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The Josquin Acrostic Re-examined

By CALDWELL TITCOMB

THE MENTION OF THE WORD "acrostic" is likely to elicit either a bemused smile, from those who since 1934 have taken pleasure in the *Saturday Review*'s weekly puzzles, or a contemptuous sneer, from those who consider such unmomentous diversions a waste of time. Yet the acrostic has been a feature of a sizeable and respectable body of literature. "The taste for this literature, the choice of subjects, the use that is made of them," Dom Henri LeClercq has said, "are precious indices of the intellectual state of an epoch."[1] Despite a minor flurry in Britain during the last half of the 19th century,[2] however, acrostic literature has fallen on hard times since being denigrated by Samuel Butler, Dryden, and Addison during the Baroque era.

Now acrostics may take several forms. In the acrostic proper—by far the commonest—one reads down (or up) the first letters of successive lines. If the last letters of the lines are used, up or down, it is a telestic; if the first letters of the last word in each line, an acrotelestic. The use of the first or last letter of words at the internal caesura of successive lines yields a mesostic. These various types may be combined simultaneously. And occasionally one must read diagonally, make a right-angle turn ("gallows acrostic"), or skip a regular number of lines, and so on.

The musician, if he thinks of the subject at all, will recall the RICERCAR acrostic derived from the initial letters of the Latin words in an inscription affixed by J. S. Bach to his *Musical Offering* in 1747: *Regis Iussu Cantio Et Reliqua Canonica Arte Resoluta* ("By the King's order, the theme and the rest resolved by canonic art").[3] And he will recall that Guido of Arezzo in the 11th century firmly established the

[1] Henri LeClercq, "Acrostiche," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Vol. I (Paris, 1907), col. 356.

[2] The most eminent practitioner was Lewis Carroll, who wrote about a dozen acrostic poems in the 1860's and 1870's. See his *Complete Works*, ed. Alexander Woollcott (London/New York, 1939), pp. 827-829, 832-838, 840-841. Other publications, cryptically edited for the most part, include *A Century of Acrostics on the Most Eminent Names*, ed. C. V. G. (London, 1855); *Double Acrostics*, ed. K. L. (London, 1865); *Heath and Gorse* (Dublin, 1866); *Original Double Acrostics*, ed. A. B. (London, 1866); *Hidden Sense*, ed. E. R. Babington (London, 1867); *The Sphynx*, ed. C. C. and E. C. (London, 1867); *Acrostics in Prose and Verse*, ed. A. E. H. (London, 1868); *Puzzle Monkeys*, ed. E. L. F. H. (London, 1869); *Holly Berries*, ed. A. P. A. (London, 1869); *Whetstones for Wits*, ed. "Crack" (London, 1872).

[3] For commentary on this acrostic, see Hans T. David, *J. S. Bach's Musical Offering* (New York, 1945), pp. 42-43.

solmization names derived acrostically from the initial syllables of the lines of a well-known hymn, of which the first six phrases begin successively one scale degree higher, and the first stanza of which reads:

Ut queant laxis
*Re*sonare fibris
*Mi*ra gestorum
*Fa*muli tuorum
*Sol*ve polluti
*La*bii reatum
Sancte Johannes.

But acrostics had already enjoyed a noble history from ancient Babylonian times and had long since invaded the musician's world. Although the oracular Sibylline Books, assigned to the 6th century B.C., were burned in 83 B.C., we learn from Cicero[4] that each prophecy contained in the Greek hexameters therein announced its subject acrostically. Acrostics were common also in the verse of the later Alexandrine Greeks. And the Hebrew of Chapters 1-4 of Lamentations, and of nine of the Psalms (*ca.* 200 B.C.), contains an acrostic—notably the remarkable abecedarian stanzaic acrostic of Psalm 119 (118 in the Roman Catholic numbering).

Acrostics abound in classical Latin verse. One can cite practically every eminent poet: Ennius, Plautus, Terence, Lucretius, Catullus, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius, Phaedrus, Seneca, Statius, Juvenal, Valerius, Calpurnius, Martial.[5] As the Roman Empire continued, the acrostic still attracted versifiers. In the 2nd century A.D., unknown authors wrote Arguments to be affixed to 19 of Plautus's 20 surviving plays, and these give the play's title as an acrostic[6]—a device that Ben Jonson revived in the Arguments to his *Volpone* (1605) and *The Alchemist* (1610).

Commodian delighted in acrostics and telestics in the 3rd century, as did Ausonius and Porfirius in the 4th; in the 5th, Flavius Felix constructed verse with a simultaneous acrostic, mesostic, and telestic. The waning years of the Empire also saw a rage for mortuary verse inscrip-

[4] Cicero, *De divinatione*, Bk. II, Ch. 54. *Cf.* Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*, Bk. IV, sect. 62.

