Contratenor part provides a harmonic and rhythmic foundation. The overall style is characteristic of the late medieval or early Renaissance period, reflecting the Mannerist aesthetic.

Example 4: Alexander Agricola, *S'il vous plaist que je vous tiengne*

The image displays a musical score for a piece by Alexander Agricola, titled 'S'il vous plaist que je vous tiengne' (continued). The score is presented in three systems, each consisting of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, an alto clef staff in the middle, and a bass clef staff at the bottom. The first system begins at measure 39. The second system begins at measure 44. The third system begins at measure 50. The notation includes various note values (quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes), rests, and accidentals (sharps, flats, and naturals). The piece is in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a common time signature. The score is a continuation of a previous section, as indicated by the measure numbers starting at 39, 44, and 50.

Example 4: Alexander Agricola, *S'il vous plaist que je vous tiengne* (continued)



Example 4: Alexander Agricola, *S'il vous plaist que je vous tiengne* (continued)

vous plaist bien gives no hint of its eventual final, *g*, until near the end of the first part (bar 31), before which point there have been cadences on *c*, on *d* and on *a*, the latter two apparently marking out the ends of lines. Nearly every subsequent cadence on *g* is undercut by the contratenor, the only exception (apart from the final cadence) being the beginning of the second part (bar 42), too soon to be functionally effective.⁶³ In both those voices *g* is also the lowest pitch; the highest is *d'*, which until the end is at least as stable a reference-point as the eventual final. The last phrase sums up the song's pitch-centres (bars 57–76): two cadences on *a* in close succession (bars 60–2) are followed by another on *c* (bar 64–5); then a cadence on *g* is displaced onto the wrong part of the beat (a characteristically Agricolesque conceit, bars 66–7), and finally the high *d'* is touched on once more in the first discantus (bar 72) before the entire range is traversed (for the only time in the piece in either voice) before the end. This final phrase also intensifies prevailing features: large leaps including some unusual intervals, and runs of semiminims in the second discantus, albeit ordered through the use of sequence (a common signal of closure).

Another notable feature of *S'il vous plaist bien* is its length, which reinforces the setting's expansive character. The sense of scale is emphasized in several ways: by the broad registral sweeps just mentioned; by the repeated circling around pitches (and more specifically top notes), recalling Ockeghem; and by the intricacy of the interactions between voices. This expansive style is characteristic of a number of apparently late works,⁶⁴ including *Se mieulx ne vient*, *T'Andernaken* and a number of the untexted tenor re-workings (*e.g.*, *Amours*, *amours* and *Tout a par moy I*) in which the abundance of invention seems almost to overwhelm formal constraints. When such constraints are absent, the pieces grow to an exceptional length, so that one might almost

63 Fitch, *Agricola and the Rhizome II* (cf. fn. 6), pp. 36–8.

64 Several are preserved in the Basevi 2439 ms., probably copied within months of Agricola's death, and which contains predominantly secular pieces.

speak of a hypertrophy of forms. This pattern is noticeable in the sacred music as well: elsewhere I have argued that the Mass *In mynen zyn* is another of these late works, and it is one of the most expansive Mass cycles of the entire period.⁶⁵ The words of the *Agnus Dei II*, for example, are set to three separate sections, consisting of a trio (setting the words »Agnus Dei«), a duo (for »qui tollis peccata mundi«, and a quartet (»miserere nobis«). The first of these sections (Example 5) is of particular interest in the present context, since its voice-ranges precisely match those of *S'il vous plaist*. Its opening passage is especially reminiscent of the song, with its counterposing of semiminims and longs (albeit that the latter are motivated here by the pre-

Example 5: Alexander Agricola, *Missa In mynen zyn*, Agnus Dei, bb. 37–92

65 Fabrice Fitch, »Two Fellows from Ghent: For the Obrecht and Agricola Quincentenaries,« *Proceedings of the International Jacob Obrecht Quincentenary Conference, Antwerp 2005* (online publication of the Alamire foundation, University of Leuven, forthcoming). Stylistically, it incorporates to an exceptional and often extreme degree all the features that I have proposed as embodying Mannerist tendencies.

