The Apotheosis of Josquin des Prez and Other Mythologies of Musical Genius

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In the past thirty-odd years, the subject of Josquin des Prez has launched at least five scholarly conferences and more than two hundred studies published in three volumes of proceedings (totaling some 1,200 pages); in dozens of scholarly journals, monographs, and Festschriften; and most recently in the 700-page Josquin Companion. An international editorial board, subvened by the musicological societies of two countries (the AMS and the Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis), oversees the publication of his (second) opera omnia. Standard reference works and popular Internet

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I wish to dedicate this essay to Joseph Kerman in honor of his eightieth birthday, and to the memory of two recently deceased scholars, Janet Levy and Philip Brett.

sources routinely call him the “greatest composer of the Renaissance” and even “the greatest composer in the history of Western music.” Some rank him as the fourth member, honoris causa, of the venerable triumvirate of genius composers tout court: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven—and Josquin. H is personality and career are so often compared with Beethoven’s that he is popularly known as the “Beethoven of his time.” H is Missa Pange lingua, as performed by the Tallis Scholars, won the Gramophone “Record of the Year” award in 1987, the only time a recording of early music has garnered the coveted prize. H is foregone status as musical genius is proclaimed not only in the popular media and in music history textbooks, but also in the pages of JAMS: “a creative personality already in essence fully formed . . . Josquin started as Josquin—and started at the top.” Like the goddess Athena, who burst forth “fully formed” from the head of Zeus, Josquin des Prez now inhabits the mythological realm of musical Parnassus.

How did a single composer come to tower over the intellectual and cultural landscape of present-day musicology? How, when, and why did Josquin acquire this status and celebrity as the incomparable composer to whom all others must yield pride of place? Why Josquin and not, say, Palestrina, once lionized as the “savior of music,” or perhaps Lasso or Gesualdo, once designated his fellow cohorts in Renaissance musical genius? On the basis of what evaluative criteria has Josquin’s genius been deemed to surpass that of every other composer of the period loosely described as “the Renaissance”? What exactly is the critical justification for the apotheosis of Josquin des Prez in the late twentieth century?


3. “Perhaps you wonder why the work which before was done by one person . . . has to be re-done by a large group of musicologists. The reasons should be clear and they hold, mutatis mutandis, also for such composers as Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, whose music is now being published in Neue Ausgaben” (Willem Elders, “Towards the New Josquin Edition,” in Proceedings of the Josquin Symposium, Cologne, 3-8, at 3).


5. Tallis Scholars, Missa Pange Lingua, Gimell 454 909-2 (1987). The recording also includes the Missa La sol fa re mi.

The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the "naturalness" with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history. I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there.

—Roland Barthes, Mythologies

Without wishing to slight Josquin, I am troubled by a prevailing "what-goes-without-saying" (cela va de soi) attitude toward him, as if his gargantuan stature in late twentieth-century music historiography were somehow preordained by Nature. I have wanted to unearth the "ideological abuse" that I suspected of lurking beneath the genius-thinking and hero worship that still characterize much musicological utterance about Josquin. Like its subject enshrined in the Parnassus of musical genius, Josquin historiography resides largely in the realm of "myth" as defined and first theorized in Roland Barthes's "Myth Today," one of the classic texts in the field of cultural studies. In Barthes's formulation, myth operates in such a way as to make realities that are the product of highly complex and historically determined processes seem "natural":

Myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the "natural." What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a "matter of course"; under the effect of mythical inversion, the quite contingent foundations of the utterance become Common Sense, Right Reason, the Norm, General Opinion, in short the doxa.

8. Barthes, "Myth Today," in Mythologies, 109-59. "Myth Today" is the postface, written in 1957, of the collected essays of Mythologies written between 1954 and 1956. It derives from the earlier, structuralist phase of Barthes's work as "mythologist" or critic of ideology. Barbara Engh notes, "Music itself has a special status in Barthes' work: when he is at work as a semiotician, as an ideology critic, music is absent from his considerations. When he moves to a critique of those practices, music emerges as a privileged discourse." See "Loving It: Music and Criticism in Roland Barthes," in Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 66-79, at 66. The conspicuous absence of discussions of music in his earlier critical project does not, however, preclude its appropriation for an ideological critique of music. For an excellent introduction to Barthes's thought in general, see Graham Allan, Roland Barthes (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); for the central place of Mythologies in his critical trajectory, see especially pp. 33-52.
Derived from the linguistically based science of signs known as semiology, myth, according to Barthes, is depoliticized speech conveyed by a discourse consisting of rhetoric, defined as “a set of fixed, regulated, insistent figures, according to which the varied forms of the mythical signifier arrange themselves.”¹⁰ In other words, rhetoric is the language which normalizes or “depoliticizes” the discourse of myth and makes it seem acceptable, commonsensical, and ultimately complacent. These formulations then become conventional wisdom and as such tend to go unchallenged, thereby eliminating competing discourses which might enrich an otherwise impoverished cultural view. As others have noted, myth as here defined is virtually coterminous for Barthes with ideology.¹¹

¹⁰. A “discourse” as Barthes defines it can include “modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity.” “Political” is understood “in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world.” Barthes, “Myth Today,” 109–10, 143, 150.

¹¹. Allen, Roland Barthes, 34. Terry Eagleton’s definition might be useful for understanding “ideology” in relation to Barthes the mythologist/ideologist and to the present critique of genius. “A dominant power may legitimate itself by promoting beliefs and values congenial to it; naturalizing and universalizing such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; denigrating ideas which might challenge it; excluding rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and distorting social reality in ways convenient to itself. Such ‘mystification,’ as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions” (Ideology: An Introduction [London: Verso, 1991], 5–6; emphasis in original). Here I have tried to confine my own usage of the term ideology to its specifically Barthesian sense, as “the presentation of cultural phenomena (like ‘genius’) as if they were timeless, universal, and natural, rather than historically determined.” Barthes’s later poststructuralist criticism, dating from the late 1960s, would distance itself from this oppositional rhetoric, as we shall see, but Eagleton’s definition above also resonates with Barthes’s earlier intellectual project as a critic of ideology, as well as with the current usage of the term in cultural studies. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz regretted that “it is one of the minor ironies of modern intellectual history that the term ‘ideology’ has itself become thoroughly ideologized.” (See “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in The Interpretation of Cultures [New York: Basic Books, 1973], 193–223, at 193.) He questioned whether “having become an accusation, it can remain an analytic concept,” tainted as it is with the prevailing dictionary definitions linking it with the “factious propagandizing” of Nazi “ideology.” He nevertheless attempted to “defuse” the term, advocating a return to a more neutral understanding as a set of intellectual propositions (ibid., 200). For an excellent brief history of this often confusing term, which appeared in the late eighteenth century referring to a “philosophy of mind” or the “science of ideas,” and came, under Napoleon Bonaparte, to acquire its still largely pejorative meaning, see Raymond Williams, “Ideology,” in his Keywords A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1976; rev. ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). In musicology today, the word continues to be used in the tautly Napoleon sense as a term of derogation for leftist inspired, sociopolitical viewpoints of those (called “ideologues”) whose work is indebted to various “isms,” usually of a feminist or neo-M arxist, or cultural materialist, stripe (and occasionally in reverse to...
Against the backdrop of Barthes’s theory of myth, then, as well as Janet Levy’s exploration of the “covert and casual values” that inform conventional musicological wisdom, this essay seeks to expose the historical legitimation project through which the scholarly reception of Josquin des Prez came to replicate the mythmaking, universalizing rhetoric of genius that has long surrounded the figure of Ludwig van Beethoven. The ideological refashioning of Josquin in the image of Beethoven has simultaneously shaped and derailed the intellectual trajectory of early music scholarship in the past thirty years by privileging a discourse of musical genius in the service of which, among other concerns, the composer’s canon is being decimated beyond historical recognition, and the richness and complexity of the musical culture of which he was a vital part risks being overshadowed and obfuscated by the disproportionate amount of attention invested in his singular accomplishments. I offer these thoughts in the interest of a resolute historicization of discourses of musical talent and creative endowment, countering the ongoing hegemony of authentication studies in Josquin scholarship, and examining the imbrication of mythologies of musical genius in the suppression of certain kinds of music historical and critical inquiry. My project directly engages the disciplinary critique of musicology begun in the 1960s with the Kerman-Lowinsky polemics conducted in the pages of JAMS and considers the complicity of musicological dispensations both “old” and “new” in the privileging of musical genius. The starting point for these specific reflections, which form part of a larger critical project on issues of authorship, creative patrilineage, and musical genius, dates from nearly thirty years ago when, as a fledgling graduate student, I caught a visionary glimpse of the magnitude of the “Josquin phenomenon.”

describe the denigrators of those viewpoints). It is often accompanied by the adjective “fashionable,” as if to suggest that serious philosophical schools of intellectual and critical thought were somehow inappropriate or even inimical to certain kinds of musicological enterprise.


14. I use the verb decimated with an understanding of its original derivation from the Latin decimare, meaning to eliminate “one in ten,” a statistic in fact far lower than the ratio of works that have been eliminated from the Josquin canon in the late twentieth century. The accomplishments of contemporaries of Beethoven, as well as those of other genius composers, have similarly been overshadowed.

15. The occasionally polemical tone of this essay is in keeping with this spirited tradition, and I intend no disrespect toward musicologists of the past or present, who will be mentioned in due course, particularly Edward Lowinsky and Joseph Kerman to whose pioneering critical thought I plainly owe an incalculable intellectual and scholarly debt.
A “Josquin” Epiphany: Firestone Library, Princeton University, Fall 1976

**Epiphany** . . . a) a moment of sudden intuitive understanding; flash of insight
b) a scene, experience, etc. that occasions such a moment.

Excited voices pierce the silence of the subterranean music carrels. I peer out of my assigned cubicle to determine the cause of celebration: the arrival of a book—a thick, cherry-red tome—“Lowinsky’s Josquin Proceedings.” The older graduate students who had attended the International Josquin Festival-Conference five years earlier had regaled us neophytes with reverential accounts of the momentous occasion; circumspectly, I had refrained from asking who “Lowinsky” was. Nor did I confess that I hadn’t heard much about Josquin des Prez in my undergraduate days or that what little I did know about him owed to occasional chance exposure to a band of lute-toting students in flowing mumus and beaded headbands. Endowed with a rock-star first-name celebrity (and unlike “classical composers” who are known by their last names), “Josquin” was uttered with a breathy, smugly self-important intonation. The most ardent among these students, a reluctant participant in the seminar on the Second Viennese School, would histrionically feign aural torture by planting her index fingers firmly in each ear whenever Schoenberg was played in class. Sadly, I thought, these narrow-minded “Josquin”-lovers are obsessed with some Renaissance composer most people have never heard of, while I am preparing an honors thesis and piano recital on Robert Schumann, a composer whose claim to musical greatness is unassailable.

Or so I thought. From the moment I set foot in graduate school, I sensed with mounting trepidation that I had much to learn in short order. The

16. Some early music composers like Leonel (Power), Adrian (Willaert), and Cipriano (de Rore) were also referred to by their first names in manuscripts and prints during their own lifetimes. Only first names have survived for certain medieval composers like Notker, Leonin, and Perotin. In the present day, Josquin stands as the only canonic composer routinely referred to by first name alone (with the exception of “Hildegard” of Bingen, depending on whether or not one now considers her “canonic”). I shall elaborate on naming practices in connection with Foucault’s “author function” as it may relate to Josquin, in an expanded form of this essay. See Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101–20, at 105–7.

17. Of interest are Barthes’s comments on Schumann from around the same time: “Is this why our period grants him what is doubtless an ‘honourable’ place (of course he is a ‘great composer’), but not a favored one (there are many Wagnerites, many Mahlerians, but the only Schumannians I know are Gilles Deleuze, Marcel Beaufils, and myself)? Our period, especially since the advent, by recordings, of mass music, wants splendid images of great conflicts (Beethoven, Mahler, Tchaikovsky). Loving Schumann . . . is in a way to assume a philosophy of Nostalgia . . . it inevitably leads the subject who does so and says so to posit himself in his time according to the injunctions of his desire and not according to those of his sociality.” Roland Barthes, “Loving Schumann” (1979), in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 293–98, at 298.
earnest pronouncement that I “loved Schumann” and intended to write my dissertation on him was met with sidelong glances conveying the subtle message that his thesis-worthiness was suspect, unless of course I was planning to work on his “sketches or autographs.” The composers of moment seemed to be Beethoven and (again) “Josquin,” the latter standing on “what-goes-without-saying” equal footing with the former, to the point of meriting the deployment of a small army of graduate students (in which I would soon find myself happily enlisted) to encode his music on keypunch machines. At the very least, I would need to revise my hierarchy of great composers, for this “Josquin” was proving to be a formidable musical force to reckon with.

The Apotheosis of Josquin des Prez: Lincoln Center, New York, June 1971

Apotheosis: 1 the act of raising a person to the status of a god; deification 2 the glorification of a person or thing 3 a glorified ideal.

In 1999, after well over a decade of immersion in feminist epistemologies and other critical theory, I found myself rereading the printed account of the opening session of the 1971 Josquin Festival-Conference (the official historical record, as it were) in preparation for the spoken address that occasioned the original version of this essay. It was astonishing to confront the Otherness of the hallowed text I once knew as a graduate student. Whereas my previous readings had been informed by an awe-inspired reverence for universal truths about Josquin, now I was struck at every turn by the historical contingency of the event and the extent to which it seemed a classic embodiment of the intellectual preoccupations of a bygone era, musicology wie es eigentlich gewesen in 1971. How did I fail to notice the sheer extravagance, the pageantry, the...
self-conscious sense of historical moment that marked the occasion, indeed its
mythic proportions? Increasingly resistant, I found myself approaching the
text with a hermeneutics of suspicion.22

The festivities opened with a Renaissance fanfare—Josquin’s *Vive le roy*,
performed by the New York Pro Musica Wind Ensemble. Once concluded,
Claude Palisca, then president of the American Musicological Society, stepped
to the podium. Designated as “presiding” over the opening session, Palisca set
the tone of encomiastic grandiloquence that would mark the introductory
speeches. The word *great* surfaces repeatedly in the opening pages of the text:
the occasion as an “homage to the great composer,” the “most international
of the great composers”; the venue as a “great citadel of the performing arts,”
a “great institution”; the historical context as “that great event around his
50th year that was to expand the world he knew,” an expedition facilitated by
“those great patrons of music, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon.”23

After recounting conference organizer Edward Lowinsky’s extensive prepa-
rations for the event, Palisca introduced five additional distinguished guests,
each of whom then addressed the assembly.24 The last to speak was William S.
Newman, president of the American Musicological Society during the two
years Lowinsky was planning the festival, who had, “through one of the many
instances of secret diplomacy in this project,” we are told, “reserved the
honor” of introducing Edward Lowinsky for himself.25 At last the “distingui-
shed procreator” of the event, as Newman described him, stepped forward
to address the assembly, and further encomia ensued. Lowinsky lauded the
“heroic dimension of [Albert] Smijers’ work” in completing the Josquin edi-
tion, and the “historic moment” when the board of the Dutch Musicological
Society decided to sponsor it.26 He called upon Ludwig Finscher, representing
the International Musicological Society, to read the text of a cablegram sent to
salute Helmuth Osthoff, “a great Josquin scholar,” unable to attend owing
to illness, and praised Friedrich Blume, “one of the greatest musical scholars
of our time,” for risking his health to make the trip.27 Sumptuous gifts—
presentation copies of facsimiles of Canti B and Petrucci’s second book of

22. A term coined in the 1970s by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur for a method of in-
terpretation whose purpose is to read beyond the literal, surface-level meaning of a text in order to
unmask the political interests it serves.


24. The speakers included Peter Mennin, president of The Juilliard School; Dr. William R.
Emerson, director of Research and Publications of the National Endowment for the Humanities
(he is not listed in the official conference program); Ludwig Finscher, representative of the
International Musicological Society; Gustave Reese, president of the Renaissance Society of
America; and William S. Newman. “Opening Session,” in *Josquin Proceedings*, 4–10. See also the
International Josquin Festival-Conference program for Monday, 21 June, p. 5.


27. Ibid., 12–13. Blume had “come all the way from Germany to New York notwithstanding
his doctor’s warnings that the trip might be a hazard to his health.”
masses—had been bestowed upon the foreign guests and conference speakers. And as if the gods of Parnassus themselves were smiling down upon the gathering in anticipation of the imminent apotheosis of their newest confrere, a previously unknown copy of the first print of Petrucci’s *Odhecaton* had resurfaced comme par miracle in the New York Public Library. By the end of the address, even the spectators had morphed into “this great audience.”

A conference report by a Columbia University graduate student—one Richard Taruskin—subsequently published in *Current Musicology*, chronicled an event of breathtaking scholarly excitement and enthusiasm, of such powerful intellectual voltage that speakers were running back to their rooms at night to revise their as-yet-to-be-delivered papers in light of new evidence that kept emerging each day. “It was thrilling,” Taruskin wrote, “to see the state of knowledge of Josquin’s life and work change before one’s very eyes.” A media event extraordinaire, the New York Times reviewed all four sold-out concerts at Alice Tully Hall. By all accounts, the Josquin Festival-Conference was a triumph and a testimonial to the indefatigable energy and entrepreneurial genius of possibly the most brilliant cultural historian the field of musicology has ever known. There never was before, and probably will never be again, another musicological blockbuster to rival it.

Reflecting on my renewed acquaintance with the text of the opening events, I found it difficult to resist—even in the most skeptical, myth-busting mode—an overwhelming sense of nostalgia for the magnificence and splendor of a bygone era—in musicology, as well as the world in general. The early 1970s were still a time when stories of the decisive actions of great men and dramatic human events filled the newspapers and, more importantly, the

28. The facsimile edition of Petrucci’s second book of Josquin’s masses was specially printed by the Antiquae Musicae Italicae Studiosi at the initiative of the group’s then president, Giuseppe Vecchi, and copies of Helen Hewitt’s edition of Petrucci’s Canti B were presented by decision of the Executive Board of the American Musicological Society. Ibid., 13–14.
29. Ibid., 13.
30. Ibid., 11.
33. With respect to the further historical contingency of the occasion, it could also be said that such an event on such a scale would have been impossible anywhere other than in the United States: “In welchem anderen Land hätten die gleichen finanziellen und technischen Mittel bereitgestanden, um einen derartig perfekt organisierten Spezialistenkongreß ablaufen lassen zu können?” See Winfried Kirsch, “International Josquin Festival Conference New York,” *Die Musikforschung* 24 (1971): 441–43, at 441.
television screen, when recent memories of great human achievement still lingered in the American dream: "One small step for [a] man, one giant step for mankind." Giants and dwarves. That was the way it was in musicology as well. These were our great men, our very best scholars and leaders. They had the right to conduct the business of our great musicological enterprise in any way they so pleased; any discussion, much less criticism, of their modus operandi was unthinkable, at least for us dwarves.

