

An Edition and Translation of Two Motets by John Dunstaple,

Gaude virgo salutata and *Preco preminencie*,

with a Commentary on Some Elements of Latin Style for the Use of Musicians

edition, translation, commentary: Sasha Zamler-Carhart

Introduction

This commented edition and translation of two motets by John Dunstaple is not a scholarly article intended for classicists and specialists of medieval Latin literature. It only has practical musical goals. First and foremost, it is meant as a guide to the text of these two motets for the use of performers of John Dunstaple's music, assuming no prior knowledge of Latin or medieval poetry on their part. The purpose of the endeavor is to help performers understand the Latin text and its complex rhetorical and stylistic relationship to the music, so they can give the music the performance it deserves with the full knowledge of the many references, nuances and literary figures in the text.

Secondly, this is intended to serve as a reliable new edition and translation of these texts. When several versions of the texts exist, or in the rare cases where the standard Bukofzer/Bent edition¹ proposes an arguably incorrect text reading or incorrect punctuation, it is meant to help performers select the best possible version. Differences are only occasionally significant, for example with the choice of *Preco preminencie* in this edition as the standard title of the second motet, rather than *Preco prehemincie*. Thirdly, the goal of this commented edition and translation is to give Dunstaple scholars elements that may help them in their own attempts to date these compositions, ascertain what circles the composer was in contact with when they were written, and determine the authorship of the texts.

A Word on Authorship

On the crucial question of whether the texts were written by John Dunstaple himself, the texts offer a few clues, but no definitive answers. Since this edition concerns only two of his motets, the most we can hope to learn on this matter is whether both were written by the same author. Even on this point, the evidence is conflicting. The Latin style of the two motets is very different, partly because the poet's proficiency level seems quite different, and partly because the first one, *Gaude virgo salutata*, is written in free rhyming verse, whereas the second, *Preco preminencie*, is not only rhymed but also entirely alliterative.

Gaude virgo salutata presents a picture of an author with average, but not outstanding, classical and scriptural education for the early 15th century. This is an author steeped in stereotyped medieval poetic models, perhaps exposed to the humanistic idea of a classical usage perceived as distinct from, and more prestigious than medieval usage, but whose occasional attempts at composing in classical Latin style often serve to underscore his limited proficiency. The technical level of the poetry and the possible presence of a pun in it (see the commentary) suggest that it is perhaps the work of a student.

The texts of *Preco preminencie*, on other hand, present an author with a large classical, scriptural and patristic culture, thoroughly schooled in the art of rhetoric, and capable of impressive poetic virtuosity in his ability to combine refined classical Latin syntax, a remarkably close reading of the Gospel of Matthew and the very strict formal constraints of an alliterative poem.

Some idiosyncratic elements of style that could suggest common authorship are found in both motets (e.g. the repeated use of the unusual verb *coartare*, and the proliferation of legal terms such as *reus*, *heres*, *penalis*) but they are not strong

¹ John Dunstaple, Complete Works, *Musica Britannica* vol. VIII, ed. Manfred Bukofzer, revised by Margaret Bent, Ian Bent and Brian Trowell, 1970.

or numerous enough to prove conclusively that the texts are by the same poet. The difference in proficiency and technical ability between the motets weighs in more strongly than these details.

Thus either the texts of the two motets are by different authors, or they are by the same author at a very different stage of his education. If they are by the same author, then *Gaude virgo salutata* is – beyond any doubt – anterior to *Preco preminencie*. Indeed *Gaude virgo salutata* would then represent the work the poet in his youth, its combination of ambition and limited technical proficiency suggesting a work of his student years. *Preco preminencie*, on the contrary, would be the work of the mature poet, in full mastery of his art.

Since Margaret Bent makes a convincing argument that *Preco preminencie* can be dated, at the latest, to a service at Canterbury in 1416 commemorating the end of the siege of Harfleur² – when John Dunstaple would have been about 26 years old – the assumption that Dunstaple himself is the author of both texts raises a few problems. First, this would amount to calling a 26-year old poet mature in his technique and in full mastery of his art. While this is obviously possible given Dunstaple's technical virtuosity at musical composition at the same age, it would be a more unexpected conclusion than if the poet had been much older. But more importantly, assigning authorship of both texts to Dunstaple would require us to view *Gaude virgo salutata* as a work composed many years earlier than *Preco preminencie*, likely by a Dunstaple in his late teenage years or very early 20s. This is in theory possible, but it is problematic because nothing in the musical facture of *Gaude virgo salutata* suggests that it was composed by a young or less competent composer than *Preco preminencie*. Moreover, Bent also proposes that Dunstaple “started composing not much before 1415”³, and there is no basis here on which to dispute her claim. Thus we should regard it as unlikely that Dunstaple wrote both texts himself, since there is no satisfactory way to accord what we can observe of the chronology of the texts with what we believe about the chronology of the musical compositions.

We are left with the conclusion that John Dunstaple is the author of only one of the texts, or of neither of them. If he is the author of only one, nothing in the texts allows us to determine which one, though the answer would shape the impression we form of him as a person: a brilliant musician but only an average poet if he wrote *Gaude virgo salutata*, or a greatly talented man in both fields if he wrote *Preco preminencie*.

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² See Margaret Bent's very informative book *Dunstaple*, Oxford Studies of Composers vol. 17, p. 8, Oxford 1981.

³ See Bent *Dunstaple*, p. 5.

I. Gaude virgo salutata

(Bukofzer/Bent: No. 28)
text source: ModB ff.113v-114v

Triplum⁴

Gaude virgo salutata⁵
angelico relatu,
mox es gravida libera
omni reatu.⁶
In te deitas humanata⁷
celesti flatu,
virgo manens illibata
re et cogitatu.

Rejoice, virgin honored
by the angel's announcement,
you are now pregnant
but free of any guilt.
In you, godness was made human
by the breath of heaven,
while you remained a virgin intact
in deed and in thought.

⁴ The general topic of this motet is the Annunciation, though this is only clear in the triplum voice. The motetus only alludes to it, while the contratenor and tenor have a general Marian theme without specifically mentioning the Annunciation.

