

Tinctoris's Minimum Opus

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The story has long been known and often been told: as a student at the University at Orléans, Johannes Tinctoris made a fool of himself.¹ Proud of his accomplishments, and pleased especially with his literary prowess, he allowed his vanity to slip through and leave a permanent record, in full view of all posterity, in a document that would survive the centuries.

That document, which is still kept at Orléans today, is precious for several reasons – not the least of which is that it is the only surviving text written in the theorist's own hand. Yet what makes it truly invaluable is what he reveals about himself, intentionally and, perhaps, unintentionally. The text has been transcribed and edited by several modern scholars, and the facts of the case are well known.² Yet the story they tell remains a footnote to the larger story of Tinctoris's life. My aim in the pages that follow is to take another close look at the text, and to give it more of the interpretive scrutiny that we are accustomed to give to other documents from this period. Like so many medieval texts, the Orléans document raises questions that may not be obvious in a face-value reading. Indeed, upon sustained scrutiny we may soon find ourselves wondering what, exactly, is the story it tells, how much of a fool Tinctoris really made of himself, and who, ultimately, has the last laugh. Before delving into those questions, however, let us begin by recapitulating the story, and providing some of the context necessary to analyze it.

The year is 1463, and Johannes Tinctoris is a musician in his late twenties. Although his celebrity as the most authoritative music theorist of his time is still a decade in the future, he can already boast an impressive start to his career. He is an ordained priest, a master in the liberal arts, and a successful professional musician.

¹ Ronald Woodley, "Iohannes Tinctoris: A Review of the Documentary Biographical Evidence", *JAMS*, 34 (1981), p. 217-248, at 225-229 and 243; Id., "Renaissance Music Theory as Literature: On Reading the Proportionale Musices of Iohannes Tinctoris", *Renaissance Studies*, 1 (1987), p. 209-220, at 211-212; Leofranc Holford-Strevens, "Humanism and the Language of Music Treatises", *Renaissance Studies*, 15 (2001), p. 415-449, at 424-426; Robert H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2007), p. 249, n. 53; Jeffrey Samuel Palenik, "The Early Career of Johannes Tinctoris: An Examination of the Music Theorist's Northern Education and Development" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2008), p. 8-29; Rob C. Wegman, "Tinctoris's Magnum Opus", *'Uno gentile et subtile ingenio': Studies in Renaissance Music in Honour of Bonnie J. Blackburn*, ed. Gioia Filocamo and Mary Jennifer Bloxam (Turnhout, 2009), p. 771-782, at 779-780.

² Printed in Hilde De Ridder-Symoens et al., eds., *Les Livres des procureurs de la nation germanique de l'ancienne Université d'Orléans, 1444-1602*, 3 vols. (Leiden, 1971), 1, p. 29-30, see also 2, p. 69-70; R. Woodley, "Iohannes Tinctoris", p. 243; L. Holford-Strevens, "Humanism and the Language", p. 425.

Only a few years previously he had accepted the post of choirmaster at the Cathedral of Ste Croix in Orléans.³ With that position he had secured the safety and stability of a life within the patronage of a major institution, a steady income with good prospects of a decently beneficed career, a house to live in, and the daily opportunity to fine-tune a polyphonic chapel under his own direction.

Yet his ambitions reached further than that. In 1462 Tinctoris had taken the next step: in the autumn of that year he enrolled as a student of law at the University of Orléans. This put him on an academic track that could eventually earn him the title of Doctor of Canon and Civil Law. With a law degree Tinctoris would be able to rise to positions of responsibility in civic, courtly, and ecclesiastical administrations. That his legal career meant a lot to him is clear from later evidence. In his treatises on music, Tinctoris would never be shy about his credentials as a scholar of law. Nor did he ever abandon the hope, not even in old age, of being one day awarded the doctoral degree that had apparently eluded him during his years at Orléans.⁴

In 1463 those aspirations were still some way from being realized any time soon. Yet in this year Tinctoris did write a document that offers a glimpse into his ambition to succeed and excel. This short but remarkable text survives in his own handwriting, and at first sight looks like a somewhat overwrought exercise in self-praise. Tinctoris, the fresh law student, appears eager to project himself as a man of distinction, a figure who stands out from among his peers, and who may be destined for great things. To this end he deploys a suitably exalted stylistic register, one that looks comically out of place in the immediate documentary context of a matriculation register. Tinctoris would succeed in making an impression on people who came across his text after he had left Orléans. But judging from their reactions, which survive as annotations scribbled in the margin, these later readers were struck less by what was admirable about him (at least in his eyes) than by the extravagant immodesty of his self-representation. Although his later career would vindicate the high opinion Tinctoris had of himself – he would soon be appointed as the chief musician at the royal court of Naples – this one document at Orléans continued to make him the laughing stock of other students at the university. In our own time it has attracted commentary from a number of scholars, and has been edited more than once.⁵ However, since the text is not free of ambiguity, and may be open to different readings, I propose to take another look at it here, and explore what may or may not have been the intentions of its author.

The document that concerns us here survives in a hefty tome that is kept today in the Archives départementales du Loiret at Orléans, under the call number D. 213 (Fig. 1). It is the *Liber procuratorum*, the matriculation register of the so-called German nation, that is, the corporate body of those students at Orléans who came from the territories of the Holy Roman Empire. Since Tinctoris was born in Braine-l'Alleud, a small town in the imperial county of Brabant, he was eligible for membership in

³ Marlène Britta, "Contribution à l'étude des années passées par Johannes Tinctoris à Orléans: 1458–1465", *JAF* (forthcoming).

⁴ Richard Sherr, "A Biographical Miscellany: Josquin, Tinctoris, Obrecht, Brumel", in *Musicologia Humana: Studies in Honor of Warren and Ursula Kirkendale*, ed. Siegfried Gmeinwieser, David Hiley, and Jorg Riedlbauer (Florence, 1994), p. 65-73.

⁵ See above, n. 1 and 2.

