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Renaissance Voices

Singing Without Text

Timothy J. McGee

During the past fifteen years scholars have begun to question the long-standing view concerning the combination of instruments and voices in the performance of medieval and Renaissance music, both sacred and secular. Warwick Edwards, David Fallows, Christopher Page, Alejandro Planchart, Dennis Slavin, and Lawrence Earp, to name some of the recent contributors, have all presented evidence that supports an all-vocal performance of some of the repertory, although in the face of the quantity and diversity of music, each writer has hesitated to carry the conclusion much beyond a rather limited repertory.¹ These isolated investigations, when taken as a whole,

¹Warwick Edwards, "Songs without Words by Josquin and His Contemporaries." *Music in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Patronage, Sources, and Texts*. Ed. by Iain Fenlon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 79-92; David Fallows, "Secular Polyphony in the 15th Century," *Performance Practice: Music before 1600*. Ed. by Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie. The Norton Grove Handbooks in Music. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1989), 201-221; Fallows, "Specific Information of the Ensembles for Composed Polyphony, 1400-1475," *Studies in the Performance of Late Medieval Music*. Ed. by Stanley Boorman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 109-159; Fallows, "The Performing Ensembles in Josquin's Sacred Music," *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziek Geschiedenis* 35 (1985), 32-64; Christopher Page, "The Performance of Songs in Late Medieval France," *Early Music* 10 (1982), 441-450; Page, "Polyphony before

have now begun to take on an impressive amount of weight, to which I offer here an additional study, based on texting practices in certain fifteenth-century manuscripts, that I believe have implications for the larger issue of the reliability of some manuscripts to transmit certain kinds of performance practice information.

In the absence of clear descriptions of performance practices in either theoretical treatises or the literature of the fifteenth century, we have looked to iconographic representations and to the manuscripts themselves for assistance.² The art works are rarely specific as to whether polyphonic or monophonic music is represented, nor can we be sure whether the scenes that include instruments are indicating simultaneous or sequential performance.³ Manuscripts of secular music in which the text is fully underlaid in all parts are very much in the minority, and for quite some time musicologists have been puzzled by three varieties of incomplete texting practices commonly found in a large number of fifteenth-century manuscripts of secular music; many of the manuscripts include music completely without texts or with incipits only. Some pieces have complete texts written only in the highest voice part; and some have garbled or incomplete texts — this is especially true of repertory from another country (e.g. French songs in Italy). Texting practices vary from manuscript to manuscript, with some including all of the above. In the face of such a variety of representations of incomplete and incorrect texting, musicologists

1400," *Performance Practice: Music before 1600*, 79-104; Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100-1300* (London: J. M. Dent, 1989); Page, *Voices and Instruments of the Middle Ages* (London: J. M. Dent, 1987); Alejandro Planchart, "Fifteenth-century Masses: Notes on Performance and Chronology," *Studi musicali* 10 (1981), 3-30; Planchart, "Parts with Words and without Words: the Evidence for Multiple Texts in Fifteenth-Century Masses," *Studies in the Performance of Late Medieval Music*, 227-51; Dennis Slavin, "In Support of 'Heresy': Manuscript Evidence for the *a capella* Performance of Early 15th-Century Songs," *Early Music* 19 (1991), 178-190; Lawrence Earp, "Texting in 15th-Century French Chansons: a Look Ahead from the 14th Century," *Early Music* 19 (1991), 195-210. This is not intended to be a complete list of recent publications that have dealt with the subject.

²For some theoretical and literary evidence on this matter see Fallows, "Specific Information," but as Fallows points out, the evidence of instrumental participation is almost invariably in conjunction with very special events.

³For a similar view see Fallows, "Specific Information," 143. For a discussion of art including singers and instruments see Howard Mayer Brown, "Music and Voices in the Fifteenth-Century Chanson," *Current Thought in Musicology*, ed. John W. Grubbs (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 89-137.

have felt obliged to speculate as to how musicians would have coped with the situation in order to present musically satisfying performances.⁴

Until recently the traditional assumptions about what the texting practices indicated invariably ran along the same lines: absence of full text in any one part indicated either instrumental performance or that text was to be supplied from a separate text source; garbled texts indicated that the scribe did not understand the foreign language, but in performance either a correct text was supplied from a separate source or the piece received instrumental performance; the frequent underlaying of text in only the highest voice either required the lower-part singers to copy the text from the upper part, or was an indication of instrumental accompaniment for a solo voice. In other words, it was universally accepted that singers require a text, and consequently discussions have centered on how one compensated for its lack, either by transferring text from another source, or by playing the part on instruments. Even now a belief in the singer's reliance on text is so ingrained that the recent discussions about all-vocal performances of polyphony often include lengthy speculations as to how text can be added to the untexted parts. Ever cautious of overlooking the most remote possibilities, however, most scholars have also admitted the possibility that, under certain circumstances, some parts may have been vocalized without words. But with few exceptions that mode of performance has usually been dismissed as unusual, or at best peripheral.⁵ It is the thesis of this study that textless vocalization was a very popular mode of performance in the fifteenth century, and that evidence of this can be found by closely examining some of the manuscripts as well as a particular painting.

The widely held conviction that music without text is instrumental conforms to modern practice, but is completely without documentation during the period in question.⁶ In fact, there is no explicit evidence for any mode of performance, neither directions that textless or partially texted music should

⁴One of the earliest attempts to deal with partial texting is Gilbert Reaney, "Text Underlay in Early Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts," *Essays in Musicology in Honor of Dragan Plamenac on His 70th Birthday*, ed. by Gustave Reese and Robert Snow (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 245-51.

⁵Notable for their advocacy of vocalized performance are David Fallows and Christopher Page, see the bibliography cited in footnote 1.

⁶For a summary and discussion of the known performances of voices and instruments in sacred and secular music see Fallows, "Secular Polyphony."

be performed on instruments,⁷ nor instructions to a singer as to the location of a missing text. At the same time it is difficult to understand why a text often would be supplied (or not supplied) in a manner that made singing it (or finding it) extremely inconvenient. One would assume that music would be presented to performers in a manner that would make performance as easy as possible. As the following study will attempt to illustrate, in the case of at least some of the sources, that would seem to have been so; singers were indeed supplied with all they needed in order to perform the music according to local custom. A close look at specific fifteenth-century manuscripts yields evidence that the absence of text in any part was an indication for textless vocalization. There exists in numerous manuscripts of the period a substantial number of compositions in which partial texting has been done in such a manner that would be difficult to interpret as anything other than evidence that the music was intended to be sung in its entirety, partially with text and partially without.