⁵ The clearest indicator of medieval style, in all four voices, is the use of rhyming poetry. Classical Latin poetry was based on quantity, i.e. the length of syllables, in which rhyme was a possible but rather unusual figure (called *homeoteleuton*). While early medieval poetry tended to imitate classical models in this respect, rhyming poetry in Latin becomes gradually more common in the later Middle Ages. It becomes particularly prevalent from the 12th century onward under the influence of troubadour poetry in Provençal, and by the 13th and 14th century it is very widespread. As a general rule, the presence of rhyme in Latin poetry tends to be an indication that syllable length is not taken into account by the poet, following the Provençal model in which all vowels have the same length. See Dag Norgberg's comment: "d'ordinaire, la quantité des voyelles est indifférente dans les poèmes rimés" (*Introduction à l'étude de la versification latine médiévale*, p. 47, Stockholm 1958). In the course of the 15th century rhyming Latin poetry gradually comes to be viewed as old-fashioned, as the spread of humanistic ideals about the revival of classical models rekindles interest in Latin poetry based on quantity. It should of course be emphasized that this shift in taste is by no means immediate, or homogeneous across geographical areas and poetic sub-genres.

⁶ The word *reatus* in the sense of 'guilt' is typical of Christian writers. In classical Latin it is strictly a technical legal term referring to the state of being accused of a crime. Only after Tertullian does it gain its Christian meaning.

⁷ The word *humanatus* 'made human' is strongly indicative of medieval usage. Though its sense is perfectly clear, it is very unusual even in medieval writings, the normal expression being *homo factus*. *Humanatus* appears in the Latin translation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed (A.D. 381) as a rendition of the Greek *enanthropesas*, and later occasionally in rather obscure sources (e.g. the acts of the Council of Frankfurt in the late 8th century, and the writings of the Lombard grammarian Papias in the 11th century). Since the formation of the word from the noun *humanus* is plain, it seems far more likely that the author would have independently re-coined that word for the poetic needs of this text than used it under the influence of any of the sources mentioned above.

Quod mirum si paveas,
dum conceptus pandit,⁸
quanto magis caveas
cum ad partum scandit.⁹
Dum virgo permanneas,
mens hec verba pandit,¹⁰
dicens ‘ne timeas’
te mulcendo blandit.

Nondum contentaris,¹¹
cum dicit parituram.¹²
quomodo¹³ miraris
fietque¹⁴ curam,

Indeed if you are afraid of the miracle
when the conception is revealed,
how much more should beware
when it rises to the honor of childbirth.
While you remain a virgin
the spirit points to these words:
saying “do not fear”
it soothes and caresses you.

You are not appeased yet
when he says that you will give birth;
how you wonder about your duty
and about what will happen!

⁸ The likely meaning would require the passive *panditur* in classical usage. The use of the active form to fit the rhyme is indicative of medieval usage.

⁹ The use of *scandit* ‘it climbs’ in this context is unexpected, especially since its grammatical subject appears to be *conceptus* ‘the conception’. Both the context and the word choice are reminiscent of Horace’s verses: *dum capitolium scandit cum tacita virgine* ‘as he climbs the Capitoline with a silent virgin’ (Odes 3, 30), referring to the leading of a Vestal priestess up the steps. In this sense, *scandit* is to be read not only as the physical act of climbing, but also metaphorically as ‘rising to the honor of a religious duty’. It is very likely that the author was familiar with Horace’s verses and had them in mind when he wrote this text, since Horace’s Odes were taught in grammar schools throughout the late Middle Ages. In this respect, despite the obvious reference to classical literature, the use of *scandit* should not be regarded as a sign of humanistic influence. On the contrary, it is the mark of a typically medieval classical education, and a no less typically medieval tendency to recycle classical verses for use in Christian texts.

¹⁰ The use of the same word *pandit* twice as a rhyme only four verses apart is rather unsophisticated, whether in humanistic or medieval poetic usage.

¹¹ The verb *contentare* does not belong to Latin vocabulary, either classical or medieval, nor can it be explained as a medieval spelling of another word. Most likely it is a rather crude early-15th century English vulgarism, calquing both form and lexicon on the English ‘you are contented’, meaning ‘you are appeased’. Indeed one of the very few other places where such a word is attested is in the *Vita et gesti Henrici V*, an account of the life of the English king Henry V written in the 1430s, formerly attributed to Thomas Elmham, now to an anonymous author now usually referred to as ‘Pseudo-Elmham’: “Guerrarum stipendiis pro futuro anni dimidio persolutis, vel saltem viris stipendiariis *contentatis*...” The congruence of both time and place with Dunstaple’s life is striking and supports the idea of an English vulgarism.

¹² This is the first instance in this motet of Latin syntax possibly suggesting classical rather than medieval usage. The classical construction *dicere + infinitive + accusative* does occasionally occur in late medieval Latin, but much less frequently than *dicere quod/quia*, which is typical of the the Greek-influenced Latin in the Vulgata. Particularly noticeable here is the ellipsis by which both *te* and *esse* are omitted (*te dicit parituram esse*). The omission of *esse* would normally indicate a more sophisticated Latin style concerned with concision, but the omission of *te* is rather unusual. The combination of both may in the end be more symptomatic of the medieval concern with fitting the rhyme rather than of humanistic influence.

¹³ Another English vulgarism: classical Latin would expect the exclamative *quam* ‘how...!’ as distinct from the interrogative *quomodo* ‘how?’ but English knows no such distinction, and here the interrogative appears to be used with the meaning of an exclamative, following English usage.

¹⁴ This use of *fietque* is quite problematic. Though it literally means ‘and it will become’ nothing in the syntax of the sentence suggests what the subject of that verb could be, and how *fiet* could be meaningfully joined to the first verb *miraris* by the conjunction *-que*. Latin syntax, whether in medieval or classical usage, does not permit *curam* to be construed as the subject here, and the verb *fiet* has no attested usage with an accusative object in either classical or medieval Latin. A possible reading of *fiet que* (in classical spelling *quae*) as two words does not yield any better solutions. Therefore the meaning must be supplied by a *constructio ad sensum*, i.e. in light of the context and somewhat independently of the syntax. The best solution may be to imply an elliptical interrogative *quid*, leading to the reading ‘what will become’ or ‘what will happen’.

nescisse virum¹⁵, flaris,¹⁶
sed semper esse puram
credo¹⁷, quod miraris,
mutasse naturam.^{18 19}

Angelus: concipies
de superis celestem
Deum et tu paries
filium terrestrem.
In te non est caries,
natum habes testem.
Leviatan insanies,
hic fert tibi pestem.²⁰

I believe you have never known a man
– you received the breath – but that you have
always been pure, since you are yourself
surprised that nature has changed its ways.

