

TEXT UNDERLAY IN 16th- CENTURY VOCAL MUSIC

1.Describing the Problem

16th century vocal music received an extraordinary impetus from 1501, when Ottavio Petrucci started his music printing business in Venice, the first in the History of Music. During the first decade of the 16th century, new music publishing houses were opened in several Italian cities (Rome, Siena, Naples) and, a little later, in Paris (1528) and Antwerp (Flanders, 1543). In this way, the musical repertoire, both religious and profane, was able to reach the hands of the flourishing bourgeoisie, basically made up of merchants, doctors, legalists and professionals. The practice of polyphonic music, which until that period had been almost exclusively in the hands of the aristocracy, and thus, it spread to the middle classes of society.

During the 15th century and the first decades of the 16th, the musical repertoire of each royal, princely or ducal court was collected in handwritten songbooks that constituted the musical archive of each one of them. There, the polyphonic works that were sung, both in religious services and in the intimacy of the profane, were copied and reflected their musical tastes and preferences.

Unlike today's choral scores, where we find all the voices superimposed on a stave of various systems, in Renaissance manuscripts the voices of a polyphonic work were written separately. Usually, the text was only transcribed below the upper voice, and in the latter, the location of each syllable does not exactly coincide with the note on which it should be articulated. In the other voices¹, the copyist usually indicated only the incipit of the poem (its initial words), transcribing only the notes. Later, the music press solved the problem of the exact location of the text only partially: although in the 16th century editions the text is printed in each part, there are many passages that generate doubts and various possibilities of solution.

Both in the manuscripts and in the musical editions of the first half of the 16th century, the main difficulties in accurately underlay the text are to be found in:

. Melismatic passages: those in which it is not indicated on which syllable the melisma should be performed, nor the sounds it covers.

. Repetitions of a verse (complete or a fragment): in the original editions the sign *ij* (which means "bis" or "repetition") was used, but without clarifying precisely from which sound this repetition should start, and over which portion of the verse.

It was not until the 1550s that a greater concern began to be observed to indicate the exact location of the text in each *particelle*. Let us remember again that, throughout the 16th century, musical editions presented the voices separately in several little books, one for each voice. A "general" score was not printed as it is customary today.

The theorists and composers of the second half of the 16th century were fully aware of the lack of precision in the placement of the text in musical editions. Some of them, such as **Orlando de Lassus** (1532-1594), supervised the editions of his works with great care and corrected their errors. As a testimony of the above, we can observe the use of the phrase "again corrected", which appears in the first page of the reissues of collections of madrigals, motets and chansons (both by Lassus, and by other authors), which indicates that these have been revised with respect to their previous edition.

¹ Musical manuscripts from the mid-15th century generally contain works for a solo voice and two instruments. The copyists of the first songbooks of the 16th century, in which most of the works are for three or four sung voices, generally maintained the custom of writing the text only in the upper voice.

One of the few theories that specifically refers to the underlay of the text² in the vocal works of the Renaissance period is that written by the German theorist Gaspar Stocker, a student of Francisco de Salinas, at the University of Salamanca. The book is entitled *De Musica Verballi* and its only manuscript copy is in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (code 6486). The probable date of this work can be located around 1570. In his work, Stocker enunciates a series of rules for the correct underlay of the text and its respective exceptions. In chapter XIX, entitled "*De regulis Antiquorum*", fo. 28, the author mentions Adrian Willaert as the father of the new music:

"...Adrian (Willaert) is the first, the author, the father of the new music that everyone now imitates. He followed the rules of the old ones in many of his compositions; but also, from those rules, he invented a new music that he taught to several like Cyprien (Rore) and Orlande (de Lassus), and that he himself has shown in many works, both in Latin and in Italian..."

Stocker's theory (which has not yet been published nor translated from Latin) was nothing more than a faithful reflection of the practice of the time that he tried to compile by citing examples of works - mainly by Rore and Lassus - printed mostly between 1555 and 1560. His rules and general statements fully coincide with the solutions that, in a systematic way, **Orlando de Lassus** applied in his works.