A good case in point is ms. Florence, BN Banco Rari 230, copied in Florence not long after 1500, and containing mainly *canti carnascialeschi*.⁸ There is evidence that carnival songs were sung in all of their parts,⁹ but since in this manuscript most of the texts are not fully underlaid in any but the superius part, it has always been assumed that the singers of the lower parts would simply have sung the words of the superius. That is certainly a possibility, but there are a number of songs here in which short text phrases

⁷Phrases such as the famous "Ad modum tubam" in conjunction with the two lower parts of a Dufay Gloria may just as easily refer to the style of singing as to instruments for performance. See James Igoe, *Performance Practices in the Polyphonic Mass of the Early Fifteenth Century* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1971), 83.

⁸Facsimile, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Banco Rari 230, "Introduction" by Frank A. D'Accone, *Renaissance Music in Facsimile*, vol. 4 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986). This MS is also known by its old shelf number: Magliabechi, XIX, 141. The manuscript contains *frottole*, *strambotte*, *ballate*, *villote*, *canti carnascialeschi*, and *trionfi*. For an inventory and concordance study see Joseph J. Galucci, *Traditional Festival Music in Florence ca. 1480 - ca. 1520: Canti Carnascialeschi, Trionfi, and Related Forms* (Ph. D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1966), 91-99. Modern transcriptions in Paul-Marie Masson, *Chants de carnaval florentins de l'époque de Laurent le Magnifique* (Paris: Maurice Senart, 1913) and Joseph J. Galucci, Jr., ed., *Florentine Festival Music (1480-1520)*, *Recent Researches in the Music of the Renaissance*, vol. 40 (Madison: A-R Editions, 1981).

⁹For a discussion of the *canti carnascialeschi* and their performance see Federico Ghisi, *I canti carnascialeschi nelle fonte musicali del xv e xvi secolo* (Florence: Olschki, 1937), and Gallucci, *Festival Music in Florence*.

do appear in the lower voices, giving rise to the suspicion that when text was wanted there it was supplied. One of a number of possible examples is the "Trionfo della dea Minerva" (see Plates 1 and 2, and Example 1). Although the scribe has underlaid the full text only in the superius, the contra and tenor are given text to sing along with the superius in the phrase "la dea Minerva" (Example 1, bars 20-23). And in bars 34-38, while the superius rests, the lower three voices are given the text "vien, ch'è di suo presenza."

Example 1: Trionfo della dea Minerva'

The image displays a musical score for a four-part vocal setting. It consists of four staves, each with a different clef: the top staff is a soprano clef (C1), the second is an alto clef (C3), the third is a tenor clef (C4), and the bottom is a bass clef (C2). The music is written in a single system with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are written below the staves, primarily under the top staff. The lyrics are: "Dal - la più al - ta stel la". The notation includes various note values (half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes) and rests. There are some small symbols above the first staff, possibly indicating performance instructions or manuscript markings.

di - cen - de - a ce - le - bra - re la tuo le - ti - tia

The first system consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics. The second staff is a vocal line in treble clef. The third staff is a vocal line in treble clef. The fourth staff is a bass line in bass clef. The music is in 4/4 time and D major.

glori - o - sa Fio - ren - za La de - a Mi - ner - va
La de - a Mi - ner - va
La de - a Mi - ner - va

The second system consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics. The second staff is a vocal line in treble clef. The third staff is a vocal line in treble clef. The fourth staff is a bass line in bass clef. The music is in 4/4 time and D major.

co gl'in - ge - gni pro - pi - tia Col lei o - gni sci en -

za per ho - no -

Vien ch'è di suo pre-sen - za

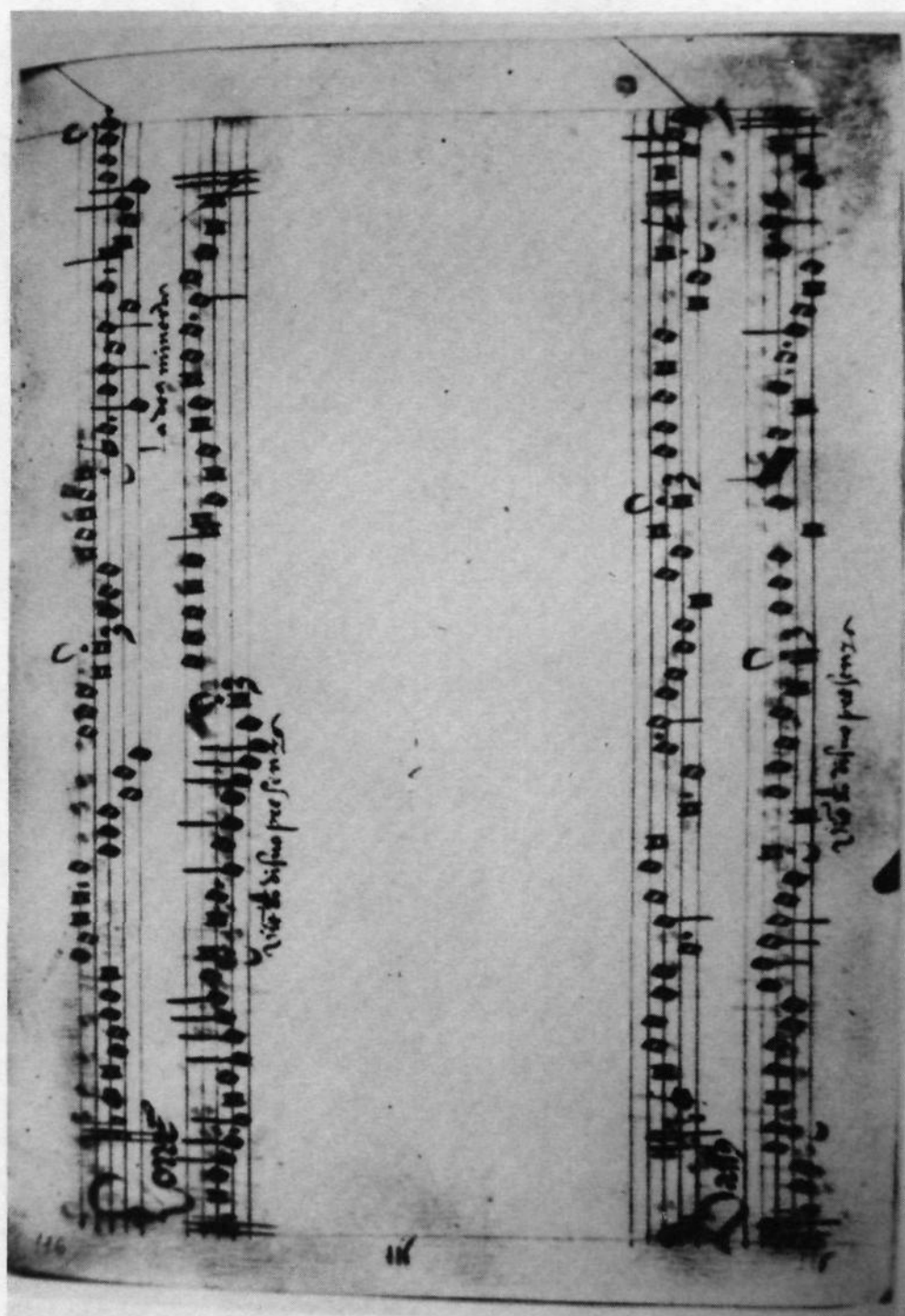
Vien ch'è di suo pre-sen - za

Vien ch'è di suo pre - sen - za

rar-ti ac - cio - chè sia piu bel - la

Obviously, if the soprano is resting while one phrase of the song is sung, as in bars 34-38 here, the scribe would have had to write the text somewhere in order to complete the verse. This would explain the insertion of the missing phrase in one of the lower parts. And in bars 20-23, since the text is already supplied in the superius, there is no reason at all to supply text in any of the other parts, much less in two of them. Often the underlay of a few words in otherwise untexted voices can be understood as a scribal convention indicating the beginning of a new section, but that is clearly not the case here. It would seem that the only possible reason for the underlay of the two short phrases of text in the lower voices is that this was the only text intended to be sung in those parts.