The Angel said: from above you will conceive
the heavenly God,
and give birth
to an earthly Son.
In you there is nothing unwholesome,
as your son bears witness.
You will enrage, O Leviathan,
for this brings your ruin!

¹⁵ The most ambitious part of the motet text, and the one where the style of the Latin text is most closely related to the style of the musical material. *Nescisse virum* should probably be read together with *esse puram* and *mutasse naturam* as infinitive complements of the verb *credo*. This is the first occurrence in the motet of a larger, multi-verse construction built on a typically classical Latin construction (see note 12 above). The musical setting of this part of the text suggests that the large-scale syntactic construction is a deliberate element of composition. Indeed, in the music for this entire stanza (from *nondum* to *naturam*) the harmony remains stably centered around G, whereas in earlier sections of the piece it frequently shifts between G, F, and occasionally D. The stanza is also set apart by its use of duple meter and longer average note values than either the preceding or the following section. Acoustically, this section sounds noticeably more static and slow-moving than the rest of the motet, so that the larger architecture of the music exactly matches the larger architecture of the Latin text.

¹⁶ A rather cryptic use of the passive form of *flare* ‘to blow’, probably to indicate ‘receiving the breath’.

¹⁷ The sudden and temporary shift to the first person affords the reader/singer a surprise appearance, and momentarily changes the nature of the text from a hymn of praise to the Virgin to a profession of faith of sorts. From the standpoint of rhetorical composition it is rather sloppy.

¹⁸ At the closing of this ambitiously constructed stanza, the music once more closely matches the text, suggesting again that the correspondence is deliberate. The melodic line on *mutasse naturam* ‘that nature has changed’ illustrates the text, since the word *mutasse* is sung on the natural hexachord, but *naturam* on the soft hexachord – perhaps suggesting that nature has changed its ways through the Annunciation and become softer, like the hexachord. There are limits to this interpretation, however, since the melody noticeably does not involve a *mutatio* from one hexachord to the other despite the word *mutasse*. Rather the natural and the soft melodies are separated by rests that obviate the need for *mutatio* in the solmization. The change of hexachord could therefore also be a matter of coincidence. Arguably less coincidental is the return to triple meter immediately after the description of change by the word *mutasse*. Interestingly, the word *natura* is used in this motet exactly at the point where each mensural change is introduced: the first time in the second voice (bar 76 in the Bukofzer/Bent edition) just before the shift from triple to duple time, and the second time here in the first voice just before the return to triple time (bar 112).

¹⁹ The sentence construction, or rather the lack of construction, means *mutasse naturam* could equally convincingly be construed with *credo* in a running *asyndeton* between infinitive clauses (‘I believe nature has changed its ways’), or with *miraris* (‘you are surprised that nature has changed its ways’).

²⁰ After the painstakingly constructed previous stanza (until *naturam*), with its ambitions of a larger-scale architecture, this ending is striking for its rhetorical inconsistency: the addressee changes abruptly from the Virgin to the Devil (*Leviatan*) in a rather awkward *apostrophe*.

Motetus

Gaude virgo singularis
mater nobis salvatoris,
radix vite popularis,
germen novi floris.
Ex te sumpsit hinc tu paris²¹
ampullam liquoris
que²² virtute²³ aquas maris
tenes stilla roris.

Dic, quo verbo concepisti,
angeli vultui
'Dominus tecum' audisti
dicens 'fui tui'.²⁴

Rejoice, extraordinary virgin,
mother of our Savior
root of the common man's life,
bud of a new flower.
Out of you He took – and indeed you gave birth to –
a vessel full of a liquor,
by virtue of which you keep the waters of the sea
like a drop of dew.

Say, by what word did you conceive,
saying to the angel's face
"I've been yours"
as you heard "the Lord is upon you"?

²¹ Another ambitious multi-verse construction. The most meaningful reading of this verse produces a daring *asyndeton*, i.e. a lack of conjunction between coordinate clauses, which in this case do not even have the same subject. This reading takes *ampullam* 'a vessel' as the object of both the verb *sumpsit* 'he took' and the verb *paris* 'you give birth to', so as to suggest that Christ is both the maker of the Virgin, as God, and her offspring, as the incarnated Jesus. Thus 'the Savior took a vessel out of you' but also 'you gave birth to this same vessel'. This reading is made more likely by the use of the word *heres* in the last stanza of this poem (see note 28 below). From the point of view of poetic composition the result is certainly acrobatic, but not particularly elegant. The complexity of the syntax suggests a deliberate attempt at a larger architecture in the Latin text, a stylistic trait more readily humanistic than medieval. However the adherence to a strict rhyming pattern – a hallmark of medieval poetry abandoned by the Humanists – frustrates this goal. The result is a hybrid and often cryptic style in constant stylistic tension between the medieval ideal of rhyme and the pre-humanistic ideal of larger architecture, and where clarity of syntax is often sacrificed to rhyme.

²² Read *qua* to match the ablative of *virtute*. No reading of *que* can produce a grammatical sentence.

²³ *Qua virtute* is probably an English vulgarism, calqued on the expression 'by virtue of which'.