[5] For discussions of ancient acrostics see Johann Simon, *Exoterische Studien zur antiken Poesie*, Vol. II (Cologne/Leipzig, 1899); Johannes Minos, *Ein neuentdecktes Geheimschriftsystem der Alten* (Leipzig, 1901). *Cf.* E. Graf, "Akrostichis," *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, new ed., Vol. I (Stuttgart, 1894), cols. 1200-1207; F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik* (Leipzig, 1922), pp. 137, 146-151; Alfons Kurfess, "Akrostichis," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Vol. I (Stuttgart, 1950), cols. 235-238; Hermann Diels, *Sibyllinische Blätter* (Berlin, 1890).

[6] *Amphitruo, Asinaria, Aulularia, Capteivei* [*sic*], *Casina, Cistellaria, Curculio, Epidicus, Menaechmei, Mercator, Miles gloriosus, Mostellaria, Persa, Poenulus, Pseudolus, Rudens, Stichus, Trinummus, Truculentus.* For the Arguments see Plautus, *Plays*, ed. Paul Nixon, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1916-38); and *cf.* the ed. of *Epidicus* by George E. Duckworth (Princeton, 1940), p. 93.

tions with acrostics and often telestics too.[7] The acrostic usually gave just the name of the deceased, but on occasion it ran to an entire sentence, *e.g.*: FLORENTINUS ABBAS HIC IN PACE QUIESCIT AMEN.

In Carolingian times, acrostic compositions, often of fantastic complexity, crop up in Bernowinus, Josephus Scottus, Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, Gosbertus, and a host of versifying monks.[8] In vernacular poetry we find acrostics used by writers and musicians such as Chrétien de Troyes (fl. 1170), Wolfram von Eschenbach (fl. 1200), Gottfried von Strassburg (fl. 1210), and Rudolf von Ems (d. 1254). And Dante adopted the practice at least once, in his *Ave Maria.* Particularly noteworthy is Boccaccio, who devised acrostics within acrostics in his *Amorosa visione* of 1341 or 1342. Taking the initial letters of each terzina, one gets three whole acrostic poems; in the first of these poems, the odd-numbered lines then yield the acrostic MARIA. This work contains other dedicatory acrostics as well.[9]

The most famous user of acrostics in the 15th century, to whom I shall return shortly, is François Villon, born in 1431. Since Josquin was born only a decade or so later, we come naturally to the chief topic of this essay—the Josquin acrostic. The foregoing remarks are, I think, sufficient to indicate the tradition into which this acrostic falls.

The acrostic in question is contained in the text, written by Josquin himself, of his Marian motet *Illibata Dei virgo,* which Helmuth Osthoff tells us is an early work.[10] It was Father Albert Smijers who in 1925 called the attention of the musicological world to the acrostic, in his contribution to the Scheurleer *Festschrift.*[11] This acrostic is of far more than usual significance, for it helped more than did anything else to establish the correct spelling of the composer's name. Remember that Josquin was active in Italy as well as the North, and that he also served the Church, whose language was Latin. Remember too that he was highly famous in his lifetime, so that his name turned up frequently in manuscripts, documents, and prints of the time. And remember that the Renaissance lacked

[7] See *e.g.* Franciscus Buecheler (ed.), *Carmina latina epigraphica* (Leipzig, 1895), items 108, 109, 220, 271, 273, 301, 331, 436-439, 511-516, 569, 661, 669, 676, 704, 712, 725-727, 745, 747-749, 795-797, 858, 1187, 1366, 1550, 1615, 1616, 1814, 1829, 1830, 1838; and *cf.* Theodor Mommsen (ed.), *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum,* Vol. V, Part 1 (Berlin, 1872), p. 168, item 1693.

[8] See especially Ernst Dümmler (ed.), *Poetae latini aevi carolini,* Vols. I and II (Berlin, 1881-84).

[9] See Boccaccio, *Amorosa visione,* ed. Vittore Branca (Florence, 1944), pp. 3-5.

[10] Helmuth Osthoff, *Josquin Desprez,* Vol. I (Tutzing, 1962), pp. 3, 19.

[11] Albert Smijers, "Een kleine bijdrage over Josquin en Isaac," *Gedenkboek an Dr. D. F. Scheurleer . . .* (The Hague, 1925), pp. 313-319. A manuscript source of the motet is Rome, Vatican Library, Sistine Chapel MS 15, fols. 243^{v}-247^{r}; and the motet was printed by Petrucci in *Motetti a 5 libro primo* (1505), of which Smijers gives a facsimile of the superius in his *Festschrift* article, p. 314. The entire text and music may be found in Smijers (ed.), *Werken van Josquin des Prez: Motetten,* bundel 5 (Amsterdam/Leipzig, 1926), pp. x-xi and piece 27.

the standardization of spelling that has since been generally established.