And yet, these were also years of colossal social upheaval and political unrest. By the time Lowinsky launched full-scale preparations for the Josquin Festival-Conference in 1969, the American dream had transmogrified into a nightmare. In the previous year alone, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy had shocked the nation, as had the riots and police brutality at the Democratic convention in Chicago. A devastating and humiliating foreign war in Vietnam was in full throttle. Unruly mobs of dissenting voices reverberated all over America in the form of civil rights marches, antiwar demonstrations, and public bra-burnings by angry women called "feminists" who demanded equal rights. Given the widespread turmoil and political upheaval in America at the time, it may seem astonishing, in retrospect, that such an extravagant fuss could be made over someone who was, at least in the greater scheme of things, a rather obscure Renaissance composer.

**Fashioning Genius: Kerman, Lowinsky, and the "Beethoven of His Time"**

A Beethovenian [sic] biography is born (one ought to be able to say a bio-mythology), the artist is brought forward as a complete hero, endowed with a discourse (a rare occurrence for a musician), a legend (a good ten or so anecdotes), an iconography, a race (that of the Titans of Art: Michelangelo, Balzac) and a fatal malady (the deafness of he who creates for the pleasure of our ears).


From a hermeneutically suspicious standpoint, the pomp and panoply of the International Josquin Festival-Conference appears to have served a much larger, and specifically ideological, purpose. Something was at stake in the staging of this conference cum gargantuan princely Renaissance extravaganza, and I suspect that it was the formal legitimation of Edward Lowinsky's own paradigm—his personal scholarly agenda—for the Renaissance musicological enterprise itself. Much of the rhetoric of the opening session—"reconciliation," "negotiations," "allies," "cooperation," "headquarters," "machinery," "ministries," "delegations," "secret diplomacy," "recruit[ment]," "conspir[acy]"—conjures up nefarious scenarios of espionage and military counterintelligence. Tellingly, the only word absent from this sea of Cold War

rhetoric is “enemy,” as if he were lurking silent and unseen in the wings, primed to launch a sneak attack. And if not exactly hidden behind the curtains, a genius lóci may well have been inhabiting the Josquin proceedings: possibly, I suggest, in the form of the young Joseph Kerman.

However tacit the political agenda of the Josquin Festival-Conference, Lowinsky had quite publicly proclaimed his ambitions for the future of musicology, not long before the conference preparations began, in a volatile and vituperative exchange of ideological manifestos with Kerman in JAMS. Kerman’s “Profile for American Musicology” had launched the first of many frontal assaults to come, against what he would later label the “positivist paradigm” of musicology, though here it is called “the true objective path . . . of the great German tradition.” “That tradition,” Kerman wrote, “was not dictated by objective truths of nature, it arose out of a certain national current of thought at a certain point in its history.”35 A key target of his proposal, implicit in 1965 and more explicitly articulated in his Contemplating Music of 1985, was what he characterized as the kind of unthinking “collecting of information” that musicologists often engage in at the expense of his preferred mode of “criticism.” One ostensibly passing comment in Kerman’s modest nine-page tract proved to be incendiary:

For reasons of time and timidity, I pass over the trivia that occupy good minds while Beethoven’s sketches remain unanalyzed (the Germans are only transcribing them) and spurious works lurk scandalously in the Josquin canon.36 [italics original; added emphasis in bold]

The latter statement about Josquin goaded Lowinsky to an impassioned defense:

Professor Kerman is scandalized by the fact that “spurious works lurk . . . in the Josquin canon.” How valid is such a complaint in view of the hard and stubborn fact that as yet we have neither the complete works of Josquin nor of any of the significant masters of his environment? . . . how can we, at the present state of Josquin research, even talk of a “canon” of his works? How can we expect to distinguish Josquin’s style from that of his many great and small contemporaries if we do not study the smaller masters with the same care as the great ones—“there should be more work on the great masters,” demands Professor Kerman, when the simple truth is: there should be more work on both great and small masters and—the two should go together.37 [emphasis added]

36. Ibid., 66.
While there is no doubt as to where Lowinsky stands with respect to Josquin's stature, or indeed with respect to the self-evidence of a hierarchical qualitative distinction between composers (great versus small), what seems remarkable about this paragraph written in 1965 is that there is no hint that Josquin should necessarily warrant special treatment in the quality and quantity of scholarly work devoted to him as opposed to other composers. Here we find an exhortation to the simultaneous study of masters both great and small—as if to suggest the contingency of the study of one upon the other.

Somewhat paradoxically, Lowinsky had published just the year before an article that attempted to trace the intellectual lineage of the idea of musical genius. In the four decades since its original publication, “Musical Genius: Evolution and Origins of a Concept,” like its subject, attracted scant attention until only recently. Briefly stated, Lowinsky’s thesis held that around 1500, when composers abandoned compositional procedures based on preexisting sacred and secular melodies in favor of freely composed polyphony, there arose a concomitant awareness of the composer as a peculiarly gifted creative artist whose exceptional musical gifts were paired with an “artistic,” read “difficult,” personality. In this subtle mixture of talent and temperament, Lowinsky saw the fermentation of the modern notion of musical genius.

I shall address my concerns with Lowinsky’s formulation at greater length below. For now, suffice it to say that Josquin, rather than being a precocious prototype of Romantic genius, emerges as Lowinsky’s own intellectual construct, heavily indebted, to be sure, to nineteenth-century German discourses of musical genius promulgated mainly by August Wilhelm Ambros (1816–1876). As for so many other areas of musicology, Ambros’s pioneering work laid the ideological bedrock of modern Josquin scholarship and provided the cultural filter through which Lowinsky and others of his generation viewed
the opinions of Josquin's sixteenth-century enthusiasts. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that Ambrosian discourse on Josquin would have sustained its scholarly longevity without the intervention at a pivotal moment in later twentieth-century music historiography of powerful scholarly agendas and personalities. A quick perusal, for example, of the bibliography on Josquin printed in the second edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* reveals relatively few isolated studies of the composer, and only two articles in English, prior to 1961. Writing in 1941, Alfred Einstein had characterized the music of Josquin, among other composers of early music, as being in a state of "petrification," in that it could no longer "make a direct appeal to the popular mind." Even as late as 1967, Carl Dahlhaus again described the music of Josquin (along with that of Machaut and Monteverdi) as "petrified," and any attempts to revive it as "futile." Such a statement would have seemed ludicrous five years later. Rather than being viewed as the unmediated, belated legacy and inevitable culmination of Ambros's sustained attention to the composer a century earlier, the late twentieth-century apotheosis of Josquin, I would suggest, arose from a confluence of highly contingent musical and historical circumstances involving the impending completion of the opera omnia in the 1960s, the publication of Osthoff's *Josquin* monograph of 1962–65, Lowinsky's "Genius" article of 1964, the Kerman-Lowinsky debates of 1965, and above all, the International Josquin Festival-Conference of 1971, which, I would further suggest, appropriated Josquin des Prez as Renaissance musicology's very own genius, ahistorically refashioned in Beethovenian guise.44


41. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson has drawn attention to the largely unacknowledged roles that reputation and personality play in evaluating the success or failure of individual scholarly endeavors. See his *Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 239–42.


44. In the opening session, Claude Palisca credited Gustave Reese, and specifically the some one-hundred-page chapter "Josquin and His Contemporaries" in *Musicien the Renaissance*, with a "large share of credit for the Josquin renaissance that succeeded the Palestrina renaissance" ("Opening Session," in *Josquin Proceedings*, 7). Reese's text twice refers to Josquin's possession of genius ("Josquin needed the large variety of text, available to the motet composers to express the many-sidedness of his genius" and "he wrote canon as readily as Bach wrote fugue... each man...")
It is worth bearing in mind that Kerman’s incendiary comment in 1965 paired Beethoven’s sketches and “spurious works lur[k[ing]] scandalously in the Josquin canon” as egregious examples of the deficiencies in then-existing scholarship. And without wishing to impute a necessarily causal relationship (the 1971 conference was ostensibly a celebration of the 450th anniversary of Josquin’s death in 1521), one cannot help but notice the timing—coincidental or not—of the International Josquin Festival-Conference in June 1971, shortly after the monumental commemorative celebrations of Beethoven’s Bicentennial, which had been enacted scarcely six months earlier in no fewer than three major international conferences in Bonn, Berlin, and Vienna.45

Coming fast on the heels of the Beethoven-Jahr, the 1971 Josquin conference was perhaps not surprisingly awash in allusions to Josquin’s “genius.” Ludwig Finscher, in the opening session, extolled “the unique genius” of Josquin, calling him “one of the first and one of the greatest incarnations of creative musical genius.”46 Myroslav Antonowycz later referred to Josquin’s creative mind as belonging “among the greatest of the great in the cultural history of Europe.” Don Harrán’s paper invoked Ambros’s opinion that Josquin was the first composer that “strikes one, predominantly, with the impression of genius.”47 Jitka Snížková’s article opens with a reference to “Josquin—this ‘genius of sparkling musical ideas and overflowing musi-cal.”48 Two papers drew explicit comparisons between Josquin and

45. See the three conference proceedings: Bericht über den internationalen musikwis-


48. The quote is credited to Heinrich Glarean (Dodecachordon, 1547), but as we shall see below, it is based on a questionable translation of the term ingenium. Jitka Snížková, “Josquin in Czech Sources of the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century,” in Josquin Proceedings 279–84, at 279, quoting Heilmuth Christian Wolff, Die Musik der alten Niederländer (Leipzig, 1956), 58, and Glarean (see the passage in question in my Appendix C, Ex. 2, below). Snížková’s contribution was one of three essays not delivered at the conference itself. See Lowinsky, preface to Josquin Proceedings v. According to the citations in Snížková’s footnote, this appears to be a freely embellished translation from Wolff’s German “Ausschweifung eines übersprudelnden Genies” (my translation would be something like: “the extravagance of his overflowing genius”), which in turn is a direct translation from the Latin “lasciuientis ingenii impetus.” Among many points that could be made here, I shall confine myself for now to two. First, neither the Latin nor the German original refers to Josquin as “this genius” (i.e., a genius persona); Wolff’s use of the genitive clearly

merely employed a technical medium particularly suited to his genius”), but never to his “being” a genius, and his text is largely devoid of the lionizing discourse that would become typical of Josquin scholarship in the decade leading up to the 1971 conference.
Beethoven, as well as Bach and Mozart. Sprinkled throughout the Festival-Conference program were eight quotations ranging chronologically from Martin Luther to Helmuth Osthoff (see Appendix A, Exx. 1–8), presumably reflecting the unanimous, transhistorical testimony to Josquin’s genius and greatness, but attesting simultaneously (and unwittingly) to the gradual inflation of Josquin’s genius status over time.

But the most remarkable comments of all came from Lowinsky himself: “And of the greatest musicians of any age, Josquin des Prez is a figure so towering that his name cannot be left out of any enumeration of great composers, however small the number of them might happen to be.” The impact of that last breathtaking remark doesn’t fully register until one takes Lowinsky literally at his word and does the math. What happened to the pluralistic Lowinsky of 1965 who advocated an all-embracing scholarly approach to composers “both great and small”? While in the “Genius” article of 1964, Lowinsky had described Josquin as being “to the Renaissance musician the very incarnation of musical genius,” even there, Josquin figures as a member of a triumvirate: Josquin, Lasso, Gesualdo, however different they were in character and as artists, share one essential quality: they are musical geniuses whose extraordinary gifts are matched by an extraordinary personality; they exhibit immense strength of feeling, spontaneity, originality, independence as human beings and in social intercourse with others; they are great individuals, and each one of

indicates possession (i.e., “Josquin’s genius,” not “Josquin, this genius”). Second, Glarean’s passage is one of several that criticize the transgressive “excess” of Josquin’s imagination. Wolff quotes Glarean in the context of a discussion of such chastising comments, whereas Snížková, by taking Wolff’s quotation out of context, has transformed Glarean’s negative statement into one of unqualified praise, and has further exaggerated its meaning by tacitly switching Glarean’s and Wolff’s genitives of possession (“of his talent”/“of his genius”) into a nominative (“Josquin—this genius”). Miller, on the other hand, rather blandly translates this key passage as “the impetuosity of a lively talent.” This and several other passages like it form clear examples of a kind of censorship or “sanitizing” of genius, which I shall discuss in a forthcoming study.

49. “In contrast with Beethoven, who to this day is more honored on paper than in performances throughout the Peninsula, Josquin completely captivated Spain and Portugal from the moment Petrucci’s prints first began circulating abroad” (Robert Stevenson, “Josquin in the Music of Spain and Portugal,” in Josquin Proceedings, 217–46, at 217); “Josquin was a professional singer and obviously an excellent one. He was a singer-composer, whereas the great composers of later times, such as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, had their own practical experience primarily in instrumental music” (Walter Wiora, “The Structure of Wide-Spanned Melodic Lines in Earlier and Later Works of Josquin,” in Josquin Proceedings, 309–16, at 309).

50. The quotation from Charles Burney (Appendix A, no. 5), who I believe was the first to acknowledge Josquin as a “genius persona” in the modern sense of the word, is emblematic of “the eighteenth-century English preoccupation with origins of all sorts, and especially, on the literary front, of the figure of the ‘original genius.’” See Glenn Wright, “Geoffrey the Unbarbarous: Chaucerian ‘Genius’ and Eighteenth-Century Antimedievalism,” English Studies 82 (2001): 193–202, at 193.


them was hailed in his time as the foremost representative of an expressive style of music.\textsuperscript{53}

Tellingly, in Lowinsky's description of these three Renaissance "geniuses" we find a virtual compendium of Romantic genius criteria superimposed upon the testimony of sixteenth-century witnesses: "extraordinary personality," "immense strength of feeling," "spontaneity," "originality," "independence."\textsuperscript{54} But even here, Josquin has yet to emerge as the towering giant of Renaissance music historiography, and this more tempered view reflected the current state of musicological opinion, in which Josquin was still, as promulgated most widely in Gustave Reese's \textit{Music in the Renaissance} (1954), "one of the two or three greatest composers of the ... Renaissance." And Reese qualified this even further, specifying that this status owed primarily to Josquin's motets. Indeed, the chapter "Josquin des Prez and His Contemporaries," while singling out Josquin, seems relatively evenhanded in its evaluation of the broader musical context:

No one man could alone have been responsible for all the characteristic qualities of the new music. Historical forces combined to mould them. But these forces were able to find particularly brilliant expression because a large group of singularly gifted composers were all vigorously active at about the same time. O'brecht, Agricola, Isaac, Compere, Josquin, Brumel, Pierre de la Rue, and Mouton were the brightest lights in an especially luminous constellation. And Josquin was a star of the first magnitude.\textsuperscript{55}

The constructed image of Josquin as Renaissance musical genius, it would seem, derives in large part from a tendency to read the letters and casual anecdotes of his sixteenth-century contemporaries through a lens strongly filtered by the Romantic discourse of genius that has permeated Beethoven reception history. Three of these in particular have contributed significantly to the mythopoesis of Josquin in seeming to attribute to him the highly idiosyncratic

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 486.

\textsuperscript{54} "The qualities with which the term ‘genius’ has been invested ever since the mid-eighteenth century, such as spontaneity, outstanding originality, and exceptional creativity were not implied in the Latin \textit{ingenium} and the Italian \textit{ingegno}, meaning natural disposition, i.e. talent" (Rudolf Wittkower, "Genius: Individualism in Art and Artists," in Dictionary of the History of Ideas Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas, ed. Philip Wiener [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973], 2:297–312, at 305). Also: "The \textit{Genieperiode}, the [literary] Romantic Movements, both in Germany and France, were times of angry enthusiasm and of wild revolt; [with] ecstatic emphasis laid upon the freedom, the spontaneity, and the originality of the creative genius" (Logan Pearsall Smith, Four Words Romantic, Originality, Creative, Genius Society for Pure English, Tract 17 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1924], 36; cited in Hans Lenneberg, "The First ‘Un-appreciated’ Genius," Journal of Musicological Research 4 [1982]: 145–57, at 155).

\textsuperscript{55} Gustave Reese, \textit{Music in the Renaissance} (New York: W. W. Norton, 1954), 184. For Reese, Josquin's only rival in the realm of motet composition was Palestrina, "due to the widely held and no doubt correct opinion that his music is more suitable for devotional purposes." But he felt that Palestrina "must yield first place to Josquin as a historical figure and must admit him to a place at least of companionship on purely musical grounds" (ibid., 246).
and temperamental personality of Beethoven. The first is the famous letter to Duke Ercole d'Este of Ferrara (1502) by his agent Gian de Artiganova, in which he discouraged the duke from hiring Josquin because he was difficult to get along with and “composes when he wants to, and not when one wants him to.”56 The second is the story of Johannes M anlius (1562), dating from four decades after Josquin’s death, in which an irascible, petulant Josquin called one of his singers “You ass!” and publicly berated him for adding ornaments that he had not written into the piece,57 an incident uncannily echoed in a well-known quote of Beethoven’s: “I refuse to allow another, whoever he may be, to alter my compositions.”58 While the notion of a temperamental Renaissance artist is itself a trope of some venerability, and was certainly a trait attributed to artists like Michelangelo, one does wonder whether these particular letters and anecdotes would have figured so prominently in Josquin studies in the absence of a Beethovenian historical framework.59 The third example is the equally famous testimony of the Swiss humanist Heinrich Glarean (1488–1563), a near contemporary of Josquin and a knowledgeable musical authority:

Those who knew him say that he published his works after much deliberation and with manifold corrections; neither did he release a song to the public unless he had kept it to himself for some years, the opposite of what Jacob O brecht appears to have done.60


57. “You ass, why do you add ornamentation? If it had pleased me, I would have inserted it myself. If you wish to amend properly composed songs, make your own, but leave mine un-amended!” Quoted in Rob C. Wegman, “‘And Josquin Laughed . . . ’: Josquin and the Composer’s Anecdote in the Sixteenth Century,” Journal of Musicology 17 (1999): 319–57, at 322.


59. The idea of being a “difficult” creative personality may have been something of a trope in this period, which saw the rise of an elite group of exceptionally talented artists in Italian courts that required “more deference than was due to mere craftsmen” (Kemp, “The ‘Super-Artist,’ ” 37). Like Josquin, the artist Andrea Mantegna, for example, working for Isabella d’Este at the nearby Gonzaga court in Mantua, “was regarded as a difficult character, quick to take offence and slow to meet obligations” (ibid.). In the Renaissance, the concept of artistic temperament had to do with humoral medicine and the Saturnine disposition that gave rise to melancholy, with the presumably greatest creative artists being the victims most seriously afflicted with the condition. See the classic studies by Rudolf Wittkower and Margot Wittkower, Born Under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1963); and Klubansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy. For a deeper exploration of melancholy as it relates specifically to Josquin, his personality, and contemporaneous anecdotes about him, see Wegman, “‘And Josquin Laughed,’ ” 338–57.