²⁴ *Fui tui* is problematic. There is a distinct possibility that a tasteless joke is meant here, especially if this text is the work of a student, as the introduction proposes. Indeed *futui* is an obscene word for 'I had sex'. As distasteful and out of place as the joke may seem in a Marian motet, we cannot escape the fact that any student in the 15th century would have immediately heard the pun *futui* behind the words *fui tui*, especially in the context of a poem about conception. So we must at least take into consideration whether the pun was deliberate or accidental. For one thing, *fui tui* is not the standard way of saying 'I was yours'. The most obvious choice would be *tua fui* or *fui tua*, with the possessive *tua* in the nominative, instead of the more unusual *tui* as the genitive of the personal pronoun *tu*. Clearly *tua fui* could have been used in this text with exactly the same meaning, and without changing either the rhyme or the syllable count. Since the unusual construction *fui tui* was deliberate preferred, the choice may have been motivated by the resulting pun. The narrative context here is also incriminating. At this juncture the hypothetical speaker of the text, who has been addressing the Virgin Mary in the second person, asks her 'what did you say as you were conceiving?' The obscene answer "*futui*" to such a question would be perfectly meaningful, and produces an obscene pun without any need to contrive the story or the grammar. The words *fui tui* do appear, certainly with no pun, in the text of Psalm 62, "Si memor *fui tui* super stratum meum, in matutinis meditabor in te", which form part of the Lauds of the Dead and the Annunciation, so the use of *fui tui* in this motet cannot be assumed to be a reference to Psalm 62. It is quite possible that the weekly uttering of the words *fui tui* in the Sunday liturgy was a regular laughing matter among choir boys, and that their occurrence in this text refers to this joke. Undoubtedly, the idea of an obscene joke within a Marian motet shocks us, perhaps to the point of dismissing it out of hand as an obvious impossibility – our choice to deny it scholarly consideration conclusively justified by a shrug. But the object here is not to flatter our modern sense of propriety, nor our modern projection of what propriety would have been in early 15th century England, but to puzzle out what rhetorical effect the text would have had on John Dunstaple's contemporaries. The craft of rhetoric, aside from its loftier uses, does extend to the art of making English choir boys giggle by introducing obscene jokes at inappropriate moments in religious music. Since evidence points to a reasonable likelihood that this text does contain such a dirty pun, this commentary at least leaves it up to the modern reader whether it should be ignored, frowned upon, or giggled at.

Presentem²⁵ conclusisti
tunc naturam sui,
messiam invenisti
de natura tui.²⁶

You absorbed his [divine] nature
as it was present,
and discovered a Messiah
of your own [human] nature.

O celestis armonia,
in hac junctioe
caro nostre cum sophia
in unum persone,²⁷
Qualiter, ex qua via²⁸
studeas colone!²⁹
Hec sola mater novit pia
et tu Jesu bone.

O celestial harmony,
in this union
the flesh and the mind of our
character were made into one.
How, in what way
you take care of a simple woman!
Only your loving mother knows this,
and you, dear Jesus.

Mater heres³⁰ Dei
mundi redemptoris,
pia tu memento mei
in extremis horis,

O mother, child of God
the world's redeemer,
remember me, devoted one,
in the last hours,

²⁵ Yet another ambitious larger-scale construction over several verses. The use of the present participle *presentem* follows classical usage. This, in addition to the separation of *naturam* from *presentem* in an elegant *hyperbaton*, and the *antistrophe* created by the quasi-repetition of *naturam sui* / *natura tui* at the end of each clause, decidedly suggests humanistic influences and an attempt at drawing on classical rhetorical figures.

²⁶ The word *natura* as used here is a technical term in theology. It refers to the so-called 'hypostatic union' of the two natures of Christ as divine and human, as promulgated at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. For this reason the words 'divine' and 'human' can safely be supplied in the translation although they do not appear in the Latin text.

²⁷ The separation of *nostre* and *persone* is another elegant *hyperbaton*, far more common in classical usage than in medieval poetry. The syntax is to be understood as if the sentence read: *caro cum sophia nostre persone in unum*. The words *in unum persone* most definitely cannot be read as 'in one person', as this would require an unjustifiable case mismatch.

²⁸ *Qualiter* and *ex qua via* have the same function: to introduce an exclamation, reinforced by the doubling of the introductory term. Though this *anaphora* is obviously used as deliberate rhetorical figure, its success as an element of Latin composition is tempered by the fact that classical syntax does not permit either *qualiter* or *ex qua via* to introduce an exclamation (the word *quam* would normally be preferred). The result, as often in this motet, is a hybrid style marked equally by its ambition to imitate classical rhetorical models as by its incomplete technical inability to do so.

²⁹ Surprising word choice: *colona* is a typically Roman word for a country-woman, unexpected in medieval poetry, and even more so in a Christian sense to refer to the Virgin Mary.

³⁰ The use of the word *heres* 'heir' demands an explanation. For the second time in this poem (see note 21 above) the author refers to the idea that Christ is Mary's creator as well as her offspring, this time expressing it in the form of an explicit paradox ('Mother, child of God') strongly reminiscent of an identical figure in Dante's *Divina Commedia*: "Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio" (Paradiso, Canto 33). It is quite plausible that the author was familiar with Dante's work, although the figure of Mary being the daughter of her own son is by no means restricted to Dante. Independently of the deliberate paradox, the choice of the word *heres* is unexpected for its register. It is a technical legal term used to describe someone in a position to inherit from another, and occasionally by extension someone who succeeds another in a duty or office. In either case it is not an obvious semantic choice to describe the relationship between Jesus and Mary. The choice can of course be explained by the need to find a two-syllable equivalent of *filia* to fit in the verse, but the unexpected resort to legal terminology in this and other cases may suggest that the author had a legal background. (See also *reatus* at note 4, *reus* at note 31, *penalis* at note 36).

ne coartent mei rei,
secum suis horis³¹
et presentas faciei mei³²
plasmatoris.³³

so that my enemies do not constrain me
into their midst at their time,
and present me to the face
of my creator.

Contratenor

Virgo mater comprobaris
matrem partus indicat
claustrum ventris virginialis
intactam te iudicat.

O virgin mother, you are proved right:
the birth shows that you are a mother
but the unbroken lock of your virgin womb
proves that you are untouched.

Virginem cum divinalis
natus ille benedicat
celum, tellus, unda maris³⁴
laudes tuas predicat.

While that divine child
blesses the virgin,
heaven, earth and sea
Proclaim your praises.