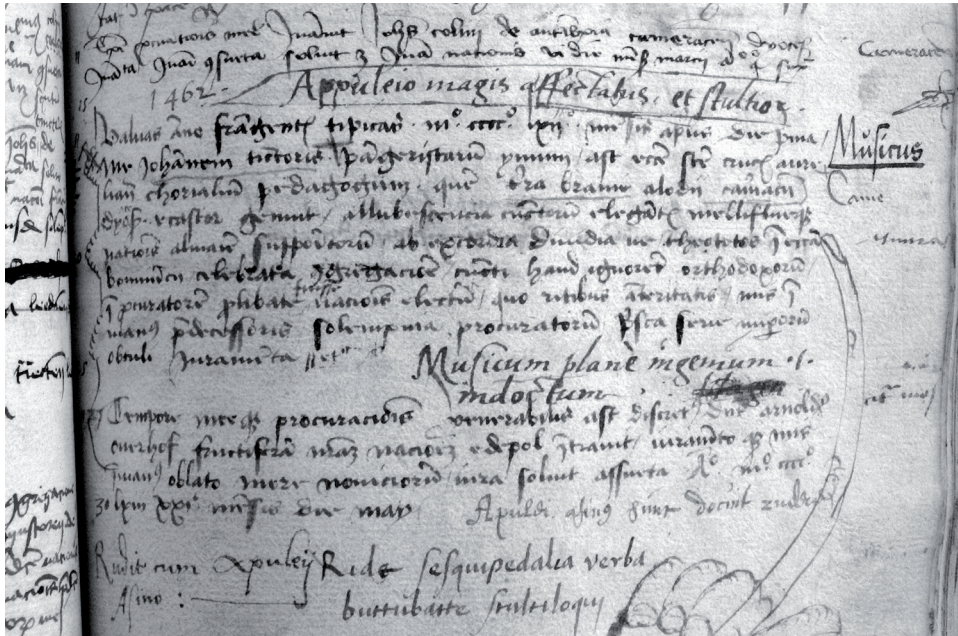


Fig. 1. Statement by Johannes Tinctoris as he assumes office as Procurator of the German nation at the University of Orléans, 1 April 1463. Orléans, Archives départementales du Loiret, D 213, *Liber procuratorum*, vol. 1, fol. 62r.

the German nation.⁶ This is how we first encounter him in the register, on folio 61v, when he is sworn in as a member by the nation's procurator Petrus de Duvelandia. His matriculation, some time between July and October 1462, is recorded as follows:⁷

Tempore mee procuracionis iuravit venerabilis dominus et magister Johannes Tinctoris de Brania Allodij, Cameracensis dyocesis, et succentor ecclesie Sancte Crucis, et fecit iuramenta solito more et pecuniam procuratoris et bedello nacionis in promptu soluit; sed nacioni francum in proxima electione solvere promisit, quem francum nacio et supposita eiusdem solempniter congregata sibi ob specialem favorem remisertunt.

In the time of my procuratorship, the venerable lord and magister Johannes Tinctoris of Braine-l'Alleud in the diocese of Cambrai, succentor of the church of Ste Croix, swore and took the oaths after the usual custom, and paid the procurator and the beadle in ready money; but he promised to pay the nation's franc at the next election, which franc the nation and its members, in a solemn assembly, waived as a special favor to him.

It is typical of documents like these that they are careful to record the titles and distinctions of the individuals. For example, Tinctoris is styled “the venerable lord”, which reflects his dignity as an ordained priest. He is also styled “magister”, which

⁶ Cf. most recently Ronald Woodley, “Tinctoris's Family Origins: Some New Clues”, *JAF*, 5 (2013), p. 69-94.

⁷ *Livres des procurateurs*, 1, p. 28.

means that he has successfully completed the liberal arts curriculum, possibly at another university. Finally, he is called “succentor” at the prestigious Cathedral of Ste Croix, which confirms that he is more than a mere singer. Tinctoris is a musician qualified to take on professional responsibilities at a major choral establishment. One further detail which Petrus de Duvelandia is careful to add is Tinctoris’s place of birth, and the diocese in which he had been ordained. It is his birth in Braine-l’Alleud, in the diocese of Cambrai, that confirms his eligibility to join the German nation.

The task of the procurator himself, as we can tell from the document, was to admit new students to the nation, to record their matriculation in the register, and to collect the membership fees.⁸ The procuratorship was a position that rotated quickly, typically about three or four times a year. In fact new members might very soon be called upon to serve in this capacity themselves. Petrus de Duvelandia, for example, had joined the German nation only the previous year, in July 1461. And it would be Tinctoris’s turn to assume the office in April 1463, a mere six months after his matriculation. Every new procurator was required, upon assuming his responsibilities, to enter a formal statement in the register in which he stated his name, status, and positions, confirmed his German nationality, and declared that he had been duly elected to the office. Tinctoris would enter such a statement as well, and it is this text that will be the subject of the present essay.

Before turning to that text it may be useful to say a few words about procurators’ statements in general. As might be expected, they tend to be succinct and to the point; often the language is simply copied from previous entries. All that matters, after all, is formal matters of protocol, and these require no elaboration. Let us take the example of Petrus de Duvelandia, who had entered the following statement when he took office on 1 July 1462:⁹

Anno Domini m^o cccc^o lxi^o, prima die mensis julii, convocacione et congregacione preclare et inclite suppositorum nacionis Almanie solemniter celebrata ego Petrus de Duvelandia, in artibus magister, Trajectensis dyocesis, per venerabiles dominos prefate nacionis unanimi voce nemineque contradicente ac reclamante electus fui in procuratorem ejusdem nacionis juravique juramenta solita et fieri consueta in manu predecessoris.

In the year of Our Lord 1462, on the first day of July, after the solemn celebration of the meeting and assembly of the distinguished and illustrious nation of Germany, I, Petrus de Duvelandia, master of arts, from the diocese of Utrecht, was elected by the venerable lords of the aforesaid nation, with unanimous voice, no one opposing or protesting, to the procuratorship of the same nation, and I have sworn the usual oaths that are accustomed to be rendered, in the hand of the predecessor.

⁸ For a more detailed listing of the procurator’s responsibilities, see R. Woodley, “Iohannes Tinctoris”, p. 228: “his duties [...] included calling the general assemblies of the nation; writing the name and place of origin (sometimes together with the diocese) of novices into the ‘Liber procuratorum’ or matriculation book; and receiving the novices’ oath. The procurator was in addition charged with the administration and maintenance of the goods, seal, and archives of the nation (especially the ‘Libri procuratorum’ and the statutes), and also of the finances.”

⁹ *Livres des procureurs*, 1, p. 29.

As we can tell from this example, procurators' statements were basically affidavits of some sort, that is, written legal declarations meant to attest to the truth of certain facts. The precise facts that every new procurator was required to affirm were (1) the date on which he assumed office, (2) his name, his academic or societal status, and his place of origin, (3) the fact of his election by the German nation, (4) the occasion and sometimes location of the election, (5) the fact that the vote was unanimous, and (6) his having taken the oath in the hands of his predecessor. Yet the procurator's statement was not an empty formality. In the unlikely event, for example, that a new incumbent knowingly affirmed an untruth (especially one that affected his authority to act on behalf of the nation), he would be deemed to have acted in bad faith, and could face disciplinary and legal consequences. Not that the stakes were especially high. There were few opportunities to abuse the rights and responsibilities of the office, and fewer incentives still to seek it for that motive.