The powerful resonance of this comment in the late twentieth century lies, I suspect, in its tacit evocation of the “struggling artist” genius trope and, more specifically, of Beethoven, the embodiment of heroic striving, the indefatigable genius, laboriously reworking his compositions in sketch after sketch after sketch.

In a revised version of his “Genius” article, published in the Dictionary of the History of Ideas (1973), Lowinsky himself linked Josquin and Beethoven with explicit reference to the aforementioned Glarean anecdote. A comparison of the earlier (1964) and later (1973) versions of the article reveals that Lowinsky added a new section on Beethoven as the quintessential “representative of musical genius, . . . both as a man and as an artist.” More importantly, Lowinsky pairs Josquin and Beethoven in connection with Nietzsche’s reaction to Beethoven’s sketches: “All great artists and thinkers were great workers, indefatigable not only in inventing, but also in rejecting, sifting, transforming, ordering” (Human All Too Human, 1878). He continues with a comparison of the two composers’ personalities:

It was Nietzsche who, following Beethoven’s example, discovered an element of musical genius often overlooked by writers from the Renaissance through romanticism: endless patience and infinite striving (Streben) or effort. One of the few writers remarking upon this was Glareanus, when he spoke about Josquin des Prez. And, indeed, there is a peculiar affinity between the personalities and the creative characteristics of the great genius of the fifteenth century who came out of the Middle Ages and moved toward the new world of the Renaissance, and the composer of the eighteenth century who moved from classicism to romanticism, creating in the process a musical amalgam of an utterly unique character.

The source of Lowinsky’s comparison happens to be the 1960 edition of Donald Jay Grout’s History of Western Music, as duly cited in a footnote. Grout’s widely circulating music history textbook predated the original version of Lowinsky’s “Genius” essay by several years, and yet it was only in the 1973 revised version of the essay, written in the aftermath of the 1965


62. Lowinsky based his comments on the following excerpt: “Josquin and Beethoven resemble each other in many ways. In both, the strong impulse of personal utterance struggled against the limits of the musical language of their time. Both were tormented by the creative process, and worked slowly and with numerous revisions. Both had a sense of humor: both, because of their independent attitude, had trouble with their patrons. Both, in their best works, achieved that combination of intensity and order, individuality and universality, which is the mark of genius” (Donald Jay Grout, A History of Western Music [New York: W. W. Norton, 1960], 183).
Kerman-Lowinsky exchange and the 1971 Josquin Festival-Conference, that the additions conjoining Josquin and Beethoven as kindred geniuses appear, along with the added phrase labeling Josquin “the great genius of the fifteenth century.” The point here is not to establish the intellectual primacy or “origins” of the Josquin-Beethoven paradigm, which might well prove an exercise in futility. Rather it is to show brief ideological freeze-frames of Lowinsky’s gradually changing thinking about Josquin.

The invocation of a Josquin-Beethoven paradigm assumes a universal, transhistorical understanding of the characteristics of musical genius. While Glarean’s remarks about Josquin’s painstaking, time-consuming creative process have often been interpreted as implicitly devaluing the comparative facility of Jacob Obrecht (c. 1458–1505), Glarean elsewhere famously praises Obrecht for his astonishing “fertility of invention” and seems amazed that he had composed a mass in one night. In other words, Glarean clearly admires and admits the viability of both creative models, whereas his comments have been retrospectively viewed through a Beethovenian lens as necessarily preferential of Josquin’s belabored approach. Others besides Glarean similarly regarded the ease and rapidity of execution typical of Obrecht and also of Heinrich Isaac (c. 1450–1517) as signs of exceptional creativity. The aforementioned Artiganova, in attempting to dissuade Ercole d’Este from hiring the unreliable Josquin, tellingly marvels that Isaac had composed a motet in two days: “From this one can only judge that he is very rapid in the art of composition.” In matters of artistic production around the same time, “pedantic, slow, laborious execution smacked of the artisan’s craft,” and by the mid-sixteenth century, most theorists were “insisting on facility of execution, on a manner of painting that would give the impression of rapid work and effortless skill hiding the toil that had gone into the making of the work of art.” Michelangelo’s comments on the subject are fairly typical of the period: “Works are not to be judged by the amount of useless labor spent on them but by the worth of the skill and mastery of their author.”

63. For example, Albert Smijers, in a lecture to the [Royal] Musical Association on 26 April 1927, discussed the aforementioned passage from Glarean and asked, “Does not this make us compare Josquin with Beethoven, who in a similar way often was busy with the ideas for a new work, making improvements from time to time until it received a definite form?” (Albert Smijers, “Josquin des Prez,” Proceedings of the Musical Association 53 [1926–27]: 95–116, at 104). The temperamental association between the two continues even in more recent literature on Beethoven: “We have only to read the account of an early sixteenth-century critic like Glarean to see the enormous emotional impact of the music of Josquin, who reduced his listeners to tears, and who, furthermore, was known for his arrogant and temperamental refusal to write music when commissioned except when he felt like it” (emphasis added). See Charles Rosen, “Did Beethoven Have All the Luck?” review of Beethoven and the Construction of Genius by Tia DeNora, The New York Review of Books, 14 November 1996, 57–64, at 58.

64. Quoted in Wegman, “‘And Josquin Laughed,’ ” 334.


66. Quoted in ibid.
In other words, it is questionable whether “painstaking effort” necessarily carried the aesthetic value that has been retrospectively attributed to it, for methodical Beethovenesque compositional process has not necessarily conferred present-day genius status upon all Renaissance composers. Adrian Willaert, to give but one example, had a similar reputation in the Renaissance for being slow to produce, according to his student Zarlino. Hailed in his day as “divino Adriano” and as a “new Pythagoras,” Willaert was regarded by many as the unrivaled heir apparent to Josquin. H is six-voice motet *Verbum bonum et suave* had even been sung under Josquin’s name in the papal chapel choir. And yet for a variety of historical and historiographical reasons, Willaert’s present-day reception history has been dwarfed by that of Josquin.

Owing largely to the influence of Glarean’s comments about Josquin’s working habits, it often seems as if a covert assumption operative in Josquin scholarship is that the only surviving attributed works that can truly be authentic are the pieces that Josquin would presumably have “corrected carefully” before he “released” them “to the public” and that happen to conform to late twentieth-century, historically constrained notions of compositional perfection. Even if there is some truth to Glarean’s testimony (and we must at least acknowledge the possibility that there isn’t), it fails to take into account the possibility of the composer’s works (say, his working drafts) being circulated without his permission (a number of viable hypothetical scenarios leap to mind, including unscrupulous pilfering, whether during his own lifetime or of his posthumous creative estate).

Moreover, even in the cases of those purportedly “carefully corrected” works he “released to the public” — and it is doubtful that Josquin and his contemporaries would have understood those phrases as we do today — there is no guarantee of musical perfection by early twenty-first-century standards. Their alleged release for public consumption says nothing about anyone else’s aesthetic taste or musical judgment beyond Josquin’s own. Further, the music printing process in its nascent years would hardly have ensured the accurate

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69. The anecdote comes from Zarlino, who recounts that when Willaert pointed out that the motet was in fact his own, the singers never wanted to sing it again. One is inclined to ask, along with Rob Wegman, “whether we may not be dealing with a phenomenon of mass psychology,” rather than musical judgment (“Who Was Josquin?” in *The Josquin Companion*, ed. Sherr, 21–50, at 25).
70. This of course begs the question posed by Foucault, “How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death?” particularly in the absence of a “theory of the work” for this period. More importantly, such a question impinges directly on Josquin’s status as an “author,” or his “author function,” both then and now. See Foucault, “What Is an Author?” 103–4. I address these questions in a forthcoming monograph on authorship and creative patrilineage.
reproduction of every last detail of a composition, much less guarantee total authorial control over the final product. “We must remind ourselves that we deal with the beginnings of printing and that editorial methods and standards that cry out for improvement in the twentieth century were certainly far from perfect in Petrucci’s time,” as Lowinsky himself cautioned thirty years ago.\footnote{Elders, “Report of the First Josquin Meeting,” 28.} Palestrina and Victoria, who published several decades later, were exceptional among their contemporaries, according to Ludovico Zacconi, in having had the opportunity to supervise carefully the publication of their work.\footnote{James Haar, “A Sixteenth-Century Attempt at Music Criticism,” this Journal 36 (1983): 191–209, at 196, citing Ludovico Zacconi, Prat\'ica di musica (Venice, 1592).} It seems to be assumed, in part because of Glarean’s remarks, that Josquin would have benefited from similar authorial supervision, but whatever quality control Josquin may have exercised in the creative process, it seems more likely that it went more or less out the window once the piece left his hands.\footnote{Johannes Ott hints at this possibility in the preface to the motet collection Novum et insignum opus musicum of 1537: “outside of the fact that we were forced to make use of the services of men who do not understand the art [of music], there is also great danger that we have used manuscripts in which many features have been purposely corrupted by certain persons and in which many things have been either omitted or changed through negligence.” Edgar H. Sparks, The Music of Noel Bauldeweyn (New York: Galaxy Music, 1972), 94–95. This remark, while often cited to justify suspicion surrounding the authenticity of the pieces transmitted in this and other late manuscripts of German provenance, might just as well attest to post-authorial contamination of a work that encountered untold vicissitudes in transit to print.} In other words, broadly stated, there is an urgent need in Josquin studies to engage in a more historically grounded theorizing about epistemological questions of aesthetics, authorship, music production, and the status of the work as they relate specifically to the pre-modern period.

Aspects of Josquin’s reception history resonate so strongly and retrospectively with Barthes’s “bio-mythology” of Beethoven, as outlined in the epigraph at the opening of this section, that they tend to blur and even dissolve the vast chronological and epistemological boundaries that separate the two composers. One almost seems to imagine their historical consubstantiation. Bedecked in Beethovenian rhetoric as a struggling hero, Josquin is endowed with a discourse (of genius), a legend (multiple mythologizing anecdotes), a race of Titans (rubbing shoulders in the same sentences—and possibly during his lifetime—with Michelangelo and Leonardo), and an iconography (the austere, turbaned Josquin of the Opoer woodcut striking a pose not unlike the cool, distant regards characteristic of icons of the heroic Beethoven). Josquin lacks only a “fatal malady” comparable to Beethoven’s deafness. And the paradigm extends still further in the widespread adoption of Ambros’s division of Josquin’s canon into a tripartite Beethovenian early-middle-late chronology, in the Beethovenizing rhetoric that ascribes to Josquin the “liberation” of Renaissance music from the shackles of cantus firmus treatment, in
the Beethoven-like proliferation of recordings of his uncontested “masterpieces” (one now enjoys the luxury of opting for the recorded authority of the “Phillips” or the “Peres” Pange lingua in the same way that we speak of the “von Karajan” or “Norrington” Ninth),

Just as Beethoven scholarship, in the aftermath of the Beethoven-Jahr conferences, saw a proliferation of sketch studies and publications of autograph facsimiles, so Josquin research (in the absence of sketches and autographs) turned its attention to the paleographical scrutiny of scribal hands, manuscript variants, and archival documents in the service of dating and authenticating Josquin’s canon. Though chronologically disparate enterprises, Josquin authentication studies and Beethoven sketch and autograph studies derive from the same impetus to sacralize the artistic productions of genius composers of the past; and each participates in a kind of perfection-aesthetics driven by a desire to isolate those incontestably authentic products of musical genius.

Fetishizing Genius

Bishop Hugh of Lincoln (later canonized) was one of the most assiduous practitioners of furta sacra [sacred theft]. Allowed to handle the arm of Mary Magdalene at a rival shrine, he surreptitiously bit off a finger and took it back to his parish, where it remains today. Bishop Hugh, with his good teeth and opportunistic gnawing at the sacred, was a precursor of our modern museum curators, who also seek out and acquire, usually by less macabre means, the artworks that serve as contemporary equivalents of the sacred, though instead of the bones of the saint they present for veneration the personal creations of the

74. Adorno’s commentary on the fetishistic character of musical life, and “commodity listening,” resonates broadly for genius-composer studies, particularly his thoughts on the “totalitarian” nature of the “star principle,” to which even musical works are susceptible: “A pantheon of best-sellers builds up” and “the most familiar is the most successful and therefore played again and again and made still more familiar” (Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” in Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory, ed. Stephen David Ross, 2d ed. [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987], 540–49, at 541).

75. Joseph Kerman some time ago drew attention to the phenomenon of musicologists flocking from the study of Renaissance music to that of the nineteenth century (Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985], 144). I would amplify this observation to include scholars such as Carl Dahlhaus, Lewis Lockwood, Ludwig Fincher, Martin Staehelin, Christopher Reynolds, and doubtless others, who have published on both Josquin and Beethoven.

76. While Beethoven studies saw, if not a steady stream, at least a regular trickle of publications of sketches and autographs spanning the century from Gustav Nottebohm’s pioneering studies until 1970, one need only peruse the bibliography in the second edition of The New Grove to see the extent to which they have proliferated in the past thirty years.

77. Kerman saw tremendous potential for the kind of true criticism he sought for musicology in the study of Beethoven sketches and autographs (Contemplating Music, 134–42).
Once Josquin had been apotheosized and refashioned as the Renaissance musical genius par excellence, his reception history began to accumulate the ideological residue of genius tropes that have fueled the mythologizing of Beethoven Hero, and the music attributed to him became subject to the ever more assiduous curatorial fervor of musicological high priests seeking to enshrine a canon of works “truly worthy of devotion.” For want of space, I shall focus here only on the tendency to privilege, even fetishize, attribution and chronology studies. My concern is not to disparage attribution scholarship per se, but rather to consider its arguably totalizing and oppressive effects.

While questions of authenticity had figured to some extent in Josquin scholarship well before 1971, largely in connection with the completion of the opera omnia then in progress (but also dating back to the work of Ambros), the major intellectual legacy of Lowinsky’s conference was to establish the hegemony of authenticity and chronology studies as the sine qua non of future progress in the field. Indeed, Lowinsky hinted as much in his opening address:

Musicians must learn that unless they keep conversant with current scholarship they may not even know whether what they perform as Josquin is in fact by Josquin. A number of works that now are part of the Josquin edition will not appear in a truly critical second edition.

79. Scott Burnham has compared the mythological figures of Hector and Achilles, human hero and demigod, respectively, as those through which “we may discern the difference between Beethoven’s Hero and Beethoven Hero. Doing so may make us more pointedly aware of the ironic interaction between the values instantiated by Beethoven’s heroic style and the way in which Beethoven has been installed, through the implicit tenets of our reigning analytical methodologies, as the godlike hero of Western art music, a force of history whose will becomes musical necessity” (Beethoven Hero, 157).
80. As Hayden White notes, while there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a fetish, it is important to establish its effect on a given culture: “The social scientist is much more interested in how a given fetishistic practice functions in a given culture, individual or group, whether it is oppressive or therapeutically efficacious, than in exposing the error of logic or rationality that underlies it” (“The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish,” in his Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985], 183–96, at 184).
81. In his review of the Josquin Proceedings, Anthony Newcomb similarly notes that the essays in the first two sections of the volume directly confront the “two fundamental areas” of authenticity and chronology of life and works, and formed the “core of excellence around which the volume is built” (Musical Quarterly 63 [1977]: 549–55, at 550).
82. “Opening Session,” in Josquin Proceedings 16. Moments earlier, Lowinsky had explicitly stated the need for a new edition that would be produced with “international cooperation.” As he said, “Now that the first edition has been completed, nothing would be more beneficial than . . . well-planned international working conferences in which all aspects of a new edition would be
Shortly thereafter, in his keynote address, Friedrich Blume alluded in uncannily Kermanesque terms to “a considerable number of works of dubious authenticity, even spurious works [that] have beclouded the tradition” (emphasis added).83 He then proceeded to devote virtually the entire address (its subtitle “The Man and the Music” notwithstanding) to establishing the priority of authenticity studies for future Josquin scholarship:

Further progress in Josquin research and in the study of the music of the whole age will largely depend on detailed inquiry into the catalogue of the authentic works of the master. This will probably be the most burning problem, for how should the scholar pursue serious studies of Josquin’s music, and how should the amateur find an approach to this outstanding musician, unless they know that the composition in their hands is really by Josquin... It will, therefore, remain a constant challenge to Josquin research to set up an inventory of indubitably authentic works and to eliminate all dubious and spurious works handed down erroneously under his name.84 [emphasis added]

The virtually uncontested hegemony of authenticity studies in Josquin research some thirty years later is clear from a recent review of the Josquin Companion, in which Allan Atlas noted, “In all, the problem of ‘authenticity’ and the apparent desire to trim the canon have become something of an obsession, one that can be seen on virtually every page of the Companion.”85 The statistics, as he says, are indeed “startling—even alarming”:

The New Josquin Edition (NJE) accounts for twenty-nine mass cycles attributed to Josquin in one source or another; while Smijers included twenty in his “old” Josquin edition, Noble accepted only eighteen in his 1980 New Grove worklist, and there are those who would now cut the number to a dozen or so; likewise, of the 161 motets with attributions to Josquin (according to the NJE), Smijers published 110, Noble accepted seventy-eight, while the current consensus would trim the list to no more than about fifty. And needless to say, each revisionary wave is certain that it has it right.86


84. Ibid., 21–22.
86. Ibid., 63, paraphrasing David Fallows, “Afterword: Thoughts for the Future,” in The Josquin Companion, ed. Sherr, 569–78, at 571. Fallows acknowledges, “But the pattern seems to suggest that Josquin is getting smaller and smaller; and it may just be time for a little more generosity.”
One explanation for the “obsession” with authenticating Josquin is the post-1971 proliferation of a genius trope that absolves him from the sin of technical error—whether of counterpoint, part-writing, or text setting—via a presumptive endowment with creative perfection or infallibility. Josquin qua Genius can no longer be seen to have written a note of less-than-perfect—technically and otherwise—music, music that is deemed “worthy of him” in the parlance of the inner sanctum. As Rob Wegman assesses the current state of affairs, “Josquin’s works must, in all circumstances, be seen to represent the pinnacle of musical achievement. Yet this opinion is no longer based on firmly attested works; on the contrary: it has become self-fulfilling in dictating which works we should accept and which we should reject.”87 In other words, proceeding from the a priori assumption of Josquin’s genius, the trope of creative “perfection” becomes the overriding criterion for making “objective” determinations about the authenticity of a given piece; authenticity and perfection thus become mutually constitutive.

Forty years ago, it was still possible to acknowledge the existence of “flawed” Josquin works, albeit so long as they were depicted as “fledgling” efforts. Helmuth Osthoff, for example, readily accepted the authenticity of six “Satzfehler motets,”88 whose “archaic style and many technical defects” were telltale signs of apprentice works from Josquin’s early career; indeed, as he said, it would be “unthinkable” to place them elsewhere in the chronological spectrum, once his authorship is accepted.89 (Once fully mature, it seems, Josquin would never again be capable of a “technical defect.”) In a now-classic paper entitled “Authenticity Problems in Josquin’s Motets,” presented at the 1971 conference, Edgar Sparks proceeded to reject every one of the same six motets in a thoroughgoing demolition of Osthoff’s arguments. He concluded: “One can hardly expect Josquin to write a masterpiece every time he sets pen to paper; nor can one expect him to write without stylistic variation. But how dull a work, and how much variation from the norm can one accept?”90 Notable here is the “what-goes-without-saying” assumption that the “norm” is so wholly self-evident as to need no further elucidation.