³¹ The style of this section is quite heterogeneous. The word *rei* (singular *reus*) refers originally to opposing parties in a lawsuit in Roman law, then only to the party accused of wrongdoing, and by extension in later Latin to one presumed of being a criminal, or occasionally a debtor. The only meaningful interpretation of *rei* here is the one of an opposing party, but this choice is problematic. First it relies on an exclusively classical meaning of *reus*, which falls out of use even in late Antiquity, and would therefore probably only occur to the author if he had studied Roman law. This is by no means unlikely, since the study of Roman law was quite idespread in the 15th century – though much less so in England than on the continent because of England’s strong indigenous common law tradition. But even if *reus* is accepted in its Roman sense, the word still has to be understood metaphorically as ‘enemy, accuser’ in the context of Judgment Day. However this poetic usage is not attested elsewhere, unsurprisingly since *reus* always tends to mean ‘defendent’ rather than ‘accuser’. Thus it seems likely that the author’s word choice in this case was largely motivated by questions of rhyme and assonance, and apparently at the expense of semantics. It is also surprising to find *rei* paired with the verb *coartent*. In classical usage *coartare* only describes a physical action: ‘condensing, pressing, blocking’. It does not acquire the moral sense of ‘constraining, compelling’ before its appearance in Christian documents (e.g. the 4th century Vulgata and the 5th century Codex Theodosianus), after which it becomes established in medieval usage. Thus in effect the poetry here jumps back and forth between different usages and registers, Roman law here, late Christian Latin there, giving the language a rather unsettled and cryptic style. This is reinforced by the obscure verse *secum suis horis*. *Secum* “with him/them” can probably only refer to *rei*, but it is an abnormal construction with *coartent*, lending the sentence a further aura of confusion and grammatical discontinuity. The expression *suis horis* ‘at their time’ is doubly surprising. Semantically it is unclear what role that complement plays in the sentence and what it refers to. Poetically it repeats the rhyme in *horis* found just two verses earlier, a rather unsophisticated poetic choice, including in late medieval usage.

³² This figure, if it is intentional, is quite elegant: *faciei* is in the dative, *mei* is in the genitive (with *plasmatoris*), but both appear to have the same ending in *-ei*, giving rise to a word play based on apparent grammatical ambiguity, a favorite in the classically-inspired style of the Humanists.

³³ The word *plasmator* ‘creator’, in which a Latin ending has been tacked on to the end of a Greek root, is one of the most common hallmarks of Christian Latin usage in the Middle Ages. It first appears under Tertullian’s pen (*Adversus Iudaeos*, 2) but probably owes its popularity in musical texts to its use in a hymn by pope Gregory the Great (*Plasmator hominis, deus*). Its use gradually wanes with the rise of humanist Latin, where the more strictly Latin *creator* is preferred, though it is still found in musical texts at the end of the 15th century, e.g. in the troped Kyrie of Johannes Tinctoris’ *Missa L’Homme Armé*.

³⁴ Although *celum, tellus, unda maris* looks like an elegant *asyndeton* in which conjunctions are omitted for rhetorical effect, it is likely that the omission of the conjunction is attributable instead to the constraints of rhyme and syllable count. The absence of *climax* in the list suggests more probably that this is a simple enumeration of items on a similar level of grammatical and rhetorical importance, a typical stylistic figure of medieval texts.

Non est partus hic penalis³⁵
qui matrem letificat.
Christus factus fraternalis
sicut exemplificat.³⁶

This is no shameful child
who gladdens his mother
Christ was made as a brother,
as he demonstrates.

Tenor

Ave gemma celi luminarium
Ave Sancti Spiritus sacrarium

Hail, jewel, luminary of heaven.
Hail, shrine of the Holy Spirit.

(repeated three times)

³⁵ Like *reatus* (see note 4 above) and *rei* (see note 31 above), *penalis* is strictly a legal technical term in classical Latin, with the meaning ‘penal, pertaining to criminals’ (classical spelling *poenalis*). In Christian authors the sense is extended to ‘painful, shameful’. Its use here points to the medieval tradition, but also to the author’s predilection for legal terminology.

³⁶ As in the triplum text, this ending is striking for its rhetorical inconsistency with what precedes it (see note 20 above). While the whole text is in the second person, addressing the Virgin Mary, this last sentence changes both topic and grammatical construction: it is in the third person, and it describes Christ rather than the Virgin. It is unlikely that this is done as a parallel to the ending of the triplum, as the figures are different. The triplum ends in an *apostrophe*, remaining in the second person, but changing the addressee from the Virgin to the Devil, while the contratenor ends in what could best be described as an abrupt *paraprosdokian*, changing both the grammatical person and the topic.

II. Preco preminencie

(Bukofzer/Bent: No. 29)

text sources: ModB ff.127v-129r; Tr92 ff.184v-186; Canterbury 128 f.6

Triplum³⁷

Preco preminencie^{38 39}
principi precessit,⁴⁰
salus sapiencie
subito successit.⁴¹

The herald preceded
the prince of excellence,
salvation immediately
replaced wisdom.

³⁷ The topic of this motet is John the Baptist. The text of the triplum follows the Gospel of Matthew quite closely.

³⁸ The Modena B manuscript features the spelling *prehemincie*, which has been retained in the Bukofzer/Bent edition, and as a result has now become the generally accepted modern name of this piece. The Modena B spelling with an *h* is typical of late medieval hypercorrective spelling, where complex or unusual words can appear with added silent letters, or substituted letters pronounced the same way (e.g. *y* in place of *i*, final *d* in place of *t*) in an attempt to reflect an etymology assumed – or invented – by the medieval author. In this case, there is no doubt that the *h* is meant to be silent and should not be sung. The text preserved in the Trent 92 manuscript in fact has *preminencie* in place of *prehemincie*. While the Modena B version is closer to the standard 15th century Latin form *preeminencie* (classical spelling *praeeminentiae*), it does give the opening verse eight syllables, while all other stanza-initial verses in this poem have seven syllables, not eight. The version in Trent 92, *preminencie*, on the other hand, may be further away from correct Latin, but at seven syllables it appears to be a better fit metric for this poem. A possible explanation for this is that the hypothetical original English source indeed featured a seven-syllable opening verse with *preminencie*, which the Modena B scribe recognized as a Latin mistake and corrected into *prehemincie*, to the detriment of the verse, whereas the Trent 92 scribe was not bothered by the mistake and copied what he saw. The triplum text is unfortunately not preserved in the Canterbury fragment. The question remains whether the opening verse should in fact be read with seven syllables to match all the other stanza-initial verses in the poem, or whether the author was content to begin his poem with an irregular verse. Bent rightly points out that in Dunstaple’s isorhythmic motets “the sense of poetic metre is totally lost. In terms of the musical use to which the metre is put, the texts might as well be prose.” (*Dunstaple*, p. 68). This observation could however be used to argue the point either way: if the poetic meter makes no difference to the music, then there is no problem in finding an irregular verse with an extra syllable, since this does not disturb the music. Or conversely: if the poetry is totally independent from the music, then poetry and music should be regarded as two parallel compositions, and musical considerations need not come into play in determining the best reading of the poetic text. This edition prefers to draw its conclusions on the basis of the internal structure of the poetry. Not another single instance can be found of metric or rhyming irregularity in the poetry. On the contrary this commentary details numerous examples where the poet prefers to twist Latin syntax to a breaking point, and to rely on the most tenuous of semantics, rather than to introduce any irregularity in the meter or the rhyme. From this we conclude that the original opening verse of this read *Preco preminencie*, with seven syllables, and that the standard modern name of this piece should be amended to reflect this.