Nevertheless, there are two points worth bearing in mind. First, procurators entered their statements as an obligation to the nation they served. It was the German nation that would own and keep the record of the statement, and which, in case of contention, had the right to produce it before authorities competent to arbitrate. Second, and for that very reason, the text had no implied reader. Its purpose was not to edify or to entertain, or to move readers by rhetorical or other literary means, but to serve as a legal instrument, as valid proof in contexts where proof might be required. In this respect it was not different from, say, a contract, or a promissory note, or a quitclaim.

Without an implied reader the document was not subject to the rhetorical principle of decorum, which dictated that the choice of literary style should always be appropriate to occasion and audience. It made no difference to the evidentiary value of a legal document in what style it was couched, provided that it did not equivocate or mislead. It is surely for this reason that variations in wording between one procurator and the next tend to be superficial. Consider, for example, the statement by Duvelandia's immediate successor, Johannes Goeswijnstoren; I have marked the six essential points itemized above by number:

Anno Domini M^o CCCC^o LXII^o, die quinta mensis octobris, congregacione facta preclare nacionis Alamanie ego Johannes Goeswijnstoren de Trajecto superiori, Leodiensis dyocesis, per venerabiles dominos predicte nacionis nemine contradicente electus fui in procuratorem fructifere nacionis predicte juravique juramenta solita et consueta fieri in manu predecessoris mei.

(1) In the year of the Lord 1462, on the fifth day of the month of October, (4) after the assembly of the distinguished German nation had been held, (2) I, Johannes Goeswijnstoren of upper Tricht in the diocese of Liège, (3) was elected to the procuratorship of the aforesaid fruit-bearing nation by the venerable lords of the aforesaid nation, (5) without opposition from anyone, and (6) have sworn the customary and usual oaths in the hand of my predecessor.

Compared to all other such statements in the register, the one by Tinctoris stands out as unique. This is not because he had altered the legal substance of the statement, which had to be confirmed in all its particulars. Yet there was no particular reason why that substance should be as tersely worded as had been the custom. It is in this respect that Tinctoris departed from the example of other procurators. The style he adopted was grandiose, overblown, and, in the context of a matriculation register, out of place. Since its pomposity has to do directly with its Latinity, it would be hard to convey the tone and stylistic register of the document in idiomatic English. A modern translation would probably have to sound a little like the Earl of Kent's mocking address to the Duke of Cornwall in the second act of *King Lear* (II. ii, v. 1173-77):

EARL OF KENT.

Sir, in good faith, in sincere verity,
Under th'allowance of your great aspect,
Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire
On flickering Phoebus' front—

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

What mean'st by this?

In a literal translation, Tinctoris's statement runs as follows:¹⁰

Valuas anno frangentis tipicas . m^o .
cccc^o . lciij^o . mensis aprilis die prima | me
Iohannem Tinctoris . pangeristarum ymum
| ast ecclesie sancte crucis Aurelianensis
chorialium| pedagogum . quem terra
Branie Alodij Cameracensis dyocesis .
ecastor genuit | allubescencia cunctorum
elegantis melliflueque nationis Almanie
suppositorum . ab excordia diuidia ne |
theotocos in ecclesia Boni Nuntij celebrata
congregacione | cuncti haud ignorent
orthodoxorum | in procuratorem prolibate
`fuisse' nacionis electum | quo ritibus
anteritatis | mis in manus predecessoris
solempnia . procuratorum prisca serie
nuperorum obtuli iuramenta || et cetera.

<Be it known> that in the year of the One
Breaking the Figurative Gates 1462 [1463
n.st.], on the first day of the month of April,
I, Johannes Tinctoris, least of panegyrist
yet pedagogue of the choristers of the
Church of the Holy Cross in Orléans, whom
the land of Braine-l'Alleud in the diocese
of Cambrai has, by Castor, brought forth,
have been elected, by the affectionate
favor of all the subjects of the elegant and
honey-sweet nation of Germany, <without>
needless divisions, lest, the assembly
having been celebrated in the church of the
Theotokos of Bonne-Nouvelle, all orthodox
believers would scarcely be ignorant, to
the procuratorship of the prolibated nation,
where, after the rites of anteriority, I have
proffered the solemn oaths of the recent
procurators of the old order in the hands of
my predecessor, et cetera.

¹⁰ For another translation, see J.S. Palenik, "The Early Career of Johannes Tinctoris", p. 21. Both here and in the entry of 21 May 1463 (below), the vertical lines represent the punctuation marks used by Tinctoris, which are likewise oblique slanting lines. The Latin text given here is based directly on the *Liber procuratorum* and preserves Tinctoris's punctuation, which carefully articulates the grammatical structure of the text. Note, especially, how the parenthetical *theotocos... congregacione* is neatly demarcated from *ne... cuncti haud ignorent* into which it is nested. On another note, the MS clearly reads *prolibate*, that is, poured forth, rather than *prelibate*, aforetasted, into which it has usually been emended. Other details of the text and the translation are to be discussed below.

To which the modern reader can only respond, following the example of the Duke of Cornwall: “what mean’st by this”? Is this author serious or is he in jest?

What Tinctoris *means* to say is clear from a comparison with the statements by Duvelandia and Goeswijnstoren cited a moment ago. The new procurator makes it perfectly clear (1) that his statement is dated 1 April 1463, (2) that he is Johannes Tinctoris, choirmaster of the Church of Ste-Croix in Orléans, (3) that he has been elected to the procuratorship (4) in a formal session held in the church of Notre-Dame-de-Bonne-Nouvelle, (5) that the vote was unanimous, and (6) that he has taken the customary oath in the hands of his predecessor. That much is clear. But what is the meaning of the Latin style in which all this is presented?

Later users of the *Liber procuratorum* were in no doubt as to what Tinctoris had meant. Decades later, long after he had left Orléans and its university, they could not contain their amusement when happening across the text. More than that, they apparently called in others to have a look and to share in the hilarity. One later user drew a large hand with an absurdly elongated index finger, to make sure that the text would always be easy to locate and could not possibly be missed. Their marginal comments leave us in no doubt as to their opinion of the author (Fig. 1):

Appuleio magis affectatus, et stultior.	More affected than Apuleius, and more stupid!
Mūsicus.	A musician . . . ¹¹
Musicum planè ingenium id est indoctum.	Plainly a musician’s mind, that is, an unlearned one.
Apulei asinus sinit docuit rudere.	Apuleius’s ass lets him bray and has taught him.
Rudit cum Apuleij Asino:	He brays with Apuleius’s ass!
Ride sesquipedalia verba buttübätte stultiloquj.	Have a laugh at those sesquipedalian words, the yakety-yaks of this foolish prattler!
Parturiunt montes nascetur ridiculus mus.	The mountains are in labor, and a silly mouse will be born.