In my doctoral *thesis* [*Mellange d'Orlande de Lassus (1570): Transcription, étude critique et commentaires*, University of Tours, France, 1979] I have dealt with this aspect -among others- in the works of the famous Flemish composer. This collection (whose title means "mixture", in reference to the various musical genres present in it) constitutes a retrospective of works by Lassus from the period 1555-1570 and includes French chansons, Italian madrigals and profane motets³. In the 105 works that make up the *Mellange* (which I have transcribed in its entirety into modern notation from the original) I have been able to verify that, with reference to text underlay, Lassus provides a series of identical solutions for many similar cases, which are thus transformed into **constants**. These **constants**, as well as their exceptions and special cases, coincide with the rules enunciated by Stocker in his treatise.

It is important to clarify that the original edition of the *Mellange* is extremely meticulous with regard to the exact location of each syllable below the corresponding note and, in the cases where the sign *ij* appears, its resolution is obvious and does not pose the frequent conflicts in the musical editions of the first half of the century to which we alluded above. The enunciation of these constants (we prefer this denomination, instead of "rules") will serve as a guide and will give us the necessary musicological framework to solve by analogy most of the problems posed by the correct underlay of the text in vocal works from decades prior to 1570. The constants will be exemplified by means of musical

² Several music theories of the time allude laterally to the problem of text accommodation in vocal music. The most important ones are: *Scintille di musica*, by Lanfranco (1533), *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica*, by Nicolo Vicentino (1555) and the monumental treatise by Zarlino *Istitutioni harmoniche*, published in 1558. Each one of these is a watering down of the previous ones, in the aspect that concerns us here. Vicentino's treatise seems to be the most personal of all and we suggest reading the excellent article written by Prof. Don Harran, published in *The Musical Quarterly*, whose title is "Vicentino and his rules of text underlay". It sets out the rules proposed by Vicentino for the correct underlay. His statements, however, are not totally respected in his own works.

³ Works with Latin text, but without liturgical content

passages taken from works by various authors of the 16th century and can be applied to the entire vocal music of the Renaissance period, from Josquin and Juan del Encina to Monteverdi and Dowland, and in works by Spanish, Flemish, French, Italian, German and English composers.

The main modern editions of Spanish works from the *Golden Century* have been made several decades ago and, for the most part, by the Spanish Institute of Musicology⁴. These transcriptions to current musical notation are very careful in many aspects, but in others, such as the text underlay and the leading tones not written in the original (*musica ficta*), they were not approached with an updated musicological criterion. Since Spanish polyphony of the 16th century constitutes one of the pillars of the Renaissance repertoire for Spanish-speaking choirs and vocal-instrumental groups, it seemed appropriate to us to select as a priority for the exemplifications passages taken from works of the three most important Spanish songbooks: *Palacio* (manuscript, probable date of copy: ca. 1480 - 1520), *Uppsala* (edited in 1556, although works it contains were probably written in the 1530's) and *Medinaceli* (manuscript, ca. 1540 - 1570).

In this work, each **constant** will be initially exemplified with a passage taken from works of Lassus Mellange of 1570, in which each syllable of the text is located below its corresponding note. From these examples we will propose the restitution of similar cases in passages from works of other authors whose application of the text is doubtful. The series of **constants** and special cases that will be listed will allow choir directors to question and thus modify or confirm the solutions that contemporary reviewers have proposed in their transcriptions regarding this aspect for the interpretation of 16th century vocal works.

2.CONSTANTS

A - All cadential resolution must have syllabic articulation

Example 1

Las, voulez vous, S, de Orlando de Lassus (1555)⁵



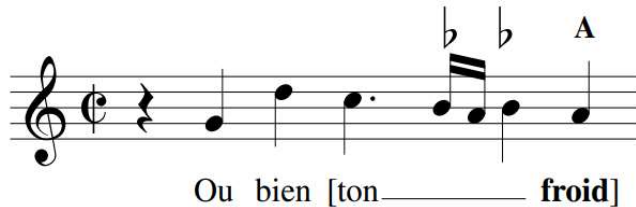
⁴ Presbyters Higinio Anglés and Miguel Querol -subsequently Directors of the Institute- have transcribed the Cancioneros de Palacio, Medinaceli and the collections of the works of Francisco Guerrero, Cristobal de Morales and Juan Vásquez, among others.