Plate 2



If that is so, we must ask what the singers did during the remainder of the song, and how the untexted phrases were performed? It is possible that the lower parts were to be played on instruments with the exception of the short texted phrases which would be sung. But besides being somewhat awkward, that would seem impractical since it would require either two people per part (instrumentalist and singer),¹⁰ or an exact match of instrument and voice (a bass instrument would have to be played by a bass singer, etc.). The most reasonable conclusion would seem to be that the part was sung in its entirety, which is what is commonly believed about *canti carnascialeschi*, and that the singers simply vocalized the untexted parts without words. I am suggesting, therefore, that the scribe has written exactly what was the local practice in the performance of this song; a tradition in which singers vocalized any phrases for which there was no text underlaid.

This example is not unique; of the 155 songs in the manuscripts, 38 others have exactly the same kind of texting—short phrases written under at least two parts other than the superius, thus indicating the same kind of performance as is described in the example above.¹¹ But what of the performance of the lower parts in the other 116 songs? Five of these have full text underlaid in all parts, making their performance obvious, and another 40 are incomplete. Of the remaining 71, some have short text phrases in one of the lower parts, and some are completely without text in all but the superius.

The reason I have chosen this manuscript for my principal example is because it contains such a homogeneous repertory. Since we know that the *canti carnascialeschi* repertory was customarily sung in all parts, the only question is whether or not the lower parts were sung with all of the text underlaid in the superius.¹² The logical conclusion from the evidence

¹⁰Instrumental doubling of such parts in sacred music would seem to be the conclusion of Alejandro Planchart, "Parts with Words and without Words."

¹¹I have not counted those compositions which could be considered to present ambiguous evidence: those with a texted phrase in a single lower voice, or those in which the texted phrase coincides with the beginning of a new musical section.

¹²It is reported in several accounts that carnival songs were performed by masked singers during Carnival time preceding the Lenten season and during the Calendimaggio. See Gallucci, *Florentine Festival Music (1480-1520)*, vii; and Ghisi, *I canti carnascialeschi*, 18-24. Iconographic support of a purely vocal rendition is found in the early print *Canzone per andare in maschera per carnasciale fatte de più persone*, which depicts a set of five masked singers accompanied by Lorenzo de' Medici standing next to typical Florentine buildings

presented above would seem to be that they were not; that those parts without text in the manuscript were vocalized without text. Performances of this repertory, therefore, included singing some songs with text in all parts; and some with text only in the superius while either completely or partially vocalized in the lower parts.

It is not clear why the performance tradition would call for such a varied practice, although some of the texts suggest a possible answer. Those in which occasional phrases of text are distributed in the lower voices seem to fit into two categories, both of which are present in the "Trionfo della dea Minerva"; the reinforcement of a particular sentiment, as in bars 20-23; and the presence of a dialogue (or quasi-dialogue), as in bars 34-38. Those for which the text is found only in the superius afford a mixture of secular Italian songs, but lack either of the above-mentioned textual characteristics. As for the five fully-texted compositions, one is "Ecco dea admirata," which praises the Medici,¹³ and could well have been written for a specific ceremonial occasion for which four-part texting would have been appropriate. (See the discussion of texts with similar purposes below.) But this is not obviously true of the other four texts, all of which are love lyrics with classical allusions, but contain nothing to suggest a special occasion.¹⁴

Next, I would like to consider manuscript BN Banco Rari 337 (BR 337), a bass part-book also from Florence, dating from the end of the 15th century; the sole survivor of what must have been a set of four.¹⁵ The majority of compositions in BR 337 (90 of the 106) either have only incipits or are completely without text. Of the remaining 16, 12 have full texts underlaid, and four have short phrases such as those described above. This part-book is of particular value to the present investigation since it contains 39 concordances with ms. 230, a strong indication that it belongs to the same tradition.

while young women gaze out the windows at them; see Ghisi, *I canti carnascialeschi*, Fig. A. The undated print is thought to be from the late fifteenth century.

¹³A Modern edition (with errors) appears as "Canto delle palle" in *Feste musicali della Firenze Medicea*, ed. Federico Ghisi (Florence: Olschki, 1939; repr. Bologna: Forni, 1969), 19.

¹⁴Those compositions are two anonymous works: "A pre d'una riviera" (fol. 61), and "Donna se qual solevi" (fol. 63), and two by Michele Pesenti: "Quando lo pomo viene dallo pomaro" (fol. 65), and "So ben che la non sa" (fol. 65v.).

¹⁵For a discussion and inventory see Bianca Becherini, *Catalogo dei manoscritti musicali della Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze* (Kassel, 1959), 109-11; additions and corrections in Knud Jeppesen, *La frottola*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen: 1968-70), vol. 2, 43-45.

Three of the partially texted songs in BR 337 are concordant with compositions in ms. 230: "Nè più bella di queste," by Heinrich Isaac, "Aprite in cortesia," by Alexander Coppinus, and the anonymous "Volon gl'anni e mesi et l'ore." In each there is identical texting in the bass part.¹⁶ In addition, BR 337 contains a composition not in ms. 230, "Chi non e ben fornito," in which a text has been provided for only the first phrase, i.e. the refrain.¹⁷ The four partially texted songs, therefore, provide evidence of the same practice as is found in ms. 230: vocalization of much of the part, with occasional phrases of text sung for purposes of emphasis, dialogue, or perhaps simply contrast.

By their very nature, part-books do not allow the individual singers an opportunity to view any part but their own during performance. Any text not on the page cannot be supplied in performance simply by reading it from another part—a possibility in those formats in which all parts are visible to all singers.¹⁸ We can probably assume, therefore, that the performer of the part-book did not sing any text other than what was on the page; the presence of the four partial texts and 12 fully-underlaid texts in this format suggests that when text was desired, it was written in. In fact, the sloppy hand in most of the full texts, as opposed to the far more skilled incipit hands, indicates that full texts were added by the performer to music that had been provided without text.¹⁹ In contrast, the partial texts are entered in the same professional hand that entered the incipits, suggesting that these phrases were initially intended for texting, whereas the full texts were an afterthought.