How deeply embarrassing. In his very effort to adopt a rhetorical style appropriate to his person and commensurate with his dignity (or so these later commentators concluded), Tinctoris has exposed himself in the most painfully revealing way. He has succeeded in making himself the object of ridicule. Only a few decades later, fellow-students at the university will call him an ass, a fool, a prattling ignoramus – and worse yet, a musician.

¹¹ This more neutral annotation, according to R. Woodley, “Iohannes Tinctoris”, p. 243, is in the hand of Adolphus Eichholz, who began to compile an index to the volume in 1517.

Today, those assessments must seem only the more on target because we, unlike his early commentators, actually know what became of Tinctoris after he had left Orléans. And if the truth be told, the pompous pedantry of Tinctoris's entry does not seem completely out of character. There are close apparent parallels especially in the first treatise he published after moving to Naples, the *Proportionale musices* of c.1472-73. Almost ten years had passed since he had been procurator at Orléans, and obviously a lot had changed in the meantime. It is evident from the *Proportionale's* Prologue, for example, that Tinctoris had now completely immersed himself in humanist learning, and was able to write elevated Latin prose with a degree of assurance of which his early literary effort – if that is what it is – had given little inkling (see Appendix).¹² He had become a Ciceronian: erudite, widely read, and suitably conscious of his musical as well as classical erudition. As the footnotes to App. 1 show, the Prologue's introductory section alone contains no fewer than fifteen intertextual allusions to other writers. Although the sources are not identified in the text, that makes his exercise in literary *imitatio* only the more impressive. There is a degree of literary sophistication here that is well beyond anything he seemed capable of showing in his early Orléans effort.

And yet, there are signs that recall the Orléans Tinctoris. Once again he seems keen to impress. And he is eager to project himself as the equal of the two musicians he praises most lavishly, Johannes Ockeghem and Antoine Busnoys. Also, he is quite unafraid to castigate the errors of those less learned than himself. Perhaps the most breathtaking example of just that censoriousness comes in the third chapter of Book III of the *Proportionale*, entitled “When proportions are to be indicated”.¹³ Almost immediately Tinctoris seizes the opportunity to lambaste his favorite scapegoat Petrus de Domarto, who in his *Missa Spiritus almus* had “sinned intolerably” by not indicating a proportion of inequality where he should have. The theorist has no patience with the possible counter-argument that the sign of *prolatio major* is by itself sufficient to establish that proportion and that Domarto's notation, consequently, is neither negligent nor unduly confusing. For the *prolatio major* sign, or so he points out, is not a sign of proportion and hence cannot obviate the need for one.

Logic may be on Tinctoris's side, but precedent is not. He is forced to concede that *prolatio major* augmentation has been applied by just about every major composer of his time except Dufay. He is at a loss to explain this in the case of Ockeghem and Busnoys, “who are well known for their Latinity”. Yet he professes to be quite unsurprised at Regis, Caron, Boubert, Faugues, Courbet, and many others, “since I have heard that they are not literate at all”.

Minime litteratus: it is a withering comment, one that seems designed to humiliate. But what precisely does Tinctoris mean by *litteratus*? Throughout the Middle Ages, *litteratus* had been the designation for a person who had the ability to read and write Latin, usually a cleric. Yet it is unlikely that this is the sense in which Tinctoris used

¹² R. Woodley, “Renaissance Music Theory”, Reinhard Strohm, “Music, Humanism, and the Idea of a ‘Rebirth’ of the Arts”, *Music as Concept and Practice in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Reinhard Strohm and Bonnie J. Blackburn, (Oxford, 2001; “New Oxford History of Music”, III. 1), p. 346-405; Rob C. Wegman, “Johannes Tinctoris and the ‘New Art’”, *M&L*, 84 (2003), p. 171-188.

¹³ Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 3 vols. in 2 ([Rome], 1975-78; “Corpus scriptorum de musica”, 22), 2a, p. 48-50.

the term. After all, he cannot imply that the five composers had no Latin whatsoever, since they undoubtedly had received rigorous training in it when they were choirboys. (Indeed, Regis is known to have been active as a schoolmaster.) It is true that *litteratus* could be used in a more extended sense, meaning learned, or widely educated, or scientifically skilled, or even just clever or elegant. Yet the more we are willing to accept this diluted sense of the word, the more rude and insulting Tintoris's comment would be, since he would effectively be denying that the five composers had culture or intelligence of any sort. We can tell from comments elsewhere that he could have meant no such implication. Tintoris considered Regis, Caron, and Faugues, at least, as among the most distinguished composers he had heard and whose music he sought to emulate to the best of his ability (App. 1). More importantly, Tintoris praises Busnoys and Ockeghem by comparison for their *Latinitas*, a more specific competence which it is not necessarily shameful to lack, but which may explain and perhaps excuse errors of musical orthography. Quite what Latinity has to do with the notation of musical proportions is another matter, of course. But that is precisely why Tintoris's remark is so revealing. Just as in the case of the Orléans document, he is eager to foreground issues of Latin style and erudition, even in a context where they have no apparent relevance.

There is a seductive picture emerging from all this. At Orléans as well as at Naples, Tintoris reveals himself as a man who is not content just to know how much he has accomplished, and how little he has to prove – on the contrary, he needs to advertise the fact, as though fearing that readers might assume the opposite otherwise. There appears to be a fundamental insecurity underlying both documents, as if Tintoris's sense of self-worth is contingent upon the esteem of others – which is not only why he wants to be in a position to command esteem, by laboring long and hard in literary studies, but why he needs to draw public attention to the fruits of that labor.

And yet, perhaps the picture is a little too neat. There are several points that do not seem to add up, and that must make a face-value reading of the Orléans text problematic. Consider, first of all, that the literary feat in the Orléans *Liber procuratorum* is not nearly as impressive as even Tintoris himself, even at his most vain, could have realistically imagined. Like the fellow-composers he took to task in the *Proportionale*, he is certain to have received Latin instruction as a choirboy, that is, from the age of about seven. Indeed as master of the choristers at Orléans Cathedral he was very probably teaching Latin himself, or would at least have been expected to be able to do so if called upon. If we consider, moreover, that he would have spoken Latin on a daily basis at the university, as was normally required by statute in the Middle Ages, then how much of a literary effort did the entry in the *Liber procuratorum* actually represent? How impressed could he expect his fellow-students to be, given that he was unlikely to have held a monopoly on extravagant vocabulary in a university environment? And even if that vocabulary was unusually bookish or learned, why must his use of it necessarily be a sign of earnest literary pretension, when we are quite prepared to recognize the intentional absurdity of Kent's address to Gloucester? How realistic is it that after more than twenty years of speaking and reading Latin almost every day, Tintoris could somehow still manage to be oblivious of even the most commonsensical distinctions between the serious and the absurd?