The result of all this was that the many old sources offered us an enormous variety of choices in spelling the musician's name. Among the forms of the first name are the Franco-Flemish *Josse, Jossé, Jossien, Jossequin, Josquin, Joskin, Jesquin, Jusquin, Giosquin;* the Latin *Josquinus, Joschinus, Juschinus, Jusquinus, Jodocus, Judocus, Judochus, Jodoculus;* the Italian *Judo, Judocho, Judoco, Juschino, Jusquino, Joschin, Joschino, Giusquini, Jacobo,* and the abbreviations *Jo.* and *Ju.* The last name took such forms as the French *Després, des Pres, des pres, despres, Desprès, Desprez, des Prez, Deprès, Depret, Deprez, de prez, Desprets, despretz, de prezis, despree, de Prés, de press, Dupré;* the Italian *Del Prato,* and the Latin *de Pratis, a Prato, a Pratis, Pratanus,* and *Pratensis.* And he was also called *Josquin Dascanio,* i.e. *d'Ascanio,* a reference to his sometime employer Cardinal Ascanio Sforza.[12]

So Josquin's motet text comes to the rescue. The *prima pars* runs as follows:

*I*llibata Dei virgo nutrix
*O*lympi tu regis o genitrix,
*S*ola parens verbi puerpera,
*Q*uae fuisti Evae reparatrix,
*V*iri nefas tuta mediatrix,
*I*llud clara luce dat scriptura.
*N*ata nati alma genitura,
Des, ut laeta musarum factura,
*P*raevaleat hymnus et sit ave,
*R*oborando sonos, ut guttura
*E*fflagitent, laude teque pura
*Z*elotica arte clamet ave.

This yields acrostically IOSQVINDESPREZ. One must recall here that ever since ancient Roman times the letters *i* and *j* were interchangeable, as were the letters *u* and *v*. Thus the only remaining question was whether Josquin's last name should be split. Smijers chose to do so. But in 1939 J. Delporte called attention to a letter dispatched sometime after 1507 to Margaret of Austria.[13] This letter may have been written by Josquin

[12] See A. Smijers, "Josquin des Prez," *Proceedings of the Musical Association,* Session 53 (London, 1927), p. 98; Osthoff, *op. cit.,* p. 3 and *passim;* Osthoff, "Josquin Desprez," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* Vol. 7 (Kassel, 1958), cols. 190-214; Claudio Sartori, "Josquin des Prés cantore del duomo di Milano," *Annales musicologiques* IV (1956), pp. 55-83; Nicolas Slonimsky, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians,* 5th ed. (New York, 1958), p. 374. Similarly, variant spellings are found for the 14-15th-century painter Pierre Desprez; see Chrétien Dehaisnes, *Documents et extraits divers concernant l'histoire de l'art . . . ,* Vol. II (Lille, 1886), pp. 722, 729, 759.

[13] J. Delporte, "Un document inédit sur Josquin Desprez," *Revue liturgique et musicale* (renamed *Musique et liturgie*), 1939, pp. 54ff. A description of the letter had been printed in *Inventaire sommaire des archives départementales . . . : Nord—Archives Civiles,* Série B, Vol. I, Part 2 (Lille, 1906), p. 405, item 1465.

himself. At the very least it was personally approved by him. In the text of the letter he is clearly referred to by name as *Desprez.*[14] The combined evidence of the acrostic and the letter leaves no doubt that the proper form of the composer's name is *Josquin Desprez.*

Paul Henry Lang has, however, made the conjecture that the composer's name "may have been Josse van der Weyden, as Rogier van der Weyden the painter was called Roger de la Pasture."[15] There is a certain attractiveness about this suggestion at first glance—*Josquin* coming from *Jossekin,* the diminutive form of the Flemish *Josse.* Indeed, the 15th-century painter too was on occasion referred to by an analogous diminutive, *Rogelet de la* (or, ungrammatically, *le*) *Pasture.*[16]

But the two cases are not actually parallel. With the painter, we do not have a real Fleming parading under a French translation of his name. In his early decades, the painter went only under the name *de la Pasture;* later, he changed it across the board to *van der Weyden.*[17] What we observe, then, is a clearly marked shift from a Walloon name to its Flemish counterpart. Such a practice, furthermore, was so rare as possibly to be unique—the only other remotely comparable example that readily comes to mind is the 17th-century painter Karel Dujardin, who went through his whole life as a pure Dutchman bearing a French surname.

Of our composer, however, Gustave Reese has said, "Culturally and in every other sense that really matters, he was a Frenchman."[18] The earliest document we have about him is from 1459, when he was still a lad, and it designates his nationality as French,[19] as do a number of later ones. Were he really *van der Weyden,* surely this form would have turned up at least once among the dozens and dozens of appearances of his name. Without question, we had best stick to *Josquin Desprez.*

By working the acrostic into his text, Josquin was proclaiming himself as the creator of the work. Not even his most ardent admirers could maintain that his verse shows him to have been a good poet. But no-one can blame him for lacking the double genius in poetry and music that characterized Machaut in the 14th century and Berlioz in the 19th.