A comparison of the texting practices in the 39 concordant bass parts of both mss. reveals an extremely flexible attitude:

In 25 compositions the bass parts in both mss. have the same practice;
in 21 of the pieces neither ms. includes text, and in 4 compositions the
same amount of text is underlaid in both manuscripts (this amounts to

¹⁶Ms. 337, fol. 51v., 71v., and 64v.; ms. 230, fol. 116v., 117r., 37v.-39r., 135v.-136r. respectively.

¹⁷Ms. BR 337, fol. 113v.

¹⁸On the possibility of singing text from another part see the interesting discussion in Fallows, "Secular Polyphony in the 15th Century," 209-11.

¹⁹There is evidence of several different music and text scribes in BR 337, but for the most part the incipits are written neatly and appear to be professional, while the full texts are not.

one phrase in two pieces, two phrases in one piece, and the full text in one).

In 12 compositions a phrase of text is underlaid in ms. 230, but not in BR 337.

In 1 composition the full text is underlaid in ms. 230, but not in BR 337.

That the amount of text supplied to any of the lower parts was subject to change in this restricted repertory can be seen in that 12 of the concordant compositions that received partial texting in the bass part of ms. 230, had none in BR 337. Without the other three part-books belonging to the BR 337 set, of course, we cannot know which of the two possible practices this indicates—either that the entire composition was textless in all four part-books, or that the text was restricted to the superius, possibly with some phrases in the altus and tenor parts. We do know, however, that the singer of the bass part in BR 337 did not sing texts in these compositions as did his counterpart who sang from ms. 230. Additional evidence of the variable practice of texting is presented by the one composition in BR 337 which has full text in the bass (suggesting that it was fully texted in all parts), but which ms. 230 has text underlaid in only the superius.²⁰

The reason for the insertion of short textual phrases in four pieces in BR 337 is undoubtedly the same as for those in ms. 230. The reason for the full texts, however, is no clearer than it was in ms. 230, although two of them present the same possibility of being associated with a special occasion as did one text in ms. 230. One of the full texts, Heinrich Isaac's "Alla battaglia" was written for a very special occasion, the installation of a Captain General of the Florentine army. I have argued elsewhere that this text would have been appropriate on only the one occasion,²¹ and for that reason I am suggesting that there may be some link between compositions written for specific ceremonial occasions and their presentation with full texting in all parts. A similar type of official occasion could have been the reason for full text in Isaac's "Ora e di maggio," perhaps the beginning of the May festival (*Calendimaggio*). But no special occasion is suggested for

²⁰Of interest, but on a separate topic, is the fact that the two sources have completely different texts for the same music: "Oime che la signora mia," in BR 337, fol. 82r., and "O, Dio che la brunetta mia," ms. 230, fol. 30v. The composition is credited to Michele [Pesenti] in both sources.

²¹See Timothy J. McGee, "'Alla battaglia': Music and Ceremony in Fifteenth-Century Florence," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36 (1983), 287-302.

compositions such as "Fortuna disperata," Pesenti's "Oimè che la signora mia," or Josquin's "Scaramella," and I do not have anything to propose at this time.²² A more relevant question to this study, however, involves the performance practice for the 90 compositions in BR 337 that are without text.

Based on the close association between this ms. and the one discussed earlier, in terms of date, provenance, and the large common repertory, I would suggest that the performance practice was the same for both: all vocal, and for the same reasons. Because of the much higher number of compositions known to have text in ms. 230, it is easier to argue that case. We simply do not know how many of the compositions in BR 337 were texted in the other parts. But BR 337 does contain a very similar repertory, and it has three examples of partial texting identical to those in ms. 230 that require vocalization of the remainder of the part. I am suggesting that a singer performed from BR 337, vocalizing his part most of the time and adding texts into his book only on special occasions, when for some reason the singing of text in all parts was considered desirable. The variety of texting practices, and the difference in texting practices of some of the same works found in both manuscripts is evidence of the amount and kinds of performance practice freedom allowed to any ensemble.²³

The examples cited above are drawn from two manuscripts with an unusually homogeneous repertory, and therefore there is the possibility that there may be evidence of a practice that was outside the norm, one which may have applied only to Florence at the end of the fifteenth century. It is true that manuscripts from that period overwhelmingly preserve French chansons, not Italian native songs, and thus by concentrating my study on a

²²Because of the amateur text hand, I do not believe that the presence of text for these compositions was simply a case of a scribe copying everything from his source. On scribal habits see John Nádas, "The Structure of MS Panciatichi 26 and the Transmission of Trecento Polyphony," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34 (1981) 393-427; Hans Schoop, *Entstehung und Verwendung der Handschrift Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canonici misc. 213* (Bern, 1971); and Margaret Bent, "A Contemporary Perception of Early Fifteenth-Century Style: Bologna Q15 as a Document of Scribal Editorial Initiative," *Musica disciplina* 41 (1987), 183-201.

²³To take this last point a step further, seven compositions in BR 337 concord with Florence, BN, Magl. 164-67, and whereas all of those in the Florence manuscript have full texts, this is true of only five of those in BR 337; this provides additional evidence of the varieties of texting practices within a rather tightly unified repertory, all from the same location.

minor portion of the recorded repertory I may have discovered only a relatively small local practice.²⁴ While this remains within the realm of possibility, similar evidence found in manuscripts containing the chanson repertory from much earlier in the fifteenth century, originating from both inside and outside of Italy, suggests that the practice of textless vocalization was not simply a local one, nor one restricted to the end of the century. A random sampling of several dozen manuscripts has yielded a surprising number of cases similar to those reported above. A representative example is found in a Burgundian court manuscript written in the early decades of the fifteenth century: Escorial V. III. 24 (see Plate 3 and Example 2).²⁵

It is clear that the reason for the partial texting in Example 2, Guillaume Dufay's chanson "Estrines moy," is that the text is a dialogue. The underlay divides the text according to the separation of the voices in the dialogue (although, curiously, the higher vocal line sings the part of the male):

he: Embrace me and I will embrace you, my only love.

she: How?

he: With this heart that I have to offer you this New Year's Day.
Take it willingly.