Even setting aside the fact that Tinctoris had nothing to prove when it came to Latin fluency and literary elegance, it is worth remembering that we are not dealing with a boy or an adolescent who might actually have been immature enough to make an ass of himself. Tinctoris, as we have said, was approaching thirty, he was an ordained priest, a *magister in artibus*, and a professional musician entrusted with the responsibility of training and educating young boys. How likely is it that a man whose societal status and ecclesiastical dignity was so well-established as to need no advertising, least of all in a matriculation register, would have felt a particular need to impress? In fact, if that was the aim of his rhetorical flourishes, then why did Tinctoris “forget” to mention two important distinctions that any other procurator would have mentioned without ado. Note that he styles himself “Johannes Tinctoris, least of laudators yet pedagogue of the choristers of the Church of the Holy Cross in Orléans”. That is indeed one of his distinctions, and certainly not the least. Yet unlike Petrus de Duvelandia, indeed unlike most procurators in the register, he does not add that he is also a priest and a *magister*. It is true that Johannes Goeswijnstoren, who also enjoyed these distinctions, did not mention them either. Yet in Tinctoris’s case we are supposed to assume that his procurator’s statement was shaped by a desire to impress. We cannot even attribute the omission to simple carelessness, for Tinctoris did proofread his statement, as we can tell from his later insertion of the verb *fuisse* (see Fig. 1).

Moreover, the text shows grammatical blunders that would seem hard to reconcile with any attempt to attain a high level of Latinity. As a matter of fact the text does not even make sense. For one thing, there is a structural verb missing which is required for the sentence as a whole to be grammatically complete. That verb is required by the peculiar construction which Tinctoris uses. Instead of saying, like other procurators including Duvelandia and Goeswijnstoren, “I have been elected” (*ego... electus fui*), he opts for the *accusativus cum infinitivo*, “me... to have been elected” (*me... fuisse electum*). This construction by itself is obviously incomplete: it cannot make a closed sentence (literally, a *clause*) unless there is an additional verb – which I have supplied in the translation with the conventional opening “be it known” (*sciunt omnes*). This emendation right at the beginning allows the construction as a whole to be understood as “be it known that I have been elected.” Of course, the required verb could just as well have been supplied at the end. The point is that the coherence of the statement is contingent upon that verb. And yet it never arrives to provide grammatical closure.

The expectation of closure is heightened by one of Tinctoris’s parenthetical sub-clauses: “lest all the faithful would scarcely be ignorant” (*ne... cuncti haud ignorent orthodoxorum*). This phrase, too, requires a verb, indeed the very same verb that is missing from the sentence as a whole. For the sense that is implied but not articulated is surely this: be it known, lest the faithful remain unaware, that I have been elected.

There is a further problem with that same sub-clause.¹⁴ It is apparent even at first sight that the phrase is needlessly confusing, indeed nonsensical, because it involves a triple negative. The first of the three “nots” is “lest” (*ne*, in order that not). This

¹⁴ For this and what follows, see also L. Holford-Strevens, “Humanism and the Language”, p. 425 n. 45. It is perhaps no coincidence that the apparent inversion of meaning affects a clause that has no legal significance.

is followed by “scarcely” (*haud*, not at all). And the third is “that they know not” (*ignorant*). Now the required sense, evidently, is that all orthodox believers should know that Tinctoris has been elected, or rather, that they should not remain ignorant of the fact. That sense would have been successfully communicated if Tinctoris had left out *haud*, “scarcely”. Yet by keeping it in, and not deleting it even when he proofread his own text, he has managed to say exactly the opposite: be it known, lest all of the orthodox believers *should* actually know. Or at least, that would have been the opposite if he himself had supplied “be it known”, or some equivalent. Without it, the basic structure of the text is literally: “me, Johannes Tinctoris... to have been elected... lest all the faithful should scarcely be ignorant.” Period.

There is another place where Tinctoris manages to say the opposite of what he intends. When he writes that his election to the procuratorship was unopposed, the phrase he uses is *ab excordia dividia*, by which he of course means to say “without needless divisions”. Yet because he uses *ab* and not *absque*, the literal meaning is “on account of needless divisions”, as if it were extreme partisanship that secured his election.¹⁵

Yet another expression that seems calculated to cause confusion is *mis in manus predecessoris* (“in the hands of my predecessor”). This is Tinctoris’s needlessly complicated rendering of the standard *in manu predecessoris mei*, as used for example by Duvelandia and Goeswijnstoren (see above). For some perverse reason Tinctoris opts to use the very early Latin genitive *mis*, which had lost all currency after it had been supplanted by *mei*.¹⁶ By changing the word order, moreover, and by changing the expression from “in the hand” (*in manu*) into “into the hands” (*in manus*), he has created a phrase that sounds almost exactly like the common *meas in manus*, “into my hands”.¹⁷ In fact he uses the phrase *mis in manus* in that very sense, that is, incorrectly, when he swears in Arnoldus Overhoff the next month:¹⁸

Tempore meeque procuracionis venerabilis
ast discretus dominus Arnoldus Ouerhof
fructiferam nostram nacionem edepol
intrauit | iuramentoque mis in manus oblato
more nouiciorum | iura soluit assueta . anno
. mo . cccco . lxiij xxja mensis die may.

During the time of my procuratorship, the
venerable and distinguished lord Arnoldus
Overhof entered, by Pollux, our fruitbearing
nation, and having taken the oath in my
hands after the custom of novices, he paid
the accustomed duties, in the year 1463, on
the twenty-first day of May.

Errors like these seem almost designed to leave the impression that the author is way in over his head, becoming hopelessly entangled in his own fruitless efforts to produce a style beyond his competence, and consequently losing all control over

¹⁵ This may be why J.S. Palenik, “The Early Career of Johannes Tinctoris”, p. 21, opted to translate the passage as “which has been subjected to senseless division”.

¹⁶ Philip Baldi, *The Foundations of Latin* (Berlin - New York, 1999), p. 338. Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae*, XIII, reported its use in the *Annales* of Ennius: *Ingens cura mis cum concordibus aequiperare*, “a great care of mine to match those who are of like mind.”

¹⁷ For this, see also J.S. Palenik, “The Early Career of Johannes Tinctoris”, p. 25.

¹⁸ This use of *mis* for *meas* is not attested elsewhere as far as I know, though it is used for *meis* in Plautus, *Poenulus*, 1188: *rebus mis agundis* (“for doing my things”).

grammatical coherence and sense. Yet the question is whether such uncommon ineptitude is plausible in a man who has spoken and read Latin for almost twenty-five years, and who was in fact about to enter the legal profession, where verbal precision of all things was of the essence.