³⁹ The genre of alliterative poetry is typically medieval, and also typically English. While alliteration was occasionally used in classical and early medieval Latin poetry, it was an unusual figure, and its proliferation as in this motet would have been considered heavy-handed and inelegant by classical standards. By contrast, alliteration is a hallmark of Latin poetry in early medieval Ireland, as well as of early poetry in the Germanic languages (such as Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse), both sources being important influences on medieval English poetic style. In the course of the 15th century, new humanistic conceptions of Latin style would have once again rejected constant alliteration as old-fashioned and awkward. Thus in this motet, the combined use of universal alliteration *and* rhyme places the poetic style unmistakably in the later Middle Ages, and unmistakably in England. At the same time, the concurrent presence of classical elements of style, as the following notes explain, makes the triplum text a fascinating witness to the stylistic tension between a mature medieval model and an increasingly attractive humanistic model: superficially the poem appears clearly medieval, but many details of its composition betray a strong humanistic influence.

⁴⁰ *Preminencie* and *sapiencie* are remarkable for their repeated use of the dative, both times with verbs (*precessit*, *successit*) that normally require the accusative. Even more remarkable is that the use of the prescribed accusative would have still allowed the verses to rhyme (*preminenciam*, *sapienciam*). The only possible explanation is that the rhyme in *-am* was avoided because it is used in the following stanza (*penitentiam*, *potenciam*). This in turn shows a keen attention to rhyme patterns on the part of the author, and confirms his preference for bending syntax over bending rhyme.

⁴¹ *Subito* ‘immediately’, is possibly a reference to the fact that Jesus immediately came out of the water when he was baptized, since he had no sins to wash. Matthew 3:16: “Baptizatus autem Iesus, confestim ascendit de aqua”.

Preco penitentiam
prius predicavit,⁴²
princeps per potenciam⁴³
peccata purgavit.

The herald was the first one
to preach penitence,
the prince, through his power,
purified the sins.

Legislator latuit
languidis largitus,⁴⁴
precursor patuit
prudens et peritus.

The one who gave the law
went unnoticed in his generosity to the weak,
but the forerunner appeared,
skilled and wise.

Limpha⁴⁵ lavit liquida
lubricam luentem,
turba tinctam turbida
timet et tergentem.⁴⁶

With flowing water he washed
the slimy crowd, who atoned,
but the confused crowd was afraid
of the soaking, cleansing water.

Missus ministerium
magni mandatoris⁴⁷
mutat in misterium⁴⁸
modi melioris.⁴⁹

The one who was sent
turns being in the service of the Great Sender
into the secret
to the best way of life.

Pax paterna panditur
plebi penitenti,
filius dum funditur
flumine fluenti.

The father's peace is extended
to the atoning crowd
as the son is washed
by the flowing river.

Descendit divinitus
donum deitatis
particeps paraclitus
princeps⁵⁰ pietatis.

The gift of deity
descends from heaven
with the help of the Holy Ghost,
prince of piety.

⁴² A reference to Matthew 3:1-2: "In diebus autem illis venit Ioannes Baptista praedicans in deserto Iudaeae, et dicens 'poenitentiam agite'."

⁴³ The construction *per* + accusative to express a complement of manner ('by/through his power') points to medieval usage, though here it can also be explained by a concern for syllable count. As an element of medieval usage, it is characteristic of the influence of the vulgar languages on Latin syntax: English or French would use a preposition to express manner where classical Latin usage would require the ablative case alone (*potencia*).

⁴⁴ The construction *latuit languidis largitus*, where the *largitus* is an attribute of the subject of *latuit*, but is itself further qualified by the dative *languidis*, is unusual in Latin. It would however be expected in Greek, especially with the verb *latuit* (Greek *elathon* + nominative participle). If Greek syntax is the intended model here – and the sophistication of the rest of the poem supports the notion that the author could resort to such refined mannerism – then the meaning could then be read as 'it was unknown that the one who gave the law was generous to the weak'.

⁴⁵ The poetic grecism *limpha* (for *aqua*) is a rather classical choice, found e.g. in Virgil.

⁴⁶ An elegant use of *synchysis* (interlocking word order) in the case syntax: *turba* goes with *turbida*, *tinctam* goes with *tergentem*. This figure is characteristic of classical usage, being far less common in medieval Latin usage.

⁴⁷ 'The Great Sender' is a rather unusual metaphor for God.

⁴⁸ Following the word *mutat* 'changes', the *tempus* indeed changes from triple to duple. This is quite unlikely to be a coincidence.

⁴⁹ The choice of the words *modi melioris* is probably not a coincidence either: from the time that the word *modi* is sung, the *modus* of the tenor voice changes from *perfectus* to *imperfectus*.

⁵⁰ *Particeps* – *princeps*: a rare and rich internal rhyme.

Singulare sequitur
signum sanctitatis
tribus⁵¹ hiis tribuitur⁵²
tronus trinitatis.

Then follows an extraordinary
sign of holiness.
To these three is awarded
the throne of Trinity.

Cesset⁵³ circumfusio⁵⁴
cella celsitatis^{55 56}

Let the crowding of the mob stop
by [retreating to] a sanctuary of height,

⁵¹ Just after the word *tribus* ('to the three'), the *tempus* returns from duple to triple, and the *modus* of the tenor voice returns to triple as well. This is unlikely to be a coincidence.

⁵² *tribus* 'to the three' – *tribuitur* 'is awarded': a playful and elegant example of the rhetorical figure *paronomasia* (similar-sounding words, but not etymologically related).

⁵³ In both the triplum and the motetus, it is noteworthy that the alliterations with the letter *c* use it either exclusively as a soft *c* followed by the vowels *e*, *i*, or exclusively as a hard *c* followed by *a*, *o*, *u*, indicating that the author certainly pronounced the letter *c* differently in each case, and that *cesset* would not have been an alliteration with e.g. *carceris*.

