Interactivity and Allegory in Polytextual Motets in the Thirteenth Century

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Many studies have been dedicated to the use of allegory in medieval and Renaissance religious art, particularly when sacred images are interwoven with secular, even mundane, ones. What began as the addition of *clausulae* and tropes to the melismatic portions of monophonic Alleluia became a common method of exegesis toward the Renaissance.[1] Following this method, most scholars approach motets through a model that separates the roles of author and receiver. This minimizes to a great extent the participation of the latter in the process of communication. In this paper I propose another perspective for the interpretation of the transmission of thirteenth-century polytextual motets. This perspective considers the receiver as an active participant in the process of reception/perception. Through the application of the concept of interactivity, I suggest that the authors of the motets did not intend their works to convey final messages, but rather to be open works of art designed to be perceived through several layers of meaning, and to be created by and for participation. My interpretation assumes the presence of a general frame of reference which both authors and audiences shared during the Renaissance, especially in liturgical contexts, as well as the presence of a disposition continuously to explore the mysteries of faith, expressed symbolically in the liturgy.

From the beginning of Christian liturgy, music has played a substantial role in it. It has served a number of purposes, for example as a mnemonic device, as a solemn ritual or as a platform for interpreting and commenting on the written Word. Plainchant – which is still practised today in monastic communities – was the principal form of devotional Christian music for more than a millennium. As the name suggests, it consists of a single melodic line. This line can be associated with a number of related texts and the cyclical character of the liturgy ensured that a congregation would hear a certain melody with a certain text at least once a year.

The process of communication resulting from this confluence of melody and text can

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[1] Howard Mayer Brown, 'Emulation, Competition, and Homage: Imitation and Theories of Imitation in the Renaissance', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 35 (1982): 1–48; Christopher Reynolds, 'The Counterpoint of Allusion in Fifteenth-Century Masses', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 45 (1992): 228–260); Michael Long, 'Symbol and Ritual in Josquin's "Missa Di Dadi"', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 42 (1989): 1–22; David Rothenberg, 'Angels, Archangels, and a Woman in Distress: The Meaning of Isaac's "Angeli archangeli"', *The Journal of Musicology*, 21 (2004): 514– 578.

be considered as simple and direct, according to Charles Peirce's triadic model: a symbol (melody and text) is presented as the message and as it is perceived, it forms an interpretant [definition needed, perhaps in footnote 2] or interpretants in the mind of the faithful listener, the receiver.[2] It is clear that the clergy did not condone liberal or even individual interpretations of liturgical symbols, yet neither they nor the celebrant could avoid the fact that each listener produces interpretants which respond to his own frame of reference, his system of values, and his knowledge of the liturgy and of the fundamentals of Christian thought and belief.

If each text in the liturgy had had a unique melody, it would have been difficult to remember the immense number of tunes needed for the large number of texts. But this was not the case. Psalms were sung in formulas according to mode and feast rank, and melodies of other parts of the Mass and Office were shared by a number of different – yet related – liturgical occasions. A part of the Mass that is particularly well suited for this practice is the Alleluia. So commonplace was this method of sharing melodies that monks began to add words to the long melismatic sections of the Alleluia, so that they became unique to one or another feast. While this new text was not initially an official part of the liturgy, it was certainly appropriate and served an exegetical purpose. These *clausulae*, or added texts, evolved into the more formal Sequences, a liturgical hymn sung after the Alleluia of which the verses elaborated, or commented, on the object of a certain feast. A clear example, which survived the reforming actions of the Council of Trent and is still very popular today, is the *Stabat Mater*, the sequence for the Feast of the Seven Sorrows. Here, the author Jacopone Da Todi presents an image of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross, suffering because of the death of her son. With an apparent lack of substantial biblical text to support this feast, the sequence served as a powerful aide in the promotion of Marian devotion.

It is possible to reconstruct an experience of a member of a medieval congregation who listened to the Alleluia of a certain feast day, and developed an interpretant which involved qualities of a message different from that represented by the symbol, thus creating a separate liturgical instrument. In the aforementioned example of the feast of Seven Sorrows, a listener would not find it difficult to recall the related liturgies when similar texts were sung and the same melodies were used, for example during the feast of the Ascension. Even though there is not much evidence concerning the criteria for assigning one or another melody to a certain feast in each parish, it is certainly interesting for the modern observer to imagine how local use and the cyclical nature of the liturgy would produce a matrix of relationships

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[2] Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Writings of Charles S. Peirce*, ed. Max Fisch (Bloomington, IN, 1982).

between feasts which were biblically and dogmatically linked.