Sparks’s disclaimer notwithstanding, one can discern in his lengthy defense of Josquin against the contamination of “Satzfehler” a reluctance to see Josquin—even in his youth—as capable of the occasional technical imperfection. Examples of this kind of aesthetic rescue operation saturate the Josquin literature. A similar case involved the Missa Unemousse de Biscaye.

88. The “Satzfehler motets” are characterized by a particular “compositional error” that involves the dominant cadence with leading note and leading-note suspension sounding simultaneously in different voices.
Any attempt to regard this as mature richness of invention is contradicted by crudities of part-writing and dissonance treatment, that are more frequent here than in any of Josquin’s other masses. If this mass is by him, it must be early; and if it is early it reveals a quite different aspect of his character from L‘ami Baudichon.91 Perhaps the best-known casualty of the infallible Josquin genius trope is the Missa Da pacem, long regarded by Ambros, Blume, and Osthoff as a “masterpiece.” Ambros considered its Credo in particular to be an unrivaled achievement “that no master of the past or present, no matter what his name, has surpassed.”92 Nevertheless, in a monograph published one year after the 1971 Josquin Festival-Conference, Edgar Sparks found the work full of “thick” counterpoint and “awkward, even incorrect dissonance treatment as well as forbidden parallels,” and argued what many now consider to be the definitive case for the authorship of the obscure sixteenth-century composer Noel Bauldeweyn.93 The implicit assumption that compositional “perfection” is a prerequisite of “greatness” is itself a product of the Romantic notion of the heroic, “flawless” genius. And yet, as Dahlhaus noted, “perfection” could just as well be seen to be the “counterpole” to the idea of greatness: “Some work of art flawed from the point of view of perfection may be significant from the point of view of greatness.”94 We need more reasoned creative negotiations of this kind in the aftermath of Josquin’s apotheosis.95

The authenticity fetish has reached the point where any matter-of-fact assertion of “part-writing errors”—as Patrick Macey makes in the case of the motet Misericordias Domini, an early and, until only recently, unchallenged

93. Ibid., 241–42, paraphrasing Sparks, The Music of Noel Bauldeweyn, 43.
94. Dahlhaus, Esthetics of Music, 88–89.
95. There are some refreshing signs that the pendulum has begun to swing back in the direction of a more careful reconsideration of the criteria for the previous ejection of this piece, if not others as well. Richard Sherr attempts at least to rehabilitate (if not reattribute outright) the Missa Da pacem. He rightly points out the highly subjective nature of the “qualitative” criteria Edgar Sparks used to eject the mass from the Josquin canon, noting, “It would seem that Sparks has clinched the matter in favour of Bauldeweyn, but the work itself has not changed. If Ambros, Blume, and Osthoff thought the work a masterpiece, surely there is still a bit of a masterpiece left in it” (“Missa Da pacem and Missa Allez regretz,” 242). Alejandro Planchart goes even further, suggesting that “Sparks indulges in a bit of critical overkill in dealing with the work, most likely because he was bucking a well-established scholarly tradition that considered Josquin as the author and was influenced by the heroic mythologizing of Josquin promoted by Lowinsky. The fact remains that, no matter who the author is, Da pacem is a beautiful and well-written work, one well worth studying and performing” (“Masses on Plainsong Cantus Firmi,” in The Josquin Companion, ed. Sherr, 89–150, at 89 n. 2).
work\textsuperscript{96}—risks not only incrimination of the piece on grounds of suspect authenticity but almost certain canonical annihilation as well. In the present purgative climate, any such "errors" will be assailed by another Josquin scholar as merely the most egregious of a hitherto overlooked legion of compositional "errors." Thus, in \textit{Misericordias Domini}, Finscher finds "excessive text repetition and overuse of one motif," "too many emphatic cadences in which the music seems to stop altogether," and an imitation that "irritatingly starts with a 'wrong' motif in the superius." While stopping short of ejecting the piece from the canon entirely, he remains skeptical: "All in all, the piece looks as if the composer is experimenting and is not quite sure of himself, but it is difficult to see how Josquin could be in such a situation at any time after \textit{Ave Maria}."\textsuperscript{97} And so yet another of Josquin's "most powerful works" proceeds inexorably down the road to disattribution, its premature demise now all but certain after Joshua Rifkin's recent indictment of it as a piece that "bristles with contrapuntal solecisms to a degree unmatched by any motet with a more obviously trustworthy attribution to Josquin."\textsuperscript{98}

Particularly vulnerable to the genius trope of creative infallibility are pieces with conflicting attribution wherein the argument for disattribution, as for problematic works of otherwise uncontested attribution (like the aforementioned), almost invariably proceeds from a perception of some "flaw," "deficiency," "weakness," or "anomaly." Perhaps it is time to give serious thought to the dubious generosity of the attributive process by which "gifts" of Josquin's musical detritus are bestowed upon his distinguished but lesser-known contemporaries, because an unforeseen phenomenon, a by-product of the authenticity problem, has arisen in the form of the double (or even multiple) misattribution. Once Josquin's canon is safely purged of a now-suspect work, the piece then risks sullying the reputation of the unlucky composer

\textsuperscript{96} Patrick Macey, "Josquin's \textit{Misericordias Domini} and Louis XI," \textit{Early Music} 19 (1991): 163–77. Alejandro Planchart prefers to explain these "errors" as "deliberate archaisms": "I find Macey's arguments for the date and authenticity of the motet convincing but do not agree with what he calls part-writing errors. To me these are deliberate archaisms, similar to those of Okeghem's \textit{Requiem}, and very much part of the work's affective world. This is one of Josquin's most powerful works" ("Masses on Plainsong Cantus Firmi," 136 n. 87). The assumption of "deliberate archaisms" is a common critical strategy adopted in defense of the authenticity of pieces whose "perfection" is somehow perceived to be compromised. Friedrich Blume, for example, defended the \textit{Missa Da pacem} on the grounds that the "archaisms were deliberate on Josquin's part." See Sherr, "\textit{Missa Da pacem} and \textit{Missa Allez regertz}," 240, citing Josquin des Prés, \textit{Missa Da Pacem}, ed. Friedrich Blume (1932; 2d ed., Wolfenbüttel: Möseler Verlag, 1950), 3. Interestingly, Nicholas Cook finds the systematic use in Beethoven scholarship of similarly apologetic discursive strategies. See note 110 below.


\textsuperscript{98} Rifkin, "M unich, Milan, and a Marian Motet," 328 and 328–29 n. 195. Rifkin cites in particular the "sheer quantity" of parallel intervals, and "bald parallel fifths by leap into a strong beat."
to whom it is by default assigned, usually the one involved in the conflicting attribution. This leaves the scholar who has staked his or her career on unveiling this default composer’s unappreciated genius little choice but to rush to the rescue with a defensive declaration that the flawed work is worthy of neither composer, as in the case of the five-voice motet Missus est angelus Gabriel:

In his edition of FlorL666, Lowinsky has rejected Josquin’s authorship for many reasons, and I totally agree with him. . . . But Lowinsky’s next step is incomprehensible. He says: “But the work qualifies as a composition of Mouton’s mature period.” . . . Thus Lowinsky has laid all the weaknesses of Missus est angelus Gabriel at Mouton’s door. In his view these are: “a uniform texture, plodding and unadventurous rhythm favoring accent on the regular beat, and using syncopation only to embellish a fundamental regularity, the sluggish declamation.” . . . In my opinion, we have encountered a double misattribution in the sources of this opus dubium.\(^9\)

Here we find an example of one of the most regrettable repercussions of the Josquin authenticity fetish: upholding Josquin’s infallibility at all costs requires the compensatory denigration of the reputation of Jean Mouton, an outstanding composer of dazzling contrapuntal virtuosity, a favorite of Pope Leo X and of several kings and queens of France.\(^10\) Not only does this process of decontamination questionably recategorize and reattribute these works; it also further decontextualizes them by orienting Renaissance musicology to specific genius-personalities, like Josquin, rather than to the broader community of musicians of which he was but one, albeit vital, representative.

Confronted at every turn with what Dahlhaus called the “refuse left behind by source criticism,”\(^10\) I have yet to see a cottage industry of scholars springing up to salvage the musical viability, not to mention the recordability, marketability, and programmability, of the “rejects” from the erstwhile Josquin canon.\(^10\) And though not nearly as economically devastating as doubtful


100. Praised by Glarean, Mouton was described by Ronsard as a pupil of Josquin and by Folengo as a composer whose music would be “mistaken for Josquin’s,” a comment perhaps corroborated by no fewer than ten conflicting attributions his works share with those of Josquin. And yet present-day scholarship finds Mouton wanting: He was “probably not a student of Josquin,” and his “melodic contours themselves tend to be rather short-spanned. . . . [He] was often indifferent to good text declamation: his music is filled with incorrect accentuations and other infelicities in the way he combines words and notes, a trait indicating that he was more interested in purely musical design than in expression” (Howard Mayer Brown and Thomas G. MacCracken, “Mouton [de Houlguie], Jean,” in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 2d ed. [2001]: 17:241).


102. One remarkable exception is a recent recording by Andrew Kirkman and the Binchois Consort, Josquin and His Contemporaries (London, Hyperion, CDA 67183 [2001]), consisting
authenticity in the art world,\textsuperscript{103} conflicting attributions in Josquin do have certain economic ramifications in the recording industry.\textsuperscript{104} In the three decades following the 1971 Josquin conference, the reception histories of Josquin’s designated cohorts in musical genius, Lasso and Gesualdo, have been overshadowed by a disproportionate amount of attention to Josquin, as has that of entirely of works of conflicting attribution and whose stated purpose is to provide the listener with “the chance to judge for [him]self.”

\textsuperscript{103} Following the “disattribution” of the famous Rembrandt painting “Man with a Golden Helmet,” a Berlin curator tried to assure the press that the painting was “an independent original in its own right, with its own independent worth.” See Svetlana Alpers, Rembrandt’s Enterprise: The Studio and the Market (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2. According to Alpers, “It is hard to value a painting which is not the product of a particular artist’s hand. ‘This is an authentic work by ‘x’ ‘ has been central to the marketing, to the study, and even to the definition of pictures” (ibid.). Earlier versions of the present essay included an extensive discussion of the role of Rembrandt scholarship as a paradigm for Josquin authentication studies. Summarized as briefly as possible: The International Josquin Symposium held in Utrecht in 1986 focused critical attention on a number of pieces with conflicting attributions involving Josquin and some of his outstanding contemporaries, particularly Mouton, LaRue, Verdelot, and Brumel, whose works had been comparatively neglected by modern scholarship. A paper by Joshua Rifkin drew attention to the Rembrandt Research Project (RRP), founded by a group of Dutch scholars with the purpose of “subject[ing] every single Rembrandt attribution, no matter how universally accepted, to a searching and, so far as possible, unprejudiced inquiry.” Rifkin advocated a redirection of authenticity studies on Josquin following the model of the RRP, one that would interrogate “the attribution of all the works known to us under Josquin’s name—even the most obvious attributions of the most obvious works,” including, he added, the Missa Pange lingua” (Joshua Rifkin, “Problems of Authorship: Some Impolitic Observations. With a Postscript on Absalon, fili mi,” in Proceedings of the International Josquin Symposium, Utrecht, ed. Elders, 45–52, at 46–47). This initiative, which gave rise to several of the more controversial mis en doute of the past fifteen years, may have further fueled the authentication fetish.

Without recounting the complex and embittered history of the RRP, suffice it to say that by the mid 1990s, Rembrandt connoisseurship had become so mired in confusion that two curators collaborating on the 1995 exhibition “Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Aspects of Connoisseurship” ended up disagreeing so fundamentally on the authorship of twenty of the forty-two purported Rembrandt paintings that each resorted to writing his own exhibition catalogue. Meanwhile, technological advancements in the areas of autroradiography, which shows the distribution of specific pigments, and dendrochronology, which permits the dating of wood, have yielded dramatic results. The painting Study Head of an Old Man, for example, thought definitively to be an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century imitation, was shown to have been painted on wood from a tree felled between 1626 and 1632, in the middle of Rembrandt’s lifetime. See Gary Schwartz, “Truth in Labeling,” Art in America 83 (1995): 52 and 56; and Henry Adams, “In Search of Rembrandt,” Smithsonian 26 (1995): 86. Paradoxically, the impetus to apply ever more rigorous standards of authentication in Rembrandt studies, born perhaps of a potent anti-Romanticism, ended up imposing genius-laden evaluative criteria that reinscribed the very ideology it wished to eradicate.

\textsuperscript{104} First, there is the phenomenon, mentioned earlier, of Adorno’s “pantheon of best-sellers,” namely, the recording ad infinitum of presumed “authentic” masterpieces, at the expense of those less stunning (or even potentially dubious) works that might afford a better handle on what “quotidian Josquin” (if one can be permitted to think such a thought) sounded like. This was already problematic in 1971: “interpreters often choose the same works, some of which have
the once towering and unassailable giant of Renaissance composers, Palestrina, himself long mythologized as the “savior of music.” Of the post-1967 scholarship included in RILM Abstracts, an admittedly somewhat crude but reasonably approximate measure, there are 292 entries for Josquin, 188 for Lassus, and 58 for Gesualdo; Willaert has 47 and Rore 32. The “singularly gifted composers” active during Josquin’s lifetime have elicited still fewer: Obrecht has 42, La Rue 34, Senfl 15, Compere 12, Brumel 8, and Mouton 6. Entries on Palestrina are somewhat more numerous (330), but many of them concern Hans Pfitzner’s opera on the composer.

The extent to which the late twentieth-century reception of Josquin could compete with, much less eclipse, the reputation of Palestrina seems all the more remarkable in light of the following comment contrasting him with Josquin:

Palestrina’s historical reputation resembles that of no other composer in musical history. While Josquin had remained a celebrated figure in the 16th century, his star then waned in the light of changing tastes and styles and has only been revived in the 20th century. With Palestrina, however, a concatenation of historical developments combined to maintain his prestige at an ever higher level for 200 years after his death, while most of his predecessors and contemporaries were virtually lost to view.105

The relative decline of Palestrina with comparison to Josquin is to some extent a counterreaction to the post-Romantic mythologizing of that composer, particularly in the century following the publication of Giuseppe Baini’s Palestrina in 1829. Paul Henry Lang, praising the second edition of Karl Gustav Fellerer’s Palestrina (1960) for its myth-debunking objectivity, described the “romantic haze” formerly surrounding the composer’s image and become positive warhorses, while many masterpieces are yet to be heard” (Nanie Bridgman, “On the Discography of Josquin and the Interpretation of His Music in Recordings,” in Josquin Proceedings 633–41, at 633). For the most recent discography see Peter Urquhart’s appendix in The Josquin Companion, ed. Sherr, 597–639. His list reveals twelve CD recordings of Missa Pange lingua, thirteen of Nymphes des bois and fifteen of Ave Maria . . . Virgo serena. Meanwhile, there appear to be no CD recordings available of the masses Ad fugam, Allez regretz, D’ung autre amer, Fortuna desperata, and Une mousse de Biscaye, the authenticity of at least three of which has been questioned either formally or informally, not to mention dozens of motets and songs still considered authentic. Second, the disproportionation attention to Josquin in general comes at the expense of his exceedingly gifted if lesser-known contemporaries, Obrecht, Isaac, LaRue, Mouton, Compere, and Brumel, some of whose works have been edited for decades but are, even now, not readily available on recordings, thus depriving us of an audible basis for comparison, and further widening the “genius gap” between Josquin and other composers.

noted that a “cool, reasoned, scholarly examination of this prodigious Satz-
kunst” had been “largely inhibited by the worship of the legendary hero ‘who
saved church music’” (emphasis in original).  

For centuries, many beloved and attributed pieces—the masses Da pacem,
Allez regretz, Une mousse de Biscaye, L’ami Baudichon, Di dadi, D’ung aultre
amer, Mater patria motets Absalon fili mi, Misericordias Domini, O bone et
dulcis me Jesus, Planxit autem David, Inviolata, integra, et casta es chansons
Milie regretz, Coeur desolez, Allez moy—whose canonicity now hovers under
an ominous cloud of suspicion or has already “bit the dust of inauthenticity,”
were counted among Josquin’s works and in several cases must surely have
contributed to the reputation he enjoyed during and especially after his own
lifetime. But in light of post-apotheosis scholarship, it would appear that,
despite possessing a staggering and virtually unparalleled knowledge of the
total corpus of attributed works, numerous Josquin scholars—including
Ambros, Blume, Osthoff, and Lowinsky, along with three editors of the first
Josquin edition (Smijers, Elders, and Antonowycz)—must now be regarded as
being in some sense blind or tone-deaf, for they failed to notice that so many
of the composer’s attributed works suffered from appalling “crudities of part-
writing and dissonance treatment” or egregious stylistic anomalies. Can it be
that so many have been so wrong for so long? Or has something else perhaps
gone awry?

One possible explanation might be that Josquin’s dissonance treatment has
yet to be sufficiently historicized and contextualized, both within his own œu-
vre and in comparison with that of his predecessors, contemporaries, and suc-
cessors, including Palestrina. In the absence of thoroughgoing, comparative
investigations of the contrapuntal practices of many different composers,
music written around 1500—at a time when contrapuntal concerns were
perhaps more fluid and far less orthodox than would become typical of
the later sixteenth century—has tended to be judged by the anachronistic
standard of a Palestrina-style purity of dissonance treatment. Indeed,
Dahlhaus’s cautionary remarks urging a revisionist approach to dissonance

106. Paul Henry Lang, “Palestrina Across the Centuries,” in Festschrift Karl Gustav Fellerer
zum Sechzigsten Geburtstag am 7 Juli 1962, ed. Heinrich Hüschen (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse
Verlag, 1962), 294–302, at 294. The work of Noel O’Regan and Jessie Ann Owens in the late
1980s and 1990s has helped to revitalize a more nuanced and critical scholarship on the composer,
as has the recent monograph by James Garratt, Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagina-
tion: Interpreting Historicism in Nineteenth-Century Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2002).