⁵⁴ This use of the word *circumfusio* is obscure and rather erudite. Though the literal sense of the word is 'pouring around of a liquid', both St. Ambrose (in *De Iacob et vita beata* 1.1.3, and his *Letters* 20.8) and Pope Gregory the Great (in *Moralia* 10) use it in the metaphorical sense of 'crowding around of people', but this use is exceedingly rare and hardly attested anywhere else. The context confirms that this metaphorical reading is appropriate here, since it probably refers to the mobbing crowds following Jesus in Matthew 4:25 and 5:1. The author must have been quite familiar with the writings of either St. Ambrose or Pope Gregory, or both, since it is unlikely he would have coincidentally devised exactly the same metaphor with such an obscure word as *circumfusio*. This, in turn, suggests that he must have had considerable patristic erudition, in addition to the knowledge of classical literature he displays elsewhere. It is quite striking that the variant of this text found in MS Trent 92 has *circumcisio* instead of *circumfusio*. *Circumcisio* is certainly a scribal error, since the topic of circumcision never comes up in the story of John the Baptist, or anywhere in Matthew 3-6. Indeed the rhetorical construction of the texts in this motet is quite careful, and follows the Gospel of Matthew closely. It is therefore rather unlikely that the author would have carelessly introduced a topic from the writings of Paul into a text that parallels a Gospel story. From the point of view of rhetorical authority, there is a sharp hierarchical distinction between the status of Paul's writings and that of the Gospels, and that distinction would have been even more obvious to a 15th century author. The discrepancy between the manuscript sources then comes down to a scribal difference: the scribe of Modena B was perhaps more educated and recognized the word *circumfusio*, or at the very least he was more careful in copying his model. The scribe of Trent 92, by contrast, was either less educated or sloppy here.

⁵⁵ This 'sanctuary of height' is probably a reference to Jesus retreating to the mountains to escape the mobs following him in Matthew 5:1: "Videns autem Iesus turbas, ascendit in montem". This interpretation is consistent with the mention of 'mobbing crowds' in the previous verse. The translation is reached by taking *cella* as an ablative and regarding it as the means by which the mobbing stops. The verb [retreating], which is not in the original, is supplied for clarity.

⁵⁶ *Celsitas* is a very rare word for 'height, loftiness' (even Du Cange's monumental *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis* does not reference it – the usual Latin word being *celsitudo*). It is in fact found once in the letters of St. Cyprian (39.4) and once in St. Hilary of Poitiers' discussion of Psalm 148 in his *Tractatus super psalmos* and hardly anywhere else. Thus, like the word *circumfusio* in its metaphorical sense, the word *celsitas* is found primarily in commentary on Scripture by the Church Fathers. This common source is unlikely to be a coincidence. Rather, the use of *circumfusio* and *celsitas* in the same sentence suggests that the author was well versed in patristic literature, which in turn may suggest that he was a priest, or a layman with advanced training in theology. Remarkably, the variant of this text found in MS Trent 92 misreads *celsitatis* 'of height' – just as it does with *circumfusio* – replacing it with *cecitatis* 'of blindness', which is not meaningful in this context. Since the same type of substitution is now attested twice in the same verse and by the same scribe, it is safe to assume that the scribe of Trent 92 did not know the words *circumfusio* and *celsitas*. Indeed the average literate man of the early 15th century, though fluent in Latin, would probably not have known these words unless he was a theologian or was particularly well acquainted with the writings of the Church Fathers. The scribe of Modena B, on the other hand, was either more educated or more careful. These lexical considerations alone support the inference – independently of any codicological observations – that the Trent 92 manuscript cannot have been the model for Modena B manuscript, since it is not possible for a scribe to have consistently replaced meaningless words with ones that fit better with the story in the Gospel of Matthew, have the same number of syllables and sound similar, and are coincidentally all drawn from the same body of patristic literature. The opposite, on the other hand, remains logically possible: Modena B can be a model for Trent 92, though nothing here suggests that it is.

renovat renacio⁵⁷
requiem renatis.

for rebirth renews
the peace of those who are reborn.

Premebatur patria
primitus penalis
renatosne regia
recipit regalis.

The sinner was originally oppressed
by his own nation.
Did the royal court
receive those who are reborn?

Motetus

Precursor premittitur⁵⁸
populum parare,
nebulosis nititur
nova nunciare.⁵⁹

The forerunner is sent in advance
in order to prepare the people,
he tries to announce the news
by speaking in riddles.

Duritatem^{60 61} domuit
deserti decenter,
predicando profuit
pluribus prudenter.

He fittingly overcame
the harshness of the desert,
and wisely preaching
he served many.

⁵⁷ The rhyme *circumfusio* – *renacio* is an interesting one. It confirms that *-io* is meant as two syllables, since every rhyme in this poem is dissyllabic. It does not, however, suggest that the author may have pronounced *-sio* and *-cio* the same way. Indeed other rhymes in this poem show that the preceding consonant is never taken into consideration for rhyming purposes when the rhyme ends in two adjacent vowels, i.e. when the last two vowels of the verse are not separated by a consonant. Thus *patria* rhymes with *regia* – though *r* clearly was not pronounced like *g* – and similarly *domuit* with *profuit*, *custodia* with *talia*, and *convivio* with *salario*.

⁵⁸ The Canterbury fragment spells *premittitur* with two *t*'s, as Latin etymology in fact requires. This spelling is preferred over *premititur*, which appears in Modena B and therefore in the Bukofzer/Bent edition.

⁵⁹ The choice of the infinitives *parare* 'to prepare' and *nunciare* 'to announce' in a clause expressing purpose ('...sent in order to prepare') is noteworthy. Classical usage would usually eschew the infinitive and prescribe a gerundive construction: *ad populum parandum*, *ad nova nuncianda*, and even late medieval usage would tend to prefer a gerundive to an infinitive. The syntax used here is a grecism, calquing a Greek construction in which a simple infinitive can be used to express purpose. This construction can be found as a hellenizing mannerism in early classical Latin poetry and theatre, for example in Plautus. However it is unlikely that that early repertoire is this author's source of inspiration since it does not enjoy broad currency as a literary model in the late Middle Ages, unlike later authors e.g. Horace, Ovid or Virgil. The same Greek-inspired infinitive construction can be found again in much later Latin, namely in the Vulgata (e.g. Luke 23:26: "imposuerunt illi crucem portare"), though not as a mannerism, but as St. Jerome's way to translate the Greek original while keeping the original syntax. It is more likely that the Vulgata is the model in this case, pointing to more medieval than classical stylistic influences.