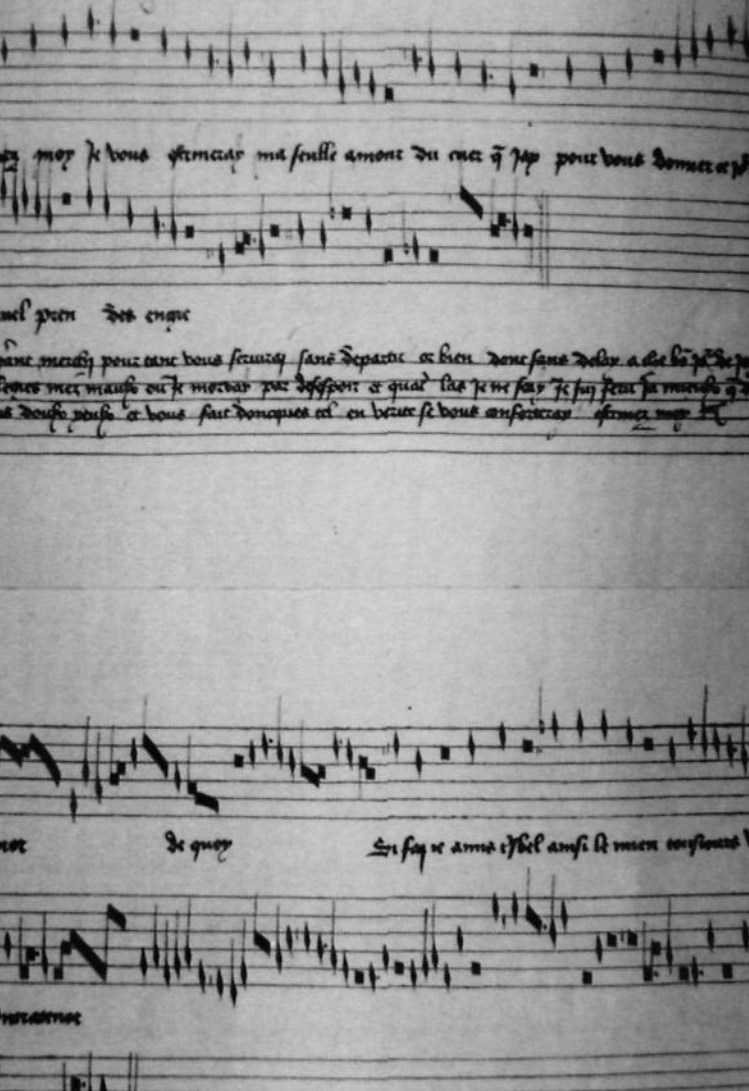
she: So I do most handsome love, and I will give you mine forever.

Again the question arises as to how the tenor and soprano parts were intended to have been performed during those sections of the song when they have no text. If the tenor duplicated the words of the soprano in the first half, and then the soprano sang along on the tenor's final phrase, the intended dialogue would be destroyed. It is possible that both performers played instruments or were replaced by instrumentalists when there was no text. But it would be easier to imagine that both parts were sung in their

²⁴As Gilbert Reaney has pointed out, however, most chanson manuscripts that survive from the early fifteenth century are of Italian provenance; see his "Text Underlay in Early Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts," 247.

²⁵Escorial, Bibl. del Monasterio, MS V.III.24, fol. 59v. and 60r. For a description of the ms. and its contents see Walter H. Kemp, *Burgundian Court Song in the Time of Binchois: the Anonymous Chansons of El Escorial MS V.III.24*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, and Wolfgang Rehm, *Codex Escorial: Chansonnier*, Documenta Musicologica, zweite Reihe: Handschriften-Faksimiles, 2; Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1958.

Plate 3



ferez moy je vous ferez ma seule amant du cuer q'ay pour vous donner et pour les
 nouuel pren des enque
 Et espere mercy pour tant vous secour sans departir or bien done sans delay a dieu se je ne puis de vous
 Et allons mes maistr ou le mortier par desport et qu'il l'ait je ne fais je ne puis je ne puis je ne puis
 de vous doubte deus et vous fait doncques et en veue se vous enforment ferez moy

Ence de quoy En foy et amour et bel ainsi et mien courtoisie de l'Esper

Oufant

Example 2: 'Estrines moy,' after Besseler, Dufay,
Opera Omnia, vol. 6.

The musical score is written for two voices: Contratenor and Tenor. The Contratenor part is in the upper staff, and the Tenor part is in the lower staff. The music is in a single system with three staves. The lyrics are in French and are written below the staves. The score is divided into three systems of three staves each. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the Contratenor and Tenor parts entering. The second system continues the melody, and the third system concludes the phrase. The lyrics are: "E stri - nes-moy | je vous e-stri-ne - ray ma sul - le | a - mour du cuer que j'ay | de quoy | pour vous don - ner ce jour de l'an nou -".

E stri - nes-moy | je vous e-stri-ne - ray ma sul - le |

CONTRATENOR

TENOR

a - mour du cuer que j'ay |

de quoy |

pour vous don - ner ce jour de l'an nou -

vel pre - nes en gre.

Si fay je a - mis tres

This system contains three staves of music. The top staff is in treble clef and contains the lyrics 'vel pre - nes en gre.' with notes and rests. The middle staff is in treble clef and contains the lyrics 'Si fay je a - mis tres' with notes and rests. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains the lyrics 'Si fay je a - mis tres' with notes and rests. There are vertical bar lines separating the measures.

bel aus - sy le mien a tous jours vous

This system contains three staves of music. The top staff is in treble clef and contains the lyrics 'bel aus - sy le mien a tous jours vous' with notes and rests. The middle staff is in treble clef and contains the lyrics 'bel aus - sy le mien a tous jours vous' with notes and rests. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains the lyrics 'bel aus - sy le mien a tous jours vous' with notes and rests. There are vertical bar lines separating the measures.

don - ray

This system contains three staves of music. The top staff is in treble clef and contains the lyrics 'don - ray' with notes and rests. The middle staff is in treble clef and contains the lyrics 'don - ray' with notes and rests. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains the lyrics 'don - ray' with notes and rests. There are vertical bar lines separating the measures.

entirety without instrumental assistance, vocalizing without words when none were underlaid in the part.²⁶ "Estrines moy" is also found in the North Italian source, Oxford, ms. Canonici 213,²⁷ with a similar division of the text, except that the words "de quoy," found in the tenor part of the Escorial ms. (Example 2, bars 7-8), are omitted. As in the Florence mss. discussed above, additional unambiguous examples of this same texting practice can be found in both manuscripts: at least two in Escorial, and 22 in Oxford.

Owing to the dialogue nature of the "Estrines moy" text, the evidence for vocalization of the untexted sections in the superius and tenor parts is at least as compelling as that of the examples presented earlier. This piece, however, gives rise to the additional question of the mode of performance for the contratenor part which has no text at all.

A reason often advanced for believing that many of the untexted parts of chansons (especially those of the contratenors) were intended for instruments is that they are melodically angular, i.e. that they include a large number of leaps and contain many short phrases marked off by rests. Upon close inspection, however, this reasoning does not stand up; numerous texted parts exhibit the same characteristics as do the untexted contratenor lines, as can be seen by comparing the contratenor part of "Estrines moy" with its tenor. In fact, this kind of melodic "awkwardness" is not restricted to any particular lines, although it is more often present in the lower parts. But in "Per amor de costey" by Hugo de Lantins, from the Oxford ms.²⁸ (Example 3), all three texted parts exhibit no less "awkwardness" than does the contratenor of "Estrines moy." It is certainly possible to find contratenor lines that are more angular and "awkward" than those presented here, but as Lloyd Hibberd pointed out in 1946, if we are to determine that certain lines

²⁶Dennis Slavin, "In Support of 'Heresy,'" draws the same conclusion concerning the performance of this composition. Also see Lawrence Earp, "Texting in 15th-Century French Chansons." I am grateful to Profs. Slavin and Earp for allowing me to see copies of their articles before publication.