Now the majority of acrostics present the name of the verses' recipients or dedicatees, or convey some other kind of message. But there are long-standing precedents for laying claim to authorship acrostically, as Josquin did here. The practice goes all the way back to the ancient Roman poet Ennius. His verse survives today in such brief fragments that

[14] Fasimile in Osthoff, "Josquin Desprez," *loc. cit.,* Plate 11 opp. col. 224; text reprinted in Osthoff, *Josquin Desprez,* Vol. I, p. 69.

[15] P. H. Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York, 1941), p. 193.

[16] See Thieme-Becker, *Künstler Lexikon,* Vol. XXXV (Leipzig, 1942), pp. 468ff.

[17] See Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres . . . ,* new ed., Vol. VIII (Lib. Gründ, 1955), p. 725.

[18] Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance,* rev. ed. (New York, 1959), p. 228.

[19] See Osthoff, *Josquin,* Vol. I, p. 4 and *passim.*

proof is no longer possible. But Cicero tells us[20] that his work contained verses that yielded acrostically QUINTUS ENNIUS FECIT.

Suetonius informs us that Aurelius Opillius (first century B.C.) incorporated his name acrostically in his now lost *Pinax*.[21] And Commodian's 3rd-century *Instructiones*, which are acrostic from start to finish throughout eighty sections, conclude with the acrostic signature ITSIRHC SUCIDNEM SUNAIDOMMOC, which when read backwards says, "Commodian, beggar of Christ."[22] By taking every eighth letter of every eighth line in the preface of Hrabanus's 9th-century *De laudibus sanctae crucis*,[23] one reads MAGNENTIUS HRABANUS MAURUS HOC OPUS FECIT. And the ensuing Book I contains nearly thirty of the most incredibly complex acrostical designs ever constructed[24]—examples of the genre known as *carmina figurata*.

The chief immediate predecessor to Josquin as an acrostician was the poet Villon, whom I have already mentioned. His modest output contains seven acrostics, of which four indicate the authorship. The *envoi* of his *Ballade pour prier Nostre Dame* (1461) reads:

> *V*ous portastes, digne Vierge, princesse,
> *J*esus regnant, qui n'a ne fin ne cesse.
> *L*e Tout-Puissant, prenant nostre foiblesse,
> *L*aissa les cieulx et nous vint secourir;
> *O*ffrist à mort sa très chiere jeunese;
> *N*ostre Seigneur tel est, tel le confesse,
> *E*n ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.[25]

Remembering that *i* and *j* are the same, we get the acrostic VILLON E. Exactly the same acrostic is contained in the *envoi* of his *Ballade de la grosse Margot*.[26] In both cases, the E may stand for *escrivit*. The *Ballade des contre vérités*[27] ends with the plain acrostic VILLON.

You will have noticed that, in Josquin's poem, part of his name is to be read horizontally instead of vertically. There are numerous such examples in classical Latin poetry. And in fact the same thing happens in the *ballade* "Brouez, benards" from Villon's *Le jargon et jobelin*, in whose *envoi*[28] the author's name appears acrostically as VILLN. Villon's remain-
O
ing three acrostics designate the names of other persons. The *Ballade a*

[20] Cicero, *loc. cit.*

[21] Suetonius, *De grammaticis*, sect. 6 (J. C. Rolfe ed., Vol. 2 [Cambridge, 1914], pp. 404-406).

[22] Commodian, *Carmina*, ed. Ernst Ludwig (Leipzig, 1878), pp. 52-53.

[23] J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia latina*, Vol. CVII (Paris, 1864), cols. 147-148.

[24] *Ibid.*, cols. 141, 149-261.

[25] Villon, *Complete Works*, ed. Anthony Bonner (New York, 1960), p. 68.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[28] Villon, *Poésies-Ballades*, ed. Gilbert Sigaux and Auguste Vitu (Strasbourg, 1958), p. 237.

s'amye[29] contains FRANCOYS and MARTHE; and the *Ballade pour Robert d'Estouteville*[30] works in the name of Robert's wife, AMBROISE DE LORÉ.

A few years after Josquin's motet, Guillaume Alexis's *Le blason de faulses amours* was published in 1486. Here the signatory practice continued, since the work ends with the acrostic GUILLTALECJS.[31] This poem inspired the *Contreblason de faulses amours*, which appeared in 1512, while Josquin was in the service of Louis XII. At the beginning of the *Contreblason* there is an acrostic giving the date, MCCCCC E DOUXE. A mesostic provides the name of the princess, LOISE D'ALBERT; while one can pick out of line 5 horizontally the letters, in the right order, making up the prince's name, Charles de Croi. And the name of the poet is disclosed in a telestic, ESTRÉES.[32] In like manner did the several kinds of acrostics continue to be used throughout the rest of the Renaissance.