⁵ The date we indicate in each example corresponds to that of its first edition. The rhythmic values have been reduced at half from its original value

Restitution of similar cases of doubtful resolution in the original from the constant stated. Our proposals will be seen into square brackets.

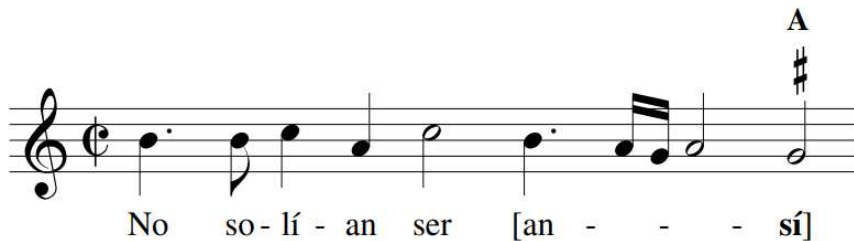
Example 2

Si froid et chaut, S, de Orlando de Lassus (1564)



Example 3

Estas noches a tan largas, S, anónimo, *Cancionero de Uppsala* (1556)



Example 4

Pues no te duele mi muerte, S, de Juan del Encina, *Canc. de Palacio* (ca. 1500-1520)



A1 - After cadential resolution there may be a brief melismatic passage (rare)

Example 5

Quédate Carillo adiós, S, de Juan del Encina, *Cancionero de Palacio*



As we will see in later examples, the text underlay in strophical works is extremely conflictive. In these, the composer has surely conceived his music only for the first stanza. Thus, in the following musical repetitions of other passages of the poem, some

adaptations will be necessary. This is the case of the last example.

Quédate Carillo adiós is a spanish *villancico* from the early 16th century. The *villancico* was a fixed poetic-musical form in which the composer wrote the music for the opening verses of the poem, and the rest of the text was to be sung on the same music. Example 5 corresponds to the third line of the *copla* of its first stanza⁶. The first line of that *copla* (example 6) is sung over the same musical phrase and is structurally different from it:

COPLA 1	SYLLABLES	ACCENTUATION	ENDING
<i>Quédate adiós compañero</i>	8	1-4-7	female
<i>Ya me despido de ti</i>	(different music)		
<i>No digas que me partí</i>	7	2-7	male
<i>Sin saludarte primero</i>	(same música as <i>Ya me...</i>)		

We note that there are differences in the real number of syllables as well as in the internal accentuation of these two verses. Therefore, text and music should be adapted differently in both cases. Facing this situation, we should only respect the **constant A1** if it does not imply an incorrect accentuation of the poetic phrase. **Composers of the period tried by all means that the natural accentuations of the words were respected as much as possible. This basic and general idea becomes very difficult to respect in strophic works, where different verses with the same melodic line have important structural differences**, like we observe in this example. All the above brings with it the possibility of articulating a musical phrase in a different way with different texts.

Two possibilities of application of the text in this case are transcribed below. The first one respects the constant A1 (as in example 5), but the accentuations in the poem do not coincide with the musical ones; the second one prioritizes the prosody and does not respect the constant A1. It is necessary to clarify that either solution is feasible for this extreme case, although here we lean towards the second one.