Of course there is more to the procurator's statement than brute ineptitude alone. Tinctoris does seem a little more successful in his efforts to find more ornate ways of saying what his predecessors had said in straightforward Latin. Almost without exception, however, he settles on words and expressions that are so contrived as to suggest yet more ineptitude. The very first words of the statement provide a clear example. According to Tinctoris it was not "in the year of the Lord" (*anno domini*) that his election had taken place, but "in the year of the One Breaking the Figurative Gates" (*valuas anno frangentis tipicas*). Not that this alternative is by itself nonsensical. Tinctoris is referring to the Gates of Hell as mentioned in St Matthew 16: 18: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (*tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et portae inferi non praevallebunt adversum eam*).¹⁹ That the Gates of Hell (*portae inferi*) must be meant in a figurative sense is evident from this scriptural verse alone, since gates can only be opened and closed, but cannot literally be said to prevail against the church. They must in other words stand for the powers of darkness in general. Yet Tinctoris confuses the matter by associating those same gates with the narrative of the Harrowing of Hell. According to this latter narrative, Christ had literally blown the Gates of Hell off their hinges, in fulfilment of the prophecy "For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder" (Ps. 107: 16).²⁰ Ironically, then, it is precisely in the Savior's victory as "the Breaker" – *frangens* in Tinctoris's words – that the Gates of Hell were *not* figurative, but literally gates, heavily fortified and guarded by demons. In fact there is scarcely an artistic rendering of the Harrowing from this period in which the righteous are not seen to step through those very gates, often with the doors lying in ruins at the Savior's very feet. Which is to say, in sum, that Tinctoris has once again managed to write nonsense, nonsense of the kind he would surely have corrected in the Latin exercises of his own choirboys.

When it comes to this, there is another infelicity (for want of a better word), that even littlest choirboy would have learned to avoid. When Tinctoris describes his origin in the land of Braine-l'Alleud, he adds force to the point by using the exclamation *ecastor* (lit. by Castor), which is a borrowing from the comedies of Plautus and Terence. There was nothing especially erudite about this borrowing as such, for these comedies were a regular staple in plays put up in schools. For that very reason, however, choristers and schoolboys would have been the first to remember

¹⁹ Tinctoris's use of the word *valva*, folding door, is paralleled in Erasmus's *Carmen heroicum de solemnitate paschali*, v. 130-132: *Iam trepidatus adest, validas nec multa moratus / Impulit in valvas, vectes confregit ahenos / Divinoque graves disiecit numine moles* ("The dreaded figure is now at hand; with no delay he strikes the strong doors, breaks the bronze bars, and by his divine power dashes the heavy mass to pieces"). After Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 86 vols. to date (Toronto - Buffalo, 1974-), 85, p. 314-315.

²⁰ John Arnott MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh, 1930).

that in Antiquity only women swore oaths by Castor, never men.²¹ Even if in the unlikely event that Tinctoris himself had no practical acquaintance with Plautus and Terence, surely a man of his literary pretensions would have known about the gendered usage on the authority of Aulus Gellius, who devoted the sixth chapter of his *Noctes Atticae*, Book XI, to just this point:²²

In our early writings neither do Roman women swear by Hercules nor the men by Castor. But why the women did not swear by Hercules is evident, since they abstain from sacrificing to Hercules. On the other hand, why the men did not name Castor in oaths is not easy to say. Nowhere, then, is it possible to find an instance, among good writers, either of a woman saying “by Hercules” or a man, “by Castor”; but *edepol*, which is an oath by Pollux, is common to both man and woman.²³ Marcus Varro, however, asserts that the earliest men were wont to swear neither by Castor nor by Pollux, but that this oath was used by women alone and was taken from the Eleusinian initiations; that gradually, however, through ignorance of ancient usage, men began to say *edepol*, and thus it became a customary expression; but that the use of “by Castor” by a man appears in no ancient writing.

Of course, the entry in the *Liber procuratorum* has a more varied vocabulary than these few examples suggest. Yet many of the other words and expressions used by Tinctoris are eccentric and exceedingly rare. Noteworthy, of course, is his predilection for Greek loanwords whenever they can substitute for perfectly regular Latin terms: *orthodoxus* (for *fidelis*), *theotocos* (for *virgo*), *pedagogus* (for *magister puerorum*), *tipicus* (for *figurativus*). Yet if the point was somehow to suggest that the author had picked up these and other words from years of study, then his fellow students would have quickly found him out. For it so happens that all the “difficult” words in his text, including those that are scarcely attested in any other known text, are found in a dictionary that circulated widely throughout the Middle Ages: the *Derivationes* of Ugucione da Pisa (c.1190-1200).²⁴ With the help of this dictionary, anybody could have seasoned his Latin with a choice selection of “sesquipedalian words” (to quote one of Tinctoris’s commentators, who was in turn quoting Horace). Table 1 shows Tinctoris’s “difficult” words as they are attested and defined in Ugucione’s dictionary (I have left out the more common words which are of course included in the dictionary as well). Taken together, the glossary in Table 1 accounts for 10 per cent of Tinctoris’s text. (His entry in the *Liber procuratorum* is made up of 93 words altogether.) Could he really have imagined that no one would notice?

²¹ Frank W. Nicolson, “The Use of HERCLE (Mehercle), EDEPOL (Pol), ECATOR (Mecator) by Plautus and Terence”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 4 (1893), p. 99-103, and B. L. Ullman, “By Castor and Pollux”, *Classical Weekly*, 37 (1943), p. 87-89.

²² After Aulus Gellius, *The Attic Nights* (London - New York, 1927; “Loeb Classical Library”, 195), 2, p. 312-315.

²³ *Edepol* was used by Tinctoris when he recorded the matriculation of Arnoldus Overhoff; see *Livres des procurateurs*, 1, p. 30, and above.

²⁴ Ugucione da Pisa, *Derivationes*, ed. Enzo Cecchini, 2 vols. (Florence, 2004; “Edizione nazionale dei testi mediolatini”, I. 6). It is well known that Dante Alighieri made frequent use of Ugucione’s *Derivationes*; see Paget Toynbee, *Dante Studies and Researches* (London, 1902), p. 97-114 (“Dante’s Latin Dictionary”). For the possibility that Dufay, or a poet in his vicinity, had access to the dictionary, see Leofranc Holford-Strevens, “Du Fay the Poet? Problems in the Texts of His Motets,” *EMH*, 16 (1997), p. 97-165, at 112.