⁶⁰ These verses refer to Matthew 3:1-4, in which John the Baptist is described as dwelling in the desert before his calling to begin preaching. The Gospel emphasizes, through a description of his clothing, that he had adapted to harsh life in the desert.

⁶¹ At this point the Modena B manuscript reads *deitatem* instead of *duritatem*. This reading, though erroneous, has been taken up in the Bukofzer/Bent edition. The correct reading, *duritatem*, is supplied by the Canterbury 128 fragment. The superiority of the *duritatem* reading is easy to ascertain: 'overcoming the harshness of the desert' is meaningful in the context of John the Baptist's early life, whereas 'taming the deity of the desert' is far-fetched. Interestingly, the Trent 92 manuscript has no text at all between *nunciare* and *deserti*. The notes on which *duritatem domuit* should be sung are supplied without any text underlay, and the manuscript shows no trace of erasure in that area. One possible explanation – but this is a conjecture – is that both Trent 92 and Modena B were copied from a source in which that part of the text was corrupted or illegible. The Modena B scribe may have attempted to supply adequate text for the missing part (no doubt aided in his task by the regular alliteration and meter) whereas the scribe of Trent 92 may have preferred to make no assumptions and leave the problematic section blank.

Carceris custodia
captus coartatur,
timens tantis talia
tyrannus turbatur.^{62 63}

While captive, he is subjected
to the confinement of jail.
Fearing things of this sort,
the tyrant is disturbed by such great events.

Crudeli convivio⁶⁴
caros⁶⁵ convocavit
saltantem⁶⁶ salario
sacro saciavit.

He invited his loved ones
to a cruel feast
and rewarded the dancer
with the holy prize.

Pars prima precinditur
proceris proceri,⁶⁷
miserando mittitur
merces mulieri.⁶⁸

The head of the tall master
was cut off,
deplorably, and the reward
was sent to the woman.

⁶² Another stylish figure of *synchysis* (interlocking word order, see note 46 above): *timens* goes with *talia* ('fearing... such things') and *tantis* goes with *turbatur* ('by such great events... he is disturbed'). The use of this figure is more indicative of classical than of medieval usage, although here it is an elegant solution to the strictness of the alliterative form, itself a medieval paradigm.

⁶³ These verses refer to John the Baptist's imprisonment in Matthew 14:3 "Herodes enim tenuit Ioannem, et alligavit eum" and to Herod's fear that John the Baptist fame as a prophet may start an uprising, as reported in Matthew 14:5: "timuit populum, quia sicut prophetam eum habebant".

⁶⁴ The subject here is Herod, and the dancer in question is his step-daughter, daughter of his concubine Herodias. These verses refer to a feast organized for Herod's birthday, on which occasion his step-daughter danced for him and pleased him greatly. Matthew 14:6: "Die autem natalis Herodis saltavit filia Herodiadis in medio, et placuit Herodi". To reward the dancer, Herod promised her anything she desired. The 'holy prize' in these verses refer to John the Baptist's head, which is what the dancer requested. Matthew 14:8: "Da mihi, inquit, hic in disco caput Ioannis Baptistae".

⁶⁵ Trent 92, Modena B and Canterbury 128 all read *caro* in this place – and consequently also the Bukofzer/Bent edition. However it is hardly meaningful given the grammatical context, as *convocavit* would then find itself without an object, and the sentence could only be interpreted by means of far-fetched elliptical assumptions, taking *caro* as 'flesh' or as the dative of 'expensive', though neither idea appears in the corresponding text in the Gospel of Matthew and neither allows the sentence to appear properly constructed. The correct reading is an emendation to the accusative plural *caros* 'his loved ones', which is an exact fit for both the syntactic and narrative contexts: 'he invited his loved ones to a feast'. While *caro* can be reliably viewed as a mistake, its presence on three different manuscript sources, including an English one, raises the question of the transmission of this error. It may suggest that all three manuscripts were copied from the same source, or that two of them were copied from the third one. It also raises the question of why the scribe of Modena B did not correct this mistake, if he was so keen to correct mistakes and edit the text elsewhere (for example *preminencie* to *prehemincie*). This example, as well as the one addressed in the following note, should serve as a warning for us not regard the Modena B scribe as universally more reliable than his counterparts in other sources.

⁶⁶ Modena B reads *saltans in* 'dancing in' and this erroneous reading has been taken up in the Bukofzer/Bent edition. The correct reading *saltantem* 'the dancer' is found in both Trent 92 and Canterbury 128. Here again, the Modena B scribe is proving not to be universally reliable.

⁶⁷ An imaginative figure of *paronomasia*, with the genitive noun *proceris* 'of the master' juxtaposed to the genitive adjective *proceri* 'tall, long'. Though clever, this figure may also indicate that the author does not take syllable length into account in the composition of his verses. Indeed in classical Latin the root *procer-* as a noun ('a noble person, a master') has two short vowels, whereas in the root *procer-* as an adjective ('tall, long') both vowels are long. In classical usage, where syllable length is a paramount consideration, the *paronomasia* might not have been as successful given the obvious metrical difference between the two words. Its effectiveness as a rhetorical gesture here presupposes that quantity is ignored.

⁶⁸ The woman in question is Herodias, the dancer's mother, who had incited her daughter to request John the Baptist's head as a prize, and to whom she carries it on a platter. Matthew 14:11: "Et allatum est caput eius in disco, et datum est puellae, et attuli matri suae".

Prestent per presidium⁶⁹
preces precursoris
sequentis subsidium
sancti salvatoris.

May the prayers of the precursor
and the aid of his successor
the Holy Savior
ensure our protection.

Tenor

Inter natos mulierum
non surrexit major Johanne Baptista⁷⁰

Among those born of women
non greater one has arisen than John the Baptist

⁶⁹ The use of the preposition *per* + accusative is redundant here. Classical usage would use the accusative alone: *prestent presidium* 'may they ensure protection'. The construction with *per* is not particularly typical of medieval usage either, and thus is probably dictated only by a concern for syllable length.

⁷⁰ A quote from Matthew 11:11.