Example 5

Quédate Carillo adiós, S, de Juan del Encina, *Cancionero de Palacio*

Qué - da - te [a- diós com- pa - ñe - ro _____]

Qué - da - te [a- diós _____ com - pa - ñe - ro _____]

Before moving on to the enunciation of the constant B, it is necessary to indicate that the greatest conflicts that arise for a correct underlay of the text in the works of the 16th century are found in the melismatic passages, where the problems are multiple and of different order. One of them is the choice of the exact sound on which the syllable that begins the melisma must be articulated. The second problem is to determine what the last note of the melisma should be, and, consequently, where the next syllable should be placed. At this point we must make the following clarification: in melismatic passages it is necessary to determine which is the shortest rhythmic value. Thus, we will be able to understand the essence of the **constant B**, where the rhythmic values of the melisma must

⁶ This *villancico* begins with a three-line *estribillo*, followed by the first stanza (4-line *copla* + 3-line *estribillo*).

be compared, and, by means of this comparison, specify the exact sound where the melisma should end.

B - A melisma must end after a long rhythmic value, selecting the latter from the shorter value of the passage

Example 7

J'ai cherché la science, T, de *Orlando de Lassus* (1564)



Here, the shortest rhythmic value of the melisma is the eighth note; for the melisma to end, it is necessary to let a sound of greater rhythmic value pass: the quarter F; then, the next syllable must be articulated over the next sound.

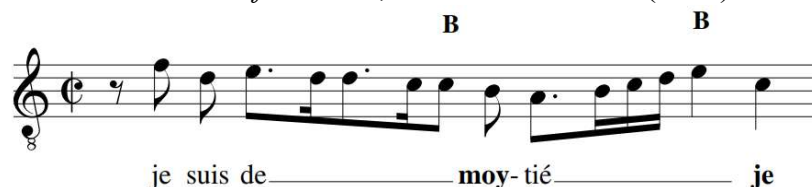
The constant B, rigorously applied by Lassus in all the works of the *Mellange*, allows us to solve many doubtful passages in works prior to the 1550s.

We understand that theories such as Stocker's are the faithful reflection of a practice that has been in place for a long time and constitute nothing more than a compilation and enunciation of his constants. Theories are not "discovered" and imposed; their gestation process is exactly the opposite.

The following example also comes from another work in Lassus's *Mellange* and has been indicated with total precision in the part. Given its rhythmic complexity, it is very illustrative of the scope of the **constant B**.

Example 7

Un avocat dit a sa femme, A, *Orlando de Lassus* (1570)



In the first part of the example, the shortest value is the semiquaver, and therefore the next syllable must be articulated after an eighth note (higher value with respect to the minimum of the passage); in the second part, the syllable je must be articulated after the first quarter note.

Restitution of similar examples, based on the constant B

Example 9

Ardant amour, Orlando de Lassus (1564)



Example 10

Vencedores son tus ojos, S, Anonymous, *Cancionero de Palacio*

Tus o - jos son [ven - ce - - - do - res]

From this example we can see how the different constants may combine.

Example 10

De os servir toda la vida, T, Anonymous, *Cancionero de Palacio*

De os [ser - vir to - da mi vi - da Hol - ga - ré]

y [sir - vien - - - do os mo - ri - ré]

In this example we present the integral reconstruction of the text underlay for the tenor voice corresponding to the initial *estribillo* of the work. Its transcription in the *Cancionero de Palacio* -Anglés edition- only presents the text written in the upper voice.

The *Cancionero de Palacio* is the oldest of the musical manuscripts that we will deal with in this work, and obviously, is the one that presents the most problems in this issue. In almost all of its more than 450 profane works the text is indicated only in the upper voice. Our task is to completely reconstruct (not just correct) the exact position of the words in the remaining voices.

Example 12

Llaman a Teresica, A, Anonymous, *Cancionero de Medinaceli*

Lla - man a Te - re - si - ca y [no vie - - - - ne]

In this example the constants A and B are combined and self-corrected. Let's see: according to B, the melisma over the syllable *vie--* should have concluded in the half note (long sound), but since only one syllable remains to be articulated in that verse and it must be located over its cadential resolution (A), the melisma concludes in the following sound. By combining both constants, a correct solution was found for the passage.