Y

T

There remains one feature of Josquin's verse to call to your attention, namely the presence of a mesostic alongside the acrostic. Let me make clear at once that I do not claim that Josquin necessarily devised the mesostic intentionally; it could be attributed to chance, as the signatory acrostic most definitely could not. The mesostic is extracted by reading down the last letter of the fourth syllable in each line: AUSI SAIA TOTA.

The only difficulty here is the middle word. *Ausi* means "I have ventured" or "I have applied myself." In the circumstances, *tota* could be neuter accusative plural, with the verb taken transitively; or first-declension ablative singular, with the verb intransitive. But what do we do with the *saia?* Well, the word exists in medieval and Renaissance Latin for a kind of wool cloth (which the French called *saie*); but that would not make any sense. Or we might read the word as *saja*, which is the name of a species of acorn; but this makes no more sense than the other.

A solution lies in taking *saia* as a contraction. The choice then obviviously descends upon *sapientia*. This word, like hordes of other words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, was frequently written with the middle missing in various ways.[33] Reading *sa[pient]ia tota* as an ablative of manner or specification, we come up with the sentiment, "I have applied myself with all the wisdom at my command." Even if unintended by Josquin, the thought is at least eminently appropriate.

[29] Bonner ed., p. 72.

[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

[31] Guillaume Alexis, *Oeuvres poétiques*, ed. Arthur Piaget and Emile Picot, Vol. I (Paris, 1896), p. 248.

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 343.

[33] Adriano Cappelli, *Dizionario di abbreviature latine ed italiane usate nelle carte e codici specialmente del medio-evo* . . . (Milan, 1929), p. 341.

Let us proceed then to the *secunda pars* of the motet. The rest of Josquin's text is as follows:

Ave virginum decus hominum
Coelique porta,
Ave lilium, flos humilium
Virgo decora.
Vale ergo, tota pulchra ut luna,
Electa ut sol, clarissima gaude.
Salve tu sola cum sola amica,
Consola la mi la canentes in tua laude.
Ave Maria, mater virtutum,
Veniae vena, ave Maria,
Gratia plena, dominus tecum,
Ave Maria, mater virtutum.
Amen.

Father Smijers, having noticed the acrostic in the first stanza, naturally considered the possibility of another in the second stanza.[34] Taking the initial A as the Latin preposition for 'from,' one was left with *Cauvescauga* or *Cawescauga* (W equals double-U). This, Smijers surmised, might be the name either of Josquin's birthplace (which had never been established) or of the place in which Josquin resided when he wrote the motet.

Looking into the first alternative, Smijers enlisted the assistance of Canon Th. Lauridan te Roubaix, president of the Société d'Études de la Province de Cambrai, who thought it "at least probable" that the second stanza continued the acrostic. He thought the piling up of praises to Mary, out of logical sequence, to be a result of a preoccupation with getting the right initial letters. And, indeed, the second stanza as poetry is even inferior to the first. But the Canon reported that Northern France and the Lowlands contained no place-name remotely like *Cauvescauga*. The other alternative caused Smijers to check names in northern Italy. But the few places beginning *Cave-* were clearly inapplicable. And Smijers declared the question unresolved.

However, there leaps to the eye from the sequence of letters one group of five, ESCAU, which suggests at once the river Escaut, located in the Josquin country. The name, in fact, is incorporated in that of Condé-sur-(l')Escaut, the very town in which Josquin lived for a while and died, and in which he may even have been born.

Osthoff, in his work-in-progress, has also noticed this feature. But he blithely tosses in the last two letters and says that ESCAUGA equals Escaut, and that the preceding letters designate most probably Josquin's birthplace on the Escaut.[35] However convenient this may be, it is simply a case of sweeping the dust under the carpet.

Charles van den Borren has, quite recently, tackled this problem more

[34] Smijers, "Een kleine bijdrage," pp. 317-319.
[35] Osthoff, *Josquin*, Vol. I, p. 4.

diligently.[36] From the year 1248 he invokes the written use of the Flemish names *Cawo* and *Kauwo* to designate one of two towns later known as *Cantin* and *Cantaing*, both fairly near Cambrai. In the acrostic he then reads CAW(E) as signifying one of these towns, and (E)SCAU as *Escaut*. The GA he equates with the Flemish *gouw* ('region' or 'district'), which is comparable to the German *gau*, and cites the use of the compound form *Henegouw* (the German *Hennegau*) to designate the county of Hainaut.

He goes on to suggest that, had the composer been born in Cantin-Cantaing, Josquin might have taken the opportunity in Italy to pass himself off as coming from the more important city of St. Quentin (pronounced the same as Cantin), capital of the county of Vermandois—which would help to explain the application of the adjective *Veromanduus* to Josquin. Actually, I find this argument more congenial than the first. I am bothered by, among other things, the idea of a Frenchman's dragging Flemish into a Latin poem, and by the appreciable difference between *ga* and *gouw*.