The melismas of the Alleluia also gave origin to complex works of polyphony in the Late Middle Age: the polytextual motets. To create this rather bizarre phenomenon, an existing melismatic melody was assigned a new syllabic text; then another author added a second melody with a different text and so on, until as many as four voices were added. Sometimes, the new texts were even in a different language. This leads to questions such as how listeners could discern between the different voices; how they could possibly differentiate the various texts; and whether this practice was a spiritual exercise, an artistic curiosity, or even a riddle designed solely for entertainment.

I propose that the polytextual motets were spiritual exercises and part of the liturgy; that, in fact, the listeners to these motets were not only capable of listening to all voices, but also to comprehend the texts. Within powerful frames of reference resulting from well-trained memories, the listeners of polytextual motets were able to perform *simultaneous selection* in the reception/perception of the motet.

I further propose that a synchronized participation occurred in the process of communication; that actions were exerted on the message, creating an implicit two-way relationship. This suggests an application of the concept of *interactivity* in the process of perception/interpretation of thirteenth-century motets. Yuping Liu and Shrum define interactivity as

> The degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each
> other, on the communication medium, and on the messages and the degree
> to which such influences are synchronized.

From this definition, three prerequisites can be extracted for interactivity to occur: active control, two-way communication, and synchronization.[3]

A separate aspect to consider is the differentiation between the structure and the experience of the interaction. The former refers to the opportunity that a given context offers for interaction, while the latter is the perceived sensation of each party at the moment of interchange. I will show below how each of the actors in the process of perception/interpretation performed simultaneous actions which affected the formation of interpretants by the listeners, thus modifying their spiritual, religious and even political experience. The communication parties are the listeners on one side and the liturgy on the

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[3] Yuping Liu & L. J. Shrum, 'What is Interactivity and Is It Always a Good Thing? Implications of Definition, Person, and Situation for the Influence of Interactivity on Advertising Effectiveness', *Journal of Advertising*, 31.4 (Winter 2002): 53–64.

other. The latter is represented by different agents, namely the designers of the liturgy, the authors of the texts and melodies, and the performers. From the perspective of interactivity, a deep reciprocal communication may be observed at the most spiritual and intimate level within each listener. A profound, significant experiencing of the mysteries of the faith is, arguably, the key purpose of the liturgy.

Polyphony and Liturgy: The Origin of the Motet

The short length and laudatory purpose of the Alleluia produced chants which were elaborate, and also melismatic. This made them fertile soil for experiments which eventually led to polyphony. While two or more simultaneous voices were heard in the Mass only from the Late Middle Ages (and only on the most solemn of feasts in urban dioceses), the practice appeared with some regularity within monastic communities in the tenth century at the latest. This is when the first descriptions of polyphony and its use are found in music treatises in francophone regions. The most primitive instances of Christian polyphony in Western Europe that still survive in notation consist of parallel voices added to melismas. This is called *organum*. Later, the notes of the melodies in melismatic chants, such as the Alleluia, were extended in order to add several faster notes against one long note below. This second type of polyphony, which also involved rhythmic patterns, is called *discantus*. Once *discantus* sections were emancipated from their parent chants, they served as the bases for sequences. The popularity of these pieces grew, and they soon became independent of the liturgy. They become separate but related devotional instruments with texts of their own: the motets. The term 'motet' comes from the French *mot*, which refers to the practice of adding words to existing musical material.

The thirteenth-century motet is, in its very essence, a piece of music composed by many authors. The popularity, relevance and beauty of a certain Alleluia melisma motivated a clever monk, canon, or singer to compose an additional voice on top, with a text appropriate to the original liturgical context. Once that became popular amongst listeners and/or singers, another composer added a third voice, then yet another could add a fourth. Often, the newer voices added on top would be in the vernacular, producing a 'macaronic' motet. Since the notes from the original melisma became longer to accommodate the faster, rhythmic notes of the *discantus*, the first voice came to be known as the 'tenor', from the Latin *tenere*, meaning 'to hold'.