A special case of melisma is the one made over two or three sounds of equal rhythmic value, as in EXAMPLE 12 over syllable *no*. Most of the time, these short *melismas* are performed to allow a better prosodic accentuation of the poem: here it allows the correct

accentuation of the word comes, because it makes its accented syllable coincide with the beginning of a new *tactus*. (*idem* beginning Ex.11).

Example 13

No podrán ser acabadas, S. A. De Mondexar, Cancionero de Palacio



C- Melismas are usually performed either on the accented syllable of the last word of the verse, or on the one with the highest semantic relief

We can see this constant applied in most of the preceding examples:

Example 1 (syllable chan-), Ex 4 (die-), Ex 5 (ti-), Ex 7 (scien-), Ex 8 (-tié), Ex 9 (-ten-), Ex 11 (-vir -vien-), Ex 12 (fri-), Ex 13 (dí-).

In some cases, the melisma is performed on a weak syllable of the word, as in ex 11 on *Holgaré*. In this case, there is a contradiction: the accent of the word is on its last syllable, but the melisma is performed on a weak one.

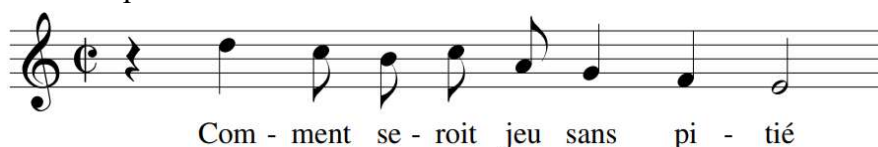
This situation is mainly observed in male ending verses in which the last syllable is accented. It is necessary to clarify that not only in vocal works with text in Spanish, but also in Italian, French, Latin and English, it is common to find musical accentuations and melismas on weak syllables that do not always coincide with the natural accentuation of the spoken word. In our opinion, we believe that a recited poem is transformed when it is set to music, so, the contradictions mentioned do not detract it in any way, since a text acquires a new dimension and expressive potential when it is sung. However, our task will be to avoid as much as possible these contradictions by carefully choosing the melismatic syllable.

D- Imitative passages must have identical text underlay

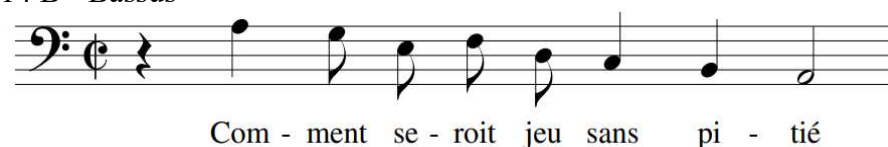
Example 14

Un avocat dit a sa femme, Orlando de Lassus, 1(570)

14 A - Superius



14 B - Bassus



Restitution of similar examples, based on the constant D

Example 15

I vostri acuti dardi, Philippe Verdelot (1534)

15 A - Tenor



15 B – Alto (Ctenor)



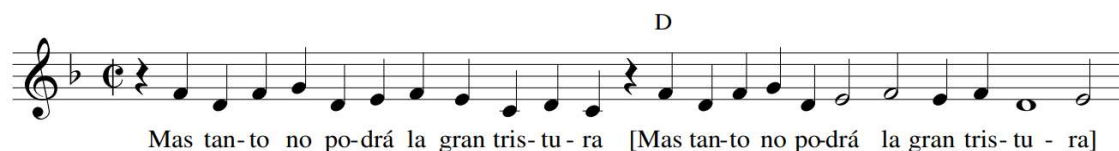
Comparing the T and A parts we observe that the first musical phrase of the latter concludes in the cadence over the G; its following phrase begins with an imitative motif of three ascending sounds per joint degree (identical to that of the tenor, and imitative with respect to the beginning of the previous phrase). Both passages in A must have the same initial text articulation. The constants A and C solve the ends of each phrase.

Example 16

Por do començare, Pedro Guerrero, Cancionero de Medinaceli

16 A – Alto

First musical phrase with the text underlay in the original. Second one without text below the notes.



16 B – Tenor

In the last musical phrase, several **constants** have been combined



In some cases, where musical imitations are not rhythmically identical, the text underlay must be.