107. I refer here to pieces that have been attributed to Josquin since the sixteenth century
and that, as Rob Wegman reminds us, certainly formed part of the repertory his contemporaries
assumed to be by Josquin. Hence, many of these newly “inauthentic” pieces may nevertheless
have significantly shaped his outstanding reputation as a composer. Wegman, “Who Was
Josquin?” 34.
treatment in Josquin and an assessment of it on its own terms seem to have fallen largely on deaf ears in the ensuing thirty years.108

A second possibility lies in the venerable tradition of music historiography that tends to view the genius-composer's creative trajectory as a strictly linear progression from the unskilled works of youth to those of consummate artistic maturity. For Mozart and Beethoven, we at least have concrete datable evidence attesting to their far-from-flawless efforts as budding geniuses, although these tend to be safely tucked away in complete editions and selectively retrieved on special anniversary occasions as precocious receptacles of the composer's "golden nugget."109 In Beethoven's case, we have a number of indisputably authentic mature works that have become sources of embarrassment, "hardly . . . worthy of Beethoven's genius."110 Would that the "Beethoven of the Renaissance" merited the same "pass" for an occasional substandard work: in Josquin's case, it often seems as if any stylistically problematic or contrapuntally imperfect work finds itself relegated to some nebulously defined "early" period of his career or, more often than not, summarily tossed out of the canon altogether. As one Josquin scholar has recently admit-

108. “The view of Josquin's counterpoint as a Palestrina style with archaic residues and imperfections needs revision. The treatment of dissonance in the period around 1500 must be measured by its own standards. Many dissonant figures that Palestrina banished from the ‘réne Satz’ appear with great regularity in Josquin’s motets, whether late or early. They have the air of self-evidence. Far from forming deviations from a norm that Josquin supposedly shared with Palestrina, they carry their norm in themselves” (Carl Dahlhaus, “On the Treatment of Dissonance in the Motets of Josquin des Prez,” in Josquin Proceedings, 334–44, at 336; emphasis added). Joshua Rifkin invokes Dahlhaus’s article as if to suggest that he questioned the authenticity of Misericordias Domini (“Munich, Milan, and a Marian Motet,” 328 n. 195). In fact, Dahlhaus cites the motet as one of many examples of Josquin’s systematic use of dissonance treatment that would much later come to be banished in the pure Palestrina style. A comprehensive history of counterpoint in the pre-Palestrina era, which in addition to Josquin would ideally focus serious attention on dissonance treatment in the music of Ockeghem, Busnoys, and their contemporaries, has yet to be written. For a recent comparison of the practices of Josquin and Ockeghem see Anne-Emmanuelle Ceulemans, “U ne étude comparative du traitement de la mélodie et de la dissonance chez Ockeghem et chez Josquin Desprez,” in Johannes Ockeghem: Actes du XLe Colloque international d’études humanistes, Tours, 3–8 février 1997, ed. Philippe Vendrix (n.p.: Klincksieck, 1998), 707-53.


110. Cook, “The Other Beethoven,” 3, 9, citing Ernest Walker. The pieces in question, Wellingtons Sieg, Op. 91 (1813), and Die glorreiche Augenblick, Op. 136 (1814), generally discredited as “potboilers,” have become subject to a number of “apologetic strategies” that seek to explain why in such works, according to Schindler, “the genius of the composer does not attain its usual heights” (ibid., 7). Cook’s article is a model of the kind of critically informed, historicizing work which might assist in the rehabilitation of pieces attributed to the historical Josquin des Prez and which have been marginalized or disenfranchised on grounds of suspect authenticity.
ted, this tendency often arises out of a “sense of protectionism of the great man; we simply do not want to believe that occasionally he could have had a really bad day and produced a mediocre work.”\textsuperscript{111}

Third, it is not clear to what extent and on what basis “compositional errors” can be alleged for the music of this period. Little if any evidence from Josquin or his contemporaries survives that would speak to, much less settle, the question of their adherence to theoretical proscriptions of “crudities of part-writing,” parallel fifths, and dissonance treatment.\textsuperscript{112} If a composer like Felix Mendelssohn, working more than three hundred years after Josquin, could be preoccupied with concerns about “fifths” and “counterpoint” on the verge of a work’s publication, it seems possible that such issues may have been perceived as lesser problems of grammatical syntax subject to last-minute correction.\textsuperscript{113} Why then should we expect pieces of Josquin, who could hardly have enjoyed the authorial control over the publication process typical of later composers, to be spotlessly error-free, particularly when it is questionable whether such “errors” (if indeed they were regarded as such) constitute a serious challenge to the aesthetic quality of the work overall.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, concerns with alleged compositional error often seem to be matters of covert and casual values and aesthetic taste concerning the kind of music a “genius” like Josquin “should” have written and which masquerade as objective “fact” via the heavily freighted rhetoric—or “force of opinion”—of a critical authority.\textsuperscript{114} Force-of-opinion scholarship creates an illusion of empirical, factual “objectivity” that circumvents the need

\textsuperscript{111} Richard Sherr, introduction to The Josquin Companion, ed. Sherr, 1–10, at 8.

\textsuperscript{112} For studies of Josquin’s dissonance treatment see Dahlhaus, “On the Treatment of Dissonance.” For a study dealing with one composer’s compositional practice with respect to theoretical prescription see Bonnie J. Blackburn, “Did Ockeghem Listen to Tinctoris?” in Johannes Ockeghem, ed. Vendrix, 597–640.

\textsuperscript{113} Mendelssohn often relied on his sister Fanny to assist him in the tedious work of scrutinizing his pieces for “fifths” and “counterpoint”: “Neither in this letter nor in your former one, do you say one word about ‘St. Paul’ or ‘Melusina,’ as one colleague should write to another—that is, remarks on fifths, rhythm and motion of the parts, on conception, counterpoint, et cetera anima. You ought to have done so, however, and should do so still, for you know the value I attach to it, and as ‘St. Paul’ is shortly to be sent to the publisher, a few strictures from you would come just at the right moment” (letter to Fanny Hensel of 30 January 1836, in Felix Mendelssohn: Letters, ed. Gisella Selden-Goth [New York: Vienna House, 1973], 255; emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{114} Rob Wegman recently drew attention to the phenomenon of “the force of opinion,” so dubbed by Castiglione in connection with a famous Josquin anecdote wherein a piece performed at the court of Isabella d’Este Gonzaga was reported to have “pleased no one” until someone ascribed it to Josquin, whereupon its musical stock instantly soared. Wegman defines the “force of opinion” as “a deeply-rooted but ultimately unsupported and subjective conviction” and finds the phenomenon at work in as much as the twenty-first century as in Josquin’s day (“Who Was Josquin?” 33). It can be readily seen, for example, in the latest New Grove worklist, wherein many individual pieces carry annotations (under “Remarks”) concerning the status of their authenticity, for example: “questioned by X, defended by Y” where X and Y are names of individual Josquin scholars and/or the New Josquin Edition.
to resort to stylistic evaluation as a criterion for authenticity. We have already seen the perils of style criticism at work (in the aforementioned case of Sparks and O'stloff, who arrived at diametrically opposed conclusions about not one, but six motets). The proscription of stylistic evaluation that continues to hold sway over Josquin scholarship is a by-product of what Barbara Herrnstein Smith has called a "politics of evaluative criticism": "One of the major effects of prohibiting or inhibiting explicit evaluation is to forestall the exhibition and obviate the possible acknowledgment of divergent systems of value and thus to ratify, by default, established evaluative authority."115

The fetishizing of authentication studies itself seems an inevitable by-product of a longstanding disciplinary privileging, among what Bruno Nettl calls musicology's "shared beliefs," of the biography and masterworks of individual composers:

[Historical musicologists] have tended to participate in major ritualistic activities, such as the publication of a composer's *opera omnia* or the performance of a composer's entire corpus of works... [they] have used the musical work, especially the master-work, as the principal focus for research and presentation. Other shared beliefs involve the integrity of periods, the insights one can gain from biography, the overwhelming validity of chronological approaches, and the significance of using the works of a single composer (rather than, to give an artificial example, the works written or performed in one city during one year) as units of study.116

Such author-centric methodologies, as Gary Tomlinson reminds us, "[maintain] the modernist myths of genius and inspired, empowered, heroic individualism and [support] the reflection of these myths in the omniscient critic," therefore both affirming a sense of the "omniscience" of the musicologist but simultaneously restricting our scope of inquiry.117 Indeed, part of the reason that questions of musical authorship have at times become so totalizing is precisely because the "masterwork" of the composer/author, contextualized as such, is inextricably bound up in what Barthes has called "a process of filiation":

115. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 24. I wish to thank Drue Fergeson, who first drew my attention to this important book while she was still a graduate student at Duke University in the late 1980s. It has significantly influenced my thinking throughout this essay. Evaluative style criticism has long been eschewed in the editorial policy of the *NJE*, as the remarks of Martin Staehelin demonstrate: "In view of the difficulty of yielding an unequivocal identification in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries on the basis of stylistic judgment alone, I have restricted myself to procedures based upon pure source research, procedures that do not necessitate stylistic reasoning, or if so, then only for purposes of control" (Martin Staehelin, quoted in Elders, "Report of the First Josquin Meeting," 24; emphasis in original).


The Apotheosis of Josquin des Prez

Are postulated: a determination of the work by the world (by race, then by History), a consecution of works amongst themselves, and a conformity of the work to the author. The author is reputed the father and the owner of his work: literary science therefore teaches respect for the manuscript and the author's declared intentions, while society asserts the legality of the relation of author to work.118

Like the "conceptual and methodological confinement" that Herrnstein Smith identified in the critical work of Frye and others, which "exhibits a severely limited conception of the potential domain of literary study and of the sorts of problems and phenomena with which it could or should deal,"119 Josquin research has long privileged an exceedingly restrictive focus on philosophical and factual questions of authenticity, biography, and chronology.120 Some scholars would regard the hegemony of such composer-centric methodologies, however significant and valuable such studies are deemed to be, as impeding the exploration of "myriad situations we as historians might construct around a musical utterance and the plurality of meanings the music might thus engage."121

In this respect, it would be useful for Josquin studies to immerse itself in a process of methodological and theoretical self-examination that would, among other things, reassess the intellectual and disciplinary costs of persisting in an

119. Herrnstein Smith, Contingencies of Value, 25.
120. As Richard Sherr acknowledges, "Authenticity is still very much a modern subject of debate; in fact, along with the details of Josquin's early biography, it sometimes appears to be the only subject of debate" (introduction to The Josquin Companion, 9). The publication, in 2003, of Joshua Rifkin's monumental 112-page JAMS article, devoted to postdating by eight years the first known copy of Josquin's Ave Maria, suggests that issues of chronology and authenticity continue to stand at the forefront of Josquin studies. Bruno Nettl's allusion to the "overwhelming validity of chronological approaches," mentioned above, echoes Carl Dahlhaus's comments on "the significance attached to chronological frameworks cobbled together from dates of composition (as though the historical significance of a work depended solely on the moment that it was created rather than on its lifespan within a musical culture)" (Dahlhaus, Foundations of Music History, 132). As the first Josquin motet historically "anthologized" in print, and quite possibly the most widely anthologized piece in all Renaissance music, Ave Maria . . . Virgo serena offers a musical paradigm of what Barbara Herrnstein Smith referred to as "cultural-historical dynamics of endurance," that is, a process by which an artifact seen by an interpretive community to be in some way exemplary—"the best of its kind"—often has "an immediate survival advantage" because of its greater chances for cultural reproduction. It will thus be "more frequently read or recited, copied or reprinted, translated, imitated, cited, commented upon" and so forth. Once an exemplary artifact has acquired such status for several generations, "it will also begin to perform certain characteristic cultural functions by virtue of the very fact that it has endured—that is, the functions of a canonical work as such—and be valued and preserved accordingly" (Herrnstein Smith, Contingencies of Value, 48, 50). With a "lifespan within a musical culture" spanning multiple centuries, this motet would make an excellent subject for an individual reception history similar to that undertaken for Magnus est tu, Domine by Cristle Collins Judd; see note 122 below.
ultimately futile quest for absolute right/wrong, yes/no answers about the problematic authorship of individual works, and encourage the expansion of its intellectual horizons into areas of more broadly historical, cultural anthropological, or critical theoretical concern that would facilitate dialogue and interaction across disciplinary borders. A model of the kind of unforeseen historical and hermeneutic vistas that open up when questions of authorship and authenticity are decentered, marginalized, or simply side-stepped altogether, is Cristle Collins Judd’s fascinating study of the reception history from the sixteenth century to the present of a single piece, the “dubious” motet *Magnus es tu, Domine/ Tu pauperum refugium*, attributed to both Josquin and Heinrich Finck. In the broader context of Renaissance studies, Martha Feldman’s recent work on print culture explores the madrigal repertory from a Foucauldian perspective of discursive formations and their circulation in a given culture. She sidelines the traditionally central question of “who wrote what and why,” seeks instead to explore “how practices of naming functioned in the context of mass circulation,”123 challenges the venerable assumption (still prevalent in Josquin scholarship) that all pieces were duly attributed unless the composer was not known,124 and demonstrates why publishers might have preferred anonymity in certain cases.125 As the author of the first collection of printed music devoted to a single composer, Josquin is a major figure in the transitional period around 1500 that witnessed a shift from the dissemination of music via manuscript to the production of print anthologies and single-author editions, and during which attitudes toward musical authorship were dramatically shifting. By virtue of what economic, cultural, and historical processes did the music of


123. “Much bibliographical evidence within printed production needs to be understood in the broadest sense to ask not just who wrote what and why, but how practices of naming functioned in the context of mass circulation and what tendencies and tensions were introduced into naming practices by the accelerated commerce of sixteenth-century Italy.” See Martha Feldman, “Authors and Anonyms: Recovering the Anonymous Subject in Cinquecento Vernacular Objects,” in *Music and the Cultures of Print*, ed. Kate van Orden (New York and London: Garland, 2000), 163–99, at 167.

124. This is the default assumption with respect to many pieces attributed uniquely in late posthumous prints and transmitted anonymously during Josquin’s entire lifetime. As Allan Atlas has asked: “Why do we assume that they—pieces and/or attributions—were born only a generation after Josquin’s death, either as honest mistakes or as a result of a publisher’s intent to deceive (and what a cynical assumption that is!)? And why use anonymous transmission during Josquin’s lifetime as negative evidence when we really know so little about why a piece bears an ascription in one source but not in another?” (“Canon Fodder,” 64).

125. “Even if printers preferred non-anonymous production, all things being equal, they seem nevertheless to have regarded certain pieces, certain kinds of pieces, and most likely pieces by certain kinds of authors as being categorically ‘anonymous’ in character” (Feldman, “Authors and Anonyms,” 168–69).
Josquin, more so than that of any of his gifted musical contemporaries, come to play such a pivotal role in that transformative process?126

A more radical possibility for rethinking questions of authorship and attribution would be to relinquish—or at least to consider less categorical approaches to—the sacrosanct notion of a single-authored creative “work,” whose epistemological legitimacy in this period is in any case open to question, and to begin seriously to entertain notions of collaborative or collective authorship and creativity. During this period of musical history in which the nascent notion of the “composer” was in the process of crystallizing, many musicians still saw themselves first and foremost as men of the cloth and servants of the church. Because the myth of the solitary genius is arguably more prevalent in music than in any other of the creative arts, it may take time to consider collaborative authorship seriously in the same way that it has gradually come to be recognized (however reluctantly) that Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and other great artists had workshops full of assistants.127 While collective authorship is perhaps more difficult to imagine in music than in painting or sculpture, a Renaissance mass could easily have been the product of creative collaboration facilitated by the material circumstances of the everyday lives of Josquin and other musicians of his day. Most of these men were members of highly interactive social, religious, courtly, or professional communities (guilds and confraternities; choir schools of collegiate churches and cathedrals; musical chapels and private households of princes, prelates, and popes; and so forth) who gathered together multiple times a day for liturgical celebrations of Mass and Divine Office or for various kinds of public and private music-making. The Romantic image of the “genius [composer] in the garret,” working in solitude and isolation (and promulgated in popular films like Amadeus and The Immortal Beloved), would be difficult to reconcile with the largely communal social and professional realities of Renaissance musicians.128 A more flexible and historically grounded view of authorship in this


127. On the “myth of solitary genius” see the study by Jack Stillinger, Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). In the world of art connoisseurship, Svetlana Alpers reports that “a surprising number of works are proving to be not by Rembrandt’s hand, but instead by those students, assistants, and imitators” (Alpers, Rembrandt’s Enterprise, 11). The idea of collaborative authorship is faring less well in Shakespeare studies, where, according to Marjorie Garber, “some of the resistance to the idea that Shakespeare wrote his plays in collaboration with other playwrights and even actors in his company comes from our residual, occasionally desperate, need to retain this ideal notion of the individual genius” (“Our Genius Problem,” The Atlantic Monthly 290, no. 5 [December 2002]: 65–72, at 65).

128. Without addressing the possibility of collaborative authorship, Philip Weller notes that “polyphony was by definition a collective enterprise” and draws attention to the inherent
period might well explain the wide disparity in musical styles or even technical competence exhibited within pieces deemed to be of “uneven” or “inconsistent” quality (the Missa Da pacem, for example, which must otherwise fall victim to a categorical “Josquin/not Josquin” antinomy).  

Such major epistemological, conceptual, and methodological reorientations require self-conscious reflexivity and theoretical awareness of the extent to which a priori expectations often dictate what we set out to find, as well as our critical response. When the German critic Ludwig Rellstab visited Beethoven in 1825, for example, he found that “the man didn’t match the myth.” Having expected the “powerful, genial savagery” depicted in portraits of the composer, he was especially surprised to find that “there was nothing expressing that brusqueness, that tempestuous, unshackled quality which has been lent his physiognomy in order to bring it into conformity with his works.” Conversely, in the process of remaking Josquin in the image of Beethoven, the canon of musical works “properly” bearing his name has had to be reconfigured to ensure its conformity to the expectations of “musical perfection” fashioned from the myths of the man that have nourished his historical reception.

**Retrofitting Genius**

To Plato and his followers Socrates was an exceptional individual, remarkable both for his unique personality and for his total dedication to the life of philosophy, but they would not have called him a genius. Similarly Homer, though traditionally regarded as divinely inspired, the source not only of all poetry and

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129. As Edgar Sparks remarked: “Possibly the most noticeable peculiarity of the Missa Da pacem, in its relation to Josquin, is the uneven quality of the music. The superbly eloquent Et incarnatus praised by Ambros and quoted as a musical example by Osthoff, is counterbalanced by the stagnant Agnus III . . . the largely non-imitative, non-declamatory counterpoints, and the short, stiff phrases of the canon of Agnus III of Da pacem sound unbelievably antiquated. The addition of the charge of ineptitude, an accusation that Da pacem must face and which can be directed against no compositions that can definitely be classified as late works of Josquin’s, makes it impossible to bring this movement into any plausible connection with them” (The Music of Noel Bauldeweyn, 37 and 42).

eloquence but also of wisdom and knowledge, did not become a genius until the eighteenth century. For it was only then that the modern idea of genius as an extraordinary creative power in man was first formulated.131

Several recent studies seeking to investigate aspects of Josquin’s reputation have closely linked his preeminence in Renaissance musicology with the widespread attribution to him of “genius status” in the sixteenth century.132 Proceeding from these important points of departure, I wish to explore the possibility that even the anecdotal and archival evidence testifying to his sixteenth-century reputation has tended to be read and evaluated in terms more universalizing and monolithic than may be warranted, owing in part to covertly genius-laden ideological perspectives inherited from the nineteenth century. Can the randomly surviving sixteenth-century assessments of Josquin’s musical talent and creative endowment necessarily bear the overwhelming weight of the transhistorical notions of “musical genius” that have long been attributed to them? Or, has the idea of the Romantic “genius persona” been ideologically “retrofitted” to earlier historical periods?133 To what extent, for example, can Lowinsky’s assertion that Josquin was “to the Renaissance musician the very incarnation of musical genius” withstand closer historical scrutiny?