This practice of appropriation, re-composition, and reconstruction was intimately tied to a culture of ritual, allegory and symbolism. It was a way of learning through and with

music and one of the formative agents of the motets. Memory played a very important role in the process of perception/interpretation/creation of liturgical instruments, and even more so in the perception/interpretation/creation of the paraliturgical objects, such as the motet. A clear example of this can be seen even today in monastic communities: every monk must be able to recite the complete psalter from memory before taking his vows. Clearly, without the modern distractions and with a discipline which was firmly rooted in tradition, the human mind of the Renaissance was in a much better disposition than the mind of the average person today to absorb all 150 psalms. Even so, candidates still assisted their memories by using certain melodic formulas when reciting the psalms. There was a set number of formulas for each mode, so that the relationship between word, melody and mode made recall much easier. This technique of associating melodies with texts can be mapped to more abstract concepts, such as mysteries and dogmas of faith. When medieval clergymen and choir singers learned several related texts using the same melodies and formulas, they were able to absorb and interpret the liturgy in a way that made the whole larger than the sum of its parts (to borrow from *Gestalt* terminology). Plainchant and devotional singing was part of everyday life, and it was pobably not explicitly understood as the complex matrix of interconnected elements that the modern observer finds today. However, it is almost certain that such a matrix existed, even if only subconsciously, and that this matrix enabled communication to display the characteristics argued for here.

It was in this culture of interrelations and correlations, this matrix, that the motet was born. The genre, being much freer than plainsong by virtue of its paraliturgical nature, was fertile ground not only for the exploration of polyphony as a method of composition and oral transmission, but also for commenting on the dogmatic and on the liturgical, sometimes with traces of political commentary and subtle criticism. They were also, together with sermons, one of the first platforms for devotion in the vernacular, something which did not become canonical until the twentieth century, under Pope John XXIII.

It is also important at this point to remember that once motets became well known and enjoyed, they became subjects for *contrafactum*, a practice by which the melodies remain the same, but the texts of the *discantus* voices are changed while still retaining some association to the tenor. Motets that have the same melodies, but different texts, are referred to as belonging to the same melodic family. The practice, common also in other religious genres in the Middle Ages, further intensifies the complexity of the matrix of layers of meaning in the repertoire and the interactive nature of communication through the liturgical instruments. In the same way that texts and melodies of the Mass were linked to each other, motets made use of allegory. [We need some definition of 'allegory' as used here] Free from liturgical

convention and usage, some motets included popular texts, often dealing with stories of chivalry and courtly love, while remaining relevant to the original context of the tenor.[4]

From the outset, the motet was considered a malleable, even ambiguous genre. A motet is complex, yet incomplete. It was even subject to varying interpretations, due to its polyphonic nature: during performance, one voice could be emphasized above others throughout the composition, or according to specific verses. The attention of the listener would then have been drawn to that voice. These variations in the perception/interpretation/creation of the polytextual motets lead me to construct the process of perception/interpretation through interactive lenses. I propose that the subtle variances in performance and the influence exerted by each listener created a synchronized process whereby both parts effected actions on the communication instrument, forming interpretants which themselves underwent continuous modifications in the mind of the final receiver. I shall refer to the corpus of medieval liturgical instruments as the 'liturgical matrix'.

Perception/Interpretation/Creation of a Polytextual Motet – Interactive Perspective

My perspective on the interactive nature of the perception/interpretation/creation of the polytextual motives will now be discussed more thoroughly by recapitulating aspects of the discussions above and using specific motets as examples. When examining the application of an interactive model in specific cases of the medieval corpus of compositions, it is necessary to consider a few additional aspects related to the context surrounding the performance of motets. Christopher Page, in 'The Performance of *Ars Antiqua* Motets', masterfully presents the conceptual indeterminacy of the genre. On the one hand, Page introduces musician Johannes de Grocheio, who declared that motets were highly sophisticated instruments which should only be performed before learned men, *literati*, clergymen and people knowledgeable in liturgy. On the other hand, the scholar presents the words of Pierre de Palude, a theologian and contemporary of Grocheio, who minimized the exegetical value of motets when he associated them with mundane pleasures, profane music and lascivious subjects. As Page concludes, they are both somehow correct.[5] Motets are founded on the most sacred chants of the religious tradition, but then they also combine Latin religious texts with vernacular counterparts filled with secular images – joined together by the use of dance rhythms. This is, at best, a paradox.