Example 17

Quedate Carillo adios, Juan del Encina (1498), *Cancionero de Palacio*

17 A – Superius



17 B – Bassus



In Spanish works from the beginning of the 16th century where the text underlay is barely suggested, we should look for musical reference points (imitative writing, clearly syllabic or melismatic phrases, accentuations, cadential passages) that will serve as indicators and will help us in the choice of the best solution in the doubtful passages. As for example 17 B, let us remember that the B part (as in most of the works in the *Cancionero de Palacio*) does not have the text written below the notes. Since it is an imitative passage between S and B, it was possible to reconstruct the text identically for both voices (**D**)

E - If only two syllables are to be articulated in a melisma, they must correspond to its first and last notes (often when the constant B cannot be applied)

Example 18

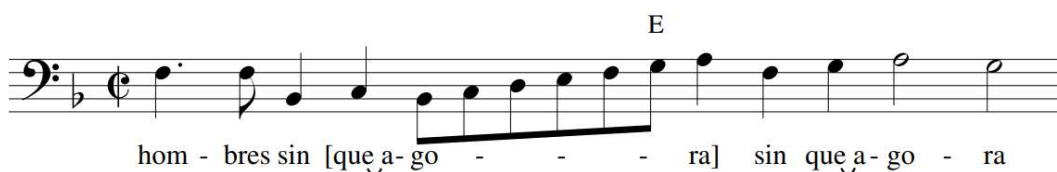
Ave color vini clari (Quinta pars), Orlando de Lassus (1570)



Restitution of dubious passages

Example 19

Nimpha gentil, B, Gines de Morata, *Cancionero de Medinaceli*



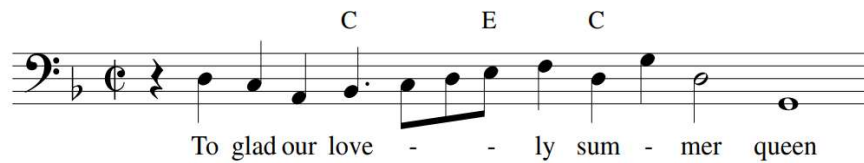
Example 20

Mon coeur gist, A, Claudin de Sermisy (1528)



Example 21

The sun the season in each thing revives, B, Orlando Gibbons (1614)

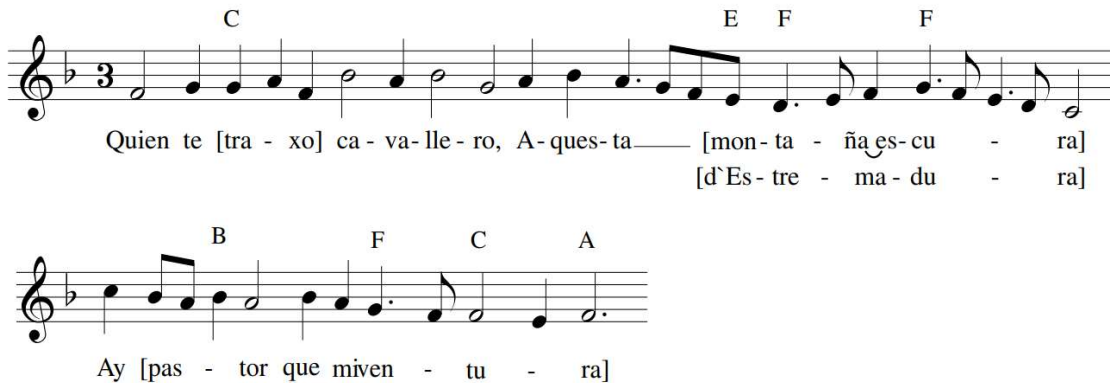


3. PARTICULAR CASES

F - In some passages, a dotted value and its next short value are followed by an immediate syllabic articulation. (contradicts B, but is in agreement with E)

Example 22

Quien te traxo cavallero, S, Juan del Encina, *Cancionero de Palacio*



In this example, *melismas* are performed on non-accented syllables (*Aques-ta pas-tor*). It has already been commented that in works of ternary meter, and especially in those of the *Cancionero de Palacio*, this situation is frequent. Here, too, there are melodies that emphasize a word on accented syllables (*mon-ta-ña, es-cu-ra, ven-tu-ra*), thus, respecting their prosody.