The image displays five systems of musical notation for a lute and voice. Each system is numbered at the beginning of the first staff. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, various note values (quarter, eighth, sixteenth notes), rests, and accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals). Some measures feature triplets, indicated by a '3' over a group of notes. The music is written in a style characteristic of the Mannerist period, with complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines.

Example 5: Alexander Agricola, *Missa In mynen zyn*, Agnus Dei, bb. 37–92 (continued)

sentation of the model's head-motive in the Cantus); thereafter, rhythmic usage is freer still, with two brief but telling passages in O3. The second of these, unlike the first, is unmotivated by imitation, a flight of fancy that brings the Bassus to a peak of both register and rhythmic intricacy. This is the first appearance of a high *d* in any voice since the beginning of the section, when it appeared as part of the model's head-motive. That pitch soon re-appears

in the Cantus, and is increasingly adumbrated in the Bassus before the final bars, when it is repeated again and again in a final interchange between the high voices. But however much one argues that these repeated circlings around the final have been carefully prepared, the rhythmic ostinato and the deliberate avoidance of cadence lend these repetitions an obsessive quality that is entirely typical of the composer. Equally typically, the built-up energy is only exhausted by a lengthy coda once the middle voice has come to a standstill. Far from art concealing art, this is compositional virtuosity worn on its sleeve, the composer's prowess ostentatiously displayed, even at the risk of bewildering the beholder.

The last example, like *S'il vous plaist*, represents an extreme of virtuosity; but the tendencies indicative of Mannerism are already observable in pieces that must date from the earlier part of Agricola's career, for example the virelais *A la mignonne de fortune* and *Je n'ay dueil*, or the motet-chansons *Revenés tous regretz / Quis det* and *L'eure est venue / Circumdedederunt me*. (The signs are there in the virelais as a group, which seem generally to be early works.) In other words, the chronology does not suggest a neat progression from simplicity to complexity (or the other way round), but there is no reason to expect it to do so: far easier to imagine Agricola cultivating this ›expansive‹ style throughout his career, alongside pieces cast in a more straightforward manner. As in earlier repertoires, textual considerations undoubtedly play a part in certain fundamental stylistic decisions, in that the ›expansive‹ style would have been considered inappropriate for lighter or scurrilous texts, which make up a sizeable proportion of Agricola's songs. But it does seem that, as the century draws to a close, the stakes are being raised. It is not particularly that the pieces become more florid; rather, the imbalances, involutions and ambiguities of material are stepped up. Agricola's late work thus adumbrates yet another mannerist trait identified by Shearman, the imposition on previously established forms of »an all-powerful artistic will«. ⁶⁶

This phrase now seems dated, with its resonances of the cult of artistic personality typical of Renaissance art criticism since Giorgio Vasari; but it is not entirely inappropriate in the context of Agricola's generation in which, for the first time in Western art music, not two or three but several well-documented composers achieve widespread recognition and leave behind substantial bodies of work. The past few years have seen a marked increase in our recognition of them as distinctive figures. Within this group, Agricola

66 Shearman, Mannerism (cf. fn. 38), p. 75.

stands most markedly apart from certain homogenizing tendencies that were to shape the high Renaissance – ideals of balance, economy, and the rationalization of technique – and modern historiography's perception of them. In describing certain traits of his style as ›mannerist‹, I seek neither to recycle convenient labels nor to classify him, but to suggest similarities in composers' attitudes to their respective historical periods. Insofar as Mannerism represents, not a reaction against already existing preoccupations, but their »logical extension«,⁶⁷ many of the underlying attitudes discernible in his treatment of the *formes fixes* (and the other genres in which he worked) find clearer parallels in other periods, I suggest, than in his own. Perhaps – to paraphrase Heinrich Bessler – it was after all not Obrecht, but Agricola who was the »geniale Außenseiter«⁶⁸ of his generation.

67 Ibid., p. 49.

68 Heinrich Bessler, »Von Dufay bis Josquin: ein Literatur-Bericht,« *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 11 (1928–9), p. 18.