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[4] Gerald Hoekstra, 'The French Motet as Trope: Multiple Levels of Meaning in *Quant florist la violete / El mois de mai / ET GAUDEBIS*', *Speculum*, 73 (1998): 32–57.
[5] Christopher Page, 'The Performance of *Ars Antiqua* Motets', *Early Music*, 16 (1988): 147–164.

The setting in which motets were performed, together with the words themselves, suggests that a combination of entertainment and social criticism was also sought. As Page further explains, the audience of the first double and triple motets was educated and sophisticated. Listeners were highly skilled in the understanding and interpretation of the liturgical matrix. The widely shared referential frame of such an audience provided fertile ground for any composer to challenge them artistically, intellectually and morally. A successful motet would not only be tasteful and pleasant, it would also generate a degree of controversy. As I have suggested above, the popularity of a two-voice motet would furthermore present a challenge to the original composer himself and other composers, who would then try to add new voices and texts. In doing so, they would also create new layers of meaning and enhanced ambiguity in the process of reception and as a result of perception/interpretation/creation.

The liturgy of the Ascension serves as an example of a source of inspiration for the composing of motets. The central idea of the celebration is the mission which Jesus assigns to his disciples and his further promise to return, leaving the Holy Spirit as custodian. Gerald Hoekstra shows how various families of motets were composed over melismatic fragments of the Alleluia for the Ascension. The tenor text itself, '*ET GAUDEBIS*', is part of a commentary on the feast's subject.[6] Many of the motets added voices to carry texts dealing with chivalry legends and courtly love in the vernacular. One case, however, is especially worthy of attention. *Ypocrite, pseudopontifices / Vellut Stellae / ET GAUDEBIS* is a double motet with Latin texts in both voices. The texts present a seemingly contradictory message when viewed individually, and is indeed contradictory to the degree of conceptual confrontation. This motet can be found in rhythmic notation in MS Pluteus 29.1 of the Florence Library.

The text of the *motetus* – the first added voice – presents the virtues of clergymen, who 'shine like the stars' and who through their 'fountain of virtues' lead the 'flock to the sweet pastures of Life'. The *triplum* – or third voice – portrays a completely opposite description of priests. 'Murderers of the Church, toasting with their cups in their alcoholic orgies', 'concoctors of books of errors', 'practitioners of lust and lies', 'oppressors of the poor' from their unfortunate 'high chairs'. Before this apparent contradiction, Hoekstra reminds his reader of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoris,* known as the Rule of Benedict by prelates. In one of the chapters, the Pope enumerated the virtues of any good priest, while in the next chapter, he discussed that behaviour which was unsuitable for a just leader.

Ypocrite / Vellut / ET GAUDEBIS is a clear example of the apparent ambiguity which

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[6] Hoekstra, 'The French Motet as Trope'.

is evident throughout the repertory of early motets. The message becomes less foggy when viewed from the vantage point of the main idea of the original liturgy. According to this idea, Jesus leaves his Church in the hands of his disciples, but promises to return and to bring all the just to the Kingdom of his Father. Even though omitted from that particular liturgy, the idea of the second coming carries with it an apocalyptic context. Jesus will not only come as the Savior of the Just, but he also arrives as the Judge of the Sinners. The author of *Ypocrite* – which many scholars believe is Philip the Chancellor[7] – manages to bring together two seemingly contradictory ideas, but which refer to the same theological idea, a basic one for Christianity. The question, however, is whether audience members were capable of discerning the two texts, to relate the allegories to concrete ideas, and to bring to the foreground ideas from other liturgical contexts or facts of everyday life – all while listening to the motet. How could they fully enjoy the sophisticated art of the authors through live performance? Even with an efficient use of memory, an intimate knowledge of the liturgical matrix, abundant education and in light of the popularity of the dance-like music which informed the melodies of discantus voices, it may be hard to imagine from a modern perspective that each text could be effectively and simultaneously perceived and their meanings understood unequivocally by the audience. I argue that this indeed happened in the Renaissance.