Table 1. Selected words used by Tinctoris in the *Liber procuratorum*, and their definitions in Ugucione da Pisa's *Derivationes*, ed. Enzo Cecchini, 2 vols. (Florence, 2004; "Edizione nazionale dei testi mediolatini, I. 6), vol. 2 (page numbers in parentheses).

anteritas, -tis idest antiquitas (59)
allubescencia, -cie. obediencia uel consensus (677)
Diuidia, -ie. Discordia, Bellona (1274)
elegans, -tis. valens, excellens, nobilis, utilis, pulcer, bonus (660)
excors, -dis. iners, fatuus, insipiens (185)
mellifluus, -a, -um. fluens et abundans dulcedine et melle (747)
nuperuus, -ua, -uum. dicebant antiqui, idest nouus, nouicius, scilicet nuperuus dicitur uel nuperus quasi nuper ueniens (829)
orthodoxus, -xi. vir recte glorie, scilicet recte credens et ut credit uivens, quo nomine non potest vocari qui aliter uivit quam credit (348)
pangerista, -te. laudis decantator (895)
pedagogus. qui sequitur puerum studentem uel cui parvulus assignatur et dicitur sic quia agat et ducat puerum et refrenet lasciuientem etatem (918)
prelibo, -as. pregustare, precontingere, sacrificare (674)
theotocos. Dei genitrix, quasi tota diuina (1207)
tipicus, -ca, -cum. figuratiuus (1224)

Surely there must be a limit to the number of implausibilities we are prepared to accept in order to sustain an attractive but unexamined reading of a medieval text. Tinctoris's entry is nothing short of a literary disaster, on that we can safely agree. Yet from his later writings, which began to be published only ten years later, we also know that he was a man of exceptional intelligence, industry, and erudition. On that, too, we can agree. His career up to his matriculation at the University of Orléans is consistent with this: he had, after all, attained the priesthood, the master's degree, and a musical position, and all this before the age of thirty.

An alternative reading may surely suggest itself if we take our cue from the fact that Tinctoris, in several passages, appears to say the opposite of what he intended. What if saying the opposite *was* his intention? Would it strain plausibility to view the text as a fifteenth-century counterpart, say, to *Ein musikalischer Spass*, a composition designed to present as rich and varied a collection of beginner's mistakes as Mozart had encountered in his years as a music teacher? For such a burlesque to be understood in the right spirit, and not to reflect badly on the author's actual competence, it is of course necessary to err on the side of absurdity while maintaining a surface of earnestness. Tinctoris's statement easily meets that condition.

If it seems odd that Tinctoris would have chosen the *Liber procuratorum* for this purpose, it helps to bear three points in mind. First, for all the seeming seriousness of his entry, later students felt no hesitation about adding expressions of hilarity in the margin, complete with a drawing of a pointing hand. Clearly, then, the *Liber procuratorum* was not so formal a document as to allow no room for humor. And yet it was formal enough to make an exercise in grotesquely inflated rhetoric truly hilarious to contemporaries.

This brings us to the second point, which is that the very kind of humor that plays on inversion is something closely associated with clerical youth culture, and especially student culture, throughout the later Middle Ages. In fact one of the most obvious vehicles for just that kind of humor was Latin composition.

Finally, there is a circumstance that may be purely coincidental, and then again may not be: Tintoris wrote his entry in the *Liber procuratorum* on the first day of April. Although the custom of April Fool's pranks and jests is not yet attested in the fifteenth century, it was, at least in some regions, a popular feast equivalent to Mayday or New Years Day.²⁵

The aim of this article has not been to rehabilitate Tintoris. If I had been concerned about his posthumous reputation, I would not have been so ready in the past to agree that our theorist was the pompous buffoon he has seemed to be, to Orléans students and modern scholars alike.²⁶ And yet, perhaps I was led astray by those very students, who were so ready to conclude that Tintoris the Musician brayed like Apuleius's Ass. As we can tell from their marginal comments, the patent absurdity of Tintoris's procurator's statement gave them an easy sense of superiority, a satisfying and self-congratulatory laugh at the expense of a bumbling ignoramus. And since they are after all contemporary witnesses, why should we not follow suit?

And yet, Tintoris must surely be allowed to be his own contemporary witness, too. And if we listen carefully, perhaps we can hear him having the last laugh, a hearty laugh at *our* expense – five centuries after his death.

²⁵ Bonnie Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Book of Days* (Oxford, 2000), under 1 April.

²⁶ R. Wegman, "Tintoris's Magnum opus", p. 779-780.

APPENDIX

Johannes Tinctoris, *Proportionale musices* (c.1472-73), Prologue, introductory section, with textual allusions identified. After Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 3 vols. in 2 ([Rome], 1975-78; “Corpus scriptorum de musica”, 22), 2a, p. 9-10.

Sacratissimo ac invictissimo principi divo Ferdinando, *regis regum dominique dominantium*²⁷ providentia regi Siciliae, Jherusalem et Ungariae, Johannes Tinctoris, inter musicae professores suosque capellanos minimus pedum osculotenus humilem atque servilem obedientiam.

Quamquam, o sapientissime rex, a tempore *prothomusici Jubalis*,²⁸ cui Moyses tantum tribuit, ut eum in Genesi *patrem canentium organis et cithara* dixerit,²⁹ plerique viri percelebres velut David, Ptolomeus, Epaminondas, principes Judeae, Egypti et Graeciae, Zoroastres, Pythagoras, Linus, Thebeus, Zethus, Amphion, Orpheus, Museus, Socrates, Plato, Aristoteles, Aristoxenus, Timotheus, ingenuae arti musicae operam a Deo dederunt, quod teste Tullio *paene vim omnem ac materiam eius infinitam cogitatione comprehenderint*,³⁰ quo nonnullos eorum, praecipue *Pythagoram* musicae *primordia invenisse* multi *Graecorum* voluerunt.³¹ Tamen qualiter pronunciaverint aut composuerint scripto nobis minime constat, verum elegantissime id eos fecisse verisimilimum est. *Summam* etenim in hac scientia, quam *Plato* vocat *potentissimam*,³² *eruditionem* ponebant, itaque eam *omnes* antiquiis *discebant, nec qui nesciebat satis excultus doctrina putabatur*.³³

Et quanta precor illa fuit melodia virtute cuius dii, manes, spiritus immundi, animalia etiam rationis expertia et inanimata moti fuisse leguntur. Quod, tametsi partim fabulosum sit, non vacat a mysterio, nempe talia de musica poetae non finxissent nisi mirandam eius virtutem, divino quodam animi vigore percepissent.

²⁷ Rev. 19: 16: “et habet in vestimento et in femore suo scriptum *rex regum et Dominus dominantium*”.

²⁸ Henricus Augsburgensis, *Planctus Evae*, v. 1839 (1833): “Ergo *Iubal* dulci metuens *protomusicus* arti”.