Nevertheless, the ESCAU portion surely does refer to the Escaut. Its appearance seems far beyond the widest limits of coincidence, and must, I think, be viewed as intentional. But before looking further into the other letters of the acrostic, it will be instructive to examine the background of this unit.

The river Escaut, some 270 miles long, rises in the very north of France near Cambrai and flows north through Antwerp into Holland and the North Sea. Since very little of the river is in French territory any longer, the Escaut has for a long time been most generally known under its High and Low Germanic names, the Schelde and the Scheldt.

At first glance, perhaps, there may seem little reason for these names. But they are connected in a way that provides a convenient lesson in linguistics. The classical world knew this river as the *Scaldis*. It lay then entirely in Belgica, the northernmost of the famous "three parts" into which Caesar tells us "Gaul is as a whole divided." In fact Caesar was himself familiar with the river, for he mentions his determination to go "as far as the Scaldis" in his pursuit of Ambiorix in 53 B.C.[37] A century later, Pliny described the river as an important boundary line,[38] a function it fulfilled thenceforth for centuries.

Since the second syllable of the name was weak, it was variable already in early times, as with so many other similar words; writers used *Scalde* and *Scaldi* for the ablative, and *Scaldem* and *Scaldim* for the accusative. In the journey to French, the inflectional ending dropped out, as was cus-

[36] Charles van den Borren, "Une hypothèse concernant le lieu de naissance de Josquin des Prez," *Festschrift: Joseph Schmidt-Görg zum 60. Geburtstag* (Bonn, 1957), pp. 21-25.

[37] Caesar, *De bello Gallico*, Bk. VI, Ch. 33.

[38] Pliny, *Historia naturalis*, Bk. IV, Ch. 17 (sect. 106); *cf.* also Ch. 13 (sec. 98).

tomary. There was, too, the standard vocalization of a preconsonantal *l*, which became a *u*. Both processes can be observed in such Latin-to-French pairs as *caldus*[39]*-chaud*, *psalmus-psaume*, *saltus-saut*, *salsa-sauce*, *salvare-sauver*, *calvus-chauve*, *palpebra-paupière*, and *talpa-taupe*.

Also evident is the acquisition of a prosthetic *e*, which was common before an initial *s*-plus-consonant. In many instances, the resulting *es* has gone on to become *é* in modern French. But there remain a considerable number of words that have kept the *es*, such as *spatium-espace*, *stamen-estame*, and *stomachus-estomac*. Examples comparable to the specific *Sca-* of *Scaldis* include *scarabaeus-escarbot*, *scalaria-escalier*, and *scapus-escape*.

On the Latin-to-German road, there was already in the Carolingian period a standard mutation from the original *a* to *e* (or *ä*, its pronunciational equivalent). Very early, too, an initial preconsonantal *s* was palatalized to the *sh*-sound—though this was not always reflected in the spelling, as when today the *s* precedes a *p* or *t*. According to a general rule, the voiced plosives *b*, *d*, *g*, became unvoiced (*p*, *t*, *k*) when occurring at the end of a word or syllable, or preceding a voiceless consonant in the same syllable. Thus the *d*-sound is preserved in the form *Schelde* since a vowel follows, whereas *Scheldt* has only the unvoiced dental. Also, Dutch speech, while not keeping the hard Latin *sk*-sound, stays closer to this than to the soft German *sh* by following the *s* with a guttural fricative.

Thus did *Scaldis* lead to both *Escaut* and *Schelde-Scheldt*. Although the percentage of Latin-derived words in German is relatively small, it is nevertheless possible to find some parallel cases. The Latin doublets *scabellum-scamellum* yielded the French *escabeau* and the German *schemel*. *Stipula* became *estuble* in Old French and *stoppel* in German, as *scriptor* became *escritor* and *schreiber*. And *sterlingus* led to *esterlin* and *sterling*. If one includes the French words in which *es* has become *é*, one could add such examples as *strigilis-étrille-striegel*, *scrinium-écrin-schrein*, *scutella-écuelle-schüssel*, *scrofa-écrou-schraube*, *species-épice-spezerei*, and *status-état-staat*.

The river Escaut was the site of many important military engagements, from the Battle of Bouvines (1214) through, in Josquin's time, the Battle of Guinegate (1479) to Napoleon's Waterloo campaign (1815), and, in our own century, the Battle of the Lys and Escaut (1918), which ended World War I, and the Battle of the Scheldt (1944). Already in ancient times, as we learn from the 3rd-century *Itinerarium Antonini*, a bridge was built across the river, whence the settlement that grew up around it was called *Pons Scaldis*.[40] In later centuries this locality became

[39] Although nouns and adjectives normally derive from the Latin accusative, I shall use the dictionary nominative here.