Like Socrates (to paraphrase the quotation opening this section), Josquin was an “exceptional individual remarkable for his unique personality,” and


133. Here my concerns resonate with those of Andrew Kirkman, who suggests that “our perceptions of Josquin are to be sought not so much in how the sixteenth century rationalized its recent musical past as in how the eighteenth chose to interpret that view” ("From Humanism to Enlightenment," 444). My reading of Kirkman’s evidence would suggest that nineteenth-century views of musical genius—particularly those of Forkel, Kiesewetter, and Ambros, who perceived Josquin’s reception through their own Romantic lens—are perhaps even more fundamental than those of the eighteenth century, which Kirkman’s analysis shows were quite critical and uncomprehending of the composer. (See also Andrew Kirkman, “Under Such Heavy Chains”: The Discovery and Evaluation of Late Medieval Music Before Ambros,” 19th-Century Music 24 [1999]: 89–112.) Forkel’s 1801 view of Josquin as “a true genius [ein wahres Genie], even perhaps in the same sense that one is accustomed to in our times” (quoted in Kirkman, “From Humanism to Enlightenment,” 446), strikes me as acutely conscious of the construction of the “genius persona” in his own day. As stated earlier, though, I question whether the genius-imbued views of nineteenth-century scholars, including Ambros, would have guaranteed Josquin’s present-day reputation in the absence of the late twentieth-century critical mediation of Edward Lowinsky and the Josquin Festival-Conference of 1971.
though “traditionally regarded as divinely inspired,” “he did not become a genius until the [late] eighteenth century.” As I have outlined elsewhere, Lowinsky’s “Genius” essay inadequately historicizes sixteenth-century rhetoric of creative endowment. The concept of “being” a genius, in the universalizing sense commonly understood today, did not exist in the discursive practices of the sixteenth century. Indeed, no word for the present concept of a “genius” as persona existed until the mid to late eighteenth century. The Latin word genius carries no meaning of talent or creativity; the word translated as “ge-

134. Lowinsky’s “Genius” essay is the only study in the history of music to treat the subject of musical genius from its earliest manifestations to the mid-twentieth century. It is a pathbreaking essay of extraordinary erudition and remarkable breadth—a model of historical contextualization that is rarely found in musicology even today. Lowinsky was well aware of the shifting discursive formations on creative endowment and genius over the course of several millennia. He recognized that the earliest articulations of a “genius persona” are generally situated in the eighteenth century. And yet, while he does not frame his project as being necessarily iconoclastic of received wisdom in other fields (history, philosophy, art history, literature, etc.), Lowinsky does emphasize that existing histories of genius rarely included discussions of music, and pointed to the absence of music even from the standard work on genius, that of Edgar Zilsel (see n. 135 below), which remains to this day the historical benchmark (“Musical Genius,” Musical Quarterly, 322–23 and n. 6). Lowinsky’s implicit argument seems to be that a precocious notion of genius in music was already anticipated in the Renaissance, several centuries earlier than in other fields. He sees important facets of the “genius persona” as being already present in the discussions of Glarean and others, particularly Coclico. Lowinsky’s interpretations of Glarean and other early modern writers and theorists were far more imbued with the Romantic worldview of genius—and could not help but be so—than has heretofore been recognized, beyond my own preliminary critique (set forth briefly in “Musical ‘Parents,’” 170–71, of which I consider the present essay in some respects to be the logical continuation).

135. The Latin genius in the Renaissance referred to “a superior spirit inspiring a human being in the tradition of Socrates’ demon or in that of astrology (astral spirit)” (Giorgio Tonelli, “Genius from the Renaissance to 1770,” in Dictionary of the History of Ideas, ed. Wiener, 2:293–97, at 293). The essence of the Latin genius is its spiritual, divine aspect, which “inhabits” not only human beings but places as well, as in genius loci. The most thoroughgoing history of the concept of genius is Edgar Zilsel, Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Antike und des Frühkapitalismus (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1926; reprint, Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1972). See also Murray, “Poetic Genius”; Wittkower, “Genius: Individualism in Art and Artists”; and Peter Kivy, The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and the Idea of Musical Genius (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 9–14. Kivy’s study, though in no way to be construed as a history of genius, observes that Plato and Longinus, the two ancient writers most closely associated with notions of “genius,” in fact had no concept of it (ibid., 12). As Kivy further notes, “Like Plato, Longinus had no word for genius, and where both his early and modern translators use that term, which they consistently do, the literal translation is more like ‘greatness of mind.’ Although, however, Longinus did not have the word, he does seem to have had something close to one modern concept of the thing. And I shall, therefore, follow his translators in using the term for what Longinus was talking about.” His analysis of genius, then, is based on “what the translators render as ‘genius’ ” (ibid., 14). For a study of genius in the eighteenth century in relation to the emergence of the “author” and copyright law, see Martha Woodmansee, “The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the ‘Author,’” Eighteenth-Century Studies 17 (1984): 425–48.
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The Latin ingenium ("natural disposition, or talent"), which does not correspond to the English word "genius" and the meanings that accrued to it beginning in the eighteenth century.136 Present-day claims of Josquin's sixteenth-century "genius status," accordingly, need to be reevaluated to accommodate a more nuanced understanding of how the word ingenium and its Italian counterpart ingegno were used and understood by Josquin's contemporaries. Advocating much closer scrutiny of Renaissance terminology used to describe artistic productivity, for example, art historian Martin Kemp emphasizes the need for caution, lest "later stances precondition our response": "We should certainly not assume that the relevant terms, ingenium or ingegno and genio (or genius in its Latin form) should be translated or interpreted as 'genius' in the romantic or modern sense."137

Given the parallels between the dramatically changing roles of both visual and musical artists in early modern Europe, music historians, like their art historical counterparts, must more assiduously historicize the technical vocabulary used to describe musical talent and creativity. As in the domain of the visual arts, which saw the emergence in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of an array of supremely talented artists besides Michelangelo—Mantegna, Raphael, Perugino, Dürer, among others—so too the domain of music witnessed a number of exceptionally gifted composers besides Josquin. Under the rubric De Ingenio Symphonetarum, in book 3, chapter 26 of the Dodecachordon, Glarean systematically uses the word ingenium to describe the creative gifts of Antoine Brumel, Gregory Meyer, Johannes Ockeghem, Heinrich Isaac, Ludwig Senfl, Jacob Obrecht, and Antoine Fevin, as well as Josquin.138 In every case, the translator elected to render the word ingenium as "talent" or "skill" for these composers (see Appendix B, Exx. 1–8, below), whereas for Josquin, "genius" is often substituted (Appendix C, Exx. 2–4).


137. Kemp, "The 'Super-Artist,' " 35–36. Kemp also notes that "less obvious words, such as virtù or divino, might have carried some of the modern connotations of genius." See also Wegman, " 'And Josquin Laughed,' " for still further words specifically associated with creative personalities, including bizzarria, fantasia, and melancholia.

138. Clement Miller, English translator of the Dodecachordon, renders the Latin ingenium in this particular phrase as "skill": "Concerning the Skill of Symphonetae" See Dodecachordon, ed. MIlle, 2:271. His earlier German counterpart, Peter Bohn, translated ingenium as the German Genie or "genius." See Glareani Dodecachordon Basleae MDXLVII, ed. and trans. Peter Bohn, Publikation alterer praktischer und theoretischer Musikwerke 16 (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1888).
To be sure, this may have been the translator’s way of emphasizing the high esteem in which Glarean held the composer— which Glarean himself acknowledges as a personal bias that others may not share. But given that Glarean used the word ingenium in praise of all the composers he mentioned, it seems important to underscore that Josquin’s reputation alone enjoys the fortified status tacitly accorded by selective translation. Here, the subtle inflection of meaning rendered into English from a Latin theoretical treatise retrospectively shapes a Renaissance composer’s sixteenth-century reception history, just as, conversely, the late twentieth-century reception of Josquin vis-à-vis the other composers might have influenced the disparity in translation in the first place. Here we have a paradigmatic example of how a preestablished critical distinction undergirds the construction of genius.

In Glarean’s references to “natural talent,” in his apparent valorization of music that was “newly composed” over music based on “preexisting” material, and in his description of certain of Josquin’s personality traits, Lowinsky perceived the presence of nascent notions of the eighteenth-century idea of “original genius.” The idea of natural endowment with talent also emerges to some extent in Giorgio Vasari’s Lives of the Artists but as art historians, again, have noted, Vasari’s understanding of art and artistic technique is decid-

139. See for example Appendix C, Exx. 1 and 2: “in my opinion”; “unless I am mistaken in my affection.” See also “this is my opinion, and the reader is free (as we everywhere suggest) to judge as he wishes” (Dodecachordon, ed. Miller, 2:294); and “my judgment . . . is corrupted by too great a sympathy toward Josquin, since I am accustomed to place him above the uncertainty of the others” (ibid., 2:249).

140. Rob C. Wegman has drawn attention to the extent to which the hero worship evident in Josquin historiography has tended to eclipse the equally important career and musical works of Jacob Obrecht. See his Born for the Muses The Life and Masses of Jacob Obrecht (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

141. Lowinsky claims that “only in the Renaissance did it [ingenium] assume the meaning of outstanding talent,” and that it was so used by Albert, Leonardo, and “countless other” writers of the period. It is critical to point out, however, that ingenium in this period is never used in any sense other than human possession (i.e., “his genius,” never “he is a genius”). Lowinsky, in effect, sidesteps what is to my mind the most crucial question, namely, the precise meaning of ingenium as used by Glarean and others, with the assertion: “the weight of Glareanus’ statement rests not on the interpretation of ingenium, but on his distinction between extraordinary natural talent and craftsmanship, and on his insistence that the former far exceeds the latter in importance” (“Musical Genius,” in Dictionary of the History of Ideas:2:317).

142. Carl Pletsch, “Anticipations of the Theory of Genius in Vasari’s Lives?” in The Image of Technology in Literature, the Media, and Society: Selected Papers from the 1994 Conference of the Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, ed. Will Wright and Steven Kaplan (Colorado Springs: The Society, 1994), 211-14. Like other art historians, Pletsch notes that Vasari’s “understanding of art, artistic technique, and the artist are all clearly pre-modern.” What Pletsch finds more important about Vasari’s contribution to nascent notions of genius is that he wrote biographies, and some of the conventions he employed did “contribute to making biography a genre suitable for memorializing innovation in the lives of individual artists” (ibid., 213). This might be said of Glarean as well, whose brief vignettes of Renaissance composers, not to mention his lengthy encomium of Josquin, constitute early examples of music biography.
edly premodern. And both Glarean’s and Vasari’s views are centuries away from the Romantic notion of the genius persona, or even that earlier formulated by Diderot, who is generally acknowledged as the first to distinguish “being” a genius (être un génie) from “having/possessing genius” (avoir du génie). Nor was Glarean’s preference for the “newly composed” a universally shared value; some thirty years later, in 1577, Spanish theorist Francisco de Salinas praised precisely the opposite phenomenon: works based on preexisting material deserved to be held in higher esteem than freely composed works “since to the songs that have been used for centuries in the church and are familiar to all, the intertwining of many parts was added.”

More importantly, ingenium, as widely understood in the Renaissance and whatever its nuances of meaning, could not be realized without the benefit of learning and discipline that only an exemplary teacher could provide to harness and cultivate the gifts of his student. Conversely, the Romantic cult of genius had little use for teachers—the genius was by definition self-taught and sui generis; if he had a creative “father” he fought to shake him off and expunge any trace of his “influence” from his music. He would certainly never admit to “imitating” him. Glarean’s painstaking effort to report the names

143. Diderot (1713–1784) is acknowledged by Lowinsky as the first philosopher to change the concept of genius from that of avoir du génie to être un génie, and the first to regard the genius as a “type of person” (Lowinsky, “Musical Genius,” Musical Quarterly, 335 and n. 42, citing Herbert Dieckmann, “Diderot’s Conception of Genius,” Journal of the History of Ideas 2 [1941]: 151–82, at 152). Kineret Jaffe, upholding Dieckmann’s argument that Diderot “represents a turning point in the eighteenth-century discussion of genius,” has set Diderot’s individual contribution against the context of the prevailing majority of French philosophers to show how and why Diderot’s concept came to dominate the thinking of the French Romantics. As she argues, “Only by examining the eighteenth-century’s changing view of imitation, invention, creation, and imagination will we be able to trace the evolution of the nineteenth-century conception of genius.” See Kineret S. Jaffe, “The Concept of Genius: Its Changing Role in Eighteenth-Century French Aesthetics,” Journal of the History of Ideas 41 [1980]: 579–99, at 579. On the other hand, it seems clear that early eighteenth-century British writers like Shaftesbury (1711), for whom “a genius is considered as a second deity, or as a Promethus,” and Addison (1711), who distinguished between “natural” genius (Homer, Shakespeare) and “learned” genius (Plato, Virgil, Bacon, Milton), were also beginning to theorize the “genius persona.” See Tonelli, “Genius from the Renaissance to 1770,” 294–95.


145. Higgins, “Musical ‘Parents,’” 170–71. I do not wish to suggest that a single, monolithic definition of the word existed, but rather to underscore its inherent instability of meaning at a time when notions of creative endowment were in constant flux.

146. “All musical geniususes are self-taught, for the fire that animates them carries them away irresistibly to seek their own flight orbit” (Christian Friedrich Schubart, Vom musikalischen Genie, 1784–85; cited in Lowinsky, “Musical Genius,” Musical Quarterly, 325–26, and in Higgins, “Musical ‘Parents,’” 170 n. 10).

of many teachers of sixteenth-century composers, including Josquin, situates him solidly within the pedagogical discourse of creative patrilineage and a premodern understanding of creative talent which, however naturally or exceptionally endowed, still needed a teacher to bring it to fruition. In short, the Romantic concept of musical genius, which places the student in agonistic psychological warfare with his teachers and other predecessors, bears little resemblance to Renaissance ideas of creative musical talent, precisely because Renaissance writers fully embraced the notion that a master was indispensable to the student’s creative development.148

In order to apprehend the extent to which an ahistorical model of Romantic genius has been retrofitted for Josquin, we need to engage systematically in a more subtly nuanced and historicized interrogation of the aesthetic terminology used by sixteenth-century contemporaries to describe both Josquin and his contemporaries during their own lifetimes—an exercise that would likely temper the more extravagant claims made by scholars around the time of the 1971 Josquin apotheosis. Modernist scholarly preoccupations with musical genius and great composers throughout the twentieth century have stacked the deck heavily in favor of Josquin. The problem with respect to Josquin’s reputation resembles that which Tia DeNora has articulated for Beethoven: “[H is reputation] consists of retrospective accounts that isolate the quality of Beethoven’s works as the cause of his recognition.”149 This observation resonates strongly with that of Jessie Ann Owens, who reminds us that the reputation of the Josquin we know from the modern edition and from the contemporaneous tributes and anecdotes that have come down to us “reflects a series of happenstances” and is not necessarily the Josquin experienced at different times in various parts of Europe:

Ironically, it is precisely because [Josquin] does seem to loom so large that it has been tempting to create a composite picture consisting on the one hand of the many tributes he received during his own time and in the decades after his death and on the other of all of the compositions he is thought to have composed. The result is another sort of historiographical distortion. . . . To understand his place in history requires replacing the composite picture of modern historiography with a series of images specific to particular times and places.150

In other words, the “historiographical distortion,” or historical construct, reflected in this “composite picture” of Josquin overlooks the role that contin-

149. DeNora, Beethoven and the Construction of Genius. 5. DeNora cites the work on scientific “geniuses” of sociologist Michael Mulkay, who has shown that such accounts, despite being “socially accumulated” over long periods of time, have a tendency to be “interpretively projected backwards upon earlier events.” Michael Mulkay, The Word and the World: Explorations in Sociological Analysis (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1986), 173.
gencies of time and place have played in assessments of the composer’s reputation. “Each epoch has its own laws, its own taste,” as Luscinius remarked in his Musurgia of 1536, and according to Owens, “its own hero”: “Thus, over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, writers single out as heroes at least five different composers: Dunstable, Josquin, Willaert, Rore, and Lasso. Each generation, in effect, creates its own hero, either a contemporary composer or one whose feats were still vivid enough to be remembered.”

Hero-oriented historiography replicates itself in present-day Renaissance scholarship, illustrating once again what Bruno Nettl earlier described as musicology’s institutional fostering of particular methods and practices. One is tempted to consider, in turn, the ways in which the largely unspoken “institutional fostering” of individual musical genius, retrofitted to historical periods and persons to which such ideas were foreign, has fundamentally shaped Renaissance music historiography.

Theologizing Genius

Learning we thank, Genius we revere; That gives us pleasure, This gives us rapture; That informs, This inspires; and is itself inspired for genius is from heaven, learning from man.

From the vantage point of a hard-won cultural relativism, a self-centered de-centering that directs attention, as it should and must, to subject positions, object relations, abjects, race-class-and-gender, there is still this tug of nostalgia, the determinedly secularized but not yet fully agnosticized desire to believe. To believe in something, in someone, all-knowing and immutable. If not God, then Shakespeare, who amounts to a version of the same thing.

And if not Shakespeare, then Josquin, who amounts to “a version of the same thing” in Renaissance musicology. But whereas the theme of adulation in Shakespeare studies has become the subject of significant political and ideological criticism, Josquin still seems to be enveloped in a mantle of genius that renders him all but impervious to the seismic paradigm shifts effected

152. In the last decade, for example, there have been numerous publications of monographs and conference proceedings devoted to the music of Obrecht, Dufay, Binchois, Ockeghem, Busnoys, Lassus, Morales, and Palestrina, and doubtless others.
156. Outside of musicology, some of the most compelling cultural criticism—new historicism as well as various kinds of political criticism (cultural materialism, feminism, gay studies, postcolonialism)—has been carried on in art and literature of the early modern period, and
by the “cultural turn” elsewhere in the academy. The complacency and resistance to critical theory still evident in certain quarters of musicology continues to lure evangelists of genius who rail against those who would “cast a baleful eye on the whole genius thing,” bemoan the fact that “genius has been getting a bad press,” and pine for the days of “commonsense genius”:

According to the commonsense view of Beethoven’s genius, then, Beethoven was, from the start, a man apart. He was gifted with a pre-eminent genius that began to express itself early in life. In Vienna, his genius struggled for recognition; man misunderstood it, but many came to appreciate it as well. And to make the power of his genius all the more remarkable, it triumphed over the worst affliction under which a composer can labor: impairment of hearing and, ultimately, a nearly total loss, which, nevertheless, did not prevent him from writing musical masterpieces that are the wonder of the world. So says common sense about the transcendent genius of Beethoven.