It is necessary to establish some basic precepts concerning the process of perception/interpretation/creation which will help to frame it within the concept of interactivity. The hypothesis is that, in fact, the listeners of *Ypocrite* had a deep knowledge of the liturgical matrix, to the point of being able quickly to connect and group fragments of devotional instruments from several feasts according to theme or purpose. In that case, the likelihood must also be accepted that the tenors would be not only identified, but that this also would *trigger* a set of 'mnemonic switches'. This would in turn bring a number of chants, texts, and ideas to the foreground. Next, it must be considered that a motet could be performed on a feast day different than that of the original tenor, but somehow related. The tenor of *Ypocrite,* as mentioned above, comes from the liturgy of the Ascension, but the motet would also be appropriate for the Assumption, the Annunciation and even Corpus Christi – to mention only a few – in light of its underlying themes of Sacred Promise and Institution of Ministry. Besides the Word itself, sermons would add a contemporary, political, religious and cultural element to the mix. As explained above, the performance itself also played a key role and the perception of the texts would depend largely upon the interpretive decisions made by the singers toward the delivery of the motet. The decisions of each singer would also be

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[7] Tomas B. Payne, 'Poetry, Politics, and Polyphony: Phillip the Chancellor's Contribution to the Music of the Notre Dame School' (unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1991).

influenced by the reactions of other singers and that of the audience. To performing musicians, this kind of interaction among musicians and audience is certainly well known and even sought after, also today.

Based on this information, it is possible to frame the process of perception/interpretation/creation of *Ypocrite* as interactive communication. At this point, I reiterate that three factors are required to establish interaction in a communication process: actions from both parts on each other, on the message and process of communication, and the degree to which these actions are simultaneous. First, it must be established who the actors are. On one side of the equation, an agent (the singers) works as a proxy through which an entire religious tradition transcends to the listeners. On the other side there is a small group of faithful celebrants with a high level of education and training, and with a strongly developed capacity for real-time associations.

The object of communication, the motet, generates a multiplicity of layers of meaning according to its elements: the original plainsong, each of the voices, the pastoral melodies, the liturgical context and the quotidian connotations. In Figure 1, I present the matrix of interactions which occur during the process of perception/interpretation/creation of a polytextual motet. Here, it is shown how the process happens within a circle of simultaneous influence. The actions which the listener effects on the sung motet modify the message so that the listener himself receives a new symbol. These actions occur while the singers influence each other's and the celebrants' perception of the motet through their performance choices, and consequently modify the content perceived by the listener: what the listener hears is never exactly what appears on the page. These decisions are partly determined by the reactions of the celebrants. The motet is, then, modified physically and intellectually from both sides.

These simultaneous actions exerted by each part on each other, and on the motet, suggest that there was indeed interaction in the process of perception/interpretation/creation of the polytextual motets.

Beyond *ET GAUDEBIS*

I believe this perspective can be applied to the interpretation of any polytextual motet, even those which carry texts in Latin *and* vernacular. In *Mout me grief / Robin m'aime / PORTARE*, the two added texts are in French, while the tenor is in Latin (as it invariably is in this genre). There is so much freedom and artistry in this motet that the voice *Robin* comes from a popular song in both text and melody. At first sight, the texts seem not to relate to the

original liturgical context of the tenor. *PORTARE* comes from the feast of the Invention and Exaltation of the Cross – more precisely, from the Alleluia *Dulcis Lignum*. It is possible, however, to link these texts to the liturgy, as proposed in my thesis 'Preparing the Way: From the Desert of Judea to the French Forest':

> The pathetic lament of the protagonist (the faithful) in the triplum in view of the departure of his loved one (Christ the crucified) are contrasted with the joy of Marion (the faithful), a woman who rejoices in the love of Robin (Christ the resurrected) as symbolized by his gifts (redemption through his death and resurrection). The author of the motet has taken advantage of two secular tropes to transmit one of the fundamental mysteries of Christian faith. The text of the triplum presents a lament appropriate for the Invention of the Cross, while the poem of the motetus is more akin to the celebration of the Exaltation. A motet which is based on a tenor created for the liturgy of both celebrations, transmits the complex nature of the feasts of the Holy Cross: the 'dulcis lignum' which symbolizes both the sacrifice of the Christ for salvation of his faithful, and the redemption of their sins and final return.[8]