[40] Gustave Parthey and Moritz Pinder (eds.), *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti* (Berlin, 1848), p. 179.

known as *Escaupont;* and it was, if not identical with, at least adjacent to the site of Josquin's town of Condé.[41]

Leaving toponymy aside, we find evidence of another kind of proximity between Josquin and the Escaut in Jean Molinet's *Recollections des merveilleuses advenues,* of *ca.* 1500. One verse praises Josquin and other composers:

J'ay veu, comme il me semble,
Ung fort homme d'honneur
Luy seul chanter ensamble
Et dessus et teneur;
Okeguem, Alexandre,
Jossequin, ne Busnois
Qui scevent chants espandre
Ne font telz esbanois.

And a few lines later the river is cited:

J'ay veu poeuple en mes livres,
De famine troublé,
Et vendre quattre livres,
Ung seul mencault de bled.
En ceste propre annee.
Avoir, dessus l'Escaut,
La chanse retournee
Ung muit pour ung mencault.[42]

Returning to the second stanza of Josquin's text, we still have to account for the letters other than ESCAU. What I offer below is not to be regarded as *the* solution, but as *a* solution, to be weighed alongside van den Borren's and any other that may be proposed. The second stanza calls for a *quaerendo invenietis* approach. But it is perfectly consonant with medieval and Renaissance mentality that a person, having devised a simple and obvious acrostic to start with, might derive delight from making its continuation more difficult to ferret out.

Take another look at the first stanza. We see a twelve-line poem with consistently decasyllabic lines (if we do not avail ourselves of the possible internal elisions). It divides into two equal hexastichs, each with the rhyme scheme AAB/AAB.

[41] See *e.g.* Peter Wesseling (ed.), *Itinerarium Antonini* (Amsterdam, 1735), pp. 376-377; Albert Forbiger, *Handbuch der alten Geographie von Europa,* 2nd ed., Vol. 3 (Hamburg, 1877), p. 187; Filippo Ferrari, *Novum lexicon geographicum* (Padua, 1697), p. 147; François Fondeur, *Urbium . . . dictionarium* (Laon, 1680), p. 83.

[42] Noël Dupire (ed.), *Les faictz et dictz de Jean Molinet,* Vol. I (Paris, 1936), pp. 313, 316; or see Louis de Baecker (ed.), *Chants historiques de la Flandre* (Lille, 1855), pp. 238-239. It was amusing to discover that our composer missed by two letters being dispatched in 1498 by duke Philippe le Beau to examine with six engineers the flow of the Escaut: the man sent was not Jossequin but Josse Quevin; see Ch. Duvivier, "L'Escaut est-il flamand ou brabançon?" *Académie royale de Belgique: Bulletin de la classe des lettres . . .,* 1899, p. 746.

Now look at the second stanza. Regarding the final "Amen" as a mere punctuational excrescence, we are left with another twelve-line poem. But this one does not show the regularity of the first. Two lines are hemistichs. Of the rest, some are decasyllabic and some are hendecasyllabic—while line 8 has fourteen syllables (though, if one considers the "*la mi la*" as an intrusion from the tenor part, which is restricted to this three-note motive throughout the motet, this line too is hendecasyllabic). Even with elisions, it is not possible to force *all* the full lines into a decasyllabic length.

Observe now that lines 1 and 3 contain Leonine rhyme. Assuming the presence of the hemistichs as clues, and noticing the obvious hiatus after line 4, let us realign the components of the quatrain so that each hemistich constitutes a pentasyllabic line. We then have a hexastich with the rhyme scheme AAB/AAB, like the sections of the first stanza. Let this be followed by a hexastich of full lines (containing the indispensable ESCAU), the stanza then being rounded off by a return to pentasyllabic lines. Finally, recalling that, in the acrostic of the first stanza, we had to read horizontally after the first two syllables, let us similarly take two letters horizontally after the first two acrostic syllables in the second stanza.

The resulting acrostic then reads as follows:

ADCAFLUVESCAUGDAM.

AD as a Latin preposition is no problem. CA can be read as an abbreviation for *caput*, found from the 12th century on.[43] FLUV is a common abbreviation of the different declensional cases of *fluvium*. The whole phrase would then be *Ad caput fluvii Escau* ("At the head of the river Escaut"), the idea being that Josquin's area of early activity was near the river's source.

CA is also one of many abbreviations of *circa* to be found in old sources,[44] and has of course remained in use right down to the present day. In classical Latin *circa* rendered *ad* redundant, although *usque* governing an accusative was regularly used both with and without *ad*. But in medieval and Renaissance Latin, writers were not so fastidious about grammatical niceties. With *circa*, the phrase would mean, "At close by the river Escaut." Or one might similarly choose to take CA as a contraction of *citra*, in which case the phrase would be almost identical with one found as early as the 13th century, *Citra fluvium qui dicitur Escaux*[45] ("On this side of the river that is called the Escaut").