Saturated with the heroic themes of “struggling” and “triumph” over life’s vicissitudes encountered throughout this study, philosopher Peter Kivy’s characterization of Beethoven as “from the start, a man apart” (i.e., a natural, solitary genius) resonates uncannily with that of the creatively deracinated Josquin who earlier was proclaimed to have “started as Josquin—and started at the top.” Like Kivy’s tract, which dismisses the serious scholarly critiques of genius by feminist philosopher Christine Battersby and sociologist Tia DeNora, other recent manifestations of “genius anxiety” (a symptom, perhaps, of what Philip Brett called the “castration anxiety” prevalent “in our deviant profession”?) similarly undercut those who would “reduce” or “diminish” the notion of genius. Curiously, those who insist on the necessity of genius are not

159. Ibid., 184.
160. Christine Battersby, Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989); and DeNora, Beethoven and the Construction of Genius. For Kivy’s extensive commentary on each see The Possessor and the Possessed, 181–217 (DeNora) and 227–37 (Battersby).
161. In addition to Kivy’s book, whose central concern is “reduction” or “deflation” of genius, see Harold Bloom, Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds (New York: Warner Books, 2002), 2 and 7. Still another ideologist of genius derides the attacks on it as a “mythology, an attempt to grasp the ungraspable by diminishing it, reducing it.” See Edward
alone in attempting to silence pesky dissidents who would question its relevance or usefulness; the same trend is evident in the insouciance of the postmodern intellectual who would posit “we have long ago moved beyond all that.”

But have we really? Even if the ideology of genius has lost its cachet in certain corners of academe, it seems unlikely that the venerable and cherished notion will disappear from music historical discourse anytime soon, to judge from the nearly seven hundred RILM entries that have the word “genius” in their titles, abstracts, or subject lines. Some of them concern the handful of uncontested geniuses tout court like Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven; more often than not, though, they deal with composers whose putative, and hence more fragile, status as a genius persona must be cushioned with protective adjectives like “gentle,” “forgotten,” “depressed,” “conservative,” “pedantic,” “revolutionary,” “rustic,” “dramatic,” “ignored,” “unappreciated,” “suffering,” “misunderstood,” “multi-dimensional,” “flamboyant,” “invisible,” and, as if to fortify the word’s built-in hyperbole, “exceptional.” That is, of course, unless they are women who, being notoriously devoid of genius, must perforce content themselves with basking vicariously in the afterglow of reflected genius as the nurturing “shadows,” “wives,” and “mothers” of—or on occasion more ambitiously as “muses to”—the men they consorted with.

Contemporary culture is so steeped in genius-talk and genius-thinking that Marjorie Garber has dubbed the phenomenon “our ‘genius problem’: a longing for genius, a genius worship that might be described as messianic.”162 So deeply embedded in the disciplinary consciousness is an absolute, transhistorical, unproblematic notion of musical genius that its tremendously complex

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162. Garber, “Our Genius Problem,” 72. The original version of my essay, written in 1999 to address a prescribed conference agenda, and taking its point of departure from scholarly talks on gender and genius given at Duke, the University of California at Berkeley, Oxford, Princeton, and CUNY Graduate Center between 1989 and 1998, substantially antedated the publication of Garber’s essay. My focus is more narrowly circumscribed to the scholarly phenomenon of genius-thinking along with its perceived collateral damage, but I share Garber’s broader cultural concerns with its inflationary aspects. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the saturation level of today’s print, electronic, and broadcast media has reached the point that a day rarely passes without hearing the word at least once.
intellectual history has never prompted formal entries in the New Grove Dictionary, Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, or many other standard music dictionaries. The almost deafening silence of acquiescence surrounding the reification of musical genius might well be explained by the "noteworthy correlation of validity with silence" that Herrnstein Smith finds in Northrop Frye’s proscription of evaluative criticism: “Comparative estimates of value are really inferences, most valid when silent ones, from critical practice” (emphasis added). Consequently, when tacit, long-accepted critical norms and values meet with unforeseen challenges to their cultural hegemony, it is not surprising that ardent defenses of the “objective” validity of such norms are mounted, for it is characteristic of objectivist thought to conclude that “in the absence of its own conceptualizations, there could not be a world, or any thought at all.”

The virulence of attacks on DeNora’s “sociopolitical view” marks her alternative conceptualization of Beethoven’s genius status as particularly dangerous to “commonsense” genius-thinking, in which mystification and hero worship serve to sustain the status quo. When an individual or group makes a claim as to the “objective necessity or propriety” of their own social, political, and moral view of the world, and thus denies “the contingency of the conditions and perspectives from which those judgments and actions proceed,” as Herrnstein Smith concludes:

it must be—and always is—simultaneously a move to assign dominant status to the particular conditions and perspectives that happen to be relevant to or favored by that person, group, or class; it must be—and always is—simultaneously a move to deny the existence and relevance, and to suppress the claims, of other conditions and perspectives.

163. Lowinsky, noting that the idea of musical genius “is inseparable from the history of music and the concept of the musician as it developed from Greek antiquity,” also comments on the absence of the concept from standard reference works (“Musical Genius,” in Dictionary of the History of Ideas 2:312–26, at 312).


165. Herrnstein Smith, Contingencies of Value, 153.


Discourses of musical genius function exactly as myth/ideology in Barthes’s theoretical formulation. In this context, it is difficult not to read the rhetoric of those who yearn for a return to “commonsense” understandings of genius as the masking in “natural” and “universalizing” terms of an ideology that seeks to maintain existing power relations in contemporary culture. While one can empathize with the Romantic nostalgia for a monumental cultural past that moves certain critics to defend their objects of veneration, and to “shield their eyes from the challenge of multiplicity and contingency,” such an ideological stance, as anthropologist Charles Lindholm observes, “now involves a willful ignorance and an uncomfortable denial of the ambiguity of a heterogeneous present.”

The historically gendered and racially inflected aspects of genius make gratuitous invocations of the word politically problematic. Hence, it is difficult for some not to regard genius-talk and genius-thinking as a provocative challenge to “political correctness” (now a code word for “threat to business as usual”), a ringing endorsement of the perpetuation in eternam of upper-class, white patriarchal values and modes of thought, whether in musical scholarship or elsewhere. One speaks in Shakespeare studies of the “massive collateral damage wrought by Shakespeare’s genius” upon British theater.

168. Lindholm, “Authenticity, Anthropology, and the Sacred,” 335. It also suggests a powerful resistance to the infiltration of critical and cultural theory into the sanctified domain of Renaissance musicology. In a recent publication, I consigned to a contextualizing footnote references to Barthes and Foucault on postmodern concerns about authorship. This was characterized by one reviewer as “a self-conscious apologia . . . sometimes disintegrat[ing] into a kind of flaunting of postmodern terminology that detracts from what could have been a first-class effort to bring to light a lost genius” (Susan Forscher Weiss, review of Antoine Busnoys: Method, Meaning, and Context in Late Medieval Music, ed. Paula Higgins, Notes 57 [2001]: 888–91, at 890; emphasis added). See my introduction to the reviewed volume, “Celebrating Transgression and Excess: Busnoys and the Boundaries of Late Medieval Musica Culture,” in Antoine Busnoys, ed. Higgins, 1–20. I would not wish the present essay to be seen as implicitly self-exculpatory of my own countless sins of complicity with certain of the author-centric scholarly agendas I seek to problematize here; nevertheless, as a scholar of avowedly feminist orientation, I have always, and indeed “self-consciously,” avoided the assignment of “genius” status to Busnoys (or to any other Renaissance composer), beyond referring to him as an “ingenious composer.”

169. Jonathan Dollimore decried the fostering in British theater of an “embarrassingly tamed Shakespeare” commercially sanitized for the masses and drew attention to the controversy raised by actor Ian McKellan “when he noted the absence of black faces in the audience at the National Theatre and left London for provincial Leeds.” See Dollimore, Sex, Literature, and Censorship, 155–56. Marjorie Garber offers a brilliant cautionary example of the “danger of fetishizing Shakespeare” in M aya Angelou’s comment that “Shakespeare was a black woman,” and considers it emblematic of the insidious power of universalizing discourses that “Shakespeare speaks for her [Angelou], at the cost of acknowledging vestiges of racism, sexism, and classism in his own works.” Garber asks “what would happen if it were ‘in fact’ discovered,” by some “feit of archival research,” that Shakespeare really was a black woman, and concludes that such a revelation would launch “a massive campaign of disavowal” (Garber, “Shakespeare as Fetish,” 250).
America, the Bard now finds himself a recent conscript of the military-industrial complex by way of a multimillion-dollar National Endowment for the Arts project whose mission is to bring “art of indisputable excellence to all Americans.”¹⁷⁰ It is not exclusively a function of its allegedly “universal appeal” and “timelessness for all ages” that Shakespeare’s theologized body of literature is often marshaled in the promulgation of neoconservative cultural agendas. The idolatry of genius is rarely naive and always politically suspect.

One hardly needs reminding of how the music of certain genius composers has been misappropriated in the interests of unsavory nationalist agendas.¹⁷¹ It might seem inappropriate, if not absurd, to raise such concerns in a discussion of a Renaissance composer whose immunity to cultural politics has traditionally fallen into the category of “what-goes-without-saying.” And yet the historical Josquin des Prez was constituted by and constitutive of the powerful social, cultural, political, and religious ideologies of his own day.

Too often the cultural authority of music historical witnesses is invoked without apparent concern for lingering residue of covert ideological interests. Casual evaluative statements, plucked from their broader rhetorical contexts (such as those of German and Swiss humanists, publishers, and theologians), are cited as categorical testimony to Josquin’s “genius,” as if their interest in the composer was fueled purely by the aesthetic concerns of present-day musicology. But as Sarah Fuller reminds us, Glarean lived and taught in Basel in a time of fierce religious antagonism and bloody political upheaval; music was deeply implicated in these reformative religious agendas. In a climate of ideologically heightened tensions, wherein criticism of the Catholic Church could meet with charges of subversion, it is probably not by coincidence, as Fuller suggests, that Glarean defended Gregorian chant and the ecclesiastical modes, and dedicated his Dodecachordon to a powerful cardinal. Nor, I would further suggest, is it likely to be coincidental that the music of a composer with impec-

¹⁷⁰. Michael Phillips, “NEA Should Cultivate Art of Future,” Chicago Tribune, Sunday, 19 October 2003, sec. 7, p. 16. The NEA “Shakespeare in American Communities” project and a related Department of Defense subsidized project will bring Shakespeare to small towns and state-side military bases. This will almost surely involve the kind of “embarrassingly tamed Shakespeare” that Dollimore cautions against: “to become a benign force and take a central place in a liberal education, art, especially literature, has to be tamed and censored” (Sex, Literature, and Censorship, 157). In the aftermath of the polemics surrounding Robert Mapplethorpe and other controversial artists, “the NEA . . . is trying to get right with the Right. And in fallback position, who’s more unassailable than Shakespeare” (Phillips, “NEA Should Cultivate Art of Future”). Beethoven, perhaps? As Adorno wrote, “Beethoven’s pathos of humanity . . . can be debased into a ritual celebration of the status quo” (Theodor W. Adorno, “Classes and Strata,” trans. E. B. Ashton, in German Essays on Music, ed. Jost Hermand and Michael Gilbert [New York: Continuum, 1994], 214–29, at 228).

¹⁷¹. As Adorno noted, “The stamp that political movements put upon musical ones has often nothing to do with the music and its content” (“Classes and Strata,” 224). Similarly, Barthes described “the bliss which can erupt, across the centuries, out of certain texts that were nonetheless written to the glory of the dreariest, of the most sinister philosophy” (Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller [New York: Hill and Wang, 1975], 39).
cable Catholic credentials and well-documented associations with the papal chapel occupies such an astonishingly privileged place of eminence therein.\textsuperscript{172} To say that Glarean’s use of Josquin might have been politically or theologically compromised is not to deny the likelihood of Glarean’s genuine aesthetic appreciation of the music he thought to be by the historical Josquin. And while it would seem heretical even to hint at the appropriation of Josquin’s music in the service of more sinister cultural agendas, perhaps it is time for a heartier skepticism and a more hermeneutically suspicious attitude toward the testimony of our historical interlocutors, as well as a greater sensitivity and attentiveness to the ideologies and rhetorical strategies that shaped their own historically situated musical enterprises.\textsuperscript{173}

In this postmodern era, the ubiquitous phenomenon of genius has become inefficacious, arguably pernicious, and so invested with hyperbole as to render it an almost meaningless category of thought.\textsuperscript{174} Do we really want to saddle Josquin (or any other artist) with a label so intellectually bankrupt that it is now more often linked in the popular imagination with gridiron celebrity than with astonishing creative achievement?\textsuperscript{175} If seeing Josquin as a “genius” means eradicating all signs of history—of his own musical and cultural past—and regarding him as some infallible, timeless, mythical force of Nature; if it means imposing ahistorical standards of perfection on pieces historically attributed to him; if it means perpetuating in eternam the current fetish with authentication studies and thereby consigning some of the most breathtaking music ever written to the dustbin; if it means misappropriating “Josquin” in the commodification of stereotypes of gender, race, class, and sexuality, then for the sake of the disservice it does to the historical body of musical texts surviving under his name, I would not only deny but, more importantly, spare him the ignominy of genius status.


\textsuperscript{173} Especially ripe for demystification is the frequency of modern scholarly validation of Josquin as the “favorite composer of Martin Luther.” While Luther’s virulent antisemitism, promulgated in his tract \textit{Von den Juden und ihren Lügen} (The Jews and Their Lies) of 1543, as well as in earlier letters dating from 1514–16, has become a topic of discussion in Bach scholarship, its potential implications for Josquin’s reception history has, to my knowledge, as yet to be explored in Renaissance musicology.

\textsuperscript{174} I recently attended an opera performance at the Lyric Opera in Chicago whose program notes, as if to validate my project, described the stage director as “one of the foremost geniuses [plural] of theatrical design in the late twentieth century” (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{175} Marjorie Garber notes that in the wake of the 2002 Super Bowl a computer had matched the word “genius” with the New England Patriots’ coach, Bill Belichick, more than two hundred times (“Our Genius Problem,” 65). Richard Lederer’s \textit{Bride of Anguished English} ([New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000], 42) includes the following anecdote: “Washington Redskins quarterback-turned-announcer Joe Theismann once commented on the penchant of football commentators like him to label coaches ‘geniuses’: ‘Nobody in football should be called a genius. A genius is a guy like Norman [sic] Einstein.’”
How do we as both critics and caretakers of a musicological past negotiate the tension between the need for a demystification of mythologies of musical genius on the one hand, and for a sense of historical responsibility toward musical creators and their creations on the other? The musical legacy of “Josquin” grows inexorably more vulnerable to the curatorial zeal of musicology’s high priests of authentication who would smother it in the ideological debris of musical genius. The ominous cloud of disattribution hovers over even the most time-honored pieces: Nymphesdesbois Missa Pange lingua, and Planxit autem David. How can we go on “loving ‘Josquin’ ” if there is nothing left to love? If the present trend continues, the name of the princeps muscarum will have to be replaced with a defiant glyph signifying “The Composer formerly known as ‘Josquin.’ ” And yet, who exactly is this “prince” of musicians, the historical Josquin des Prez, if we do not know—or attempt to determine—which pieces he actually wrote? Is there a way out of this critical impasse?

One promising route of evacuation would be to engage in a process of critical extenuation that would disentangle the “filiation of the work” from the historical composer/author/deity Josquin des Prez. In that way, as Barthes suggests, “no vital ‘respect’ is due to the Text . . . ; it can be read without the guarantee of its father.” For even in the absence of an imprimatur, Nymphes des bois would remain for many one of “Josquin’s” most powerfully stirring and deeply expressive texts. Bereft of its creative patrilineage, any musical text of “Josquin”—whether a product of the historical composer/author Josquin des Prez or of any other of the extraordinary composers whose music has been compromised by the Josquin authenticity fetish—can become a methodological field of critical play as well as a source of pleasure, even without any guarantee of its musical paternity.

176. The case for the possible inauthenticity of Planxit autem David has been laid out in Finscher, “Four-Voice Motets,” 268–72, and reiterated in Rifkin, “M unich, Milan, and a M arian Motet,” 278 n. 77. (An earlier version of the present essay included a lengthy discussion of Planxit autem David—along with further reflections on Todd Borgerding’s discussion of its homoerotic dimensions—which I hope to publish in another venue.) Rifkin raised the spectre of the inauthenticity of the Missa Pange lingua, citing Finscher, in Rifkin, “Problems of Authorship,” 47. Finally, hints of suspicion surrounding Nymphes des bois have apparently been aroused (but not yet published) by David Fallows.

177. The glyph used by (The Artist formerly known as) Prince from 1993 to 1999 was a self-conscious political act to protest his commodification by Warner Brothers. His first album, whose existence he reportedly fails to acknowledge, was Minneapolis Genius (1977), and his most recent, Musicology (2004).


179. This discussion could well be reformulated with respect to the characteristic traits of Foucault’s “author function” (“What Is an Author?” 108–13), not to mention Barthes’s own “Death of the Author,” but I prefer to address these questions in a more expansive forum.
In the wake of his own ideological skirmishes on the battleground of "old and new" critical dispensations, Barthes eventually came to understand that, just as ideology masks itself in universalizing myth, so ideological systems become fictions when associated with a "consistency of language" that has "jelled exceptionally and finds a sacerdotal class (priests, intellectuals, artists) to speak it generally and to circulate it."\(^{180}\) As Barthes the mythologist and critic of ideology reinvented himself as Barthes the narratologist and poststructuralist, he distanced himself from his earlier polarizing position. Seeking solace in pleasure, in the realm of the sensorium, Barthes thus circumvented the critical imperative of resolving existing tensions in his work—in his case, the need to choose between classical (old) and avant-garde (new) texts:

That word [pleasure] appeared in what I would call a tactical fashion. I felt that today's intellectual language was submitting too easily to moralizing imperatives that eliminated all notion of enjoyment, of bliss. In reaction, I wanted therefore to reintroduce this word within my personal range, to lift its censorship, to unblock it, to un-repress it.\(^{181}\)

Barthes came to recognize demands for "clarity," and the impositions of "language taboos" (against "jargon," for instance), as verbal weapons in a "small war among intellectual castes,"\(^{182}\) which is a by-product of language itself as a "warrior topos".\(^{183}\) The pleasure of the text, on the other hand, is "atopic" or neutral. It does not prefer one ideology to another. "Can it be," asks Barthes in characteristically ludic spirit, "that the Text makes us objective?"\(^{184}\)

If it is true, as Adorno claimed, that the end of music as an ideology "will have to await the end of antagonistic society,"\(^{185}\) Barthes's aesthetic theory of the text can nevertheless provide an oasis of neutrality wherein pleasure offers a safe haven incapable of being colonized by any collectivity or ideological system, a refuge that resists the encroachment of orthodoxies whether of right

\(^{180}\) Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, 28.