²⁷Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canonici misc. 213, fol. 20v. and 21r. For a discussion of the ms. see Gilbert Reaney, "The Manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canonici Misc. 213," *Musica disciplina* 9 (1955), 73-104; and Schoop, *Entstehung und Verwendung der Handschrift Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canonici misc. 213*.

²⁸Fol. 22. Modern edition in Charles van den Borren, *Pièces polyphoniques profanes de provenance liègeoise (XVe siècle)*. (Brussels: Bruxelles Editions de la librairie encyclopédique, 1950), 61-62.

in this repertory were intended for instrumental performance, we will need far better proof than their supposed "awkwardness" in singing.²⁹

Example 3: 'Per amor de costey,' after van den Borren.

The musical score is presented in three staves. The top staff is for the Contratenor, the middle for the Tenor, and the bottom for a third voice. The lyrics are written below the staves, aligned with the notes. The lyrics are: "Per a - mor de co - ste - y che vel ch'i - o chan - te Per a - mor de cho - ste - i che vol ch'i - o chan - Per a - mor de cho - ste - i che vol ch'i - o chan -".

²⁹Lloyd Hibberd, "On 'Instrumental Styles' in Early Melody," *Musical Quarterly* 32 (1946), 107-30.

te Et i o chan

te Et i - o chan to per

This system contains the first three staves of a musical score. The top staff is a vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The middle staff is a piano accompaniment line, also in G major, with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment line, also in G major, with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: 'te Et i o chan' on the middle staff and 'te Et i - o chan to per' on the bottom staff.

et i o chan - to per ley.

to per ley.

ley.

This system contains the next three staves of the musical score. The top staff is a vocal line in G major, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The middle staff is a piano accompaniment line, also in G major, with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment line, also in G major, with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: 'et i o chan - to per ley.' on the top staff, 'to per ley.' on the middle staff, and 'ley.' on the bottom staff.

Since the texted parts in "Per amor de costey" are similar in melodic and rhythmic demands to both the texted and untexted parts of "Estrines moy," and because both compositions are from the same section of the manuscript, copied by the same music scribe, I would suggest that they provide evidence of a single performance practice. Lacking any evidence to the contrary, it would seem reasonable to conclude that since all three parts of "Per amor de costey" were for singers, this was probably the intended destination of all parts of "Estrines moy."

In 1971 James Igoe surveyed early fifteenth-century untexted contratenor parts in sacred music and found evidence to support the practice of singing all the parts in sacred polyphonic compositions. He arrived at this conclusion after surveying fifteenth-century references to musical performance and noting instances of partial texting.³⁰ More recently David Fallows has expanded considerably on Igoe's information, filling it out with additional musical evidence and quotes from written sources. He arrived at an even more conservative conclusion, i.e. that there is very little evidence to support a performance of these parts by anything other than voices.³¹ Igoe was referring only to the performance of sacred repertory, but Fallows also addresses secular music with the similar conclusion, that all-vocal performances had a strong presence.³²

The practice of textless vocalization would also explain an otherwise puzzling element in a beautiful painting by Philippino Lippi, executed in the 1480s (see Plate 4). Of concern to the issue here is the presence of a scroll with music in the hands of three singing angels. As can be observed in more detail (see Plate 5), the artist has represented actual musical notes, which I have transcribed as Example 4.³³ The presence of a repeat mark at the end of the portion of the scroll in the angels' hands, and the few visible notes at

³⁰Igoe, "Performance Practices."

³¹Fallows, "Performing Ensembles" and "Specific Information."

³²Fallows, "Specific Information" and "Secular Polyphony." In both essays he mentions textless vocalization as the possible practice, although he draws no very firm conclusions, and in "Secular Polyphony," pp. 210-12, he suggests that singers would find it easier to sing lines if they added text to the untexted parts.

³³Volker Scherliess, *Musikalische Noten auf Kunstwerken der italienischen Renaissance*, Hamburger Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft, vol. 8 (1972), 104-05, has published a slightly different transcription of the music. My transcription was made after the painting had been cleaned in 1985, and although it may not be as musically "correct" as the one by Scherliess, it is faithful to the notation on the scroll.

the end of the scroll on the floor suggest that this is a three-part composition, of which we have the first complete section. The nature of the part writing as well as the subject matter suggest that the piece is probably a lauda, but since this music has not been found in any other source we are left without a positive identification.³⁴

Example 4: Lippi, 'Corsini Tondo'

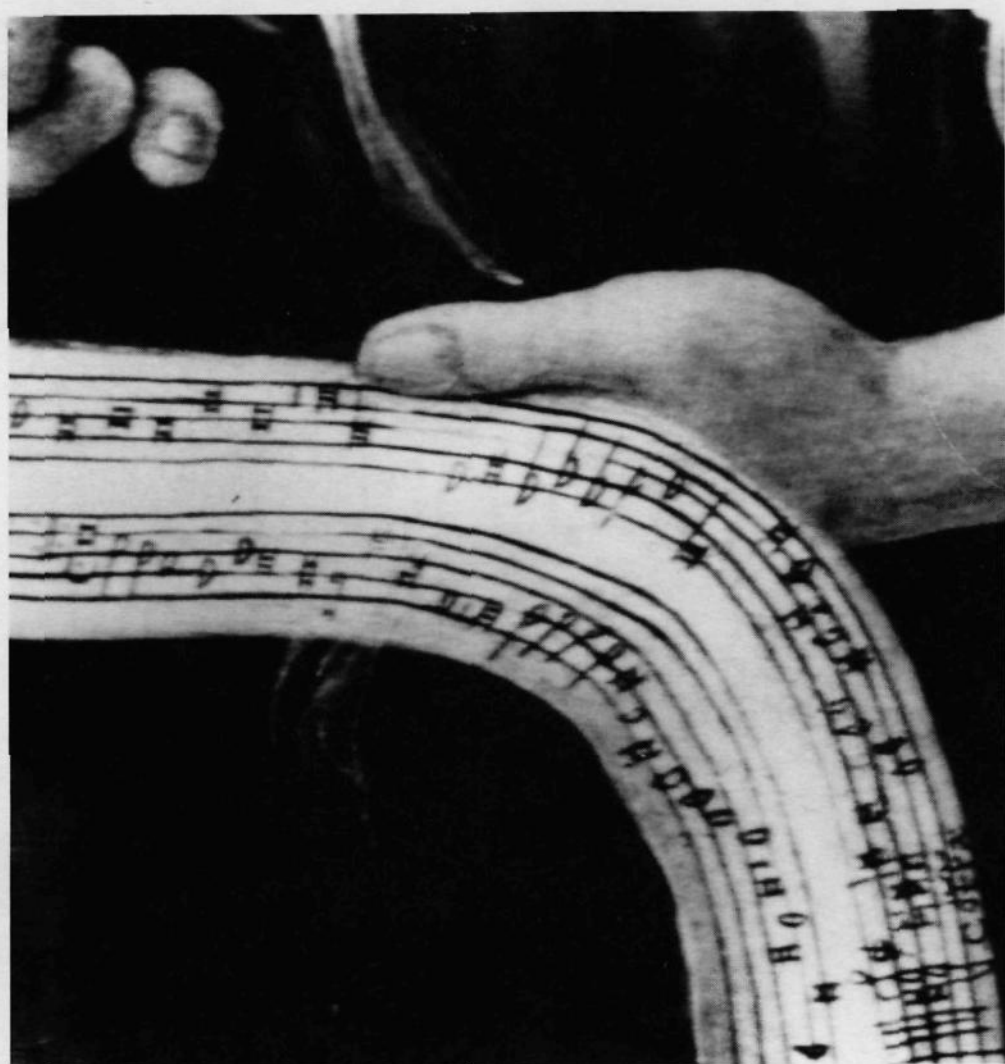
The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Tenor voice, the middle staff is for the Contralto voice, and the bottom staff is for the Soprano voice. The music is written in a three-part setting. The second system continues the piece, with a 'Ms.' marking above the Soprano part. The third system shows the end of the piece with a double bar line.