If you object to the need for abbreviations, I should point out that

[43] See Cappelli, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 52; Charles T. Martin, *The Record Interpreter*, 2nd ed. (London, 1910), p. 18.

[45] *Inventaire sommaire*, Vol. I, Part 1 (Lille, 1899), p. 180, item 224.

they are plentiful in earlier acrostics; and that in fact they were used almost anywhere as one means of conserving precious writing space (which of course also accounts for the layout of much early musical notation). If you object to the presence of the French form *Escaut* in a Latin phrase, I should tell you that there are earlier occurrences. One is the quotation cited just above. The name also can be found in the Latin text of Jacques de Guyse's voluminous 14th-century chronicle, *Annales historiae.*[46]

And if you object to the omission of the T in *Escaut* (which of course does not affect the pronunciation at all), I should answer that the spelling of the last syllable was variable anyway. Beside *Escaut*, we find frequently *Escault*, *Escauld*, and *Escaux.*[47] Furthermore, the letter is universally omitted in the spellings of the town I mentioned earlier, *Escaupont*, *Escaupons*, *Escaupent*, and in the personal surnames taken from it, like "Wautier d'Escaupont."[48] The same thing is observed in the names of other towns derived from the river's name.[49] And finally, Josquin's own province of Hainaut was, in the 14th and 15th centuries, commonly spelled *Haynau* or *Haynnau.*[50]

There remains unaccounted for only the last group of four letters, GDAM. This is simply a rearrangement—quite acceptable since Latin, an inflected language, allows flexible word-order—of the common abbreviation *A.M.D.G.*, which designates the standard motto officially adopted by the Jesuit order not long after Josquin's death.[51] In Josquin's sequence it would read *Gloriam Dei ad majorem.*

When Father Smijers was teaching here, a few years before his death, I showed this solution to him. He said it was plausible; but, kindly man that he was, very possibly he was just being polite. Anyhow, the main thing is not whether you reject van den Borren's solution or mine, or both—though I am certain Josquin consciously employed an acrostic of some kind in the second stanza. Acrostics are undoubtedly lurking unsuspected in the texts of other early music; and if the present article alerts researchers in this field to be on the watch for them, its purpose will have been served. There is no telling but what other acrostics might provide

[46] Jacques de Guyse, *Annales historiae illustrium principum Hannoniae*, Vol. XII (Paris, 1831), p. 370 (Bk. XVIII, Ch. 29).

[47] Jean Froissart, *Oeuvres*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels, 1867-77), Vol. II, p. 99; Vol. X, p. 260; *Inventaire sommaire* (see fn. 45); Duvivier, *loc. cit.*, pp. 746-748, 766-767; Pierre Deschamps, *Dictionnaire de géographie ancienne et moderne* (Paris, 1870), p. 1147.

[48] See Froissart, Vol. III, pp. 250, 252; Wesseling, *loc. cit.;* Ferrari, *loc. cit.; Inventaire sommaire*, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 213, item 1194.

[49] Froissart, Vol. XXIV, pp. 292-293.

[50] Alexandre Pinchart, *Extraits de comptes relatifs au Hainaut* (Mons, 1884), *passim;* Dehaisnes, *loc. cit.*

[51] Alphonse Chassant and Henri Tausin, *Dictionnaire des devises historiques et héraldiques*, Vol. I (Paris, 1878), p. 6; Jh. de Champeaux, *Devises* (Dijon, 1890), p. 147; Cappelli, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

musicologists with useful information as well as the simple smile of recognition.[52]

It is relevant to recall the last words of a recent celebrated indulger in puzzles, Gertrude Stein. "What is the answer?" she asked on her deathbed. There was silence. She laughed, and then added, "In that case, what is the question?"[53] These pages may contain no final answers; but I hope the question posed is valid.

*J*osquini *O*b *S*ummas *Q*ualitates *U*beres *I*n *N*omine
*D*edico *E*xiguam *S*criptiunculam *P*raesentem *R*amosam *E*x *Z*elo.

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[52] Consider the case of the great Spanish masterpiece known as *La Celestina*, published anonymously in 1499. For years scholars have been squabbling over its authorship. But the 1500 edition carries the author's apologia in the form of eleven 8-line stanzas of poetry; reading acrostically, we extract the following: *El bachjller Fernañdo de Roias acabo la comedia de Calysto y Melybea y fue nascjdo en la pvebla de Montalvan* ("The bachelor Fernando de Rojas completed the play of Calisto and Melibea, and was born in the town of Montalbán").

[53] Donald Sutherland, *Gertrude Stein* (New Haven, 1951), p. 203; Elizabeth Sprigge, *Gertrude Stein* (London, 1957), p. 265; John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Third Rose* (Boston, 1959), pp. 403-404.