It is hard for the modern mind to conceive how a motet could be composed and performed with any hope that such a complex symbolism would be transmitted to the audience. Once again, I argue that this hope was based upon reality. Let us consider, foremost, that the *chanson* '*Robin m'aime*' was immensely popular and appears either copied or referred to in numerous sources from the francophone region. In the same way that these sophisticated listeners knew and manipulated liturgical information, they could not avoid awareness and indeed enjoyment of non-religious songs. The performers of popular music and liturgical music were in many cases the same, and many religious clerics and composers copied and composed such songs by commission from their patrons. It is likely that the celebrants themselves also sang this song as part of everyday experiences. The citation of the aforementioned *chanson* testifies to its popularity and there is, therefore, a likelihood that the voice carrying it would be manipulated in accord with Figure 1, the same way that a religious text or a sacred melody would in the context of a polyphonic piece.

Final Thoughts: extending the perspective

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[8] Samuel Robles, 'Preparing the Way: From the Desert of Judea to the French Forests' (unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 2002).

I do not believe it is problematic to map the same interactive model onto sixteenth-century motets, even though they are quite different in use and structure from *Ars Antiqua* ones. In my work about Josquin Deprez's *Stabat Mater / Comme femme desconfortée* (a polyphonic setting of the sequence mentioned above by Jacopone Da Todi), I argue how the textless tenor, likely performed by an instrument, can be perceived as responding to the vacuum left by the evangelists about the mother of Jesus. The *Comme femme* tenor comes from the homonymous *chanson* by Gilles Binchois, which was as popular as *Robin m'aime* had been in the thirteenth century. It is quite plausible that this unsung, but well-known secular melody could be heard as Mary's own voice, suffering in silence at the foot of the Cross. In the same way, the protagonist of *Comme femme* laments the loss of her lover. It should come as no surprise then, that this and other motets based on the same tenor were composed for feasts which fall between Good Friday and the Assumption – the only period within the liturgical year when Mary is considered as physically separated from her son.[9]

The *Ypocrite pseudopontifices* triplum text is considered below, as part of a different strand, or family, of motets. This text appears in other manuscripts, accompanied with different *motetus*; this is the case in MSS Bamberg Lit. 115 and Madrid 20486 [Archive?]. The *motetus* here carries the Marian text *O quam sancta, quam benigna*. In it, the author uses well-known Marian tropes to describe the mother of Jesus: 'Noah's Ark, Jacob's Ladder', 'Fountain of Sweetness' and 'Salvation of all the Peoples'. Then, in the second part, the plural first person narrators qualify themselves as 'wretched', 'supplicant' and 'of vile soul'.

The exaltation of virtues that is *Vellut stellae* has been replaced in the new context with a declaration that Mary is the 'only hope' of salvation for those vile 'pseudopontiffs'. Mary is the only one who 'never forsakes her children until death', so that at the end of days they may 'rejoice' in the love of her son. The word 'rejoice', from *gaudens*, appears in three conjugations in the very last line of the *motetus*, connecting it with the *ET GAUDEBIS* tenor. Even though the Ascension is not a Marian feast, the Mother appears as the only possibility of salvation in that day in which the Christ promises to judge the sinner and save the just. Mary, being all virtue and good, is presented as a channel to return to the ways of virtue. It is not surprising that both *O quam sancta* and *Vellut stellae* share certain key elements: 'Fountain of Virtues', 'Chalice of Modesty' and 'Venerable.' In both motets, the object is the same: to show at the same time the description of human behaviour and the road to redemption. This is, in essence, the mission which Jesus left for his closest followers when he departed. This motet is thus a very intricate example of how the liturgical matrix enables the interactivity

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[9] Samuel Robles, '*Comme femme desconfortée*: A vision of our Lady of Sorrows as a Disconsolate Woman', (unpub. paper read at the 40th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2005.

that characterized the perception/interpretation/creation of polytextual motets.