³⁴I am grateful to Prof. Patrick Macey for confirmation of this fact.

Plate 4



Plate 5



What is puzzling about the artist's rendering of the musical scroll is that he does not indicate the text of the song, although there was enough room to insert at least the incipit, this despite the fact that he did enter the words "Tenor" and "Contra" under the other two parts. Further, there are no musical instruments near the angels for a performance of this *textless* composition.

Attempts to identify the particulars surrounding this painting with the aid of several art historians has proven to be only partially successful.³⁵ During the years when Philippino Lippi was painting in this style, he was working mostly in Florence. That the work was undoubtedly painted for a Florentine patron is indicated by two symbols associated with Florence: Christ is handing flowers to the Virgin Mary, a representation of Santa Maria del Fiore, the name of the Duomo in Florence; and the presence of St. John the Baptist, the patron saint of Florence, who stands in the background to the extreme right. The size of the tondo (approximately two meters in diameter) and its subject matter place the painting in the category of works often commissioned for private chapels, but a search of the archival records of families known to have commissioned Lippi (e.g. the Strozzi, the Medici) failed to uncover any information about this work. The history of the painting for several centuries after its origin is clouded in mystery and by conflicting stories until its eventual purchase by the Corsini family from that of the Rinuccini in the late nineteenth century.³⁶ Perhaps a clue as to the purpose for the commission lies in the depiction of a harbor that can be seen in the distant background, indicating that the painting represents Mary as patron saint of seafarers. If so, the text of the lauda may well be "Ave Maris Stella" or some such common text associating Mary with the sea. The tiny glittering star on Mary's left shoulder would seem to reinforce that identification. In any case, there is little doubt that this is a religious painting, which makes the absence of a text quite puzzling, since the only difference between sacred and secular music at this time lay in their texts.

The artist has been careful to represent these other-worldly people in a realistic way: the poses, the folds of the costumes, and the expressions on the faces, are all very human. And to complete his scene he has included

³⁵I am grateful for the assistance of the art library staff at Villa I Tatti as well as that of Dr. Bonnie Bennett.

³⁶This information was furnished by the Corsini family, although even the details surrounding their purchase seems to be not fully documented. Since 1982 the painting has been owned by the Cassa di Risparmio, a Florentine bank, and hangs on the wall of its board room.

three angels singing from music (or are they about to sing?—their mouths are not fully open, and one angel appears to be conducting the entry). To further depict the situation in earthly and realistic terms, Lippi has faithfully copied the music (upside-down!) to a real three-part composition, and has even gone to the trouble of indicating which are the tenor and contra parts. Since there is no evidence that Philippino Lippi was schooled in music, one could assume he has copied his scroll from a source probably supplied to him by the patron, and that he has copied it exactly as received, including clefs, note forms, and part labels. We can probably assume, therefore, that his source looked quite similar to what we see here, including the absence of text in the superius. Details of the painting, including the presence of a lauda to the Virgin, were undoubtedly specified by the patron, who had very clear intentions for the work. There is also no doubt as to the attention Philippino Lippi paid to the exact realistic details. And yet it apparently did not bother either the patron or the artist that a polyphonic lauda should be sung to the Child and the Virgin without text.³⁷ In that case can we conclude that the painting accurately represents a performance practice favored by — or at least known to — both patron and painter?

As unusual as the idea of textless vocalization may seem to us, singers apparently regularly sang without text during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as is attested to by at least two theorists. In the third chapter of his *Musica practica*, first published in the late fifteenth century, Franchinus Gafurius describes a threefold division in vocal practice:

Moreover, sounds represented by notes are generally articulated in three ways. The first way is by solmization. . . They say that this method of articulation is indeed almost mandatory for the instruction of youth. The second way is by uttering only the sounds and pitches while omitting entirely the letters, syllables, and words, a practice which a singer easily follows. . . The third method of singing is by articulating the text. . .³⁸

³⁷Dr. Bennett and I questioned the 1984 restorers of the painting concerning any indication of overpainted text and were told that nothing of that nature had been found. Because the painting was in such good condition it was not deemed advisable to x-ray it, thus eliminating the opportunity to inspect the artist's pencil cartoon beneath the paint.

³⁸Franchinus Gafurius, *Practica musicae*, Book 1, Chapter 3, trans. and ed. by Irwin Young (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 21-22.

This was still respected when quoted some ninety years later in the treatise on text underlay by Gaspar Stocker (ca. 1570).³⁹ Although Gafurius does not state that any particular repertory was regularly performed in his "second way," he does include it without special comment under the heading of normal practice.