G - Specific resolution of retards at the end of a work or musical section

Example 23

Du cors absent, S, Orlande de Lassus (1564)



Example 24

Dexa ya tu soledad, T, Juan Vasquez (1560)



Example 25

Dum complerentur, S2, Tomas Luis de Victoria

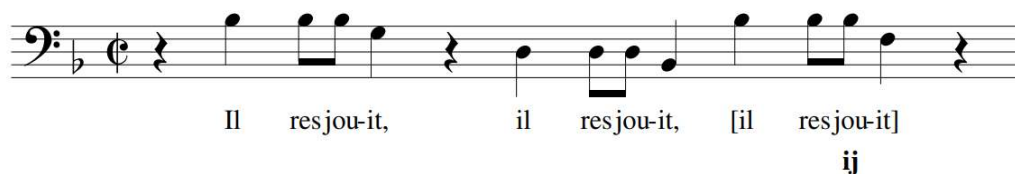


H - Repetition of the whole or parts of a poetic verse

In many cases it is necessary to repeat a fragment of the text to complete a musical phrase that is obviously syllabic. These repetitions are clearly indicated in many musical editions after 1550, but not in the manuscripts of the beginning of the century nor in the editions of the first decades of the 16th century. In the *Mellange* by Lassus, the repetition of a portion or the whole of a verse is indicated by the sign "*ij*" (meaning bis or repetition) and its resolution is implied.

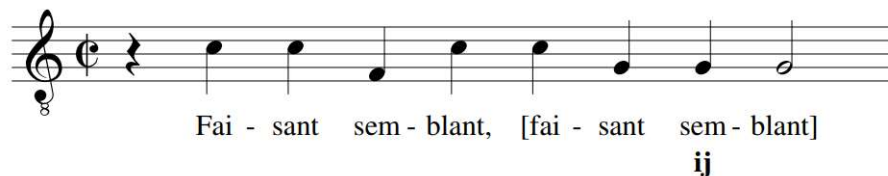
Example 26

Soyons joyeux, B, Orlando de Lassus (1564)



Example 27

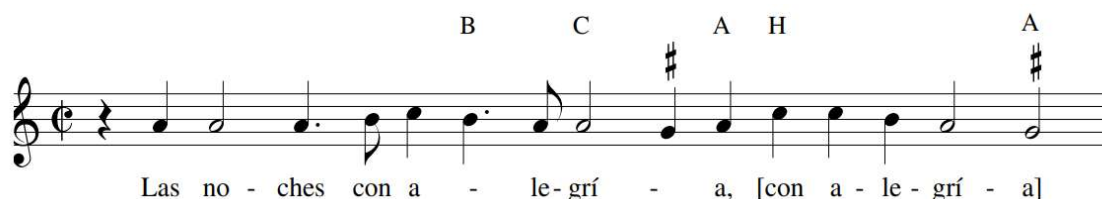
Las me faut il, T, Orlando de Lassus (1560)



Restitution of cases where the proposed repetition of text is not in the original

Example 28

Estas noches a tan largas, S, Anonymous, *Cancionero de Uppsala*



In this example we propose the repetition of the last words of the verse. This decision is justified by the clear syllabic writing of the phrase and by the double cadence that occurs in it. In the facsimile of the original there is no indication to repeat the text. The edition of the *Cancionero de Uppsala* (1556)⁷ is one in which the syllables of the poem are not exactly placed below the corresponding notes. As we can see, some period editions, although late, pose the problem we are dealing with here in its full dimension. Even so, when isolated repetition of words is not indicated in the original, this is a very delicate resource to use. We suggest adopting this extreme solution once the possibilities of text underlay through simple *melismas* or in passages that are undoubtedly syllabic have been exhausted.