The actions executed by the singers, as in the example of the *Ypocrite/Vellut stellae* above, would include emphasizing one voice over another for each performance, performing at varying speeds, even possibly performing each *motetus* voice separately in the same event. As a simultaneous response, the listeners would recall their knowledge of the liturgy and its meaning, and their memory of contemporary events would also be triggered by the motetus texts, which would create correlations between all these elements, coming up with individual, intimate, powerfully meaningful experiences. The three elements of interactivity are present in such a process.

To show the limits of the concept of interactivity, I conclude this article with a discussion of a contemporary Catholic chant. The anonymous *Saber que Vendrás,* which is quite popular in my home country, Panama, is an offertory chant which speaks about the offerings for transubstantiation, injustice and the quest for peace through self-sacrifice:

> In this World,
> Which Christ has given unto us
> We bring thee our offer of bread,
> The bread from our endless bounty
> And wine which springs from our Song
> I bring unto thee our fair quest,
> To love Justice and Peace.
>
> Knowing thou wilt come,
> And that thou wilt remain,
> Parting thy bread
> With the Poor.
>
> The thirst of all men
> Who dwell in darkness,
> Sorrows and Tears;
> The Hatred of all who perish
> Without Faith, exhausted from the struggle;
> We implore unto thee,
> Accept our life as our offer. (My translation.)

The music was borrowed exactly from Bob Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind*, a song which posts rhetorical questions about the endless acts of injustice between people. By-and-large a popular tune, Dylan's song will immediately resonate in the minds of listeners familiar with it during this most serene and solemn moment of the liturgy. Designed for reflection and inner prayer, the offertory section of the Mass would be the perfect opportunity for such listeners to call up (whether consciously or not) the unanswered questions posed by the American

songwriter. The anonymous writer of the new text added words to the melody, as in the medieval practice of *contrafactum*, indeed replacing the secular text with words with authoritative liturgical meaning. To a listener who is familiar with Dylan's music, and who regards the words as having a certain degree of authority, it may seem as if the new words are an attempt to reply to Dylan's lamentations, as if explaining what he meant by declaring 'the answer is blowin' in the wind'.[10] If the wind, a frequently used allegory for the Holy Spirit, carries the answer as expressed by the songwriter, then the new words on that same melody, 'Knowing Thou will come / and that Thou will remain' may add a substantially deeper meaning to both lyrics. This is indeed the liturgical matrix as discussed in this article. Putting the matrix at work in this modern context, one can arrive at the understanding that the listener not only trusts that the Spirit will come, but also that it bears, triumphantly, the resolution to the conflict evoked by Dylan's questions. Here, though only dealing with two sets of words, and a single, very clear liturgical purpose, the actors may still emerge from the process of communication with a new, meaningful message, that is likely not what either author had intended.

However, the criteria for interactivity are met only to a very limited degree in the case of *Saber que Vendrás*, for two reasons. Firstly, the polytextual motets were polyphonic – they had more than one equally important melodic line – and thus at least three texts were involved, even in the case of two-part motets. Because the motets were polyphonic the performers could take cues from the reactions of the celebrants and clergy and interact with them by highlighting one of the voices. This is not possible during a performance of *Saber que vendrás*. Secondly, the polytextual motets kept appearing in different incarnations, and this resulted in action upon the medium of communication. The music and the texts changed within each motet family, and the messages were continuously transformed.

Yuping Liu and Shrum advise us to consider the degree to which two or more communication parties can act on medium and on the messages, and the degree to which these actions are simultaneous. Ironically, the performance of early motets within their original context shows a higher degree of interactivity than contemporary liturgical music created in the era of interactivity.

The study of polytextual motets has led musicologists and scholars of medieval liturgy to build paradigms and models for analysis, with the purpose of understanding the processes through which the human mind could perceive, process, apprehend, analyze, modify their conduct, enjoy and strengthen their relationship to the spiritual world. In this modest effort, I

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[10] Bob Dylan,'Blowin' in the Wind', in *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (Columbia Records, 1963).

have attempted to show a perspective which makes it possible to approach, from a modern vantage point, an understanding of the expanded capacity of abstraction, perception and association that I trust the medieval clerics and even celebrants had. Further detailed study on the ability of the human mind to process and relate elements within the liturgical matrix and beyond will no doubt shed light on this fascinating human and spiritual phenomenon.

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