My efforts have been to point to specific compositions in which partial texting strongly suggests vocalization of the parts. For the compositions in those same manuscripts that lack partial texting of the lower voices, of course, there is no direct evidence of the intended performance practice. Given the interchangeability of melodic-rhythmic characteristics in texted and untexted parts and the unreliability of those characteristics as a method of distinguishing vocal from instrumental parts, I would propose that we place more weight upon the individual scribe's faithfulness in transmitting the performance practice of the repertory he recorded, in other words, that we consider the manuscript format as an indication of an actual performance practice correctly recorded by the scribe.⁴⁰ Some ten years ago Louise Litterick came to a similar conclusion in her study of late fifteenth-century manuscripts. She stated "the amount of text provided by any source for any type of composition can be interpreted as an accurate reflection of the prevailing mode of performance at the place and time that the source originated."⁴¹ I agree with this assertion, but whereas she suggested that missing or garbled text represents instrumental performance, it would now seem that the repertory was entirely vocal, and that some or all of the performers sang without words. Further, I would suggest that in many cases a single manuscript, or a discrete section thereof, represented a unique performing tradition, and that once we have clearly established the practice for any of the repertory in a source, we may well have established it for the entire manuscript unless there are specific instructions to the contrary. My

³⁹Edward E. Lowinsky, "A Treatise on Text Underlay by a German Disciple of Francisco de Salinas," *Festschrift Heinrich Bessler* (Leipzig: VEB deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1961), 234. I am grateful to Prof. Honey Meconi for drawing these two citations to my attention.

⁴⁰The complicated subject of scribal practices in conjunction with this repertory is in need of further work. A few excellent recent studies include the following: Louise Litterick, "Performing Franco-Netherlandish Secular Music," *Early Music* 8 (1980); Margaret Bent, "A Contemporary Perception of Early Fifteenth-Century Style;" and Jean Widaman, "Texted and Untexted Lower Voices in Early Fifteenth-Century Sources or, a Few Words in the Defense of Scribes," paper read at the Twenty-Fifth International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 1990.

⁴¹Litterick, "Franco-Netherlandish Secular Music," 474.

conviction of this is even stronger in the case of part-books; whereas for composite manuscripts this would refer separately to each section.

Given the juxtaposition within any single manuscript of material with a clear indication of performance intention (text), and material for which no performance indication is given (untexted), as exhibited in all four manuscripts discussed above, I should think that the most logical conclusion is that all these compositions were probably intended to be performed in the same manner: that is, vocally. To me this would seem far more logical than to believe that a separate performance practice — for which we have absolutely no evidence — was intended whenever clear evidence of an all-vocal rendition is lacking. This last point is reinforced in the cases of Florence 203 and 337 by the homogeneity of the repertory. For the Escorial and Oxford manuscripts, we can see that those compositions with clear evidence of vocalization in the lower parts are intermixed freely with those that have no indication of performance practice, and that there is nothing to suggest that any of the compositions in the manuscript were unusual in any way. When taken as a whole, the repertory in these four manuscripts is fairly representative of fifteenth-century French and Italian secular polyphony, which leads one to wonder how much of the repertory was originally intended for all-vocal performance at the locations they represent: Burgundy (Escorial), Venice (Oxford), and Florence (230 and 337).

Obviously I am questioning here the traditional interpretation of those manuscripts in which text is added to some songs but not to others. The generally accepted belief has been that many, or indeed most, manuscripts were "anthologies," containing compositions destined for a mixture of performance practices, including instrumental involvement. But there has never been any solid proof of the "anthology" theory, other than the unsubstantiated belief that untexted parts are often intended for instruments. The sheer number of surviving compositions that are without full correct texts, in comparison with those with complete and correct texts has always been a concern.⁴² This becomes even more pointed in light of the recent search for descriptions of fifteenth-century performances undertaken by

⁴²One of the oft-stated theories concerning the absence of text in all parts — that it was an economy measure — is also a bit difficult to defend. Although economy could have been the motive in the case of some manuscripts that were clearly subjected to strict budgetary considerations, one could hardly believe that this was true in the case of the elaborate presentation *chansonniers*, for example that of Florence, BN, Banco Rari 229.

David Fallows, which have yielded only descriptions of unaccompanied voices.⁴³

My hypothesis is, therefore, that a very large share of the secular repertory found in manuscripts and early prints was intended for performance by unaccompanied voices in all parts, and that this mode of performance was not affected by presence or absence of text. Certainly different courts and different cities would have had local tastes and performing preferences, and the varieties of texting practices in different manuscripts are evidence of that. It has been suggested by Louise Litterick that the inability of the members of many Italian courts to understand French could have been the reason for the frequent omission of text (or garbled text) in the chanson repertory found in some manuscripts.⁴⁴ The Italians apparently enjoyed this attractive, sophisticated music, and were content to have it sung without the texts. That the same texting practices can also be seen in French manuscripts with French texts and in Italian manuscripts with Italian texts, however, indicates that textless vocalization was apparently enjoyed regardless of the ability to understand the text. This is not to ignore the fact that at the same time numerous examples of full texting are also found, although not nearly so many as those with partial text, and I conclude that this simply suggests the extent to which tastes varied regarding practices of singing, and how much freedom was taken by performers.

Given the evidence presented here and previously by several scholars, it would now seem that up to approximately 1500 the all-vocal secular tradition was far more all-pervasive than heretofore imagined; and that many of the manuscripts formerly thought to be "anthologies" (i.e. a mixture of vocal and instrumental pieces), may instead be accurate representations of a textless vocal performance tradition. I do not discount the possibility of performing the secular repertory with instruments, which I believe has been proven to have been an ever-increasing part of the performance tradition as the fifteenth century progressed.⁴⁵ There is sufficient evidence for

⁴³Fallows, "Specific Information." The point is made even more sharply in his "Secular Polyphony," 207.

⁴⁴Litterick, "Performing Franco-Netherlandish Secular Music."

⁴⁵For evidence of instrumental performance of polyphonic music see Keith Polk, "Ensemble Instrumental Music in Flanders, 1450-1550," *Journal of Band Research* 11 (1975), 12-27; "Civic Patronage and Instrumental Ensembles in Renaissance Florence," *Augsburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* 3 (1986) 51-68; "Instrumental Music in the Urban Centres of Renaissance Germany," *Early Music History* 7 (1987), 159-86; Planchart,

instrumental performance practices that we may be confident that by the mid-sixteenth century instruments were routinely combined with voices in the performance of written secular polyphony. But the evidence presented above and in several other similar studies reported here, suggests that the practice slowly changed sometime in the late fifteenth century from an all-vocal norm (a tradition that unites the secular practice closely with that which has recently emerged in respect to the performance of sacred music).

There is no doubt that in the fifteenth century instrumental ensembles selected vocal polyphony to augment their traditional improvised repertory. It was perhaps this tendency toward selection of the vocal repertory that eventually resulted in the intermixing of voices and instruments in the sixteenth century. To understand that sequence we must look for new information that will assist us in recognizing what were the steps along the way from one tradition to the other, and to identify the earliest polyphonic compositions intended primarily for instrumental performance. What would seem certain at this point, however, is that the absence of text in one or all parts cannot be taken as evidence of intended instrumental performance; identification of the instrumental repertory must rely on other evidence.⁴⁶

"Fifteenth-century Masses;" Fallows, "Specific Information;" Fallows, "Secular Polyphony;" and Brown, "Music and Voices in the Fifteenth-Century Chanson."

⁴⁶A version of this paper was read at the Twenty-Fifth International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May, 1990. I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting this research.