²⁹ Gen. 4: 21: “et nomen fratris eius *Iubal* ipse fuit *pater canentium cithara et organo*”.

³⁰ Cic., *De or.*, I. iii. 10: “Quis musicis, quis huic studio litterarum, quod profitentur ei, qui grammatici vocantur, penitus se dedit, quin *omnem* illarum artium *paene infinitam vim et materiam* scientia et *cognitione comprehenderit?*”

³¹ Isidore, *Etym.*, III.xvi: “*Graeci* vero *Pythagoram* dicunt huius artis *invenisse primordia* ex malleorum sonitu et cordarum extensione percussa.”

³² Guillaume d’Auvergne, *De universo*, III. xx: “Quantam autem potestatem *Plato* harmoniis attribuit, apparet evidenter ex libro suo, qui vocatur *Timaeus*, ubi dixit, quod *potentissima* artium musica est”; *De legibus*, Ch. 27: “quod et *Plato* dixit in *Timaeo*, quia *potentissima* autem nostra est *musica*, respondemus ei, quia verum est hoc...” *Opera omnia* (Paris, 1674), I, p. 90 E and 1056 H.

³³ Cic., *Tusc. disp.*, I. 4: “*summam* eruditionem *Graeci* sitam censebant in nervorum vocumque cantibus... ergo in *Graecia* musici floruerunt, *discebantque* id *omnes, nec qui nesciebat satis excultus doctrina putabatur*”.

At qui postquam *plenitudo temporis* advenit,³⁴ quo summus ille musicus³⁵ *Jesus Christus, pax nostra*, sub proportione dupla *fecit utraque unum*,³⁶ in eius ecclesia miri florere musici, ut Gregorius, Ambrosius, Augustinus, Hilarius, Boethius, Martianus, Guido, Johannes de Muris, quorum alii usum in ipsa salutari ecclesia canendi statuerunt, alii ad hoc hymnos canticaque numerosa convecerunt, alii divinitatem, alii theoricam, alii practicam huius artis, iam vulgo dispersis codicibus posteris reliquerunt.

Denique principes Christianissimi quorum omnium, rex piissime, animi, corporis fortunaque donis longe primus es, cultum ampliare divinum cupientes more Davidico capellas instituerunt in quibus diversos cantores per quos *diversis* vocibus, *non adversis*,³⁷ *Deo nostro iocunda decoraque esset laudatio*,³⁸ ingentibus expensis assumpserunt. Et quoniam cantores principum si *liberalitate, quae claros homines facit*³⁹ praedicti sint, *honore, gloria*, divitiis afficiuntur, *ad hoc genus studii* ferventissime multi *incenduntur*.⁴⁰ Quo fit ut hac tempestate facultas nostrae musices tam mirabile susceperit incrementum quod ars nova esse videatur, cuius, ut ita dicam, novae artis fons et origo apud Anglicos quorum caput Dunstaple exstitit, fuisse perhibetur, et huic contemporanei fuerunt in Gallia Dufay et Binchois, quibus immediate successerunt moderni Okeghem, Busnois, Regis et Caron, omnium quos audiverim in compositione praestantissimi. Haec eis *Anglici* nunc, licet vulgariter *iubilare*, *Gallici* vero *cantare* dicantur,⁴¹ veniunt conferendi, illi etenim in dies novos cantus novissimae inveniunt, ac isti, quod *miserrimi signum est ingenii*,⁴² una semper et eadem compositione utuntur.

³⁴ Gal. 4:4: “at ubi venit *plenitudo temporis* misit Deus Filium suum factum ex muliere factum sub lege”.

³⁵ An idea apparently going back to Sedulius; see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1990), p. 244.

³⁶ Eph. 2: 13-14: “nunc autem in *Christo Iesu* vos qui aliquando eratis longe facti estis prope in sanguine *Christi*. ipse est enim *pax nostra qui fecit utraque unum* et medium parietem maceriae solvens inimicitiam in carne sua”.

³⁷ St Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, Ps. 150: 4: “Habebunt enim etiam tunc sancti Dei differentias suas consonantes, non dissonantes, id est, consentientes, non dissentientes; sicut fit suavissimus concentus ex *diversis* quidem, sed *non inter se adversis* sonis.”

³⁸ Ps. 147: 1: “*Deo nostro sit iocunda decoraque laudatio*.”

³⁹ Anon. gloss to Dante, *Purgatorio*, Canto XX, ll. p. 97-102: “Ad notandum quod *liberalitas facit homines claros*, ideo de die canuntur eius actus, et *avaritia facit homines obscuros et infames*, ideo de nocte etc.” See R. Wegman, “Tinctoris’s *Magnum opus*”.

⁴⁰ Cic., *Tusc. disp.*, I. 4: “*honos* alit artes, omnesque *incenduntur ad studia gloria*, iacentque ea semper, quae apud quosque improbantur”.

⁴¹ Apparently a common fifteenth-century proverb, as Tinctoris says. Cf. Aage Brusendorff, *The Chaucer Tradition* (London - Oxford, 1925), p. 468, and John Lydgate, *The Minor Poems*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken (London - Oxford, 1911; “Early English Text Society”, Extra ser., 107), p. 708: “*Italici vilant / Theotonici clamant / Gallici cantant / Anglici iubilant* : Lombardes weymenten / Duchemen cryen / Frenshmen singen / And Englisshmen iuyessen.”

⁴² Ps.-Boethius, *De disciplina scholarium*, v. 3-4: “quippe *miserrimi est ingenii* semper inventis uti et numquam inveniendis.”

Abstract

As a post-graduate student of law at Orléans University, Johannes Tinctoris briefly took on the responsibility of Procurator of the German Nation, the collective of students born in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire. Upon his election and oath of office, on 1 April 1463, he entered the customary note announcing his incumbency in the nation's *Liber procuratorum*, identifying himself by name and adding some details about his origins and current status in society. This note has prompted derision, in both Tinctoris's age and our own, for its pomposity and grandiloquence, being couched in a Latin style of such pedantic absurdity as to befit a stock character in a theatrical farce.

The face-value meaning of this document has always seemed straightforward enough: in his eagerness to impress (or so it would appear) Tinctoris gave in to the temptation of flaunting his Latinity at its most seemingly learned, not realizing that he succeeded only in making his lack of literary taste painfully obvious. However, it is difficult to speak of a straightforward face-value meaning when more than five hundred years have passed between a document's creation and our attempts to make sense of it. First impressions may be completely baseless, yet seductively persuasive when nourished by narrative models akin to popular comedy. The aim of this article is to find out how well the face-value reading of the Orléans document holds up to scrutiny, and to raise the possibility of alternative readings that might be less inconsistent with the complex character we know Tinctoris to have been.