Example 29

La mi sola Laureola, T, Juan Ponce, *Cancionero de Palacio*



This case is an atypical one, in which the text of T in the initial estribillo has been completely reconstituted. It consists of two 7-syllable verses:

La mi sola Laureola

La mi sola sola

An additional element used by the composer helps us in this reconstruction of the text: the initial musical motif of the work is written on the notes A-E-G-A, which correspond exactly to the first three words of the verse (*La mi sola*). In Spanish, there is an obvious concordance between the name of the notes and the text (*La-Mi-Sol-La*). The author

⁷ The *Cancionero de Uppsala* Songbook bears that name because the only copy that has survived the centuries is the one that belongs to the University Library in Uppsala (Sweden). It is -in fact- a collection of *villancicos* for 2, 3, 4 and 5 voices, anonymous (in their great majority), both profane and for Christmas. The 1556 edition was printed by Girolamo Scotto in Venice. The title of the collection includes the phrase "...now corrected again..." which suggests the possibility that there was a previous edition of this collection. This would explain the undoubtedly ancient style of writing of his works, which could be located around the 1530s, mainly by composers active in Valencia, Spain. It has been possible to establish the authorship of some works by *Mateo Flecha el Viejo* y *Bartomeu Carceres* who worked in those years at Valencia cathedral as well as at the vice-royal court.

exploits this coincidence which has been sought by him. Therefore, every time that musical motif appears, the text that corresponds to it must be the initial. This particular situation allows to solve the application of the text for the whole passage.

BRIEFING

By way of summary, and in order to put into practice all the **constants** and **special cases** enunciated, we will carry out the restitution of two more extensive examples, in which ones and the others are combined.

Example 30

Desidme, pues suspirastes, S, Juan del Encina, *Cancionero de Palacio*

De - [sid - me pues — sospi - ras - tes, Ca - va - lle - ro que go - zéis ¿Quién es la que más — que-réis?

Example 31

En esperant, S, Claudin de Sermisy, 1536

En [es - pe - rant] en ces - te [lon - gue at - ten - - - te]

Le [bien — heu - reux et de - si - ré — re - voir, — et de - si - ré re - voir]

CONCLUDING

This work does not pretend to offer unique and absolute solutions, since for many cases there are several possibilities regarding text underlay, even respecting the **constants**⁸. Our own musical sensibility will indicate which is the best of the several possible solutions for each passage. One of the guides we must follow -as we have already said repeatedly- is that of the best possible accentuation of the text, although sometimes it is possible that the sung text may contradict its prosodic accentuation.

Even if it has not been intended here to give a definitive solution to all the problems concerning the application of the text in the vocal works of the 16th century, concepts have been presented and developed from the contribution of musicological evidences that can guide the performer of our days and serve him/her as a guide to find "his" solution to the problem addressed here.

⁸ Once the *constants* that emerged from the works published in Lassus's *Mellange* have been stated, we can draw a parallel between them and the rules proposed by Nicolo Vicentino in his treatise of 1555. In chapters 29 and 30, the author sets out 12 rules that composers should follow in order to suitably accommodate text and music. Prof. Don Harran breaks them down and explains them; here we will just compare them with our constants. RULE 1 = constant B / RULES 2 AND 3 = combination of E and F / RULE 4 = H / RULE 5 has points of contact with C / RULES 6, 7, 8 AND 9 correspond to the specific treatment of the union of the final vowel of a word with the initial of the following word in Italian and Latin (diphthong between words) / RULE 10 refers to the application of the text in the leaps of 8th / RULE 11 suggests on which vowels it is more appropriate to perform melismatic passages in different tessituras / and RULE 12 proposes not to articulate syllables on some dissonances. These rules, conceived for students and composers of the period, put the main emphasis on the correct declamation of the text. As we see, the constants stated in this work cover more general and specific cases, and we believe that they are applicable to most vocal music of the 16th century.