\(^{182}\) The critical concerns Barthes articulated in his polemical manifesto Criticism and Truth, published in 1966, resonate uncannily not only with those of the Kerman-Lowsinky polemics of a year earlier, but also with those encountered repeatedly in the late 1980s and early 1990s among various proponents of the old/ new musicologies. Barthes's comments on "jargon" are particularly useful, considering its widespread pejorative use by opponents of postmodern critical theory: " "Jargon" is the language which the other uses: the Other (and not Others) is that which is not yourself; this is why we find another's way of speaking painful. As soon as a language is no longer that of our own community we judge it to be useless, empty, raving, used for reasons which are not serious but trivial and base (snobbery, complacency). . . . Why not say things more simply? How many times have we heard that phrase?" (Barthes, Criticism and Truth, 48–50).

\(^{183}\) Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, 28.

\(^{184}\) Ibid., 32.

\(^{185}\) Adorno, "Classes and Strata," 229.
or left, old or new. For “between two onslaughts of words, between two imposing systematic presences, the pleasure of the text is always possible.”

At forty years’ distance, the progenitors of the “war of fictions” that arguably spawned the “old” and “new” musicoledies emerge as strange bedfellows. In 1965, Kerman, who some two decades later would become the fonet origo of the “new” musicology, reads more like an elitist proponent of the traditional canon, wherein “great” masters are deemed more worthy of our time than “lesser” ones. Lowinsky, whose posthumous legacy has been tarred with the brush of “positivism” (“old” musicology), looks in 1965 like the prescient advocate of a contextual musicology grounded in cultural and intellectual history and embracing the study of composers “both great and small”—concerns that dominate the interdisciplinary postmodern academy today. As neither could have foreseen at the time, the two have perhaps ended up as “allies” of sorts, both complicit in the promulgation of canons of greatness: Kerman, in the promoting of Beethoven and other composers “truly worthy of devotion,” and Lowinsky, in the “geniusing” of Josquin des Prez. And in their “meta-scholarly” proselytizing for more overarching profiles for American musicology—historically contextual and critically oriented, respectively—they were also united in the desire for an interdisciplinary and more urbane musicology that reached beyond the confines of academy. In the spirit of this belated alliance, then, of ending the “war of fictions” that has calcified into “two imposing systematic presences” (of the old/ new musicologies) and of healing the disciplinary antagonism it has engendered, perhaps it is time (whether in Josquin studies or elsewhere) to contemplate a program of cross-fertilization: a more critically hospitable empirical musicology, a more empirically grounded critical musicology, and a proliferation of hybrid musicologies, of profile as yet unforeseen.


187. As I have said elsewhere, Kerman’s critique of the positivist agenda as later elaborated in Contemplating Musicology has been distorted and decontextualized. He did not suggest that the scholarly endeavors associated with positivism (edition-making, archival studies, and so forth) should be banished from musicology (beyond expressing relief at the waning hegemony of notation courses), but that they should be the means to a larger historical or critical understanding of music and its context, rather than ends in themselves (Paula Higgins, “From the Ivory Tower to the Marketplace: Early Music, Musicology, and the Mass Media,” in Approaches to the Discipline, ed. Edmund Goehrung, vol. 53 of Current Musicology [1993]: 109–23, at 112 and 120 n. 11).
Appendix A  Quotes About Josquin as Printed in the Program of the 1971 International Josquin Festival-Conference\textsuperscript{188}

1. Isaac is very facile in the art of composition, and besides, he is a fine man and easy to get along with. True, Josquin composes better, but he does it when it suits him, not when one wishes him to. Moreover, he demands 200 ducats in payment, whereas Isaac would settle for 120.

\textit{Letter to Duke Hercules I of Ferrara from his Secretary (undated; beginning of 1500s)}

2. Josquin is the master of the notes, he made them do what he wanted; the other composers had to do what the notes wanted.

\textit{Martin Luther [16th century]}

3. Now in this class of authors and in this great crowd of the ingenious there stands out as by far pre-eminent in temperament, conscientiousness, and industry (or I am mistaken in my feeling) Jodocus a Prato, whom people playfully call in his Belgian mother-tongue Josquin, as though they were to say ‘Little Jodocus’. No one has more effectively expressed the passions of the soul in music than this composer, no one has been able to compete in grace and facility on an equal footing with him, just as there is no Latin poet superior in the epic to Virgil. For just as Virgil, with his natural facility, was accustomed to adapt his poem to his subject so as to set weighty matters before the eyes of his readers with close-packed spondees, fleeting ones with unmixed dactyls, to use words suited to his every subject, in short, to undertake nothing inappropriately, so our Josquin, where his matter requires it, now advances with impetuous and precipitate notes, now intones his subject in long-drawn tones, and, to sum up, has brought forth nothing that was not delightful to the ear and approved as ingenious by the learned, nothing, in short, that was not acceptable and pleasing, even when it seemed less erudite, to those who listened to it with judgment.

\textit{Henricus Glareanus (1547), translation by Oliver Strunk}

4. I am well aware that in his day Ockeghem was as it were the first to rediscover music, then as good as dead, just as Donatello discovered sculpture in his; and that of Josquin, Ockeghem’s pupil, one may say that he was a natural prodigy in music, just as our own Michelangelo Buonarotti has been in architecture, painting, and sculpture; for just as Josquin has still to be surpassed in his compositions, so Michelangelo stands alone and without a peer among all who have practiced his arts; and the one and the other have opened the eyes of all who delight in these arts, now and in the future.

\textit{Cosimo de Bartoli (1567)}

5. It will perhaps be thought, that too much notice has been taken of this old Composer, Josquin, and his works but, as he is the Type of all Musical excellence at the time in which he lived, the less need be said of his contemporaries, who in general appear to have been but his imitators. And, indeed, it seems as if only one

\textsuperscript{188} Conference program, 10, 18, and 16.
original genius of the same kind, could ever burst out at a time in any art or nation. Indeed, I have never seen, among all his productions that I have scored, a single movement which is not stamped with some mark of the great master. There is such a manifest superiority in his powers, such a simple majesty in his ideas, and such dignity of design, as wholly justify the homage he received.

Charles Burney (1782)

6. A young man with a twinkle in his eye plots a musical revolution. Such a man was Josquin des Près, who, with his new works, overnight became the idol of Europe. There is no longer taste for others, only for Josquin. Nothing seems beautiful anymore, unless it be a work of Josquin. Only Josquin is sung in all the chapels in existence: only Josquin in Italy, only Josquin in France, only Josquin in Germany, in Flanders, in Hungary, in Bohemia, and even in Spain it is only Josquin.

Giuseppe Baini (1828)

7. With Josquin de Près, for the first time an artist enters the history of music who prevailingly makes the impression of genius.

August Wilhelm Ambros (1868)

8. Josquin's influence on the music of the sixteenth century was so profound that it seems impossible to isolate a special 'school of Josquin'. He has created the musical language of his age to an extent far exceeding that of any other composer. His music had the impact of an epochal event.

Helmuth Osthoff (1958)

Appendix B
Some Uses of Ingenium Re: Josquin's Contemporaries in Glarean’s Dodecachordon, Together with Translators

Example 1
Antoine Brumel

Maxime uero Antonius Brumel ac Iodocus hic noster Pratensis, uterque iam ad extremam uergentes aetatem. In quo cantu Brumel de artificio cantoribus ostende(n)do nihil prorsus omisit, imo intentis omnibus ingenij neruis indolis suae specimen posteris relinquere annius est. Sed uicit longe, mea quidem sententia, Iodocus Naturae ui ac ingenij acrimonia, ac ita se gessit in hac contentione, ut mihi uideatur omnium pares natura, perinde atque ex quatuor elementis perfectissimum corpus constituere uoluerit, extremas exercuisse uireis, nec inueniri meliorem cantum posse. [366]

Especially Antoine Brumel and our Josquin des Prez, both already approaching extreme old age. In this song Brumel has omitted absolutely nothing in displaying his skill to singers, but rather with all the intense vigor of his talent he has taken pains to leave posterity a proof of his ability. Yet in my own opinion

Josquin has by far excelled him in natural ability and keenness of intellect, and has borne himself this rivalry in such a way that nature, the mother of all, as if wishing to create a most perfect structure from the four elements, seems to me to have exerted her utmost strength so that a better song could not be invented. [2:268]

Example 2  Gregory Meyer

enixe orai Eximium uirum D. Gregorium Meyer, qui Ecclesiae Salodorensi in helvetijs cum magna laude ab organis est, ut Thema hoc, qua est ingenij dexteritate, digne tractaret, tum in sua sede, tum utrinoque diatessaron proprijs illis, & cum corpore Cantionis huius natis. [366]

I have earnestly entreated the distinguished Gregory Meyer, whom we have often mentioned elsewhere and who is held in great esteem as organist of the church at Solothurn in Switzerland, to treat this theme worthily in accordance with his natural skill, not only on its own tonic but also with both of the fourths proper to, and identified with the body of this song. [2:268]

Example 3  Johannes Ockeghem


This is enough now concerning Josquin. A somewhat older composer was Ockeghem, also a Belgian, who is said to have excelled everyone in skill. Namely, he is known to have composed a certain chattering song in 36 voices. We have not seen it. He was indeed admirable in invention and keenness of skill. [2:276–77]

Example 4  Heinrich Isaac


The Germanic Heinrich Isaac follows very justly the aforementioned composers both in art and in talent. He also is said to have composed innumerable compositions, learnedly and prolifically. He embellished church song especially; namely, he had seen a majesty and a natural strength in it which surpasses by far the themes invented in our time. [2:278]

Example 5  Ludwig Senfl

In huiuscemodi sane Symphonijs, ut libere dicam quae sentio, magis est ingenij ostentatio quam auditum reficiens adeo iucunditas, quale et hoc cius nostri Lutuichi Senflij Tigurini, docti nostra aetate Symphonetae. [444]
Certainly in compositions of this kind [i.e., canons], to say frankly what I believe, there is more display of skill than there is enjoyment which truly refreshes the hearing; of such a kind also is the following example (102) by our countryman, Ludwig Senfl of Zurich, a learned composer of our time. [2:274]

Example 6  Jacob Obrecht

Tertius in hac classe haud dubius est Iacobus Hobrechth et ipse Belga, quippe qui D. Erasmo Roterodamo Praeceptor fuit, Cuius iudicium de eo in AEolio retulimus. H unc praeterea fama est, tanta ingenij celeritate ac inventionis copia uiguisse, ut per unam noctem, egregiam, et quae doctis admirationi esset, Missam componeret. Omnia huius uiri monumenta miram quandam habent maiestatem et mediocritatis uenam. Ipse hercules non tam amans raritatis, atque Iodocus fuit. Ingenij quidem ostentator sed absque fuco, quasi auditoris iudicium expectare maluerit quam se ipse efferre. [456]

The third man in this class undoubtedly is Jacob Obrecht, and he is also a Belgian, who in fact was the teacher of D. Erasmus of Rotterdam, whose opinion of Obrecht we have reported in the Aeolian. Moreover, it is said that he worked with such quickness of device and fertility of invention, that, in a single night he composed an excellent Mass, and which was also admired by learned men. All the monuments of this man have a certain wonderful majesty and an innate quality of moderation. He certainly was not such a lover of the unusual as was Josquin. Indeed, he did display his skill but without ostentation, as if he may have preferred to await the judgment of the listener rather than to exalt himself. [2:277–78]

Example 7  Antoine Fevin

Iodocus Pratensis Ave Maria ad eum instituit Modum doctissime sane ac iucundissime non emota sua sede harmonia. Quam eximius ille adolescentes, et felix Iodoci aemulator Antonius Feum [sic] postea ita miratus, ut Missam ad eam instituerit, summo ingenio, summa modestia, qua uix uidi quicquam compositius. [354]

Josquin des Prez has composed the Ave Maria according to this mode, truly very learnedly and pleasingly, and without removing the harmony from its base. Antoine Févin, a distinguished young man and a successful rival of Josquin, later admired it so much, that he, showing the highest skill and the utmost moderation, composed according to it a Mass which is as skillful as any I have ever seen. [2:263]

Example 8  Multiple composers

Scio multam nos illis alijs quoque debere gratiam, qui apud me in magna sunt existimatione, cum ob ingenij acrimoniam, tum ob non proletariam Musicae rei eruditionem, quod de Okenhemio, Hobrechtho, Isaaco, Petro Platensi, Brumelio, atque alij, quos enumerare longum esset, hoc in libro saepe testati sumus. [243]
I know that we also owe much gratitude to the others who are held in great veneration by me, not only because of a **high degree of talent**, but also because of an uncommon erudition in musical matters, which we have often declared in this book concerning Okeghem, Obrecht, Isaac, Pierre de la Rue, Brumel and others whom it would take long to enumerate. [2:249]

**Appendix C** Glarean’s Use of *Ingenium* Regarding Josquin, and Translations Thereof

**Example 1**

Sed libet rursus ad Iodoci Pratensis exempla, ut doctiora ac animo meo semper arridentia defugere, Quae haud scio studione ita instituerit, an casu, ut magnis illis ingenij saepiuscule accidere solet. [220]

But I should like to hasten again to the examples of Josquin des Prez, as they are more learned and are always pleasing in my opinion; I know not whether he has composed them in this way by intention or by accident, as is accustomed to happen rather frequently with these great talents. [2:240]

**Example 2**

Porro in hac authorum classe, atque magna ingeniorum turba, molto maxime, nisi affectu fallar, eminet ingenio, cura ac industria Iodocus a Prato, quem uulgit Belgica lingua in qua natus erat, [hupokoristikos] Iusquinum uocat, quasi dicas Iodoculus. Cui uiro, si de duodecim Modis ac uera ratione musica, noticia contigisset ad natuam illam indolem, et ingenij, qua uiguit, acrimoniam, nihil natura augustius in hac arte, nihil magnificiencius produci potuisset. Ita in omnia versatilie ingenii erat, ita naturae acuminem ac ui armatum, ut nihil in hoc negcio ille non potuisset. Sed defuit in plaerisque modus, et cum eruditione iudicium. Itaque lasciuentis ingenii impetus, aliquot suarum cantionum locis non sane, ut debutit, represist, sed condonetur hoc uitium mediocre ob dotes alias uiri incomparabiles. [362]

Moreover, in this class of symphonetae and great crowd of talented men, there stands out most particularly in talent, conscientiousness, and industry (unless I am mistaken in my affection), Jodocus a Prato, whom in his native Belgian language the ordinary people endearingly call Josquin, just as one would say Jodoculus. If the knowledge of twelve modes and of a true musical system had fallen to the lot of this man, considering his natural genius and the acuteness of intellect through which he became esteemed, nature could have produced nothing more AUGUST, nothing more magnificent in this art. **H is talent was so versatile in every way, so equipped by a natural acumen and vigor, that there was nothing in this field which he could not do. But in many instances he lacked a proper measure and a judgment based on knowledge and thus in some places in his songs he did not fully restrain as he ought to have, the impetuosity of a lively talent, although this ordinary fault may be condoned because of the otherwise incomparable gifts of the man.** [2:264]

Example 3

Porro cum ingenium eius inenarrabile sit, magisque mirari possimus, quam
digne explicare, non solo tamen ingenio caeteris praef erendus uidetur, sed dili-
genia quoque emendationem. Aiunt enim qui nouerunt, multa cunctatione,
multifariaque correctione suadidisse, nec, nisi aliquot annis apud se detinuis-
set, nullum in publicum emississe cantum, contra atque Iacobus H obrecht, ut in
superioribus diximus, fercasse furtur. Vnde et quidam non inepte, alterum
Virgilio, alterum Ouidio comparari merito possesse contendunt. Quod si admit-
timus, Petrum Platensem, mirum in modum iucundum modulatorem cui
potius quam H oratio comparabimus? ita Isaacum fortassit Lucano, Feum [sic]
Claudiano, Brumelium Statio, sed ineptus haud immerito uidere de ijs tam
ieiune pronuntiare. . . .

Moreover, although his genius is indescribable and we can be amazed at it
more than we can treat it worthily, it also seems that not only in genius should
be placed above others, but also in the carefulness of his emendations. For
those who knew him say that he published his works after much deliberation
and with manifold corrections; neither did he release a song to the public un-
less he had kept it to himself for some years, the opposite of what Jacob
Obrecht appears to have done, as we have previously said. From this some aptly
maintain that the one could justly be compared to Vergil, the other to Ovid.
But if we allow this, to whom shall we compare Pierre de la Rue, a wonderfully
pleasing composer, other than to Horace? So perhaps Isaac to Lucan, Févin to
Claudian, Brumel to Statius; but I may seem truly inept to speak about them so
sketchily. . . .

Example 4

Singulæ hic uoces dignum aliquid notatu habent, ut Tenor stabilitatem, Basis
grauitatem miram Quanquam haud scio quam omnibus placeat quod in Basi
ita insurgat in uerbo Galilææ: Quid quidem ingenij lascivia prolatum, ut in
ifi-
cias ire nequimus, ita cum gratia additum fateri oportet. Cantus sapit antiqui-
tatem, cuius septima a fine notula, obticentibus omnibus alijs uocibus, sola
auditur. Sed haec sunt nims tenuia pro huius uiri ingenio.

The individual voices have a noteworthy quality in this song, as the stability of
the tenor and the wonderful dignity of the bass, although I do not know
whether it will please everyone that he rises so far in the bass at the word
Galilææ; but just as we cannot deny that this results from the undue freedom
of his genius, so also one should acknowledge that it was added gracefully.
The cantus savors of antiquity; its seventh note from the end is heard alone, all
other voices being silent. But these remarks are much too trifling for the
genius of this man.

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Abstract

Within the theoretical framework of Roland Barthes’s writings on myth and ideology, this essay seeks to expose the historical legitimation project through which the mythmaking, universalizing rhetoric of musical genius that has long
surrounded the figure of Ludwig van Beethoven came to infiltrate scholarship on Josquin des Prez, culminating in his late twentieth-century apotheosis. Contextualizing the composer’s reception history with respect to the debates between Joseph Kerman and Edward Lowinsky in 1965 and especially the 1971 Josquin Festival-Conference, the author suggests that the ideological re-fashioning of Josquin in the image of Beethoven has simultaneously shaped and derailed the intellectual trajectory of early music scholarship in the past thirty years. By privileging a discourse of musical genius in the service of which, among other concerns, the canon of works attributed to the composer is being decimated beyond historical recognition, the richness and complexity of the musical culture of which he was a vital part risks being overshadowed and obfuscated by the disproportionate amount of attention invested in his singular accomplishments. The essay advocates a resolute historicization of sixteenth-century discourses of creative endowment, a critical reassessment of the role of authentication scholarship in Josquin studies, and a renewed sensitivity to the imbrication of mythologies of musical genius in music historiographies of both the past and the present.